6. GI’s and Temporary Buildings

Although coeds prevailed during the war, they were outnumbered at times by young men learning to fly and some of their boyfriends received the typical “Dear John” letter. Several of the patriotic Minute Maids developed special friendships at the officers’ club on the wind-swept air base outside of Mountain Home, or during the canteens held on campus for homesick servicemen stationed at nearby, barren Gowen Field. “Baby boom” sons and daughters attending Boise State in the 1960s and 1970s realized that their parents had met while their father served at one of the military installations, or they began dating when he enrolled at Boise Junior College as a veteran entitled to the benefits of the June, 1944, Public Law No. 346, the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, a generously wise GI Bill of Rights.

Marriages rose abruptly, and the exploding birth rate was encouraged by the government’s subsistence allowance. Many of the veterans who enrolled in college would not or could not have done so without this assistance, thus military duty was a “mixed blessing” for the GI’s who returned home with sound minds and bodies. Having seen far-off places and peoples while bearing arms or manning ships, horizons had been broadened along with ambitions. About twenty percent of BJC’s veterans married coeds or high school sweethearts and set up housekeeping in a metal quonset hut or a frame one-story apartment building like those moved to Boise from Vancouver, Washington. Most of them exhibited a keen desire for learning, a motivation which may not have been excited without the GI Bill.

Initially, Public Law 346 provided veterans without disability who had served ninety days or more $90 if they were married, and $65 per month for those who were single. It was expected this low allowance would discourage former flyers, sailors and soldiers with little interest in education who might otherwise “cash in” on the benefits. By 1955, almost eight million “Joes” and “Janes,” about half of all World War II veterans in civilian life, had sought an education in all kinds of schools, and about four million received loans for homes and farms. The institutions they attended, academic, professional or vocational, received a maximum of $500 for each GI to cover teaching costs and supplies. Thus it was possible to accept nearly everyone who applied. Veterans who remained interested in a military experience could join the R.O.T.C. on campuses where it existed and receive an additional $50 each month.

Some educators feared, when Franklin Roosevelt signed the Bill, that GI hordes might turn their campus into an “educational hobo jungle.” In Boise, Mathews told the faculty in March, 1944, almost three months before the popular statute became law, that a former student now in the Army had warned him to expect disciplinary problems when veterans enrolled, suggesting a guild would probably help. One was organized. Thereafter, faculty found no need for alarm. This was true all over the nation. Some months after more than a million enrolled in the fall of 1946, the education editor for the New York Times observed, “The GI’s are hogging the honor
rolls and the Dean's lists . . . far from being an educational problem, the veteran has become an asset to higher education."

The term "veteran" suggested someone more mature than many of the young men entitled to wear the "ruptured duck" lapel pin. Some of their fathers, having served in France a quarter of a century earlier, were members of the Veterans of Foreign Wars (1899), or affiliated with the American Legion (1919). These stalwarts, wearing caps over their graying hair as they marched in parades carried the appellation veteran well. However, it hardly seemed fitting for some of the pink-cheeked, fuzzy-chinned GI's who qualified for membership in BJC's Esquire Club.¹

Airport Building, which became initial Vocational-Technical Office.

ACCEPT ALL VETERANS!

The college would be prepared, Conan Mathews told the press in February, 1944, "when the clock strikes . . . allowing teenage veterans to come trooping home." A well-balanced vocational program was being planned. But most of the GI's preferred academic classes to those held in the machine shop where $60,000 worth of N.Y.A. lathes, drills, cutters and grinders were installed. Students had been trained there for war work, as had the employees of several companies during night classes.

Mathews, with other career courses in mind besides those taught in the machine shop, met with representatives of the Veterans Administration, U.S. Employment Service, the American Legion and the vocational training field. Mathews accepted a mandate for the development of a program based on the actual needs of the local economy while paying particular attention to the rehabilitation of disabled veterans. In March, 1944, Harry Morrison suggested that the college take a lead in preparing students for post-war employment, gearing its program to the results of a survey conducted by the Chamber of Commerce.
Like most colleges, BJC granted up to six hours of physical education credit for active duty, and recognized courses taken while in military service following recommendations made by the Pacific Coast Association of Registrars. Veterans who had not completed high school were admitted when achievement tests were passed satisfactorily at the guidance center.

