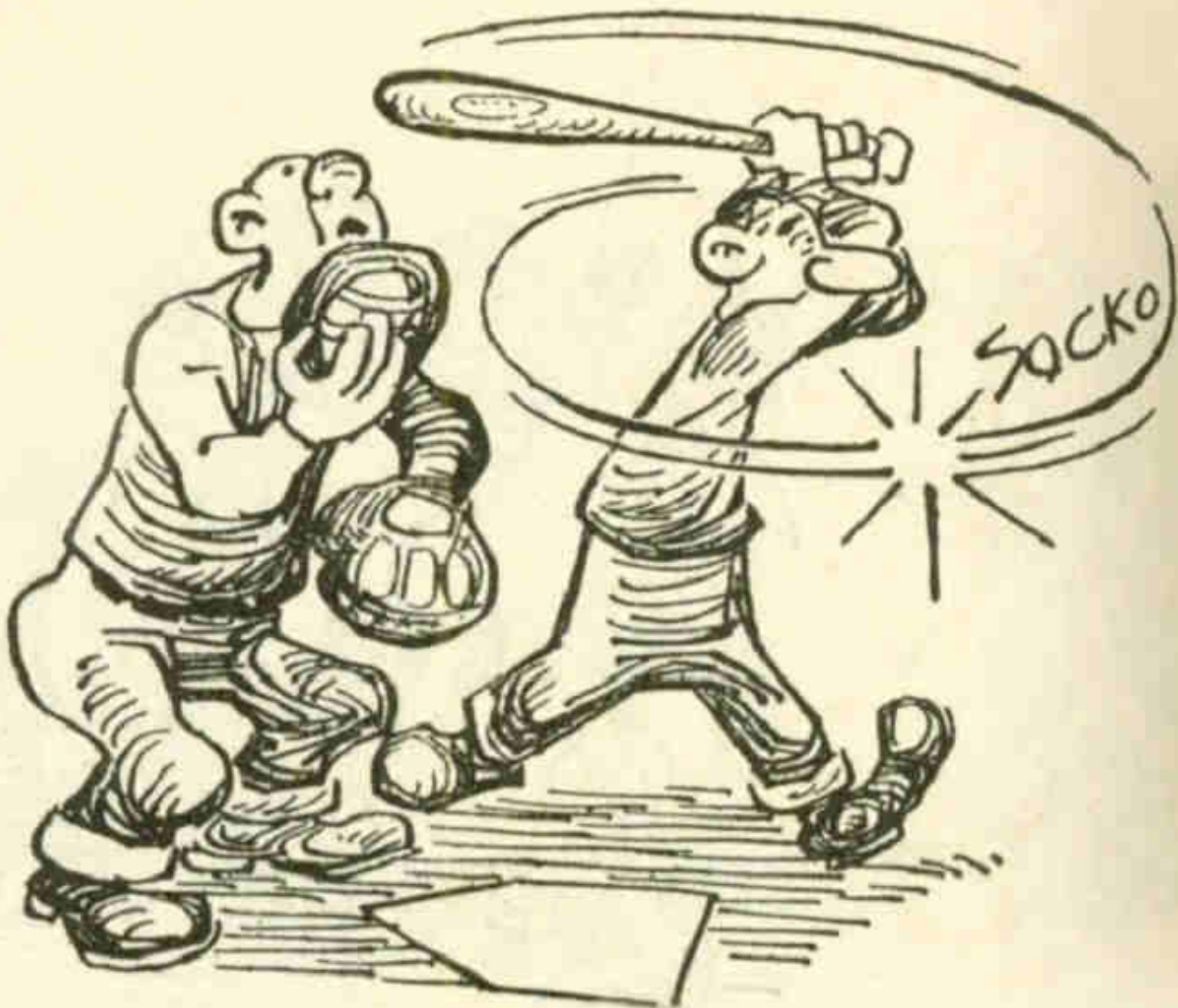


A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the War



SGT. GEORGE BAKER

A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the War

Since launching the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter in 2007, I've explored many war-related topics, including the deaths, heroism and extraordinary achievements of everyday ballplayers who were thrust into military service. To gather this information, I've read hundreds of books, scanned thousands of pages of newspapers and magazines and interviewed many veterans. Not surprisingly, I've collected a lot of stories that haven't had a "fit" in my newsletters or websites. I guess they would come under the category of funny or amusing, and certainly anecdotal. Anyway, I didn't know what to do with them.

After the release of the February 2018 newsletter, my dear friend Bill Swank from San Diego, said that it must be difficult to come up with a new theme for each newsletter, to which I agreed. "You must have come across many humorous stories and anecdotes," Bill said. "Perhaps they could be the basis of another newsletter."



And there was the birth of what you see before you. A Baseball in Wartime Newsletter that dares to look at the lighter side of the game during World War II. I hope that, like me, you enjoy taking a moment away from the terrible human cost of war and enjoy this escape into mostly truthful events that took place sometime, somewhere.

