

How did the nation proceed from World War II to the Baby Boom?

Who started World War II? During the 1930s, Adolf Hitler started showing his ambitions for a German empire. His army invaded several European countries. By 1939, Hitler had joined forces with the Italian leader, Benito Mussolini, who had his own plans for an empire. Italy had already invaded North Africa. Americans referred to Germany, Italy, and the supporters of those countries as the Axis powers.

Other nations tried to stay out of these conflicts. In 1939, however, France and Great Britain were compelled to take action against the Axis powers.

Meanwhile, Japan was trying to control the Chinese mainland and Southeast Asia. The U.S. wanted to support European colonies in the Pacific and protect its own interests, such as the Philippine islands. As tensions rose, President Roosevelt ordered a naval *blockade* of Japan.

Expecting the U.S. would have to go to war, Roosevelt mobilized the National Guard in 1940. Then the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, a military base in Hawaii. The United States entered World War II in December 1941. This country referred to itself, France, England, and Russia as the Allies.

How did Oklahomans distinguish themselves during World War II? Almost 500,000 Oklahomans served during the war. Many of them reached high rank. For instance, Patrick J. Hurley, from Lehigh, had been Secretary of War under Herbert Hoover. He became a Major General. During the war, President Roosevelt named him as a special *diplomatic envoy*.

The state's citizens also led strategic battles.

- The Osage tribe's Major General Clarence L. Tinker commanded the Air Corps in Hawaii. He was killed leading the Air Force in the Battle of Midway, which was a turning point in the war.
- Lieutenant General Lucius K. Truscott led the Allied forces at Anzio, Italy, and led the Fifth Army during the invasion of France.
- Lieutenant General Ray S. McLain commanded the field *artillery* for the Forty-fifth Infantry Division in the invasion of Sicily as well as the Thirteenth Division Field Artillery in Normandy. He was the only





The original insignia of the 45th Division resembled a gold swastika on a red background. It was changed to the “Thunderbird,” on the right, when the swastika became a famous Nazi Symbol.



Sergeant Major Art Peters tries out Hitler’s bed after the capture of Munich. 45th Infantry Division Museum.

man in the U.S. Army to go from civilian to lieutenant general.

- Lieutenant General Ira C. Eaker commanded the U.S. Mediterranean Air Force.
- The Navy’s Rear Admiral Joseph James Clark commanded the aircraft carrier *U.S.S. Yorktown* in the Pacific.
- Vice Admiral Marc A. Mitscher commanded Task Force 58 in the Philippines and Japan.

The military honors individuals as well as groups for outstanding service. One such group was Oklahoma’s Thunderbirds.

What was special about the Forty-fifth Infantry Division? In 1923, when the National Guard was expanded to a division, it was designated the Forty-fifth Infantry Division. The original insignia for the Forty-fifth looked like a gold swastika on a red background — an Indian “good luck” sign. However, the swastika became *infamous* as symbol of Nazi Germany, and the Forty-fifth dropped it.

A statewide contest brought in new designs. When the Forty-fifth Infantry mobilized in 1940, it adopted the Indian “thunderbird” symbol. It was in yellow on a red diamond field. The men became known as the Thunderbirds. Germans called them the Falcons.

They hit the beaches at Salerno and Anzio, both important battles in Italy. When they reached Germany, they took over Munich and Hitler’s own apartment. In 1944, one of their lieutenants single-handedly captured 946 Germans near Grenoble, France. He was Clarence E. Coggins from Poteau.

At one time, German communications experts could easily break American military codes. Getting advance information, of course, allowed them to stop or surprise American soldiers. But Germany never broke the “codes” of the Forty-fifth Infantry Division, because communications people of the Forty-fifth belonged to Indian tribes. Their codes were not codes at all. They were native Indian languages. These men were called code talkers.

