

The University of Illinois Goes to War

Written by John Franch
Commissioned by the UI Archives' Student Life and
Culture Archival Program,
November 15, 2007

On a sunny, mild afternoon in early December 1941, regular radio programming was interrupted by urgent news bulletins announcing the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. Uncertainty over whether the United States would enter the war had long gripped the country and many students at the University of Illinois greeted the news from Hawaii almost with relief, with an "air of hilarity and light-heartedness." (In April 1941, a student had written that the "certainty even of unpleasantness may be preferable to the uncertainty of anything and everything.") Crowds of "smiling, laughing, yelling" students packed campus restaurants and drugstores and paraded up and down Green and Wright streets. "Few were serious-faced," the Daily Illini reported. "Seemingly confident of an easy American victory, and slightly hysterical over the suddenness of the war, they laughed loudly, joked, made puns on newspaper headlines."¹ That night a group of some 600 students marched by torchlight to the President's house, chanting along the way: "Hi Ho, Hi Ho, we're off to Tokyo! We'll wipe the Jap right off the map, Hi Ho, Hi Ho." The group's effort to persuade President Arthur Willard to cancel classes the following day ended in failure, leaving some students to wonder "What's the use of having a war if we don't get something out of it?" It would be revealed later that William Schick, a flight surgeon in the medical corps, had perished in the Pearl Harbor raid. Schick was

¹Roger Ebert, An Illini Century: One Hundred Years of Campus Life (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 157; Daily Illini, December 8, 1941, p. 4, col. 4.

the first Illini to die in World War II.²

Writing in 1945, Fritz Jauch, a former Daily Illini sports editor, recalled those “crazy months” on campus before December 7th, “months when each of us knew a war was inevitable as a dawn and tomorrow, but each of us didn’t care to think of it for the moment.” “October of 1941 came,” Jauch continued, “and was amber with lazy smoke and leaves too thick for wading and war was far, and crowds thronged Memorial Stadium. And November of 1941 was frosts, and exquisite twilight, quiet and slow and hallowed, and warm lamps glowed in black, cold night, and no one knew, or wanted to know. And then, early that afternoon in December of 1941 something came from the Pacific that was thunderous and deafening and unbelievable, jarring and stirring and feverishly maddening. No, not here, not anymore on this world, not to this nation. It couldn’t happen.”³

As students worried about their futures in the wake of the Pearl Harbor attack, University administrators moved to calm these fears. Speaking to an assembly of thousands packed into a flag-draped Huff Gymnasium on December 10th, Provost Albert J. Harno, longtime dean of the College of Law, advised the students that their best course of action was to stay in school. “Your action will be consistent in full measure with the ideals of patriotism and the highest interests of our country if you remain in school until your country needs and calls you,” Harno assured the students. Quoting from a speech delivered by Edmund James, president of the University during World War I, Dean of Men Fred Turner reiterated Harno’s point: “Stay at your books, acquaint

²Ibid, July 25, 1945, p. 2, col. 2; *ibid*, December 8, 1941, p. 1, col. 4; Illinois Alumni News, January 5, 1942, p. 1, cols. 2-3.

³Daily Illini, July 25, 1945, p. 2, cols. 1-2.

yourself as best you can with those things which may be of value to you in serving the country . . . This policy is in keeping with the desire of the war department.”⁴

In fact, the United States Department of War desperately needed soldiers for the armed forces and workers for the war plants. As a result, under the prodding of the American Council on Education, colleges were urged to adopt accelerated schedules that graduated students more quickly, thereby freeing them up for military-related activity. On December 30, 1941, the University’s Board of Trustees had already acted to expedite matters by making eligible for graduation those seniors who completed seven weeks of their last semester.⁵ (Semesters were then 18 weeks long.) Faculty members, though, had trouble reaching agreement on the key issue of an accelerated schedule.

At a meeting of the University Senate (the deliberative body of the faculty) on January 21, 1942, Dean Harno—who had recently been named by President Willard as the head of a new University Central War Emergency Committee—advocated the adoption of a quarter system consisting of four twelve-week semesters, replacing the current two semesters of 18 weeks each. Harno favored the quarter system because it promised to materially speed up education and because it demonstrated to the public that the University was on board with the war effort. However, a large contingent of professors soundly defeated Harno’s proposal in a 103-75 vote, prompting a disgusted Dean Turner to describe the faculty meeting as “a rather disgraceful spectacle.”⁶ The professors seem to have primarily objected to a quarter system because it meant

⁴Ibid, December 11, 1941, p. 1, col. 1.

⁵41st Report of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees (1942), 731-2.

⁶Record of January 21, 1942 Meeting, Record Series 4/2/1, Urbana-Champaign Senate Minutes, Box 2, Folder: 1942, University of Illinois Archives; Dean Fred Turner to Dean Albert

more work for them without an accompanying increase in pay. Some professors even questioned the motives of the Roosevelt administration in calling for acceleration. “For example,” Business Professor Fred Russell explained to Harno, “we fear that the emergency is being used as an excuse to pass reform legislation, much as the New Deal has done.” Faced with this strong faculty opposition, University officials simply added four weeks to the usual eight-week-long summer session. Finally, in February 1943, the University began operating on a full-blown accelerated schedule congenial to the professors—one having three 16-week semesters.⁷

In addition to adopting an accelerated calendar, University administrators also set up new courses having relevance to the war, including classes on aerodynamics, camouflage, censorship, first aid, and military history. Officials also considered creating a series of courses that would instruct students in world reconstruction and in the avoidance of war. Having witnessed two global wars in his relatively short lifetime, Dean Harno expressed doubt about the likelihood of success of these well-intentioned classes. “If there is anything in education that will bring a different outlook to human beings on the question of going to war and on developing a world-mindedness we have yet to discover it,” Harno wrote.⁸

Officials made an effort to encourage student support of the war effort. Early in 1942, the Committee on Student Affairs (composed of nine faculty members and nine students)

J. Harno, January 22, 1942, Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Folder: War Programs–Miscellaneous, 1941-42, *ibid*.