Gary Bedingfield

- Part 1. Baseball on the Home Front
- Part 2. You're in the Army Now!
- Part 3. Baseball Goes to War
- Part 4. Baseball Around the Globe

Don't forget to visit my websites!

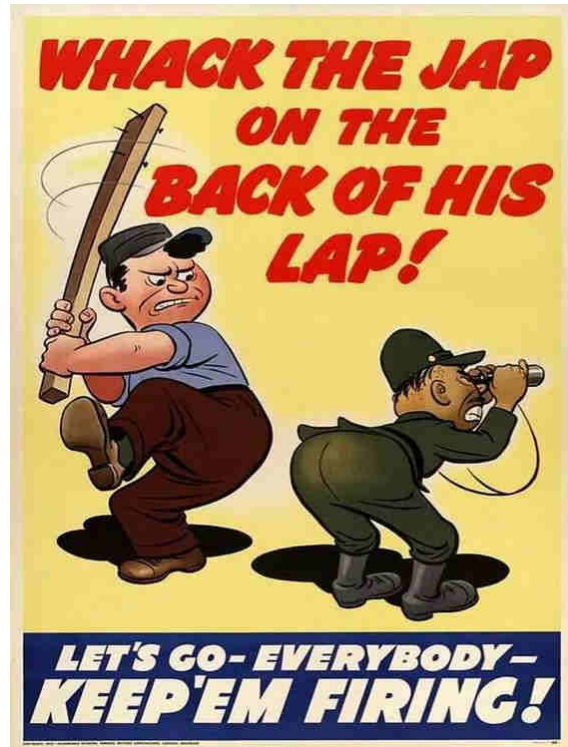
www.baseballinwartime.com

www.baseballsgreatest sacrifice.com

Part 1. Baseball on the Home Front

The question on everybody's mind at the start of 1942 was would baseball survive the war? America's entry into World War I had prematurely ended the 1918 season on September 2, after US Secretary of War Newton Baker issued a "Work or Fight" order forcing all able-bodied Americans of draft age out of non-essential employment and into the Army or jobs considered essential to the war. Fears that the war would jeopardize baseball again in 1942, however, were quashed when President Roosevelt, in response to a direct plea from baseball's ruling head, Commissioner Kenesaw Mountain Landis, sent his now famous January 15 "Green Light" letter. Roosevelt wrote, "I honestly believe that it would be best for the country to keep baseball going," and added that he would like to see more night games that hard-working people could attend. The President also noted that baseball would provide entertainment for at least 20 million people, and although the quality of the teams might be lowered by the greater use of older players, this would not dampen the popularity of the sport.

Baseball responded with enthusiasm. Major league teams with lighting systems were permitted to play 14 night contests during the season, double what they had been allowed in the past. Players and officials took 10 per



cent of their pay in War Bonds, and dozens of benefit games were staged by major and minor league teams. In 1943, spring training looked like nothing ever seen before as Commissioner Landis – at the request of Joseph B. Eastman, director of the Office of Defense Transportation – ordered the 16 major league teams to conduct their spring training north of the Mason-Dixon Line. Big leaguers, used to the balmy conditions of Florida and Arizona, battled freezing temperatures, rain and snow as they limbered up in resorts like Bear Mountain, New York, and French Lick, Indiana. Baseball faced changes, but it would survive the war.

At Shreveport, Louisiana, on July 21, 1941, Mrs. George Roby contributed some scrap aluminum to gain admission to the Shreveport Sports "Aluminum Night" game and found, upon returning to her car, that other fans had contributed two of her aluminum hubcaps.

On August 23, 1942, \$80,000 was raised for the Army-Navy Relief Fund at Yankee Stadium. Between a Yankees-Senators doubleheader, and before a crowd of 69,132, Walter Johnson, 54, threw 20 pitches to Babe Ruth, 47, who hit a home run into the right-field seats. After narrowly missing a second home run on his last swing, the Babe ambled around the bases, doffing his cap to the cheering crowd.

Because Fenway Park was still without floodlights during the war years, pitcher Tex Hughson was one of several players who scanned the night skies as an aircraft spotter, reporting to an American Legion post in suburban Brookline. "We were signed up and we would go, as volunteers of course, maybe once or twice a week," remembered Hughson. "We'd go out to this tower. We were supposed to watch and be able to alert for planes." When asked if he ever saw anything suspicious, he replied, "No, but I don't know whether at night I could have recognized an enemy plane or not."

On April 8, 1943, major league umpire Art Passarella was umpiring a pre-season game between the Chicago White Sox and an army team at George Field in Vincennes, Indiana. In the eighth inning, the soldier players got into a heated argument with Passarella over a disputed call. Amid the dispute, a jeep loaded with military police bounced up to home plate. The MPs grabbed the startled Passarella, tossed him into the jeep and dashed off to the guardhouse. By the time he was released, the game was over.

There was a shortage of ballplayers to keep baseball going during the war, but in 1944, it was discovered that Teddy Atkinson, an outfield prospect who was training with the Browns at their spring training camp at Cape Girardeau, Missouri, was only 14 years old. The Browns didn't offer him a contract.