In 1999, the army honored the last survivor of an elite World War II group of code talkers. A native Oklahoman, Charles Chibitty of the Comanche code talkers, received the Knowlton Award during a ceremony in the Pentagon’s Hall of Heroes. The award recognizes people for outstanding intelligence work. Chibitty was one of

seventeen Comanches to serve in the Army Signal Corps. While serving in the army, he earned the World War II Victory Medal, the European Theater of Operations Medal, the Bronze Star, the Europe-African-Middle East Campaign Medal, and the Good Conduct Medal.

The Thunderbirds were always “gainers,” too. They were the only division that never lost an inch of ground. General George S. Patton Jr. praised the Forty-fifth Infantry with these words:

Born at sea, baptized in blood, your fame will never die. Your division is one of the best, if not the very best, division in the history of American arms.

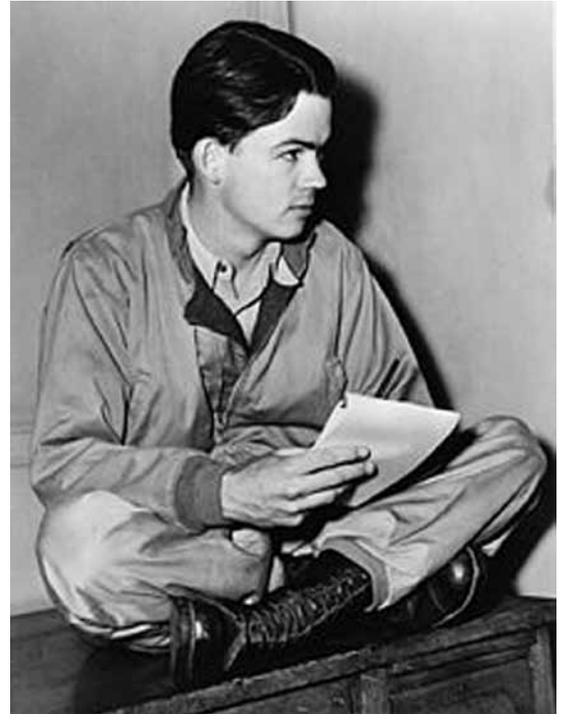
Because of military reorganization, the Army retired the Forty-fifth Infantry Division on February 1, 1968.

Who memorialized the Forty-fifth using cartoons and cameras? It wasn't the great fighters who made the Forty-fifth famous, though. It was two cartoon soldiers named Willie and Joe. Created by Thunderbird Bill Mauldin, the cartoons brought smiles to Americans around the world. To those at home, the Willie and Joe characters represented all the infantrymen in the war. The infantrymen, too, identified with the sympathetic characters. Bill Mauldin won the Pulitzer Prize for his work.

Mauldin was assisted with his creations by photographer George Tapscott. Tapscott sometimes made photographs of Mauldin in specific poses. Then Mauldin used the photos as models for his drawings. Tapscott was a copy boy for the *Oklahoman & Times* when he bought his first camera, a “box brownie,” in 1938. He was so skilled that he became the division photographer during the war.

Mauldin left the Forty-fifth in 1943, but Tapscott stayed with it for the rest of the war. He took pictures when the Thunderbirds liberated Dachau, a concentration camp. He photographed places where Nazi executioners had killed thousands of people, most of them Jewish. After news of the camps got out, he photographed a sign written in German that said, “I am ashamed that I am a German.”

After the war, Tapscott returned to the *Oklahoman & Times* as photographer. He also stayed with the Forty-fifth Infantry until the Army retired it in 1968. He himself retired from the Oklahoma National Guard in 1974.



**Bill Mauldin
in 1945**
Photo by Fred
Palumbo
Library of Congress.
New York World-
Telegram & Sun
Collection

What was happening on the Home Front? Women were excluded from the military draft and could not enlist in the service. But in 1942, the military started accepting women to work in technical and clerical positions. Members of the Women’s Naval Reserve, the Waves, trained on a simulated ship at the Agricultural and Mechanical campus in Stillwater (now Oklahoma State University).