⁷Professor Fred Russell to Dean Harno, January 22, 1942, *ibid*; 41st Report of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees (1942), 775-6; Supplementary Information on War Services of the University of Illinois, April 11, 1944, p. 11, Record Series 5/1/1, Box 10, Folder: War Programs–Miscellaneous, 1943-45.

⁸*Ibid*, pp. 13-15; Harno to C. R. Griffith, May 5, 1942, Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Folder: War Programs–Miscellaneous, 1941-42.

unveiled a slate of defense-related programs for students. The projects were divided into three groups—A for men, B for women, and C for mixed participation--and offered training in such subjects as traffic control, infantry drill, radio operation, and first aid. Within less than a year, all of the over thirty projects had been abandoned because of a lack of interest— all, that is, except for C-17: a group that had been organized by the Theater Guild to entertain soldiers. Beginning in February 1942, C-17 presented at least one show a week at Chanute Field in Rantoul.⁹ One observer praised C-17 for having made “the most consistent and worthwhile war contribution of any group on the campus.”

The newly created Illini Union Board took charge of student war activities starting in the fall of 1942. The Board launched a wide range of war-related programs with varying degrees of success. It collaborated with the Champaign United Service Organizations (U.S.O.), providing hostesses for U.S.O. events, sold war stamps and corsages in a series of fund-raising drives, collected playing cards, magazines, games, and books for ailing soldiers, and conducted a letter-writing campaign for Illini in the armed services. Writing to Dean of Men Fred Turner, John Harman, chairman of the Board’s Department of War Service, gave an honest assessment of his group’s work in 1942-43. “Our activity this year has been successful in one way and unsuccessful in another,” Harman stated. “As far as getting great things done, we didn’t.”¹⁰

The Illini Union Board, though, did have great success in carrying out its social

⁹Daily Illini, January 7, 1942, p. 1, cols. 4-5; *ibid*, November 18, 1942, p. 4, col. 3; *ibid*, December 5, 1942, p. 4, col. 2.

¹⁰*Ibid*, November 18, 1942, p. 4, col. 3; John Harman to Fred Turner, April 3, 1943, Record Series 41/2/1, Dean of Men General Correspondence, Box 77, Folder: Illini Union Board.

programs. During the fall 1942 semester, the Board sponsored an average of five dances a week. According to one writer, Illinois students enjoyed that semester “one of the fullest social programs in recent years.” Despite the war, many campus social events went on as usual. Homecoming, for example, continued to be held, though attendances at the big football game were lower than normal. In any case, basketball had become the sport to watch on campus during the early war years. This was the era of one of the best Illini basketball teams in history—the so-called "Whiz Kids": Andy Phillip, Art Mathisen, Jack Smiley, Ken Menke, and Gene Vance. They were "phenomenal shooters, wonderful passers, cool under fire, with perfect timing, perfect ball sense," and went on to win two consecutive Big Ten titles in 1942 and 1943. In the course of their war-shortened career, the Whiz Kids broke 10 Big Ten records, including records for total points in one season, total baskets in one season, total points in one game, total baskets in one game, and total conference games won in two years.¹¹

Some critics believed that the University should curtail social activities for the duration of the war. President Willard apparently agreed with this sentiment. In a note to the Illini Union Board, he quoted approvingly a statement that had been issued by the Army and Navy: “In war time, recreation in college life must be limited to that necessary for a healthy and well-rounded existence.” Members of the Illini Union Board took the hint and limited the number of social events scheduled for 1943.

Many members of the Daily Illini staff undoubtedly approved of this curbing of social activities. Not long after the Pearl Harbor attack, DI editors had begun to criticize what they saw

¹¹Daily Illini, November 18, 1942, p. 4, col. 3; Illinois Alumni News, March 10, 1943, p. 1, cols. 2-5; Daily Illini, December 12, 1943, p. 15, cols. 1-2.

as a lack of war consciousness on campus. For example, as early as February 20, 1942, a DI editorial asked “Do We Need Another Kick in the Pants?” “Here at Illinois ‘business as usual’ is the keynote,” the editorial asserted, “in fact this keynote has taken the campus by storm and the majority have forgotten that there is a war going on.”¹² Similar criticism could be found within the pages of the Daily Illini for much of the war. One DI writer attributed this student apathy—or as he called it, this “placid, phlegmatic, detached state”—to “the physical and mental isolation extant on the University campus.” Another blamed this attitude on the University’s location in the Midwest “far from the blackout and bombing dangers of either coast” and on the fact that the students were “rather shielded from the realities of war measures.”

But by April 1942 students began to directly feel the effects of the war. That month sugar rationing hit the campus. Fraternities, sororities, and independent houses were required to register for their quotas of sugar.¹³ As the war progressed, meats, processed foods, gasoline, and even shoes would be subject to rationing. Gasoline and fuel oil rationing seriously affected student travel. Students returning home for vacation were confronted with trains and buses packed to overflowing--thanks to this rationing and wartime restrictions on transportation. The travel situation became so grave late in 1942—Fred Turner in fact called it “the most serious matter so far, which brings the war home to the students”—that the University was forced to adopt a staggered schedule for Christmas vacation. In order to prevent overloaded trains and

¹²V. J. Hampton to Fred Turner, December 17, 1943, Record Series 41/1/1, Dean of Students General Correspondence, Box 2, Folder: Hampton, V. J.; Daily Illini, February 20, 1942, p. 4, col. 1.