Talking of Cape Girardeau, the city was thrilled to have a major league team in town but asked the Browns to keep their players from preying on the innocent female population. The girls, as it turned out, did not co-operate. "When we went down there," recalled Bill DeWitt, general manager of the Browns, "the guy at the Chamber of Commerce and the mayor and everybody talked to us, and said, 'You know, this is a small town, and a very religious town.' "Well, Jesus, there were more gals chasing ballplayers down there than there were in St. Louis!"

For the 1943 season, with strategic materials such as rubber no longer available, baseballs were becoming scarce. The Spalding Company developed the "balata ball" for major league use. The substitute ball was a combination of non-strategic materials including balata, a substance obtained from the milky juice of tropical trees. It was terrible and, not surprisingly, extremely unpopular with the hitters. "It was like hitting a piece of concrete," recalled Frank McCormick of the Cincinnati Reds. Mickey Owen of the Brooklyn Dodgers said, "You'd have to hit it twice to get it out of Ebbets Field."



Cliff Melton, Van Mungo and Carl Hubbell of the New York Giants "warm up" during spring training at Lakewood, New Jersey in 1943

In 1943, the York White Roses of the Interstate League had a pitcher who was 56 years old. Lefty George, who had begun his professional career in 1909, had seven wins and eight losses on the season. His teammate, Dutch Schesler, who was 43, was 5-3 on the year. Yep, that's a combined age of 99!

In September 1945, the Yankees were so hard pushed for players that they activated their 42-year-old batting practice pitcher, Paul Schreiber. Serving up fat BP pitches for the Yankees since 1937, Schreiber had last pitched in the major leagues over two decades earlier. On September 4, he

came in with two down in the sixth against the Detroit Tigers, and held them scoreless through the rest of the game. On his only other outing of the season he wasn't so successful as the Tigers slammed him for a couple of runs in the single inning he threw.

The player shortage was so bad during the war that the Durham Bulls used a felon, Ed Patterson, as a pitcher. "When Patterson said he had played at Atlanta, I thought he meant Atlanta in the Southern Association," recalled Buzzy Bavasi, who was running the club. "It turned out he was just out of the pen at Atlanta."

 Listen to the little Red Bird, Adolf...
it's telling you



**"YOUR LEAD ISN'T
BIG ENOUGH EITHER!"**

★ Sure, Adolf, you got off to a flying start! That foul-play combination, Hitler to Hirohito to Benito, worked like a charm in the early innings.

You banged the ball all over the map... because you started playing your game before anyone else had a fair chance to warm up and put a team on the field.

That's just what you counted on! But what you didn't count on, Adolf, was the

fact that a fighting spirit can overcome any lead.

You're starting to realize that now. The United Nations are hitting their stride. They have started smashing your pitchers all over the lot... putting men on bases everywhere. Soon they'll be scoring on your home plate!

There's only one flag that you and your team mates are ever going to run up in the game you started. It's the white flag of surrender.

In the World Series that lies ahead, we trust it's in the Cards to win, as surely as we know it's in the cards for Hitler, Hirohito and Benito to lose.

Alpen Brau BEER

COLUMBIA BREWING COMPANY ★ SAINT LOUIS, MISSOURI

"The manpower shortage must be terrific back home. Hard-pressed for manpower a Biloxi, Mississippi, baseball team has a 12-year-old shortstop in its lineup."

Stars and Stripes - September 8, 1944

"A schoolboy whose first love was baseball was writing answers to an anatomy test: "Your leg is what if you ain't got two pretty good ones you can't get to first base - and neither can your sister."

Stars and Stripes - January 12, 1945



When the player shortage got particularly bad, did Lucille Ball tryout?



The Brooklyn Dodgers spring training camp was at Bear Mountain, New York.
Good for skiing if nothing else.

Spring Training—1943 By Jack Sords



In September 1943, former big-league pitcher Guy Bush, was reported to be working in New Orleans as a Pullman porter helping out in the wartime emergency. "I would prefer a baseball uniform to this conductor's suit," said the 42-year-old who last pitched in the majors with the Cardinals in 1938. Bush got his wish. He was back in the big leagues in 1945, pitching four games for the Cincinnati Reds.

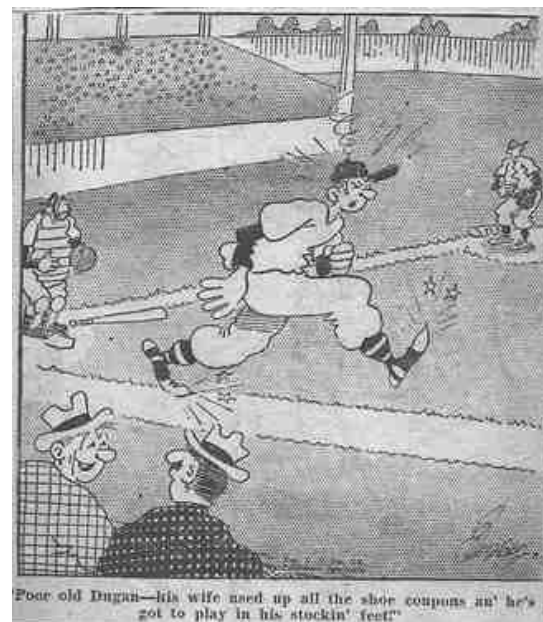
"Billy Sarni, 15-year-old schoolboy who earned \$350 a month this summer catching for the Los Angeles Angels, predicts that he will crash the major leagues by 1945 at an annual salary of at least \$35,000," declared the *Stars and Stripes* in October 1943. "Now that sounds like a lot of malarkey. But brother, just bend an ear to the astounding saga of Billy (The Kid) Sarni, who probably is the hottest 'find' in the history of organized baseball.