Women also flocked to the nation’s factories to do the jobs the absent men had always done in the past. “Rosie the Riveter” was the theme song of female factory workers. Their jobs were at the Douglas Aircraft bomber plants in Tulsa and Oklahoma City, the smokeless powder plant in Pryor, and other locations.

Military installations cropped up in several locations in the state. The Army Air Corps located its Air Materiel Command Depot at Tinker Field, outside Oklahoma City, where B-29 bombers were serviced and repaired. The Army put a training center at Camp Gruber in the Cookson Hills near Muskogee. It activated an entire army division there. The U.S. expanded Fort Sill and other military sites, and the Air Force set up several training units around the state.

Even though Oklahoma was in the middle of the continent, the Navy was very active here. Navy fliers trained at a base near Clinton and at the North Base in Norman, which used the University of Oklahoma’s Max Westheimer Field. The South Base in Norman, attached to the university’s main campus, trained skilled workers, such as machinists, for Navy service.

Altogether, the U.S. made twenty-eight army camps and thirteen naval bases in the state. The central location and abundance of good flying weather made it a good choice. After the war, Norman’s naval installation became the world’s only inland Navy base. In 1958, the Navy retired the base and returned the air field to the university. Today a small hill juts out of the flatlands along Interstate Highway 35 outside Norman to puzzle travelers who are strangers to the area. That hill is a man-made structure used by the trainees at the Navy’s Technical Training Center for gunnery practice.

Fliers also trained at a base outside Miami in northeastern Oklahoma. Many of the trainees were from Great Britain. Fifteen of them were killed during their training and buried in a nearby cemetery. After the war, when the training camp was closed, there was no one to care for the graves. Mrs. Claude A. Hill, a local resident with no sons of her own, took it upon herself to groom the graves. She planted grass and

Do You Know?

Elvis Presley used to like staying at the Best Western Trade Winds Motel in Clinton, Oklahoma.

flowers and kept them trimmed. Each year she replaced the small British flag which flew over each grave.

Several years after the end of the war, a British commander visited Miami and saw the cemetery. As a result, Great Britain awarded Mrs. Hill the King's Medal of Service in the Cause of Freedom. The inscription says, "Approved by His Majesty in recognition of the valuable service rendered by you to the Allied Cause."

How were prisoners of war treated in America? More than 400 sites nationwide, eight of them in Oklahoma, housed prisoners of war. Most were Germans. The first prisoners at Fort Reno (outside El Reno) were among the 250,000-plus captured in North Africa in May, 1943. There Germany's Afrika Korps fought under the command of the famous "Desert Fox," Lieutenant General Erwin Rommel. After five months of heavy fighting, British and American forces captured them. The Allies sent most captives to the U.S. for *incarceration*. Eventually, more than 340,000 German troops, 51,000 Italian troops, and 2,240 Japanese troops were held in prison camps on American soil.

The Geneva Convention, which made international rulings about wars, guided Europe and America regarding prisoners of war (POWs). In 1929 it had said that prisoners of war could be used as a labor force for the capturing government. During World War II, Oklahoma industry, especially the agricultural industry, needed laborers. Unfortunately, the prisoners arrived too late in 1943 to be of significant help with the crops for that year. However, they provided a much-needed source of labor during the 1944 season.

The greatest problem in using the prisoners was government "red tape." Farmers and other employers complained that the priority system made it hard to "hire" the POWs and slowed down their work. The government had *established* the system and military personnel followed it rigidly. One day, Alvin Powell, foreman of the Horseshoe Ranch near Roff, told a camp commander that he needed a supply of workers for spring lambing. The answer was that all workers were engaged in a military priority project and that he should "postpone lambing."

Despite such problems, the program succeeded in filling part of the labor shortage which had been created by the war. Some post-war reports estimate that prisoners of war provided 870,000 hours of labor



During World War II, 94 acres of Fort Reno served as an internment camp for German prisoners of war. The German POW's were "hired out" as laborers for local farmers and, in 1944, built the chapel located to the north of the parade grounds.

every month across the nation, making the value of the labor program exceed \$100 million.