¹³Ibid, December 20, 1941, p. 2, col. 1; *ibid*, April 26, 1942, p. 4, col. 1; *ibid*, April 24, 1942, p. 2, col. 2.

buses, graduate students and seniors began the vacation first, followed a day later by juniors and sophomores, and freshmen a day after that.¹⁴

Of course, the Illinois students most acutely affected by the war were the thousands who entered the armed services either through enlistment or the draft. At the onset of the war, most juniors and seniors faced the possibility of being called up at any moment, the draft age then being twenty-years-old and over. On November 13, 1942, the U.S. Congress lowered the minimum draft age to 18-years-old. As a result, in the succeeding months, the only males left on campus were those majoring in subjects qualifying them for ‘educational deferments,’ those deemed to be physically or mentally unfit for military service, and those in uniform.¹⁵

For those subject to the draft, the outlook was grim. When asked by a friend what he would be doing after graduation, a member of the Class of 1942 responded, “Carrying a gun.”¹⁶ Another senior offered a bleak view of the very different kind of education that lay ahead for many of his fellow graduates. “We will find out how it feels to have little pellets of death howl around us,” he wrote, “how it feels to see a buddy die, and some of us will know what death is like. Some of us will come out of it whole, some won’t—and all of that will be part of our education.”¹⁷

As the number of students joining the armed services grew, University enrollment

¹⁴Ibid, December 4, 1942, p. 2, col. 1; ibid, October 21, 1942, p. 1, col. 5; ibid, November 22, 1942, p. 1, col. 8.

¹⁵Louis Keefer, Scholars in Foxholes (Reston, Virginia: COTU Publishing, 1988), 7-8; ibid, 1.

¹⁶Illinois Alumni News, June 6, 1942, p. 1, col. 5.

¹⁷Daily Illini, May 17, 1942, p. 4, col. 1.

sharply declined. The downturn had begun with the institution of Selective Service in 1940. Civilian enrollment figures for the Urbana-Champaign campus fell from a high of 12,624 in 1938-39 to a low of 5,824 in 1943-44. (The Illinois Alumni News reported a civilian enrollment of only 4,451 in its March 1944 issue.) The University hadn't seen enrollments this low since the 1910s. Of these 5,824 students, 3,429 were women.¹⁸ According to one source, some women looked askance at the civilian men remaining. "The tendency to brand all young men who are not in uniform as 'draft dodgers' is all too prevalent on campus," this source maintained.¹⁹

The Illinois Alumni News described the campus during the later war years as being "a woman's world."²⁰ Indeed, as the men went off to war, women filled the slots vacated by them, taking charge of campus organizations such as the Illio, Daily Illini, Theater Guild, and the Illini Union Board. Sororities flourished during the wartime years, enjoying record numbers of rushees, while the membership-starved fraternities languished. (However, of the 56 fraternities on campus, 49 continued to operate chapters, though some were forced to consolidate and share quarters.)²¹ A few women even enrolled in the College of Engineering--a traditional bastion of maleness; the education of many of these engineering students was financed by the Pratt-

¹⁸Ibid, September 23, 1942, p. 1, col. 4; University of Illinois Annual Register 1943-44, (Urbana, 1944), 485; Illinois Alumni News, March 1944, p. 3, col. 2; Annual Register 1943-44, 485.

¹⁹Daily Illini, August 2, 1944, p. 2, cols. 2-3.

²⁰Illinois Alumni News, February 1945, p. 2, cols. 3-4.

²¹Daily Illini, January 1, 1944, p. 2, col. 1; *ibid*, September 30, 1943, p. 3, col. 3; *ibid*, January 1, 1944, p. 2, col. 5.

Whitney aircraft corporation.²² Women also supported the war effort, enrolling in first aid and nursing classes, promoting a blood bank, and wrapping bandages in Red Cross work rooms. And Idelle Stith, an accomplished dancer, assumed the role of Chief Illiniwek in the fall of 1943.²³

For the first time in history, Illini women began to receive military training during World War II. Wearing a simple uniform consisting of a brown shirt, blouse, and tie, members of the Women's Auxiliary Training Corps (WATC) drilled without weapons and received instruction in such subjects as military customs and courtesy, sanitation and first aid, and map reading. The University's WATC program disbanded after a year or so because of a lack of interest.²⁴

The Daily Illini was one University institution strongly affected by the male exodus from campus. In the late spring of 1943, an almost entirely female staff took over the reins of the student newspaper. Senior Millicent Sloboda became the first woman editor-in-chief in the history of the Daily Illini. A colleague called 'Milcy,' as she was popularly known, "a natural for the job." "Anyone will work for Sloboda and work hard," this associate explained. "Milcy has spent six semesters doing big tasks and dirty little jobs with a thoroughness and a drive that leaves no doubt of her efficiency and ability."²⁵ Under Sloboda's editorship the DI remained a

²²Ibid, June 1, 1944, p. 1, cols. 1-2. In 1944-45, out of 547 undergraduates enrolled in the College of Engineering, 20 were women. Annual Register 1944-45 (Urbana, 1945), 488. In comparison, during the 1941-42 year, there was only one woman in a College of Engineering undergraduate enrollment of 1,914. Annual Register 1941-42 (Urbana, 1942), 484.

²³Illini Years (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1950), 101; Daily Illini, October 27, 1943, p. 1, cols. 1-2.

²⁴Chicago Tribune, April 7, 1943, p. 9; Daily Illini, July 21, 1944, p. 2, col. 1.

²⁵Ibid, May 22, 1943, p. 2, col. 3.

progressive paper, one that took strong stands against racial prejudice and that championed the cause of the military trainees and the veterans on campus.

The men-women ration, however, was not as lopsided as the enrollment figures suggested. There were in fact on campus large numbers of men not accounted for in the statistics tallying civilians--the thousands of Army and Navy men receiving specialized training at the University. The first members of the armed services to arrive at the University were trainees in a Navy signal school. On March 24, 1942, the Navy had given definite word of its intention of establishing such a school on campus, and University officials scrambled to meet the May 1st deadline. Dropping all of its other ongoing construction work, the University's Physical Plant Department--under the able leadership of Charles S. Havens--launched a massive remodeling program, converting the old Men's Gymnasium (now Kenney Gym) and the Gymnasium Annex into housing facilities and the Illini Union Ballroom into a mess hall. Masts were erected on Illinois Field to give the Navy trainees realistic instruction in the various methods of signaling between ships. Thanks to the employees in the Physical Plant Department, who in some cases worked three shifts to expedite the job, the Signal School opened on May 1st as scheduled, receiving a class of 200 trainees.. The school had a capacity of 800 to 1,000 men and the training lasted for 16 weeks.²⁶

In the late summer of 1942, the Navy opened schools for diesel engine operators and for diesel engine officers. The operators were housed in the Men's Residence Hall while the

