

Reminiscences of Life at the Gamma Phi Chapter of Beta Theta Pi at O.U. 1941-1943

After graduating from McAlester, Oklahoma High School in 1941, I decided to attend Oklahoma University. Rush activities began in September. After a long talk with Roscoe and Dean Walker one evening during rush I was invited and accepted an invitation to pledge Beta.

There was a strong Beta presence in McAlester in 1941. Joe Basolo, J.B. Baumert and Cecil Hardeman were my hometown brothers. Previously Elmer Hale, Jr. had been at Gamma Phi.

My pledge class consisted of:

Bion Acton	Guthrie
Tome Allen	Sapulpa
Tom Buxton	OKC
Bill Castle	Hanna
Jack Danner	Lawton
Louis Davis	Pauls Valley
Ancel Earp	OKC
Jack Felber	Tulsa
Bill Hemphill	Pawhuska
“Slew” Hewitt	Durant
Hays Holliday	Muskogee
Weaver Johnson	Ardmore
Jim Kite	OKC
Neal Martin	Tulsa
Gus McCord	Shawnee
Phil McKanna	OKC
Earl Mitchell	Enid
Dick Leenhouts	Cleveland, OK
Malcolm Schaller	Muskogee
Bob Vandeventer	Okmulgee

Campus Life involved the usual study hall, house cleanup after midnight on Fridays, and the usual pledge activities. We took turns escorting Mrs. Thomason, our House Mother, to dinner and learned some of the amenities of proper dinner etiquette.

As part of our introduction to fraternity life, our social chairman, Frank Sneed scheduled the pledges for visits to several sororities to meet their pledges. A particularly memorable visit was an evening at the Tri Delta house from an hour at 6:30 pm. We were having so much fun playing records, dancing, etc. that Frank and the Tri Deltas social chairwoman couldn't get us to leave at the proper time. Needless to say, we heard about it and suffered from it later.

Frank Sneed was a very meticulous person who did his best to teach us the proper rules of etiquette. It is interesting that in later years in my medical practice, in Lawton, I became his personal physician.

A tradition at that time was the annual football game between Beta and KA pledges. We were given football gear by the O.U. Athletic Department for the game. We practiced hard for several weeks.

The game was scheduled for December 7th, 1941. As our team was dressing for the game, someone came in and announced "hey, the Japs have bombed Pearl Harbor". We paid little attention, since the big game was on our minds. Little did we know how our lives would be changed from that time on.

The custom was that if a fraternity member had never played in the game, he was allowed to play, even though he was an upper classman. The KA's allowed Jack Jacobs, an OU all American football player, to play against us that day. Needless to say, we went down to a crushing defeat. We never forgave them for that.

All freshman and sophomores at O.U. were required to take basic ROTC classes, horse drawn and mechanized artillery, and stable duties for demerits. Horse drawn artillery French 75's and caissons were pulled by three teams of horses in tandem with a rider for each team. I firmly believe that those horses knew the commands better than we.

In the weeks and months following the outbreak of World War II, most if us joined the ASTP (Army Specialized Training Program) or its naval counterpart - the V-12 program. A few students dropped out of school to enlist in one of the armed forces. We were actually in the armed forces but continued in civilian status in school until called up.

After hell week's activities in the spring of 1942, we were initiated as Beta members. I remember I was member 565 at Gamma Phi.

Since we knew that our university days were limited because of the war, several of us rented the upstairs of a private house for summer school. Among our group were Ancel Earp, Tom Allen and, I think, Bill Hemphill. The summer was hot and with no air conditioning, that upstairs was really and oven.

Students were not allowed to have automobiles at O.U. at that time, but a few secretly kept cars and rented a garage from some homeowners in which to store it. Joe Basolo, from McAlester, had a car in which we would periodically drive home to McAlester on weekends.

On one occasion some of the brothers asked us to bring back a case of "Choc", the famous Choctaw beer brewed in Krebs, Oklahoma. On our way back, with a case in the trunk on a hot summer day, we heard several "bangs" emanating from the trunk. On inspection we found that several bottles had exploded due to the heat. The old corks used to cap the bottles had deteriorated. The remaining bottles were delivered as promised

when we returned to Norman. There was no report on how the stomachs of those who imbibed were affected.

In the summer of 1942, I had the privilege of attending the national Beta convention at Mackinac Island, Michigan with Jim Shouse, our chapter president. Jim was from Muskogee and was an outstanding young man and president. The convention was truly a stimulating experience, meeting Betas from all over the county.

Riding in a Pullman car from Oklahoma to Michigan for the first time was quite an experience. I recall Pullman cars were switched from one railroad line to another on their way to their eventual destinations. Switching in the middle of the night in Indianapolis, Indiana was not conducive to sleep.

As school began in September, 1942, life went on as well as possible in the war years. We anxiously awaited word as to when we would be called into active military service. Eventually word arrived that April, 1943 would be the call up date. At that time we began making preparations to leave school.

For some reason, certainly not my talent, I was given the song leader job as classes began in autumn, 1942. We struggled along as well as possible. We certainly knew the Loving Cup well!

My roommate in 1942-43 was Jack Felber, from Tulsa. We occupied the northeast corner room on the second floor. It is of interest that we never corresponded or saw each other again after 1943 until Jack called me and visited me in Lawton in 2006. We renewed many old memories at that time on our day at Gamma Phi.

As I have jotted down these notes many others anecdotes from my O.U. years have come to mind.

Jim Berry and his cohorts took their finance professor hunting on at least one occasion. I am told that the spirits flowed freely. I'm sure that they didn't mind that it would improve their grades!

O.U.'s new president, Dr. Joe Brandt, took office in 1941 and announced that he intended to make O.U. "the Princeton of the west". He issued a statement admonishing students to return promptly after the O.U.-Texas game in Dallas rather than taking several extra days in Dallas after the game. Several of our brothers (I think Ross Coe was the ring leader) decided to go to Galveston. They actually stayed there the rest of the week. They sent President Brandt a post card saying "we took your advice and didn't stay in Dallas after the game".

In April, 1943, the ASTP and V-12 programs were closed as all of us in these programs were called into active service. I think the Beta House was closed at that time.

When we were discharged from the armed forces following the end of World War II, many of our classmates returned to O.U. and the house was reopened. I never returned to O.U. as I pursued my education elsewhere.

Since returning to Oklahoma in 1956 to practice medicine in Lawton, I have been back to Norman for weekend football activities. It is with pride that I see the Beta House looking every bit as good as it did in 1943.

I still look back to those two eventful years at O.U. with a lot of nostalgia. They certainly were formative years in my life.

Respectfully submitted,
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Bill Jolly