How was victory finally achieved? World War II ended in Europe on May 8, 1945. It lasted three more months on the Pacific front. On August 6, 1945, an American plane, *Enola Gay*, dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan. It was the first time any country used an atomic bomb. Three days later, Nagasaki, Japan, was the second target. On August 15, Japan surrendered to the Allied forces and World War II ended.

Around the world, the war killed 20 million people. Of those, 406,000 were Americans and 6,400 were Oklahomans.

Almost 500,000 Oklahomans served during the war. Most of them returned home to civilian life. Many took advantage of the benefits afforded them under the new “G.I. bill.” It was a law that gave benefits to veterans, including tuition money for college. So many veterans wanted degrees that colleges and universities needed extra buildings. They bought old army barracks and other military buildings, moved them to a campus, and made them into student housing.

Veterans found changes at home. With modern machinery, the farms needed fewer workers. During the war, defense plants recruited a new labor force. Many agricultural workers had moved to the cities for jobs. They and their families developed communities around the defense plants and military installations.

More than 11,000 Oklahoma servicemen were wounded during the war. Some returned home with missing limbs or other disabilities.

What was the polio epidemic? Many veterans found that family members had been sick with a very contagious disease. Poliomyelitis, now known as polio, was called infantile paralysis in the 1940s. It affected young adults and huge numbers of children and often it caused permanent disabilities. Nationally, there were 12,000 cases reported in 1943 and 19,000 cases reported in 1944. There were more than 42,000 new cases in the U.S. in 1949.

There were people who recovered completely. Most weren’t as lucky. When veterans returned from the war, some found that their children, their younger brothers and sisters, or perhaps even their wives had lost the use of an arm or a leg. The most disabled patients had to live inside an “iron lung,” a large metal container that helped them breathe.

In August 1943, Walter Cooper, a Maysville farmer, and his wife, Jackie, drove their two-year-old daughter to Oklahoma City. Their fam-

ily physician, Dr. Ray Lindsey, wanted doctors at Crippled Children's Hospital to examine the girl. Most polio cases happened in the summer, so people believed heat made polio worse. The Coopers rose before dawn and traveled in the early hours of the morning to avoid the heat.

When they arrived at the hospital, they were shocked to find hundreds of people outside the facility. The crowd was quiet and serious. Some people were inside their cars. Others stood or sat on the hospital lawn. They were all families of polio patients in the hospital.

"Rooms were filled to double occupancy," said Cooper. "So many beds lined the halls that there was barely enough room for the doctors and nurses to walk between them."

The hospital did not even allow the Cooper girl inside. Her case was mild, and she might catch a worse form of the disease from other patients. The doctors examined her outside in the car. They gave instruction for physical therapy and sent the family home. Within a few years, there were no visible signs that she had suffered from polio.

Polio continued to be a dreaded disease until 1955 when Dr. Jonas Salk perfected a vaccine. Once in public use, it practically eliminated the disease.

Who was Robert S. Kerr? Oklahoma elected a governor during the war. Robert S. Kerr, elected in 1942, was the first governor actually born in the state. He was born in a log cabin near Ada in the Chickasaw Nation and was proud of his frontier heritage. He became an attorney and oilman as well as one of the founders of the Kerr-McGee Oil Company. As a civic and religious leader, Kerr was an accomplished public speaker. A large man, he kept a "hearty manner" and a good sense of humor.

Most of Kerr's term was during the war years, and he effectively handled those war-related duties. In addition, he succeeded in gaining a *referendum* vote for free textbooks for the public schools. The state created its Pardon and Parole Board during Kerr's term. It removed from the governor's office the responsibility for deciding on sentences, pardons, and paroles. Bonds issued during Governor Phillips's term were retired before the end of Kerr's term. When he left office in 1946, there was a surplus in the state treasury.