²⁶41st Report of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees (1942), 841-2; Summary of Physical Plant Department Report for the Period 1940-1942, p. 4, Record Series 37/1/1, Physical Plant Director's Office Subject File, Box 23, Folder: President A. C. Willard, Apr-June 1943; Daily Illini, May 29, 1943, p. 3, cols. 5-6.

officers were given rooms in the Busey and Evans residence halls. The instruction in the operation and maintenance of diesel engines took place in the cavernous West Hall of Memorial Stadium, which had been converted into workshops, laboratories, and classrooms. Also, a school for Navy cooks and bakers was conducted at the University from November 1942 to June 1943.²⁷

In the summer of 1943, the Navy brought to campus its V-12 program training men to be medical, dental, and engineering officers. Though under Navy discipline, the V-12 trainees were instructed by members of the University faculty. They were housed and fed at Busey, Evans, and Illini halls. In the end, some 13,000 Navy personnel would be taught on campus in these various schools and programs during the course of the conflict.²⁸

The Army too had a strong presence on campus during the war years. Unveiled late in 1942, the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP) was organized to provide soldier-students with instruction in engineering, psychology, foreign languages, medicine, dentistry, or veterinary science. At the program's peak more than 100,000 ASTP men were studying at nearly 200 colleges.²⁹ The University of Illinois offered instruction for over 14,000 ASTPers from July 1943 until March 1946. Late in 1943, there were as many as 3,383 ASTP trainees on campus at the same time, living in 45 of the University's 52 fraternity houses. In the spring of 1944, the federal government sharply curtailed ASTP as increasing numbers of soldiers were needed for

²⁷Supplementary Information on War Services of the University of Illinois, April 11, 1944, pp. 4-5, Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Box 10, Folder: War Programs–Miscellaneous, 1943-45.

²⁸Ibid, p. 5; Illinois Alumni News, May 1948, p. 13, col. 3.

²⁹Keefer, 16; *ibid*, 37.

the ongoing Italian campaign and for the planned invasion of France.

Like their Navy V-12 counterparts, the uniformed ASTP trainees were taught by largely civilian instructors. The ASTP men had a formidable course load during their twelve-week-long terms. They attended school 34 hours a week and their study was supervised between classes and from 8:30 p.m. to 10:00 p.m. each week-day night. “The only time they have for their own pursuits is from the minute they finish the evening meal until night study begins,” the Illinois Alumni News noted.³⁰

Unlike the Navy, the Army did not allow its trainees to join fraternities or to play on University sports teams. “Our Illini sailors have become a very important and a thoroughly integrated part of University life,” one observer maintained, while the Army “has clung tenaciously to its isolationist policy.” In any case, the Army men had little time for extracurricular activities. Their schedule was nearly non-stop and the classes themselves were notoriously difficult. Even Psychology Professor Coleman Griffith, the University Coordinator of Specialized Training Programs, believed that the Army program was too burdensome. “We feel that the curriculum was too heavily loaded,” Griffith reported. “We realize, of course, that a time of war is a time of strenuous effort, but academic achievement does not thrive under conditions that produce fatigue.”³¹

Some ASTP men were critical not so much of the program itself but rather of the instructors and their methods. Writing to the Daily Illini, one student-soldier criticized what he

³⁰Ibid, 21; Illinois Alumni News, March 1944, p. 1, col. 1.

³¹Daily Illini, December 17, 1944, p. 4, cols. 1-2; Coleman Griffith, “Suggested Letter to General Aurand,” Record Series 2/9/1, President Arthur Willard General Correspondence, Box 84, Folder: Military–A.S.T.P.

saw as “the smugness, prejudice, and self-satisfaction” of “so many members of the faculty” and condemned “the ridiculous local tradition that only a teacher speaks in the classroom, especially when controversial matters are discussed.” Another soldier registered his agreement with this last criticism by recalling the “facetious” definition of a lecture as “a process by which the notes of a professor become the notes of a student without passing through the minds of either.”³²

Perhaps partly reflecting this dissatisfaction with the faculty, ASTP men at the University scored very low in history, geography, and mathematics in tests conducted by the Army early in 1944.

Members of the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program (ASTRP)—a segment of ASTP devoted to the instruction of 17-year-olds—seem to have had particular difficulty at the University. “The courses were pretty tough,” Lambert G. Condon, who had been an ASTRP trainee at Illinois, recalled, “and we had no counseling outside the classroom, no tutoring or help of any kind. Some of the teachers were foreign and hard to comprehend. Though I didn’t do so well academically, I did not flunk out as many did.”³³ Indeed, the Army received more complaints about the University of Illinois from parents of ASTRP men than any other institution and the ASTRP failure rate here was “substantially higher” than at any other school. Prompted by these facts, the Army conducted an investigation of the reserve program at the University and found, in Coleman Griffith’s words, a “remote” faculty, “unsympathetic” instructors, an “inadequate and ineffective” counseling system, a Department of Physics “entirely off the beam in its program,” and some “intolerable” sanitary conditions at Newman

³²Daily Illini, November 7, 1943, p. 2, cols. 2-3; *ibid*, November 13, 1943, p. 2, col. 3.

³³Coleman Griffith to Dean M. L. Enger, May 8, 1944, Record Series 2/9/1, President Arthur Willard General Correspondence, Box 84, Folder: Military—A.S.T.P.; Keefer, 52.

Hall, where the reserve trainees resided. Reporting to a concerned President Willard, Griffith said he believed that the reserve program wasn't "faring quite so badly" as the Army made it appear. Griffith, however, agreed that the University's system of student advisers was "antiquated," and even admitted that there was a problem with instruction. "As I have reported to you before," Griffith wrote Willard, "one of our main troubles is that, by and large, we do not know how to teach."³⁴

The masses of soldiers and sailors dramatically transformed the look and feel of the University. According to one witness, the large numbers of men in uniform made the campus seem like "some sort of combination military-naval reservation." To another observer, the rows of marching Navy bluejackets gave the Quad the appearance of the "Brooklyn Navy Yard." A so-called section marcher shepherded the ASTP men to class. When the ASTPers reached the doors of the classroom building, the section marcher bellowed "AT EASE." Once inside the classroom, the Army trainees remained standing until the section marcher roared "TAKE SEATS."³⁵ A writer for the Illinois Alumni News vividly described the campus wartime scene early in 1944:

All over campus—from old Illinois field on the north to the stock pavilion on the south—you see lines of soldiers marching to the sound of 'Hup, two, three, four—hup, two, three, four,' and the sailors to a weird chant which

³⁴Griffith to Willard, October 25, 1944, Record Series 2/9/1, President Arthur Willard General Correspondence, Box 94, Folder: Military—AST Programs.