Concerned about late registrations, Mathews told the faculty during an October, 1945, meeting that every veteran should be admitted "if at all feasible." Total enrollment that fall was about three hundred students, plus fifty-five nurses taking science courses. A year later three-fourths of the over eight hundred full-time students were men, and those enrolled in liberal arts courses outnumbered vocational students five to one. In 1947, when almost a thousand students registered for winter quarter, nearly fifty percent were veterans using the GI Bill, or Public Law No. 16 for the disabled. The faculty had more than doubled from twenty-two in 1945, to fifty-three full-time instructors.

A professor employed in 1946 to teach biology met with his students in a former Gowen Field frame hospital unit, planted, it was said, temporarily south of the Assembly Hall. But like the surplus structures found on other campuses, this temporary building remained in use, and Donald Obee's classroom there was "always too hot or too cold." Nonetheless, attendance was mandatory as in the past.

A coed who had been a freshman when the GI's arrived in force, told Chaffee that she and her classmates, starry-eyed with visions of proms, green beanies, bonfires and boys, found themselves surrounded by men. There were about a hundred males and just two girls in her government class, and they took their studies seriously. However, she said the veterans' "no nonsense attitude" did not bother the eighteen-year-old girls because so many of the former sailors or soldiers were married, and those who were not were too old by at least four or five years. Amused by this assessment, Chaffee found the GI's to be mature "men with a purpose," whose target was a college degree with or without feminine companionship.

Asked to evaluate students with military experience, Chaffee said their grades were a bit higher, thus the 140 veterans were "definitely . . . not coming to college just because Uncle Sam pays them $65 per month for subsistence." This was the intent of the GI Bill, the opinion of their instructors in Boise, and other college presidents Chaffee had talked to during a recent conference in Chicago. Returning servicemen did not want to "muff this unusual opportunity presented to them by the nation."

When someone asked what BJC was doing to meet the needs of a burgeoning student body, Chaffee said facilities would be greatly enlarged. They were several years later. Temporary surplus housing and classroom units added immediately after the war were followed by the wooden stadium erected in 1950, two brick dormitories the next year, Campus Elementary School in 1954, the Science Building the following year, and the Gymnasium in 1956. Responding to the final query of his interviewer, "Do you believe it will be necessary to refuse students, including veterans?" Chaffee said no, the college would accept all applicants meeting the school's minimum requirements on a "first come, first served" basis.
The economy continued strong after the war. Nonetheless, community colleges had to scratch backs, beg, and borrow as they attempted to acquire housing and classroom facilities needed to accommodate their clientele. For administrators charged with the responsibility of providing an adequate plant, the immediate postwar years were as hectic (but challenging and satisfying) as they were for merchants. Without enough customers during the Depression and unable to meet their demands while America was at war, businessmen were deluged with eager buyers of goods that had been rationed or in short supply. The merchant had plenty of customers and merchandise toward the end of the decade. Educators, with more students and teachers than ever before, were delighted with the turn of events, but supplying housing and classrooms was a trying task. College towns and district taxpayers were so busy catching up with their own material wants and needs, public and personal, that educators had to hoe their own row.

A couple of the frame one-story buildings Chaffee obtained at military installations in Washington and Idaho remained in use for twenty years. They were a "real boon" to the college; "they eased the burden," as the student body grew from 600 to well over 4,000. Make-do became the only answer when the GI Bill brought millions of young men to campus because educators felt they must not turn them away.

At Pocatello, where almost a thousand students attended classes during the fall of 1945, the college had nearly twice as many the following year overtaxing inadequate facilities. Officials found registration exceeded their most sanguine expectations, as veterans outnumbered men and women without military experience. Anticipating a
housing shortage, administrators had asked their neighbors to renovate attics, basements and garages so that the class of 1946 might sleep behind the proverbial furnace rather than walk twenty miles through the snow. Meanwhile, Dean John Nichols wangled surplus buildings at Boise’s Gowen Field, and most of the moving and refurbishing costs were covered by a federal grant.