In 1948, the people elected Kerr to the United States Senate. There he became known for his pointed sarcasm and his ability to get things done. He was re-elected in 1954 and 1960. Kerr was almost solely responsible for the Arkansas River Navigation Project. This project



**Governor
Robert S. Kerr**
*Oklahoma Historical
Society*



President John F. Kennedy, seated, signing the 1961 Amendments into law, June 30, 1961. Shown with the President are Rep. Carl Albert (D-OK); Rep. Wilbur Mills (D-AR); Sen. John J. Williams (R-DE); Rep. Thomas J. O'Brien (D-IL); Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson; Sen. Robert S. Kerr (D-OK); Rep. John W. Byrnes (R-WS); Abraham Ribicoff, Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare; and Wilbur J. Cohen, Assistant Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare.
SSA History Archives.

the idea and committed himself to the Senate. A wheeler-dealer, Kerr was one of the nation's most powerful senators and one of the state's most effective. He once said, "If Oklahoma needs it, I'll get in bed with the devil to get it." Oklahoma Democratic Congressman Tom Steed once said of him, "Bob came along at a time when the Dust Bowl was ending, and we needed to go places. We did."

Kerr worked to bring industry into the state, and he did a great deal to improve Oklahoma's image in the nation. He was well-respected nationwide and in great *demand* as a public speaker. He lost no opportunity to tell his audiences about the abundant resources and opportunities in his great state. His 1960 book, *Land, Wood and Water*, further promoted Oklahoma's assets. The state's Dust Bowl image began to fade.

Even though Senator Kerr hated "big government," he learned to use the government "machinery" to his advantage. He dealt in power, and he gave his support to people who supported Oklahoma and Oklahomans. Rex Hawks, a former Kerr employee, said in a 1978 interview that Kerr was "for the farmers, the old folks, and the working people."

Although many former governors had run for the U.S. Senate, Robert S. Kerr was the first Oklahoman to succeed. He won re-election in 1954 and 1960. The *Saturday Evening Post* printed an article in December 1962 calling him "uncrowned king of the U.S. Senate." But a few days later, Kerr was in a hospital bed with a heart attack. He died on New Year's Day, 1963, while entertaining a group of doctors and nurses

opened the Arkansas River to handle trade and transport between inland Oklahoma and the Gulf of Mexico. While chairing the Senate's Aeronautical and Space Science Committee, he worked on legislation that authorized NASA to send spacecraft to the moon.

Robert S. Kerr made one unsuccessful bid for the presidency in 1952. Defeated, he abandoned

with a story. The late senator was inducted into the Petroleum Hall of Fame in 1984. His home in Poteau is now a conference center and a museum.

With what shortages did the country deal during and after the war? During the war, certain goods were rationed — that is, families could purchase only small amounts at a time. They used *ration* stamps, like postage stamps or tickets, to buy those goods. For instance, the government rationed sugar, coffee, and butter. Anything made with rubber was also difficult to buy. Tires were extremely hard to get. Shortages were still a problem after the war.

World War II turned factories into defense plants. In fact, the United States did not produce any automobiles during that time. When manufacturing changed back to peacetime production, the automobile companies could not make cars fast enough to meet the demand. In many cases, customers handled the shortage by offering “bonuses” to dealers in exchange for a vehicle.

Other changes caused financial frustration, too. Veterans using the G.I. bill were serious about getting an education quickly. College students found it hard to keep up with these older classmates. Then, as veterans competed in the job market, unemployment rose. President Harry Truman warned that inflation and an economic depression were possible. Even so, prices remained high, and wages fell lower.

Gasoline had been rationed during the war. Speed limits were set at thirty-five miles per hour to save both fuel and tires. Soon the government lifted these obstacles, and people were anxious to travel. Motels began to appear along the highways. It was clear that the nation needed more and better roads to handle the new traffic. One of the leaders in road construction was Governor Turner.