³⁵Illinois Alumni News, July 6, 1942, p. 6, col. 2; Daily Illini, February 6, 1943, p. 4, col. 2; "War Activities of the University of Illinois," Faculty Bulletin Issued by the University War Committee, June 26, 1943, p. 1, Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Box 10, Folder: War Programs—Miscellaneous, 1943-45.

sounds something like: ‘Follow your LEFT, right, left, right, follow your LEFT, right, left, right. . .’ one boy doing most of the chanting and hitting a high pitch on the words we’ve put into capital letters. We’ve never heard anything like it; it has a south seas sound about it—which maybe is appropriate.

Despite this peaceful image of marching soldiers and sailors, conflict occasionally developed between the civilian students and the Army and Navy men. The marching itself could be the cause of controversy. In a letter to the student newspaper, an anonymous author alleged that walking on campus had become “a hazardous job” for civilians because “wherever you go, you’re bound to be jostled and pushed around by little squads of soldiers scurrying to their classes.” Another writer to the Daily Illini claimed that some of the soldier-students needed “a course in manners, etiquette, and self-conduct,” berating them for supposedly trampling on the grass while going to class and insinuating that they had defaced the Lorado Taft statues at the east entrance of the Library.³⁶

The decision to temporarily close the Illini Union cafeteria to civilians during the summer of 1943 sparked by far the most serious civilian-soldier controversy of the war. The closure had been prompted by an influx of ASTP men arriving on campus in July and a lack of any other suitable eating facilities for them. Forced to eat in the overcrowded and sometimes unsanitary campus restaurants, some civilian students expressed unhappiness and resentment at this state of affairs.

³⁶Illinois Alumni News, March 1944, p. 3, col. 3; Daily Illini, November 11, 1943, p. 2, col. 4; *ibid*, July 16, 1943, p. 2, col. 3. There was also a certain level of tension between civilians and soldiers at the University of Wisconsin at Madison. See Cronon, Edmund David and Jenkins, John W., The University of Wisconsin: A History Volume 3 (1994), 435-6.

In a rare front-page editorial headlined “LET’S FACE FACTS” appearing on July 22, 1943, the Daily Illini stoutly defended the student-soldiers against what it termed “malicious rumors and slander.” “Next time we hear anyone criticizing OUR service men,” the editorial concluded, “let us remember if it were not for them there would probably be no University of Illinois for quite some time to come, and perhaps not even an America as we know it now.”³⁷ The editorial attracted the attention of Dean of Students Fred Turner, who in response arranged a meeting with Millicent Sloboda, the DI editor-in-chief. Sloboda told Turner that the newspaper had received three signed letters “complaining about inconveniences caused to civilians by army students” and at least a dozen unsigned letters which had been “tossed in the wastebasket immediately.” She also said that a number of ASTP men had informed DI staffers of some “unsatisfactory situations.” According to Sloboda, in Turner’s words, “the worst situation a soldier had described was an instance in the Union where a man, who is apparently a faculty member, requested soldiers to keep their distance as the odor of their uniforms was very offensive to him.” Other soldiers had “raised the question with reporters as to why the students and faculty are not more friendly to them and why they are treated as outsiders rather than a part of the University.”³⁸ In October 1943 a major source of conflict between civilians and students was eliminated when the Illini Union cafeteria was reopened to civilians, the ASTP men’s mess hall having been moved to a newly renovated Ice Skating Rink.

In the midst of the controversy over the Illini Union cafeteria closure, Mort Slaiman

³⁷Ibid, July 7, 1943, p. 2, col. 3; ibid, July 22, 1943, p. 1, cols. 4-5.

³⁸Fred Turner to President Willard, July 23, 1943, Record Series 41/1/1, Dean of Students General Correspondence, Box 3, Folder: Willard, A. C.

wrote a letter to the student newspaper pointing out the fact that African-American students were not permitted to eat in “the ‘better’ or even mediocre eating places on campus.” An October 1943 Daily Illini editorial referred to two recent incidents where African-Americans were refused service in campus restaurants. “Many of us are inclined to dismiss discrimination, Jim Crowism, anti-Semitism, as trivial, or at least very far removed from our daily experience,” the editorial asserted. “Such an attitude is both incorrect and dangerous. Actually, our fair campus has been permeated for years with insidious prejudices of all sorts, and while the situation is much better than it was several years ago, much is left to be desired.”³⁹

Many of the veterans returning to campus—60 were enrolled in the 1944 summer session—found this segregated social situation to be unacceptable. When asked what he thought of the social conditions on campus, Robert McCarthy, a former staff sergeant in the Army Air Forces, replied: “Break down the social, religious, and racial barriers which exist on campus.”⁴⁰ Responding to questionnaires sent to them by the University in the late summer of 1944, many Illini in the armed services expressed sentiments similar to those voiced by Robert McCarthy. “I have always felt that University life should teach people how to live in a democratic society,” one respondent wrote. “The extracurricular life at the University should be a good chance to learn and practice that—yet the outdated fraternity and sorority system remains to injure, both Greeks and Independents. There is no place for a caste system in a modern university.”⁴¹ Acting

³⁹Daily Illini, October 22, 1943, p. 4, col. 1; *ibid*, July 7, 1943, p. 2, col. 2; *ibid*, October 24, 1943, p. 2, col. 1.

⁴⁰Illinois Alumni News, July 1944, p. 1, col. 3; Daily Illini, June 23, 1944, p. 1, col. 2.

