

From the UCA Archives L
The War Ends and Enrollment Soars
Third in a Four-Part Series
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Part 3

After the war ended, large numbers of high school graduates who had served in the military and put their education on hold for four to five years, were now heading to college for the first time. In addition, those students who dropped out of college to join the military were coming back to college. It wasn't an absolute return to normalcy, but after the war ended, things were headed in that direction.

This author has interviewed many World War II veterans. Every veteran that was interviewed remembered exactly where he or she was and what they were doing when it was announced that Germany and later Japan had surrendered. The students on campus at the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) were also eager for the war to end and to celebrate.

The students were waiting to celebrate as soon as they received word that Germany and/or Japan had surrendered. The May 4, 1945 edition of *The Echo* carried a short article about plans for Victory (V)-Day in Europe and stated, "The V-Day program which was planned to come at the time of the surrender of Germany will not be repeated when the time comes, but classes will be immediately dismissed in order for students to attend the services at the Methodist Church. If the notice comes after school hours, students are invited to attend the church service, and classes will be resumed at the regular time the following morning."

After the war ended the number of students enrolled at UCA began to increase at a rapid pace. The enrollment for the 1944-1945 academic year was 355 students; the 1945-1946 academic year was 635; enrollment for 1946-1947 was 1,061 and for 1947-1948 was 1,428. Students were returning or going to college for the first time on the G.I. Bill.

The G.I. Bill, officially known as The Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944, was thought by many to be the most important federal legislation of the 20th century. According to the "Student's Guide to Landmark Congressional Laws on Education" by David Carleton, "The G.I. Bill was motivated by a concern that the United States not repeat the problems it had encountered with veterans' readjustment after World War I and by concerns about mass unemployment among returning veterans." The G.I. Bill paid up to \$500 per year to cover tuition, fees, books and supplies. In 1946, the cost of tuition at UCA was \$30.00 per semester and the cost of room and board combined was \$30 to \$31 per month, depending on room location.

After the war, there were 15.4 million veterans who were eligible for G.I. Bill benefits and just over half, 51%, took advantage of those benefits. The cost of the G.I. Bill to tax payers was \$14.5 billion. The G.I. Bill was instrumental in keeping 15 million veterans from hitting the

job market at the same time and consequently, by 1947, approximately 50% of all college students in the United States were veterans.

During the war President Irby had to deal with a student body less than half its normal size. After the war, the opposite was true, and he had to find accommodations for a student body that was twice its normal size. Students were coming to UCA in staggering numbers and those students had to be taught, fed and housed. In an open letter to the public that was published in *The Echo*, President Irby stated, "The college year, 1946-1947, promises to be the most unusual one colleges have experienced. The large number of veterans and veterans' families and the usual number of high school graduates cause a crowded condition previously unknown to campuses. Yet this crowded condition has possibilities. The range of experiences among students will be a constant stimulus to faculty and students. We expect this year to be a great one in the history of Arkansas State Teachers College and are glad you are registered with us."

There was an urgent need to address the housing shortage. Unlike the pre-war years, the post-war years included a large number of married students and married students had different housing needs than single students. Just the sheer volume of students, married and single, put a major burden on UCA's campus housing. In January 1946, President Irby announced that enrollment had been denied to many married veterans due to the severe housing shortage.

One of the answers to the housing shortage for married veterans was in the form of house-trailers. President Irby requested 50 house-trailers and initially received 27 from the National Housing Administration in Washington, D.C., in January 1946. In the fall of 1946 an additional 14 house-trailers arrived on campus and 26 more were ordered. A photograph shows that the house-trailers were placed just a few yards from the south entrance of Old Main and were also placed between Bernard Hall and the first Baridon Hall.

UCA also secured 10 cottages to house single men from the Public Housing Administration with assistance from former UCA president Heber McAlister. The cottages were located on the north side of Bruce Street, in the vicinity of, and across from the current Thompson Hall. Each cottage housed five men and had a living room that measured 12 X 16 feet and one bedroom that measured 12 X 12 feet. The cottages contained a bath room and a shower.

As the number of married veterans increased on campus so did the number of babies. Although there are no statistics available on the number of babies on campus, it was apparent from the actions of President Irby that they were a significant part of the campus population. So significant that President Irby created the Baby of Arts Degree, a degree awarded only by UCA.

Several years ago, Log Cabin Democrat writer extraordinaire, Fred Petrucelli, wrote an excellent article on the Baby of Arts Degree. The Baby of Arts Degree was an honorary degree that was given to the children of veterans and other non-traditional students when the parents of the child graduated. According to *The Echo*, "To qualify for the degree, the child candidate must be the son or daughter of an ASTC graduate and must have resided on or near the campus at some period in which the parent was enrolled as a student for the degree."

President Irby was quoted in *The Echo* as saying, “The child certainly has made an impression on the campus, and we fondly hope that the campus has made a favorable impression on the child... There were two major reasons for conferring this unique degree... It created a definite feeling of fellowship between unmarried students and those with wives and families, and it creates positive publicity for ASTC because of its uniqueness.” During the first Baby of Arts Degree ceremony in August 1948, 43 children received the degree.