What kind of governor was Roy J. Turner? Roy J. Turner, the son of Lincoln County homesteaders, was elected governor in 1946. Turner had worked his way up in business, starting as bookkeeper for Morris Meat Packing Company. By the 1940s he had a 10,000-acre ranch near Sulphur. He worked to improve the Hereford breed and the Turner Ranch became internationally famous for its Herefords. Two of them were “Hazford Rupert 81st,” the first bull to produce \$1 million worth of offspring, and “TR Zato Heir,” the world’s first \$2 million bull. Turner was president of the American Hereford Association three times. He was



**Governor
Roy J. Turner**
*Oklahoma Historical
Society*

also one of the organizers of the Oklahoma Cattlemen's Association.

Turner used his ranch to promote youth interest in the livestock industry. He held an annual field day for 4-H and FFA members there. Livestock was available for special purchase as show animals for young people. At one Fort Worth show, six of the nine winning steers were products of the Turner Ranch.



George W. McLaurin was forced to sit separately from the other students at the University of Oklahoma in 1948.
Gelatin silver print.
Visual Materials from the NAACP Records, Prints and Photographs Division (47)
Digital ID# cph 3c16927
Courtesy of the NAACP

By the time Turner took office, the lag in the economy was beginning to bounce back. Oklahoma was ripe for progress. Turner pushed to expand the state's recreational facilities. He urged thrift in government and broader use of natural resources. He supported tax reductions, which lured new industry into the state. Turner also started an *extensive* highway-building program. He created the Turnpike Authority to sell bonds to build a four-lane turnpike between Tulsa and Oklahoma City. It is now known as the Turner Turnpike.

Building projects began at state hospitals and other state institutions.

These construction programs created jobs. They put money into circulation and healed the bruised economy. Across the nation, people enjoyed more wealth. By the end of the 1940s, wages reached an all-time high. For the first time in America's history, the average worker made \$5,000 per year.

One day during Turner's administration, two legislators engaged in gunplay on the Senate floor. On May 7, 1947, longtime Senator Tom Anglin, a 64-year-old official from Holdenville, was shot in the left hip. He was shot by another legislator, freshman Representative Jimmie Scott, also from Holdenville. Scott had served for more than two years as a Marine sergeant in the South Pacific during the war. Although Anglin never fired his weapon, both men were holding guns when the *skirmish* ended.

The shooting occurred just before 2:00 p.m., when the afternoon

Senate session was scheduled to convene. Scott appeared on the floor calling Anglin aside for a “discussion.” But the fight was not political. Scott, who was divorced, was evidently upset over a lawsuit against him. Anglin’s law firm in Holdenville had represented the ex-Mrs. Scott in the case.

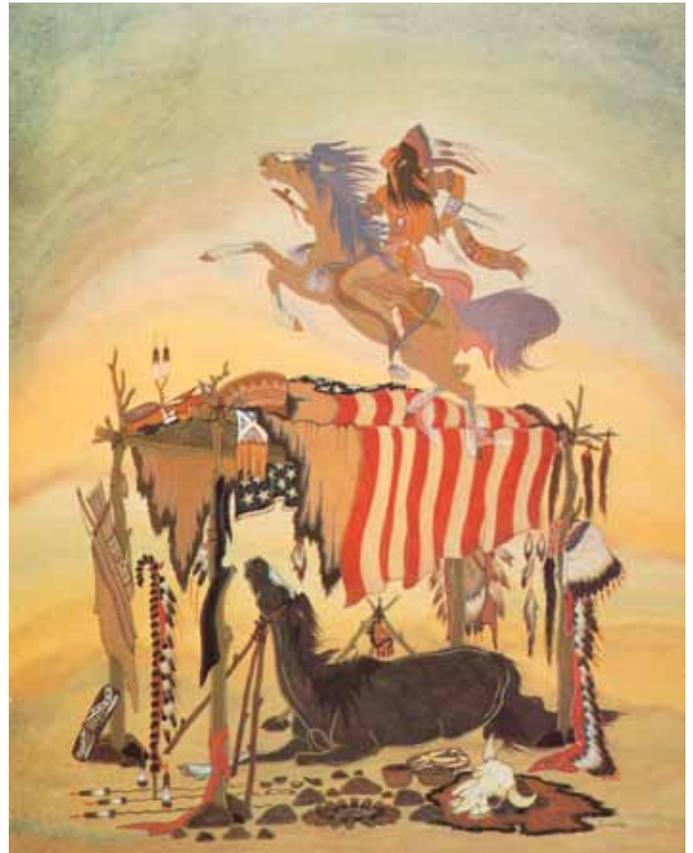
How was higher education integrated?