⁴¹Summary of Replies to Questionnaire Sent to Illini in Service, August 1944, Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Box 10, Folder: War Programs—Miscellaneous, 1943-45.

in accord with their ideals, the returned soldiers early in 1945 elected Watson Blake, an African-American, as the vice-president of the Illini Veterans of World War II, a group formed in 1944 to represent veterans' concerns. Blake would go on to help found the Illini Interracial Council, an organization dedicated to ending discrimination in local restaurants and theaters.⁴²

As more and more veterans returned in the waning days of the war, Japanese-American students began appearing on campus as well. Shortly after Pearl Harbor, the federal government had forced tens of thousands of Japanese-Americans into internment camps. In January 1944, military restrictions on Japanese-American students had been "materially" lowered and, a few months later, the UI Board of Trustees agreed to admit students of Japanese ancestry for a trial period. Each student, though, was required "to present evidence that he or she has sufficient funds to pay all expenses without the need for employment while in attendance." In November 1944, Dean of Students Fred Turner reported that there were 13 Japanese-American students on campus and that none had reported "any experiences of intolerance." ("They have been well received by our student body," he later wrote.) Upon Turner's urging, the Board of Trustees would lift the employment ban imposed on these students at its May 26, 1945 meeting.⁴³

With the Allied invasion of Normandy in June 1944, the European war appeared to be nearing a climax, and University administrators geared up for an expected surge in post-war enrollment. Already, early in 1944, the University had created a Division of Special Services for

⁴²Daily Illini, February 25, 1945, p. 2, col. 3; *ibid*, March 23, 1945, p. 4, col. 5.

⁴³Fred Turner to President Willard, May 16, 1945, Record Series 41/1/1, Dean of Students General Correspondence, Box 5, Folder: Willard, A.C.; 42nd Report of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees (1944), 903-904; Fred Turner to Coleman Griffith, November 30, 1944, Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Box 9, Folder: Students, Foreign; 43rd Report of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees (1946), 490.

War Veterans. The division was set up to assist veterans in beginning or continuing their education by offering them advice, information, and educational aid. “We didn’t learn much from the last war,” Acting Dean of Men E. E. Stafford stated, “but we did learn how to treat the veterans.”⁴⁴ University officials also began to study the matter of providing residences for married veterans, a line of inquiry that would ultimately lead to the establishment of the Parade Ground, Stadium Terrace and Illini Village complexes housing thousands of families.

University students rode a rollercoaster of emotion in the final months of the war. As the Allies drove deep into Germany, the campus learned of the death of President Roosevelt on April 12, 1945. A memorial service for FDR held at the Auditorium attracted a massive turnout. Over 3,000 students, “with a sparse sprinkling of faculty,” packed “every seat and exit, and stood against the walls, overflowing into the vestibules, and pouring out onto the grey steps outside.” The somber ceremony was officiated by clergymen of the Catholic, Protestant, and Jewish faiths. “Students of the three religious denominations sat side by side in the Auditorium, white and negro,” the Daily Illini noted.⁴⁵ Colonel C. A. Chapman, the University ROTC commandant, remarked to Dean Turner that “for many of the students there it was just like having the king die, for many of them could not remember any other President.”⁴⁶

⁴⁴42nd Report of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees (1944), 835-8; Daily Illini, October 6, 1944, p. 7, col. 1.

⁴⁵Fred Turner to President Willard, November 15, 1944, Record Series 41/1/1, Dean of Students General Correspondence, Box 5, Folder: Willard, A. C.; Daily Illini, April 15, 1945, p. 2, col. 3. UI alumnus Betty Lee Sung recalled student reaction to FDR’s death: “The whole campus was in mourning. The girls cried on each other’s shoulders.” Betty Lee Sung, Illini Comeback Guest, Student Days Exhibit Questionnaire, Student Life and Culture Archives, University of Illinois.

⁴⁶Fred Turner to Mr. and Mrs. J. F. Turner, April 16, 1945, Record Series 41/1/20, Fred H. Turner Papers, Box 47, Scrapbook 12.

On Victory in Europe Day—May 8, 1945—more than 3,000 students gathered in front of the Auditorium for a brief service. President Willard set the tone for the assembly, telling the crowd that “we have not met here today to celebrate our great victory in Europe, but rather to rededicate ourselves to the winning of the final victory over Japan.” That long-awaited outcome finally arrived on August 15th and the University celebrated with a two-day holiday. When news of the war’s end was leaked the previous day, the campus went wild. “Crowds which began dashing back and forth on Green and Wright streets shortly after six gathered into an ecstatic mob who marched and sang and shrieked their happiness above the violent discord of many car horns,” a witness reported.⁴⁷

In the months and years following the war, the full extent of University involvement in wartime research was revealed. Nineteen University physicists had taken part in the Manhattan Project that produced the world’s first nuclear bomb.⁴⁸ Physics Professor F. W. Loomis had been an associate director of the Cambridge, Massachusetts, laboratory that had developed radar. Chemistry Professor Roger Adams had served on the National Defense Research Committee.⁴⁹

Classified wartime research had also been conducted on the campus itself, much of it in Noyes Laboratory behind locked doors bearing huge black or red signs warning "No

⁴⁷Daily Illini, May 9, 1945, p. 1, col. 7; *ibid*, August 16, 1945, p. 2, col. 1.

⁴⁸Illinois Alumni News, November 1945, p. 1, col. 4. Reacting to the news of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, Mary Ellen Brown wrote in the Daily Illini: “Although we are most certainly glad that this weapon is in our hands rather than those of our enemy, we can’t help wishing, just a little, that it had never been discovered at all. The production of a weapon of such gigantic proportions . . . seems rather like playing with a Frankenstein monster that may well turn on its creator.” Daily Illini, August 7, 1945, p. 2, col. 2.

⁴⁹Illinois Alumni News, November 1945, p. 1, col. 4; Illinois Alumni News, October 1945, p. 3, cols. 4-5; *ibid*, May 1948, p. 12, col. 4.

