IN MEMORIAM
OSCAR SCOFIELD POWERS

Dr. Oscar Scofield Powers was born at High Point, North Carolina, November 20, 1909. His father was an exceptionally well read and studious Baptist minister, and he early impressed upon his children the importance and benefits to be derived from a study of the classics, ancient and modern. Oscar Powers was graduated from Wichita Falls High School in 1926 with a letter in tennis and as valedictorian. At Baylor University he had the good fortune to come under the influence of a Rhodes Scholar and excellent teacher, Henry Trantham. His enthusiasm for Greek and Latin and Ancient History was not lost on Powers who early convinced his teacher that his interest was genuine and growing. Trantham played a fine game of tennis and Powers improved his game under expert instruction and earned a varsity letter in this sport. He was graduated in 1929, summa cum laude. He continued his classical studies at Cornell where he received the M.A. in 1930. He enjoyed a summer at the University of Colorado working with W. A. and C. H. Oldfather before taking up his duties as a graduate instructor of Latin at Duke University. After three years he continued his graduate studies at the University of Chicago, 1933-1935.

Oscar Powers married Mary Elizabeth Barbee of North Carolina on March 20, 1935. In the fall they came to The University of Texas, where he was recognized as a good teacher of Latin and Greek. In 1940 he received his doctorate in the classics from the University of Chicago. Promotions came slowly in those days of economic depression and he held the rank of tutor until 1938. He was an instructor from 1938 until he volunteered and was commissioned a Lieutenant (Junior Grade) in the Navy, July 7, 1942. Men of his language qualifications were scarce and he was immediately useful as a Liaison Officer with Postal and Cable and Radio Censorship in New Orleans and San Antonio. Later he served in England, instructing in German and as a special analyst of captured German naval documents. After Germany surrendered he was transferred to France and then spent seven months at Höchst and Frankfurt am Main as a member of General
Dwight D. Eisenhower's naval advisory staff.

By the time he returned to The University of Texas in the fall of 1946 as an Assistant Professor, he held the rank of Lt. Commander in the U.S. Naval Reserve. In 1948 he was made an Associate Professor, and two years later the Navy promoted him to the rank of Commander. In addition to teaching Latin and Greek, Dr. Powers could speak German, read French, used Italian and Modern Greek for scholarly purposes; he had conducted interviews for the Navy in Spanish. He had made some study of Old High German, Old English, Old Persian, and Sanskrit. In these linguistic pursuits he had the encouragement of his colleagues and two former friends from Baylor days, Dr. Phillip Hyatt, Professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Vanderbilt's School of Religion and Dr. Dixon Wector, Rhodes Scholar, sometime Instructor of English at The University of Texas and until his death Professor of American Civilization at the University of California. During 1944 the University of Chicago Press had published Powers' Studies in the Commercial Vocabulary of Early Latin which was reviewed favorably by J. Whatmough in Classical Philology XLI (April, 1946), 125-126. He was working on a study of Heraclitus of Ephesus when the Korean War interrupted what might have been a truly productive period.

Dr. Powers' services were needed by Naval Intelligence and he was recalled to active duty, serving from May 1951 until August 1953, when he returned to the University. He become active again in the Fortnightly Club on the campus, the Texas Classical Association, the Classical Association of the Middle West and South, and the American Philological Association. However, the Navy needed his services in the training of others, and he had organized a special navy unit of which he was the Officer in Charge at the time he was called to his last active duty.

Early in September, 1954, Dr. Powers received the usual orders for two weeks training in Washington and was attempting to work that in between the end of summer term 1954 and the opening of the fall semester. When one of his colleagues had a prolonged illness, Powers had gladly shared the additional teaching load. A letter to two of his officer friends in August indicated that he hoped they would be in Washington to help make the two weeks something of a vacation.
He described enthusiastically his new unit and looked forward to the supplemental training which he would receive in his specialty. As the Baltimore and Ohio train goes over a crossing about a mile from Martinsburg, West Virginia, it makes a sharp curve, and at this point Dr. Powers was apparently thrown from the vestibule. The accident occurred on the morning of September 5, 1954. After the navy had investigated, the family was notified by the local Naval Reserve Officer in Austin and arrangements were made for the burial in Wichita Falls. He is survived by his parents, Rev. and Mrs. 0. L. Powers, two brothers, Dr. William and Dr. Stephen Powers, and two sisters, Mrs. John A. Kay of Wichita Falls and Mrs. Clarence Warren of Phoenix, Arizona. Captain F. W. Bruning, District Intelligence Officer of the Eighth Naval District, later sent the following letter, which is quoted in part:

My dear Mrs. Powers:

The personnel of the District Intelligence Office of the Eighth Naval District, wish to express their sincere sympathy and condolences at this time. CDR Powers was well known to many in this office, and he was well liked personally and highly respected professionally.

His untimely death occurred while he was on active duty en route to Washington, D.C., where it was intended to acquaint him with the latest developments in his specialty. This was in order to better prepare him for the vital role he was performing in the defense of our country through his leadership and training of young men in the Naval Reserve. His death is a great loss to the United States Naval Service, and particularly to the Naval Reserve Intelligence Program.

The following letter of appreciation for his former student was received by the Memorial Resolutions Committee:

Oscar Scofield Powers: An Appreciation

As a student in Baylor University Oscar Powers gave promise of distinction in the field he marked out for his career—that of the humanities. Never beguiled by the high grades his teachers invariably gave him in his courses, he voluntarily undertook projects beyond the routine assignments. In his pursuit of subjects rather than credits he achieved a remarkable facility in the reading of the Greek and Latin classics, and in the process developed, perhaps unconsciously, the attitudes and techniques of research. I recall him as a pupil almost unique. It was inevitable that he should have reached a high level of proficiency in graduate study and won an authentic place in the realm of scholarship. It was also inevitable that his enthusiasm should have penetrated his pupils. He was a great teacher.

His interests were not, however, confined to the classroom. His knowledge of life, his kindly disposition towards those about him and his shrewd common sense combined to make him a valued friend and counselor to all who claimed him as friend.
In his passing the University of Texas has lost an irreplaceable personality and the republic of learning an effective protagonist. But he left to us an example that will inspire and comfort us as we think his devotion to the true, the beautiful, and the good.

Henry Trantham, Chairman  
Department of Classics  
Baylor University  
16 March, 1955

Dr. and Mrs. Powers had two children, Oscar Scofield, Jr., (Buddy) and Lona. When they returned to Austin in 1946, they purchased a lot and looked forward to building the home of which they had long dreamed and which Mrs. Powers was capable of decorating so well. Plans had been made to go ahead with building in the fall of 1954. Many friends urged Mrs. Powers to make Austin her home, but she has returned to her father's home in Durham, North Carolina, where the best wishes of the University faculty follow her and the children. The two wars took Dr. Powers from his teaching and research duties. Unfortunately, the pages of decoded and evaluated documents and his findings and recommendations will never be recorded on any list of academic publications. The University of Texas is proud to have had him on her faculty and to know that he was able to perform outstanding service for his country. All members of the faculty who were able to continue their studies in the atmosphere of a free university join in grateful memory to Dr. Oscar Powers.

H. J. Leon, Chairman  
R. C. Cotner  
0. W. Reinmuth