"Crashing into AA competition with the force of a blockbuster bomb, Master Sarni performed so incredibly that Pacific Coast League fans rubbed their optics in disbelief, and either went on the wagon for the duration or began changing their brand!

"In his first full game for the league-leading Angels, Sarni poled out a home run, tagged out two men at home plate on attempted double steals and tossed out a couple of other guys at second.

"The following day he banged out three hits in three times at the plate and threw five more line drives down to second for putouts."

Sarni, did make it to the big leagues, but it took a little longer than he predicted. He joined the Cardinals for 36 games in 1951, and played just five years in the majors.



"I couldn't stop a grounder, and I couldn't catch a fly ball. I was nearsighted, and I couldn't run because I had the gout. Other than that, I was one hell of a player."
Ellis Clary, infielder with the Senators and Browns, 1942 to 1945

Part 2. You're in the Army Now!

At the beginning of the 1940s, baseball was truly America's pastime. Major league teams drew capacity crowds daily and nearly 5,000 minor league players were fine-tuning their skills with nearly 300 teams competing in over 40 leagues spread across the country. But as the Japanese began to fulfil their territorial ambitions in the Pacific and German troops swarmed through Europe at an alarming rate, those halcyon days would soon be gone as the United States began preparing to defend itself.

The Selective Training and Service Act (better known as the draft), signed by president Roosevelt on September 16, 1940, meant every American male between the ages of 21 and 36 was required to register for 12 months of military service. By the end of 1941, nearly two million Americans were in uniform, and 300 of them were



professional baseball players serving at Army, Air Corps, Navy and Marine Corps camps from New York to California.



Are these players at Fort Bragg cheering because they won the game or cheering for Betty Grable?



These ballplayers at Camp Shelby have got the right idea!

On January 30, 1943, 53-year-old Hank Gowdy - the only person on a major league roster to serve in both world wars - reported for duty at Fort Benning, Georgia. The Reds bullpen coach, who had played 17 seasons as a catcher for the New York Giants and Boston Braves, had been the first of 247 major league players to enter service during World War I. He saw action on the Western Front in Europe with the 42nd Infantry Division and returned home a war hero. In 1943, Gowdy was commissioned a major and became chief athletic officer at Fort Benning, where the

ballfield was appropriately known as "Hank Gowdy Field."

In 1941, when Private Murray Waldenburg arrived at Camp Wheeler, Georgia, with a barracks bag labeled 'Brooklyn,' an officer inquired, "What do you have in there, son, the remains of the Dodgers pennant chances?"

But that's not the end of the story. Word got back to the New York Journal-American, which when the Dodgers clinched the pennant, asked the camp

commander to grant Waldenburg a pass so that he could see a World Series game.



In 1940, a rumor circulated that Johnny Gorsica - born John Gorczyca - had joined a Polish air squadron training in Canada for duty with the British Royal Air Force. But Gorsica turned up in Beckley, West Virginia, where he was spending the winter with his wife and son, working in a drugstore. "The only bombarding he contemplates is on the pins at the bowling alley in Beckley," came the news from the scene.

Duster Mails, who pitched the Cleveland Indians to the American League pennant in 1920, enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1943, despite being almost 50 years old! Discharged from the Marines in late 1944, he worked in the Pacific with the Red Cross in 1945.

In August 1942, American Association player Fred Collins, reported for duty in the Navy and said he couldn't wait until

he caught up with one particular person, a Japanese player who had beat him out of a shutout when Collins was pitching for Providence College. "He was with one of those travelling Japanese college teams...when they came over here supposedly to learn more about baseball," he explained. "I would have had a shutout, but for this little yellow guy. He hit me for two home runs. I think I would know him if I saw him again. I just want to get my hands on him."

Hugh Mulcahy was a tough luck pitcher before the war. Over a four-year span with the Philadelphia Phillies, he never had a winning record and twice lost 20 or more games. His record for those four years was 40 wins and 76 losses and, not surprisingly, was given the nickname "Losing Pitcher". "My losing streak is over for the duration," he said upon entering military service. I am on a winning team now".

Upon arrival at Norfolk Naval Training Station in Virginia, in December 1941, Feller echoed the sentiments of Mulcahy, saying, "I've always wanted to be on the winning side and this time I know I'm with a winner."





Taken at Fort Bragg, I'm not sure how safe this is!

