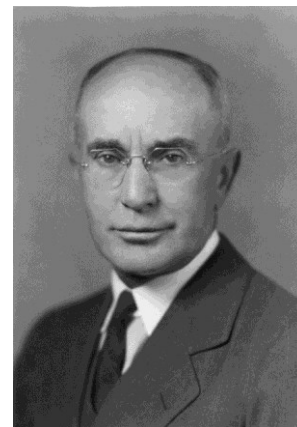


Remembering Pearl Harbor Day

31st in the Keepsakes series, originally published December 7, 2011

On December 7, 1941 the approximately 3,700 students enrolled at Kansas State Agricultural College learned that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. While the military situation in the world was of interest, most of the focus was on Germany and Europe until that historic event.

There was a degree of ambivalence on the K-State campus about Nazi Germany at the time. A bill requiring male students to take military training in their first two years narrowly passed the state legislature in 1935, and a large group of students protested this requirement to K-State's president, Francis D. Farrell. As late as January 1941 an editorial in the *Collegian* accused American youth of secretly admiring Nazi Germany and ignoring its threat to freedom. A few days later another editorial refuted those views. The *Collegian* also reported that students were divided on their support of the Lend Lease program to provide supplies to allied countries. The influence of the military at the time was reflected in the clothing that coeds wore that included "wide leather belts, regimental stripes, uniform fabrics, and white or gold embroidered eagles."



Francis Farrell

National defense became more prevalent by March 1941 when

approximately 1,300 K-State male students were required to register for the draft. Still, an article in the *Collegian* expressed the view that a college education and the training of the brain was just as important as preparing for battle.



The Collegian, December 9, 1941

All of this changed with the surprise attack on Pearl Harbor by Japan seventy years ago killing approximately 2,500 Americans in military service. Two days later the *Collegian* strongly rebuked Japan's action and favored a declaration of war, "Collegians Stand Firm in Indignation at Japs, Favor War" (the newspaper was not published on Mondays).

The front page included a piece by President Farrell calling for students to be responsible for contributing in every way towards winning the war by remaining calm and avoid saying or doing things that would increase confusion and incite disorder, doing their work as well as possible every day, and

preserving a sense of humor.

Male students who were 21 or older on July 1, 1941 were ordered to a general seminar in the College Auditorium on December 10 and to bring their Selective Service registration card.

As expected, enrollment declined during the war years to a low point of around 1,500 in 1944 (when the troops returned home enrollment rose to almost 7,500 by 1948!).



"I do solemnly swear . . . that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the United States of America . . . that I will defend the same . . . against all their enemies . . ." K-State youths looked earnest when taking Enlisted Reserve oath.



Milton Eisenhower

At one time at least 109 members of the

faculty were on leave to aide in the war effort by involvement in military service, government agencies, or war industries. Programs were established to educate and train people through the Army Specialized Training Program and the Reserve Officers Training Program (R.O.T.C.). For example, a total of 1,973 men received Air Corps training at K-State.

Space does not permit even a summary of all the war time activities and programs on campus after Pearl Harbor; curriculum

changes, dissemination of defense information, conservation drives, etc. Coeds even sold war stamps at fifty cents a kiss! Of significance was President Farrell's decision in January 1943 to leave the college. He was replaced by Milton S. Eisenhower, the only native Kansan and K-State alumnus (1924) to hold the office.

The war took its toll on the lives of K-Staters. Estimates differ but one account indicates that over 7,000 Wildcats served in the conflict with as many as 200 making the ultimate sacrifice. On May 30, 2011 a World War II Memorial was dedicated to those who served including at least 10 K-Staters who were stationed in Hawaii on December 7, 1941.



World War II Memorial

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Sources: Carey, James C. Kansas State University: The Quest for Identity. Chapter 8; "War Again and an Eisenhower Comes Home." Kansas State Collegian. December 9, 1941. University Archives photograph collection.