The Baby of Arts Degree came to national prominence in 1949, when a photograph of ten-month old Cheryl Lynn Cramer was carried by *Look Magazine*. Due to the number of children on campus the Baby of Arts Degree was awarded at both the August and May graduation ceremonies. From August 1948 to May 1955, the average number of children receiving the Baby of Arts Degree at each ceremony was 50. The degree continued to be granted sometime into the late 1950s.

The situation in the classrooms changed somewhat due to the veterans being more mature and experienced than traditional college students. According to Ted Worley, author of “A History of Arkansas State Teachers College,” “In the classroom there was a difference too. History and geography, economics and sociology and psychology were enlivened by the attitudes and experiences of students who had recently been in contact with other civilizations. Simple answers and shallow knowledge were more likely to be challenged than before... Many members of classes in assignments in child psychology and family relations had no need for theoretical assignments; they lived in suitable laboratories for those subjects. The people of the campus came more nearly than ever before a complete society.”

In the fall of 1945, the men returned and so did football. Football was not played as a team sport on an intercollegiate basis from 1942 to 1944. In 1945 football was revived and the team was under the leadership of a new coach, Charles “Dub” McGibbony. UCA was again playing against some of its old rivals.

During the 1945 season, UCA played one game against Henderson State University and two games each against Ouachita Baptist University, Arkansas Tech University and Arkansas State University. The record for 1945 wasn't good, the Bears won only one game and lost six and were badly outscored. UCA only scored 30 points on the season and Bear opponents scored 198.

However, the beating UCA took on the football field did not diminish the enthusiasm of the students. At the time, students deemed the resumption of football far more important than whether the Bears won or lost. At the end of the football season, a sportswriter from *The Echo*, George Anders, wrote a column on the Bears' first football season since 1941. He summed things up in a way that only someone from that period and under those conditions could have.

According to *The Echo* sportswriter George Anders, “I'd like to congratulate Coach Charles “Dub” McGibbony for the wonderful job he has done. This is his first year as a faculty member of ASTC, and he is living up to the old traditions that we are so proud of... It was swell having football back this season; it will gain momentum from year-to-year now, and our spirit will reach a new peak. This past season has been work and fun, and we have enjoyed every

minute of it. This page is dedicated to the football boys. In it we hope to show the appreciation of the student body and the faculty for all they have done. Joe Cook, assistant coach, and Keith "Smoothie" Sims, trainer, have done swell jobs." Anders went on to write about the individual players.

Another change to the campus was the addition of an infirmary for men. Prior to the addition of the men's infirmary there was only one infirmary on campus that treated both men and women. However, due to the large number of male veterans on campus a separate men's infirmary was created and was known as Veterans Infirmary. It had a capacity for 20 beds and also included a lobby and office space. The construction cost for Veterans Infirmary was diminished somewhat due to the materials coming from allocation of surplus war plant property.

Veterans Infirmary operated from the fall of 1948 to the spring of 1955. As the number of veterans and male students in general declined due to graduation, and the student population returned to more traditional-aged college students, there was no longer a need for two infirmaries. Beginning in the fall of 1955 both men and women students were treated in the infirmary located in Bernard Hall.

Subjects discussed on campus were enormously influenced by the recent war. Matters of discussion that were once considered to be mildly interesting were now taking center stage. One subject that faculty and students alike were interested in was the atom and the atomic bomb. The atomic bomb, as a subject matter for scholarly discussion, came into a new-found prominence after it was used on the Japanese cities of Hiroshima, on August 6, 1945 and Nagasaki, on August 9, 1945.

Dr. W.C. Ferguson, Dean of the Faculty, in a lecture to the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) discussed the atomic bomb and according to The Echo, stated, "The principle of the atomic bomb is not as great a secret as the public imagines. The atomic bomb is not a product of recent discoveries entirely, he explained, since for a number of years scientists such as Dunning, Fermi, and Lawrence have been smashing atoms by ingenious mechanical devices. One step led to another until it was finally realized that a tremendous force could be released by splitting the atoms of certain substances. In one gram of water, for example, rests pent-up energy great enough to burn 2,000,000 - 100-watt bulbs for one hour."

Upon ending his lecture to the YWCA on the atomic bomb, Dr. Ferguson was quoted by The Echo as saying, "The existence of the atomic bomb makes it imperative that we practice Christian ideals of brotherhood among nations, and strive for friendly relations with all peoples."

Author's Note: Sources for this article include The Echo, Log Cabin Democrat, UCA Office of Institutional Research, UCAsports.com maintained by Steve East, Jimmy Bryant, "Baby of Arts Degree: A Degree Unique to Arkansas State Teachers College," Faulkner Facts and Fiddlings, Spring and Summer, 2001. Jimmy Bryant, "The History of the Dorothy A. Long Student Health Services," Faulkner Facts and Fiddlings, Summer, Fall, Winter, 2003-2004. "A History of Arkansas State Teachers College," by Ted Worley, "The Centennial History of the University of Central Arkansas," by Jimmy Bryant, UCA Bulletins and "Student's Guide to Landmark Congressional Laws on Education," by David Carleton.



Gary Motley holding the Baby of Arts Degree sign in August 1948.