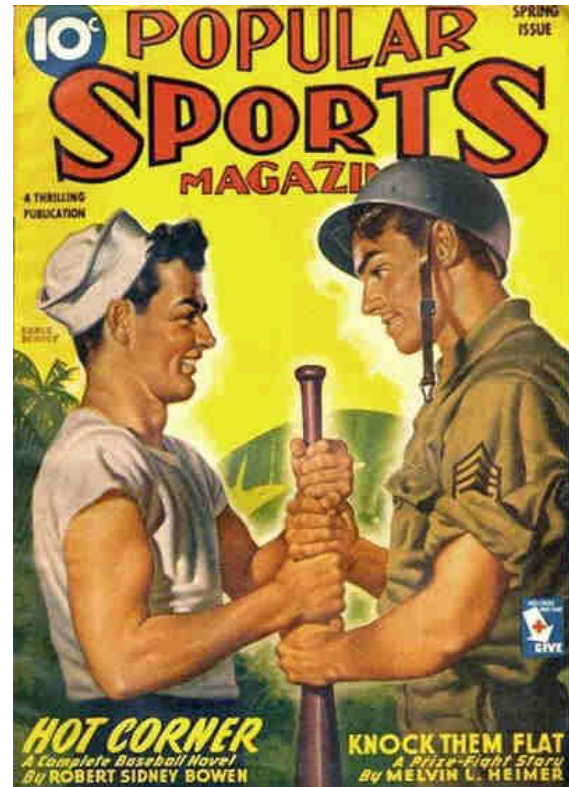


Ted Cieslak was an unlucky guy. With Oklahoma City in 1939, he suffered a fractured skull when hit by a pitch from Dizzy Trout. In 1943, he oversaw the army gymnasium program at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and met head-on with a medicine ball. Severe headaches led to his discharge, but he made his way to the big leagues with the Phillies in 1944.

"Which would you prefer - an earful of big leaguers' gab or an eyeful of Betty Grable's gams?" inquired *The Sporting News* on January 6, 1944. Confident that baseball would be a winner, fifty dollars was offered for the best letter reflecting a serviceman's view on the subject, but Betty Grable was an easy winner. "Put yourself in our place!" wrote Major Alfred C. Brown of the 19th Air Depot Group in North Africa for the \$50. "For over a year we've had nothing feminine to observe but Arab women, their bodies completely covered with dirty white robes, their heads and faces covered, with possibly just one eye peeping out. Compare this constant view to that one squint at Betty's gams. Brother, let's exchange places!"

Duke Snider served as a fireman, third class on the submarine tender USS Sperry at Guam. Snider used to win bets against other sailors and servicemen by throwing a baseball the length of submarines that arrived at Guam, that's about 300 feet. "I'd throw the ball the length of their sub, my crewmates

would win \$300 or so, and I'd pick up my guarantee - \$50," he recalled.



"When I think about my time in boot camp, the word 'coddled' came to mind," recalled Phil Rizzuto. "I spent the required number of weeks in boot camp [but] because I had the good fortune to play for the Yankees, I did not learn anything. When they had knot tying 101, the chief would say, 'Rizzuto, come up here.' He would sit me down on a chair or bench and the sailors would all practice tying knots on me.

"I missed some underwater drills and even bedmaking. I was coddled, recoddled, and when I left camp certified as someone who could be in charge of a gun crew, the fact is I was not even in charge of my right arm."





It's time to swap your bat for a gun.

A US Navy seaman used baseball terminology to get around the censors and send home a report of the sinking of an enemy submarine. "We played one game on a wet field," he wrote. "Hit home run on second pitch."

Did you hear about the newly-inducted GI who never paid any attention to his sergeant? "Doesn't anything I say make any difference?" the puzzled sergeant asked. "No," snapped back the rookie. "I was a baseball umpire before the Army got me."

Baseball Digest July 1945

Denny Galehouse served with the Navy and had no duties except athletics after he completed basic training. When asked if the players had any

special privileges, he laughingly replied that they were allowed to have their hair a little longer!

Browns outfielder Red McQuillen played baseball at the Norfolk Naval Training Station, Virginia, during the war. He recalled that the commanding officer, Captain Harry A. McClure - who used to sit in the middle of the dugout - would say, "If you goof up, I'll put you out in the middle of the Atlantic in a rowboat without oars."

Talking of Norfolk NTS, Yeoman First Class Milton Miles was so skillful at tending the field that Johnny Rigney offered him the head groundskeeping job at Comiskey Park in Chicago after the war.



Luke Appling looks pretty good in his army helmet. He became a private in the army right after winning the 1943 American League batting championship. "The war will soon be over," predicted his wife, "because outside of baseball, Luke never held a job for over two weeks."

Part 3. Baseball Goes to War

More than 500 major league players and 4,000 minor leaguers would swap their flannels for military uniforms during World War II, and many of them would serve overseas in places like Europe, Africa, India, Australia and the Pacific islands. Baseball should be extremely

proud of the fact that more than 100 professional players were decorated for bravery and heroism, 120 have been identified as being wounded in combat and 155 tragically lost their lives in military service.