Moscow’s student body, about the same size in 1945 as Pocatello’s, grew to slightly over two thousand the next year when half the students wore combat boots, the “ruptured duck” pin, or were entitled to do so. With an older and larger physical plant than the one at Pocatello, and immense when compared with BJC, the basic need at Moscow was student housing. This problem was alleviated when twenty-four prefabricated houses and 150 trailers were moved from the plutonium plant at Hanford, Washington, on to a tract along Paradise Creek near the University. More might have been accomplished if the Legislature had not cut $175,000 from Moscow’s budget.

President Harrison Dale resigned, declaring that without the deleted money it would not be possible to treat veterans fairly. His successor Jesse Buchanan headed the University until 1954, while Chaffee, assisted by Willis Gottenberg, continued to lead Boise Junior College for more than a decade. Coeur d’Alene’s G.O. Kildow might have served almost as long had he not suffered a fatal heart attack in 1962, at age sixty-seven.

A year younger and somewhat smaller than BJC, the college headed by Kildow after O.E. Lee joined the Navy in 1944, faced similar space problems when the GI’s arrived. Enrollment had increased, Coeur d’Alene’s Panhandler observed in the spring of 1946, while two years earlier the registrar had lamented an all-time low because high school girls were taking jobs and the boys were enlisting before graduation. Those that remained were “4-F boys, and girls whose economic status permitted them to ignore the lure of highly paid jobs,” along with the wives of Navy men stationed at Farragut Training Center. Still headquartered in City Hall when the war ended, the college remodeled additional space in a vacant business building and used a local theatre for student convocations as well as a large psychology class. While the gymnasium in Boise had been a hangar, Coeur d’Alene’s was a converted Kootenai County fair grounds structure. And, like Boise, the north Idaho school offered aviation training, night classes and summer school. Started before the war, the latter were not conducted consistently until afterwards.
LEWISTON STATE NORMAL SCHOOL, adopting a four-year curriculum in September, 1943, in anticipation of the demand when the war ended, presented thirteen graduates with their bachelor’s degrees in June, 1946. Registering about three hundred learners that year, there were over four hundred the following September, and about half of them were GI’s. At Lewiston’s sister school in Albion, where enrollment had dropped from over four hundred to less than two hundred, registration increased in 1945 and 1946, but not as rapidly as at the other colleges. Albion now had a four-year high school teaching certification program, but for veterans only. “Civilian students” were certified for elementary and junior high schools only, but this restriction was lifted in a couple of years.

Boise Junior College enrolled more students, but being a district rather than a state supported school like Albion and Lewiston, a four-year program was deferred for twenty years. In the meantime, while discussing without seriously seeking the implementation of an additional two years, several faculty offered night classes for adults in the spring of 1938, and summer courses in 1942.

When BJC gave summer school a whirl the first year of the war, Clisby Edlefsen, formerly with Boise High School and Link’s Business College, taught secretarial science courses for $3.00 per credit hour. The district kept twenty-five percent, and the instructor received the balance. Joseph Spulnik’s chemical warfare class was started six months after Pearl Harbor, when black-outs darkened some inland cities as well as those in the coastal states. Interest soon waned however, and the warfare class was dropped while Spulnik’s chemistry classes continued along with several other courses attracting about fifty townspeople each summer during the war.

Acel Chatburn, former State Superintendent of Public Instruction, was the summer school dean when veterans filled up classes in 1946, and asked for more. Chatburn, who joined the faculty in 1945, saw summer enrollment increase nearly six hundred percent during the many years he directed the program. Of the two hundred registrants for the 1946 session, almost three-fourths of them were military veterans eager to get a head start on their college education.

During the next four years, attendance remained near two hundred. It increased by forty percent the year North Korea invaded the South, and dropped to less than one hundred the following summer when so many students were serving in the ensuing war. After President Truman fired General Douglas McArthur, Truman’s successor Dwight Eisenhower got negotiations underway. Veterans of the Korean conflict enrolled and the summer school grew over one hundred percent, reaching a thousand before Chaffee retired.

BJC’s 1947 summer school brochure claimed strangers would find that Boise had a delightful climate with cool nights, abundant shade, extensive parks and well-kept lawns. The campus was modern, and there was a soda fountain in the Student Union. Entrance rules were gentle. All high school graduates were admitted, while veterans without a diploma submitted their service records. Adults unable to meet the regular standards were enrolled as “special students.”

