



James H. Dickens

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# Dickens a teacher as well as WWII veteran

By Margaret J. Stair  
Daily Times Staff Writer

During his nearly 91 years of life, James H. Dickens has earned the title "veteran" in more than one sense.

He is a veteran of World War II, where he served in the Army's Quartermaster Service, working to get supplies to troops at the front.

His close calls include the time the Japanese captured a 180-truck convoy on the Burma Road in India. The convoy was trying to get supplies to Chinese troops who were fighting Japanese troops.

Rather than kill the drivers or take them prisoner, the Japanese took the trucks and let the men, who were part of an all-black unit, go back to their base.

"The Japanese just did not kill black soldiers," Dickens said.

So they went back to Ledo, India, to get another 180 trucks full of supplies and completed their task. After the war ended, he came home with the American Theater Service Medal, the Good Conduct Medal, the Asiatic Pacific Service Medal with two stars, and the World War II Victory Medal.

Before he ever went to war overseas, Dickens became a veteran of a quiet struggle for social and economic change back home. The son of rural Edgecombe County farmers, he got a scholarship and went to N.C. A&T University in the late 1930s.

"One of the things that our family truly believed in was education," said Barbara D. Morgan, his niece. "Our grandparents saw to that. It was one of the things that was instilled in all of us. We



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**World War II veteran James Dickens came home to education career.**

## Neighbor

are so proud of him because he obtained things that were unknown in the '30s and '40s for black men."

He taught high school for a year before being drafted into the Army in 1942. And when he came home, he went back to school as both a teacher and a student, receiving several master's degrees while preparing hundreds of high school students for adult life.

He found scholarships for more than 50 high school students. All of them graduated from college. He is proud of having trained more than 50 student teachers over the years, including some

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## DICKENS: WWII veteran also made his mark on education

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James H. Dickens

from South Africa.

Although he started his teaching career at George Washington Carver High School in Pinetops, he moved to Frederick Douglass High School in Elm City in 1952.

That's where he was in 1969 when he became a veteran of the sweeping social change that ended racially segregated schools in the South.

"I didn't have a problem at all," he said of the transition. "The parents of the white children were just like the parents of the black children."

He felt he had the support of all the adults in his classroom, and it showed in the behavior of his students.

"I don't know of a single child that was sent home because of doing something bad," he said.

Throughout his life, he has tried to bring about change in a constructive way.

"If I didn't like something, I kept it to myself," he said. "I didn't want to stop progress."

And in doing so, he has set an example for all of the next generation of his large extended family.

"He was a mentor for a lot of members of our family as well as others," said Morgan. "He's been inspiring to us. It's felt all through the family. He has set a pace, a goal.

"I was always taught to hitch my wagon to a star. It was obtainable if you went about it the right way."

And she thinks Dickens helped show her, and many

**BORN:** July 28, 1914, in rural Edgecombe County

**FAMILY:** Wife — Annie C. Dickens, son — Edray Dickens of Washington, D.C., and dozens of nieces and nephews who are the children of his 15 siblings.

**EDUCATION:** Graduated from Bricks Tri-County High School in Edgecombe County, bachelor's degree in agriculture education from N.C. A&T University in 1941, later earned master's degrees in agriculture education, administration and supervision from UNC, NCSU, Penn State and Shaw University. Worked on a Ph.D. at the University of Illinois.

**CAREER:** Taught in Edgecombe and Wilson County Schools for 42 years. Served in the Army Quartermaster Service Co. from 1942-1946.

**HOBBIES:** Reading.

**VOLUNTEER WORK:** He cares for his wife, who is bedridden. When he was younger, he served in many leadership positions in the N.C. Association of Educators at the local and state levels. He and his wife worked in the youth department of Red Hill Baptist Church, where he served more than 30 years on the board of trustees. He did volunteer work for Nash-Edgecombe Economic Development Corporation in Rocky Mount.

others, that way. She and many other family members will come to Wilson in July to celebrate Dickens' 91st birthday.

"We want him to know how much we love him and how proud we are of him," she said.

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