We're fighting for a lot of things in this war, and baseball is one of them.
A wounded American soldier, 1944

Future major league catcher Mickey Grasso was taken prisoner by German forces in North Africa in February 1943.

Surrounded by Rommel's Afrika Korps, a young lieutenant turned to Sergeant Grasso and asked, "Mickey, shall we fight?" Mickey glanced apprehensively at the German guns ready to blast them out of existence and answered: "Man, don't be crazy." After the war, Senators manager Bucky Harris heard this story and commented, "Right there

I could've told you Grasso had the makings of a smart catcher.

PRIVATE BREGER



"Insists on the helmet! Got heaned last time!"

In 1943, the following story ran in many papers. During the fighting in North Africa, the Americans were warned to be on guard for Nazi parachutists. Eventually, two men were spotted, and although they wore the uniform of the US Army, their English wasn't too good. "What part of the States you fellas from?" asked one American.

One said New York, and the other Wisconsin.

"What's your favorite sport?"

Both replied: "Baseball."

Then the American asked, "Did ya hear Connie Mack pitched a shutout against Brooklyn and Tommy Harmon got two homers for them Bums?"

"Yeah," was the nervous reply, "we heard that on the shortwave broadcast."

With Mack being the 80-year-old manager of the Athletics and Harmon

being a Heisman Trophy-winning football player, two Germans were easily apprehended.

During the Battle of the Bulge, a girl drove her jeep into the American front lines. She wore a GI helmet and overcoat but carried no identification. After lengthy questioning by those who suspected she was an infiltrator, she was released and allowed to continue her journey. "I finally convinced the major I was an American," explained Virginia Von Lampe of Yonkers, New York, "when I rattled off the Brooklyn Dodgers' line-up for the 1941 World Series."

Sergeant Dale R. Bordner, was a radio-operator on a B-26 bomber that was shot down over Japanese-held New Britain in the Pacific in May 1942. After 10 months of scavenging for food, fighting off sickness and dodging Japanese patrols, he was rescued by Australian forces. His first words upon being found were reportedly, "How did the Reds come out in 1942?"

Umpire Augie Donatelli was a tail-gunner on a B-17 and spent 15 months as a prisoner of war after being shot down. He is said to have attempted to escape twice. The second time he was hiding in a haystack, but he didn't get all the way in. His rear end was showing. One of the German guards got him out with a pitchfork.



How Yogi Berra shot down an American plane on D-Day.

Yogi Berra recalled that his craft drew very little fire from the Germans on the beach or from the air. In supporting the landing, they were also to bring in downed German fliers for interrogation.

"Only guy we fished out, the only plane that came down in our sector, we shot down," Berra said. "It was one of our guys."

But the officer directing fire said: "That's a German," and Berra's gun crew fired. "You did what you were ordered," he said. "When we got there to him in the water, he was cursing like hell. I would have been angry, too. We fished him out and he's yelling: 'If you shot down as many of theirs as you shoot down of ours, the war would have been over long ago.'"

-
Newsday, Steve Jacobson, June 7, 1994

On December 16, 1944, two months after the World Series had pitted the Cardinals against the Browns, a massive German artillery barrage was followed by two powerful German armies plunging into the hilly and heavily forested Ardennes region of eastern Belgium and northern Luxembourg. It was Hitler's last desperate roll of the dice and became known as "The Battle of the Bulge." A password was needed for U.S. forces to identify each other while moving through the area. Baseball offered one - it was a question-and-answer code that all Americans would know, and it was nuanced enough because not just "St. Louis" would do.

Q: Who won the World Series?

A: St. Louis Cardinals.

In early 1944, Japanese troops charging US Marines on the island of New Britain in the Pacific, yelled, "To hell with Babe Ruth!"

In response to hearing this, Ruth said, "I hope every Jap that mentions my name gets shot - and to hell with all Japs anyway."

Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall designated "play ball" as the code words to signal the opening fire in the North African invasion.

Olympic distance runner, Lou Zamperini, survived in a raft for 47 days after his bomber crash landed in the Pacific Ocean. He was then taken prisoner by the Japanese. Zamperini remembered that the first bag of supplies dropped to the POWs was not food, but a bag of bats, balls and gloves.

Warren Spahn remembered the warnings about German soldiers disguised as Americans. "The Germans had our equipment, our uniforms, even our dog tags," But they didn't have a knowledge of baseball. "Our password used to be something like, 'Who's the second baseman for the Bums?' They wouldn't know who the Bums were. I used to pity any guy in our outfit who wasn't a baseball fan because he would be in deep trouble."



Part 4. Baseball Around the Globe

With the uncertainty of what lay ahead, American servicemen overseas needed a morale booster – a reminder of back-home traditions – and baseball fit the bill perfectly. Pick-up games became a regular sight in places like England, Australia, India and North Africa, while organized competition soon followed as a perfect way to entertain the masses. Big leaguers played alongside high school youngsters in games that were, to them

and the cheering crowd, as important as any World Series game.