Admittance." At Noyes Lab Professor Carl Marvel and his staff helped develop fifty new types of synthetic rubber and worked on an anti-malaria drug. Here too a team of researchers came up with a field kit that soldiers could use to test the purity of water. Noyes also housed a top-secret munitions development laboratory, the recipient of over \$900,000 in federal money. Chemists in this lab worked on a smoke screen to shield ships from enemy attack and devised methods of applying DDT. A field in the South Farms served as a proving ground and the enormous east room of Memorial Stadium was used for experiments in fog dispersal. Occasionally during the war, University students heard "not-very-distant 'booms'" that rattled windows and sometimes a "sort of pink smoke" was noticed drifting across campus.⁵⁰ If students had known how to read them, these signs would have betrayed the existence of the super-secret munitions laboratory. University chemists also investigated the properties of penicillin and other antibiotics such as streptomycin.

Harold H. Mitchell, professor of animal science, conducted one of the more controversial on-campus experiments during the war. In 1942 Mitchell received federal funding for an experiment that was designed to investigate the impact of extreme temperatures on human vitamin and mineral requirements. A climate-controlled chamber was constructed in the Old Agriculture Building (now Davenport Hall) and several conscientious objectors were recruited for the study. These recruits were placed in the chamber for six to eight hours each day and subjected "to temperatures and humidities simulating those of the desert and the jungle." (When simulating desert conditions, the chamber could attain temperatures in excess of 110 degrees

⁵⁰Ibid, col. 1; *ibid*, col. 3; *ibid*, col. 1; "Now It Can Be Told," Illini Club of Chicago Year Book and Directory (1946), pp. 45-51, Record Series 26/10/803, Illini in Chicagoland, Box 2.

Fahrenheit.) “The sweat secreted during such periods will be collected for analysis for vitamins and other constituents,” Mitchell explained in a letter to a military official. Continuing until 1944, the experiment ended up demonstrating “the need to replenish salt in tropical conditions” and inspired the publication of at least ten scientific articles.⁵¹

Looking back from the vantage point of 1945, Private First Class Fritz Jauch, the former DI sports editor, recalled the light-hearted reaction by many on campus to the Pearl Harbor raid. This initial attitude changed as students came to grips with the fact of war. “It took us a while to know what had happened,” Jauch wrote, “to emerge from our dream, our make believe. It took us nights of stunned bewilderment, and days of sudden all-enfolding aloneness. . . . And then it was there, and we knew. We knew that we, our world, we the living, were to know agony more sharp, heartbreak more cruel, desolation more awful than any before us. We knew that this was a time for greatness, more than ever before”⁵²

Of the 20,276 Illini who had served in the armed forces during World War II, 738 were killed.⁵³

Epilogue

During the post-war years, the veterans returned en masse to the University—thanks to the full tuition funding offered by the GI Bill—and school officials struggled to cope with the

⁵¹Ibid, 48-49; Gordon Oyer, “Sweating It Out: The University of Illinois ‘Guinea Pigs,’” Illinois Mennonite Heritage (Volume 18: March 1991), 1, 8-14; H. H. Mitchell to General Lewis B. Hershey, October 14, 1942, Record Series 8/7/20, Harold H. Mitchell Papers, Box 1, Folder: Conscientious Objectors.

⁵²Daily Illini, July 25, 1945, p. 2, col. 2.

⁵³Illini Club of Chicago Year Book and Directory (1946), p. 10, Record Series 26/10/803, Illini in Chicagoland, Box 2.

burgeoning enrollments. Already, in the fall of 1945, enrollment on the Urbana campus had jumped to 9,515 students.⁵⁴ By the following spring, the enrollment had reached 12,780--a figure that included 5,794 veterans.⁵⁵ University estimates showed that at least 23,000 students were planning to attend the Urbana campus in the fall of 1946. Unfortunately, the University would have the utmost difficulty housing and teaching such a large number of students--by far the largest number the school had ever seen. But these students--many of whom were veterans--could not be simply turned away. "This is both an emergency and a permanent problem of supreme importance," a University document asserted. "The veterans are in a hurry. They have given their time and energy to the nation for the purposes of war, and now they are anxious for the education which will enable them to live a gainful life in a world of peace. . . . If 23,000 young people wish to enroll in the University of Illinois, the State of Illinois must give them the opportunity."⁵⁶

The University had already taken steps to curtail enrollment. In July 1945 the Board of Trustees approved a proposal barring the admission of undergraduate women who were not Illinois residents and who were not previously enrolled.⁵⁷ Then, in January 1946, the Board took an even more radical step, extending its admission ban to most non-residents of Illinois, both male and female; however, the following month, the Trustees rescinded this decision.⁵⁸ For the

⁵⁴Illinois Alumni News, February 1946, p. 1.

⁵⁵Ibid, March 1946, p. 3.

⁵⁶"The Emergency Educational Program of the University of Illinois," May 29, 1946, Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Box 17, Folder: War Veterans, Division of, 1946-48.

⁵⁷43rd Report of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees (1946), 603.

⁵⁸Ibid, 981-983; ibid, 1001.

first time in its history, the school also began to consider adopting a policy of selective admissions—a policy designed “to select those students with the greatest capacity for making use of the educational facilities of the University.”⁵⁹

Early in 1946, University administrators were faced with a housing crisis of staggering proportions. Thousands of admissions applications poured into the registrar’s office, threatening to swell an enrollment that already approached 10,000, but at the time “the visible supply of housing” reportedly could accommodate only 10,400 students.⁶⁰ School officials scrambled to scrounge up housing space anywhere they could find for this imminent flood of newcomers. The west great hall of Memorial Stadium, the Men’s Gym Annex and the Ice Rink were pressed into service as dormitories that could house a total of 1,000 students. All of Newman Hall and the Men’s Residence halls were once again available for the use of civilian students, the ASTRP and Navy men having left the campus. Also, the capacity of fraternities was increased by 250. Most importantly, the University obtained 275 pre-fabricated houses for veterans and their families, erecting them in two sites: the so-called Stadium Terrace complex northwest of Memorial Stadium, and the Illini Village complex south and west of the Alpha Tau Omega and Sigma Nu houses on Pennsylvania Avenue. The U.S. Department of War materially aided the University’s housing efforts by agreeing to allow 2,000 student veterans to be billeted at Chanute Field in Rantoul.⁶¹

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Illinois Alumni News, February 1946, p. 1; 43rd Report of the University of Illinois Board of Trustees (1946), 981.