A wall of segregation kept white students apart from African-American students at all levels. Cracks began to appear in the wall of segregation in the late 1940s. Ada Lois Sipuel, a Langston University honor graduate from Chickasha, applied to the University of Oklahoma School of Law in 1946. The University denied her admission. Because of the segregation laws passed by Oklahoma’s first legislature, school officials were under penalty of fine and/or imprisonment if they admitted her to a “white” school. But in

1948, the United States Supreme Court ruled that African-American students must get the same education privileges as white students. The state legislature, then, *established* the Langston University School of Law for Negroes in the capitol building.

Also in the late 1940s, George W. McLaurin applied to the University of Oklahoma Graduate School. He had been on the faculty of Langston University, and he was admitted. But he was required to sit in separate areas and even to eat at a separate cafeteria table. His case went to the United States Supreme Court as *McLaurin vs. Oklahoma Board of Regents*. In 1950, the Court ruled that such segregation put McLaurin at a disadvantage and violated his Fourteenth Amendment rights. This decision started the desegregation of higher education in Oklahoma. It was the first in a series of decisions to cause desegregation of higher education across the nation.

What was the University of Oklahoma Dormitory Fire? In 1949, a fire destroyed a men’s dormitory and brought disaster to the University of Oklahoma campus. On December 3 that year, the housing for 349 male students was leveled by fire. Three students were killed and twenty-one were injured. One of them was Maurice Ahearn, twenty-six years old, of Killingsworth, Connecticut. He could have escaped easily, but he



Scaffold Burial by Woody Crumbo. This work depicts the burial ceremony of the Plains Indians. Crumbo dedicated the work to all Indian participants in America’s conflicts in honor of Private First Class Clarence Spotted Wolf who was killed in World War II.
Gilcrease Museum
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stayed inside, running through the halls to wake the other students. He died within a few feet of an exit as a result of his heroism.

The wooden building, only eight years old, was built by the Navy during the war to house officers. It had five wings and two stories. Only twenty minutes after the fire was discovered, it had spread to all five wings. Several students were cut off from fire escapes because of the blaze. They jumped from second-story windows and were injured. Many students escaped with only their nightclothes. Some, war veterans, were clutching the G.I. bill checks they had received just hours before the fire.

What was the Baby Boom? At the end of the decade, America had survived the Great Depression and another world war. Even though there were shortages, the people were no longer worried about going hungry or losing loved ones to war. In the post-war era, people in their twenties and thirties felt secure both financially and emotionally. They started raising families.

A standard birth rate for the U.S. population is about 2 percent growth per year. In the year after the war, it increased by more than 10 percent. This “baby boom” ran from 1946 till 1964, adding 75.8 million people to the country in less than twenty years. It had a very large effect on schools, jobs, and all of society ever since it began.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Name two achievements of the Forty-fifth Infantry Division.
2. Where did the U.S. keep its prisoners of war? How did it use them?
3. Why is this state a good location for military bases?
4. Identify:
 - Code talkers
 - Charles Chibitty
 - “Willie and Joe”
5. What roles did women play in World War II?
6. What was the purpose of the Geneva Convention of 1929?
7. Discuss the impact war journalists and artists can have on civilians.
8. What *epidemic* worried Americans in the 1940s and 1950s?
9. Identify Ada Lois Sipuel and George W. McLaurin.
10. Discuss the long career of Robert S. Kerr.