"Cricket, Britain's answer to softball, marathons and six-day bike races, was a leisurely game played in silence — until a team of American [Army Air Force] officers decided the game could do with a 'Flatbush' shot in the arm," announced the *Stars and Stripes* newspaper on May 1, 1944. "Cricket never again will be the same. The fliers made an inauspicious debut Saturday at Dulwich when they lost to the Wanderers, a hand-picked team of British, Canadian and Australian players, 150—57. But the day was more successful than the score indicates, and the patient fans who didn't fall asleep between 11.30 AM, when the match started, and 4.30 PM, when it finished, enjoyed more laughs than the feud between Jack Benny and Fred Allen ever produced.

"The American cricketers shouted encouragement to their bowlers, they aimed verbal barrages at the Wanderers and they got into the spirit of the game without any trouble.

"It was a gala occasion for everybody but Capt. John Puryear, of Hartsell, Ala., and 1/Lt. Robert Jerue, of Lincoln, Neb., the [American] bowlers, whose over-

arm, semi-shot put and baseball deliveries baffled nobody but themselves. If the Wanderers hadn't indulged too freely when they knocked off for lunch at 1 PM, no doubt they'd still be batting.

"On the credit side of the ledger, the Americans are certain to improve when they throw off their good-field-no-hit complex, if Dolf Luque, the fluent Cuban linguist, pardons the use of his baseball jargon to explain cricket. Capt. Alvin E. Podwojski, of Cleveland, who accounted for 22 runs, and Capt. John F. O'Connell, of Holyoke, Mass., who scored ten, were the only Americans who had read enough literature on the subject to know what the bat is for.

"For an opener, the [Americans] performed creditably, according to some of the sideline observers, who, incidentally, 'predict a great future for cricket in America.'

"Obviously, now is the time for all good GIs to pen threatening notes to their Congressmen before this thing gets out of hand. Or wouldn't that be cricket?"
Stars and Stripes May 1, 1944

During the summer of 1943, the Army Air Force All-Stars baseball team, led by former Senators' pitcher, Monte Weaver, conducted a 30-day tour of England, playing 30 games at US military bases. The team traveled by bus and this often had to be done at night. Because the blackout in Britain at that time caused virtually zero visibility they frequently had to have someone in front of the vehicle to show the way.

In May 1944, a team of US Army Civil Affairs colonels and lieutenant-colonels, were out-slugged, 16-13, in a softball game against a British officers' squad.

Stars and Stripes May 29, 1944

Queen Mary, wife of King George V, attended a fund-raising ball game in England that was organized by former minor league pitcher Ralph Ifft. The 76-year-old Queen was invited to throw out the first ball, and Ifft later remarked, "Her Majesty was in good form and, had a Brooklyn scout been there, he probably would have signed her up!"

"I'm hurtin' – they've wounded me!" shrieked Signalman 2nd Class William Grattis of Pasadena, California, while playing in the Seabee band at Sunday's opener of the Northern Ireland baseball league. Grattis' cry came just as a foul tip winged its way into the stands. "Where did it get you, pal?" asked a concerned buddy. "Right in the middle of my French horn!" came the unexpected reply.

Stars and Stripes – May 27, 1943

PRIVATE BREGER



"Don't EVER try to get distance with a grenade like that!"

The Paris-based Seine Section Clowns ball team, led by minor league pitcher, Chuck Eisenmann, added a new player to their line-up in 1944, Lieutenant Lyn "Buck" Compton, former UCLA catcher and football star. Compton was a paratrooper with the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment, whose combat exploits you may have seen on the HBO television series "Band of Brothers." Compton was in Paris in 1945, recovering from the trauma he had recently suffered in combat. "Lyn was one of my best friends," said Eisenmann. "I was going on a train out to the coast and he came up to me and said, 'I'm Lieutenant Compton, I'd like to join your team.' I had fictitious orders published and kept him with me for two years. Lyn was a slow talking guy, nose bent over from playing football. I had a German prisoner that did my chores and he [Compton] would follow this guy around and say to me, 'Ask him why they shot at us when we were parachuting down,' and the poor, terrified German would hide behind me."

Chuck Eisenmann was faced with one major problem when in England in 1943. Few, if any ball fields in the country had a pitcher's mound, and many games were played on soccer fields where the erection of a mound was not permitted. So, to overcome this, he set about constructing his own portable mound. Eisenmann built a wooden framework that was then layered with turf, and the unusual creation, which met all baseball regulations, journeyed everywhere with the team.