⁶¹Illinois Alumni News, November 1945, p. 1; *ibid*, February 1946, p. 1; *ibid*, April 1946, p. 1. The 1946 legislative appropriation provided funds for buildings that would eventually offer more permanent relief for the housing situation: the Lincoln Avenue Residence Halls and the

Despite these stop-gap measures, the University still could not house all of the students expected to enroll in the fall of 1946. School administrators addressed this problem in dramatic fashion by setting up two new divisions—one in Chicago, the other in Galesburg. In the summer of 1946, Charles Havens, the director of the physical plant department, and Edward Potthoff, head of the Bureau of Institutional Research, scouted out possible sites for a Chicago branch and ultimately settled upon Navy Pier, which was centrally located and offered 350,000 square feet of space. Unfortunately, City of Chicago officials wanted Navy Pier to be used for commercial purposes. Following “a little war of nerves” with Chicago politicians, the University managed to obtain a lease of Navy Pier. Within six weeks, the Chicago division was ready to go, opening its doors to some 4,000 students on October 21st. Amazingly, it took only about ninety days for this school—“a division larger than Notre Dame university before the war”—to progress from an idea to a reality.⁶²

The Galesburg branch was established in even faster time: University publicity described it as “The College Made in a Month.”⁶³ Beginning in mid-July 1946, new UI President George Stoddard attempted to obtain for University use the Mayo General Hospital in Galesburg, which had been built to care for the large numbers of servicemen who were expected to be wounded during the invasion of Japan. The invasion, though, did not occur and as a result the hospital never opened. Following a period of delay, the U.S. Department of War approved the transfer of

Goodwin-Green student-staff apartment complex. Illini Years, 114.

⁶²Ibid, November 1946, p. 7; *ibid*, April 1948, pp. 7-8.

⁶³“The College Made in a Month,” brochure found in Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Box 17, Folder: Undergraduate Division, Galesburg, “The College Made in a Month,” 1949.

the hospital on September 21st and exactly one month later classes began at the Galesburg branch of the University of Illinois. That semester 432 students enrolled at Galesburg.⁶⁴ From the fall of 1946 until the time of its closure in the spring of 1949, the Galesburg division would provide the first two years of college to 2,940 students.

The Galesburg division included among its enrollment some fourteen paraplegic and otherwise physically challenged students, many of whom had been injured in the war. The Special Rehabilitation program at Galesburg was one of the first of its kind to be established in the nation. Under the able leadership of Timothy Nugent, the program offered its students corrective therapy, functional training, counseling, and strenuous physical activity in such sports as wheelchair basketball, wheelchair baseball, and swimming. According to Nugent, the purpose of the program was to teach the physically challenged “to live happily and securely in a wheelchair, to afford them opportunities for those experiences that had seemingly been denied them because of an inability to ambulate normally.”⁶⁵ After the closure of the Galesburg branch, many of the paraplegic students transferred to the Urbana campus. Writing from the perspective of 1954, Nugent noted a gradual change in the outlook of the UIUC students, staff and community toward the physically challenged: “This change is one from fear and stand-offness, or over-eagerness to be helpful to open mindedness and a normal pattern of acceptance and understanding, and that of helping an individual who is disabled with the same attitude as you would help a big burly football player through a door if his arms were completely filled with

⁶⁴Illinois Alumni News, April 1948, pp. 7-8.

⁶⁵Timothy Nugent to Max Durfee, March 2, 1954, Record Series 41/1/1, Dean of Students General Correspondence, Box 18, Folder: Paraplegics.

packages.”⁶⁶

The inauguration of the Chicago and Galesburg branches, as well as the launching of 31 high school extension centers, allowed the University to accommodate an enrollment of 28,553 in the fall of 1946—far and away the largest number of students in the school's history. The Urbana campus claimed the lion's share of this enrollment total—18,378—of which 11,200 were veterans.⁶⁷ Students scoured the Champaign-Urbana area in search of housing. "Students dwell in attics and basements, in far west Champaign and far east Urbana," the Illinois Alumni News noted, "in trailers parked behind scores of houses across the community, in barns and garages made into temporary homes, on farms and in towns all over Champaign county and adjacent counties. A good many drive from as far as Tuscola."⁶⁸

Besides swelling the enrollment totals and restoring the pre-war male-female ratio, the large numbers of veterans markedly transformed the tone of the campus. The veterans were serious and in a hurry to graduate and begin a career. Many of them had families to provide for and did not have the time—or the inclination—to join campus groups, like fraternities. Dailly Illini editor Jean Hurt wrote that many veterans "aren't impressed by the prestige of a Greek letter name after they have been a member of a much larger fraternity—Uncle Sam's armed forces." Perhaps not surprisingly, a certain amount of tension developed between the fresh-faced 17- and 18-year-old freshmen and the world-wise veterans. "Many veterans are registered in freshman courses," Provost Coleman Griffith reported to President Willard. "They are more mature and

⁶⁶Ibid.

⁶⁷Illinois Alumni News, January 1947, p. 7.

⁶⁸Ibid, November 1946, p. 3.

often more aggressive and outspoken than the ordinary freshman who is somewhat embarrassed by them.”⁶⁹

The veterans began to disappear from campus in the late-1940s. A writer to the Daily Illini mourned the passing of this “golden era,” when school rules had been relaxed out of “a sense of unfairness in applying certain regulations to older, more worldly college students.” “Yes, the war is over,” this correspondent lamented, “and we are gradually reverting to prewar standards. Certain infractions, formerly overlooked, are no longer taken in so light a vein.”⁷⁰

⁶⁹Ebert, 167; *ibid*, 170; Griffith to Willard, October 16, 1945, Record Series 5/1/1, Provost Subject File, Box 10, Folder: War Veterans, Division of, 1944-46.

⁷⁰Ebert, 170.