Night school requirements were also softened, making it possible for almost anyone of college age who wanted a certain class to enroll. Several faculty, responding to the requests of teachers, business and professional people, had experimented with one-credit, six-dollar evening classes during the spring of 1938, but the nocturnal program fell by the wayside until the college was moved to the airport. Thereafter, English, Art, Spanish, typing, and civil air defense classes, plus defense plant training were taught during the war. After the GI’s returned, Roy
Schwartz's philosophy class and accounting were added. There were almost three hundred students, largely veterans and other adults by 1947, while there were over five hundred when Truman sent McArthur to Korea.

Shortly before Douglas McArthur was transferred from Japan, the college inaugurated extension courses for Air Force personnel stationed near Mountain Home. Literature, speech, history, French and psychology students met there with hardy instructors who endured more than two hours on the narrow highway, sometimes hazardous sections covered with "black ice," during the over one hundred mile roundtrip. The Mountain Home evening classes and summer school continued as the decades passed, as did the "out-reach" and "extended day" courses introduced in other communities as the college matured. Attendance at Mountain Home increased from one thousand in 1950 to nearly twice that many military and civilian students four years later.5

**ACADEMICS AND ATHLETICS**

Although teenage female high school graduates found some of the war's "Ulysses" to be too ripe by at least four or five years, numerous beardless GI's who were drafted or enlisted in 1944 or 1945, were only months older than the saddle oxford, sloppy sweater girls. The demobilization process, during the spring of 1946, provided college-bound Joes and Janes with mustering out pay, and most of them exhausted their three hundred dollars long before the $65 or $90 GI checks were received.

Meagerly funded while living off campus in a rented room shared with another veteran, they made the Student Union constructed during war the center of campus life, as it was for additional students when the first conventional dormitories were
completed in 1951. Originally housing a cafeteria, lounges, a book store and fountain, a second floor ballroom was added to the Union after so many former students returned.

Why did they come to unrenowned Boise? Most of them were native Idahoans, and the capital city housing almost fifty thousand people was the largest community in the state. Raised in small uncomplicated towns or on farms and ranches, they preferred this placid campus where the climate was generally milder than in the panhandle or eastern Idaho. Part-time jobs were more plentiful for early arrivals, and recreational activities such as hunting, fishing, skiing and boating were a few minutes to an hour from their apartment or dormitory.

Completing two years, scores of BJC graduates continued their education at the university, where they joined hometown friends who had enrolled at Moscow as freshmen. Many parents living in distant parts of the state, who had the means to do so, encouraged their high school graduates to by-pass junior college for a variety of reasons, social as well as academic, and go directly to the university, a Boise tradition.

The GI's, making it possible and necessary to expand, changed colleges and local attitudes toward them as the number of alumni increased. Certain scholars were attracted to BJC by the reputations of several instructors (Hatch, Buck, Spulnik, Fritchman and Obee were among the favorites), but years were to pass before large numbers of students able to go elsewhere enrolled for academic reasons. Cultural opportunities, though limited, were advantageous in the growing city as well as on campus, and athletic prowess emerged after the veterans arrived. The athletes were coached by Harry Jacoby, released from the Army in 1946, assisted by Lyle Smith, a former football and basketball letterman at Pocatello and Moscow. When Jacoby resigned for service-related health reasons Smith, a Navy veteran like some of his players and the college president, succeeded him.

Preceded by several able coaches, Smith's position was strengthened by eager youthful material hardened in military training camps and overseas combat duty. Assisted by George Blankley for fourteen years, Smith was in charge when Taft Junior College lost the 1949 Shrine Potato Bowl game to BJC before 12,000 clamoring fans in Bakersfield, California's Griffith Stadium. Smith had returned to the Navy and Blankley was with the team in November, 1950, when the Broncos were defeated by Long Beach City College before 47,000 spectators during the Junior Rose Bowl in Pasadena, California.

Led by the Statesman's James Brown, a non-profit corporation, Bronco Stadium, Inc., was formed in December, 1949. It financed an improved football field planted between wooden grandstands constructed with war-surplus lumber that replaced the bleacher-bordered turf where a Student Union would be erected one day. Brown's stadium was filled with cheering spectators when in 1958 the Broncos took by 22 to 0 the national football title from the junior college in Tyler, Texas.