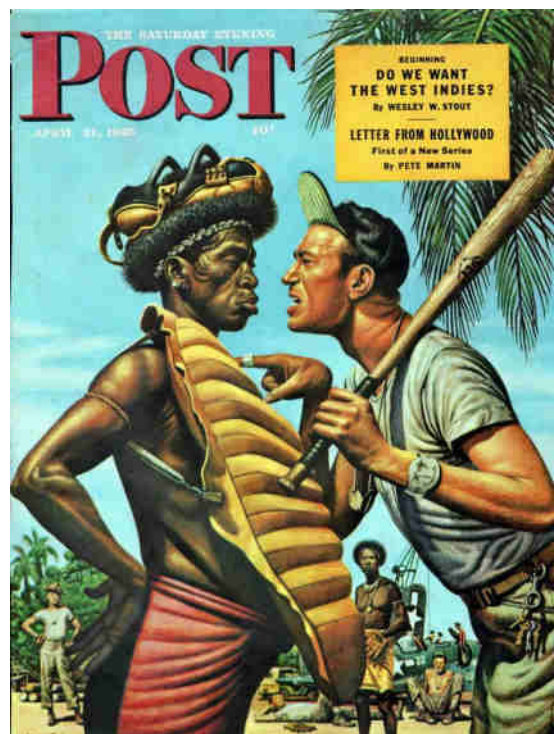


“Associated Press report from Tokyo announces that a Jap professional baseball team will tour the Philippines this winter. It puts the saki on the recent rumor that Tojo banned baseball in several sections of Japan by calling the game ‘an alien immoral American institution.’”

Stars and Stripes – November 23, 1943

Bob Feller taught pitching to natives on New Guinea and the natives taught him to throw a spear just as fast.

Benny Benson, associated with baseball in England for many years, was a British army soldier and discovered the game during the war. "I was watching a baseball game at a US Army base one time," he explained. "I noticed that at least three batters came to bat without hitting the ball and I made some comments about their performance. I was soon approached by a towering master-sergeant who offered me the chance to see if I could do better. I agreed, and the pitcher rapidly threw three perfect strikes right by me! Despite the humiliation I was hooked on baseball and when the war ended I joined my local team."



Strange games they play with sticks and balls,
Sometimes they utter curious calls,
Of "Huba-Huba, let's get two",
We don't know what they mean, do you?

A.E. Bullock, Royal Air Force officer at Stalag Luft I Prisoner of War Camp in Germany



This photo was taken in Northern Ireland in 1942, during a game between the 34th Infantry Division and the 1st Armored Division. That soccer goal post down the first base line could cause some problems.



An Indian policeman gets to try his hand at baseball thanks to some African-American servicemen.

Moe Berg, the big-league catcher who could speak 12 languages but couldn't hit in any of them, worked for the Office of Strategic Services during the war, the predecessor of the CIA. On undercover assignment all over the world, it was his baseball past that gave away his identity on one occasion. While at a field hospital in France, Berg could not resist the temptation to join in a game of catch with a couple of GIs. After the former major leaguer had made a couple of throws one of the soldiers remarked, "You're a pro." Soon afterwards the soldier added, "You're a catcher," another throw and his cover was blown, "and your name is Moe Berg."

Jim Bowen of Rowley, Massachusetts, met his wife, Margie, in England, while he was serving with the US Army's 87th General Hospital. They were married in England on July 12, 1945. The following day, Bowen played baseball for his army team and Margie came along to watch and cheer on her new husband. But before the game even started she was hit in the shin by a line drive during batting practice! Despite the injury, they enjoyed many years of happy marriage and Jim remained involved with baseball when the couple set up home in Rowley.

The Duke of Abercorn, who was to become a familiar sight at US Army exhibition baseball games in Northern Ireland, obviously enjoyed the festivities of a July 4 game in 1943. "The Duke had a few too many tipped cups of good old Irish brew," recalled one of the players, "and had to be escorted from the stadium after the third inning looking a little worse for wear!"

In his autobiography, *Ace*, co-written with Brian Kendall, Canadian-born Athletics pitcher Phil Marchildon, recounted how he threw three strikes right by the first batter he faced in his first game against an American army team in England. "The poor guy hadn't lifted his bat off his shoulder," he said. The strikeouts continued, and one by one the American batters returned to the bench in bewilderment, wondering who this guy was. The Canadian team manager finally revealed, "That's Phil Marchildon of the Philadelphia Athletics!"

On June 15, 1943, the Anglo-American Brains Trust - a committee designed to increase understanding between the United States and Great Britain, with over 200 visits to RAF and British Army bases - were at the Army Air Force Bomber Command headquarters when asked when the English would take up baseball. "When you Americans take up cricket," replied Lt. Col. Webster, director of British Army education in London.

"In what was probably the first game of cricket played between American and British soldiers of this war, a US armored regiment recently lost to their instructor opponents.

"The British soldiers admitted 'Those Yankees do put up a tussle.'

"Following the game, the teams adjourned to a mess hall for American cookies and English tea, at which time the Americans challenged the winners to a game of baseball."

Stars and Stripes June 27, 1942

"Kansas City - Nearly 95 per cent of the sporting goods manufactured in the country is going to the quartermaster depot here for use by the troops, according to figures on purchases since February 1942. Uncle Sam has bought 720,000 baseball gloves,

235,000 pairs of boxing gloves, 2,304,000 baseball bats, 2,324,000 softballs and baseballs. Recently 10,000 major league style uniforms were purchased."

Stars and Stripes – April 24, 1944



Despite explosions in the background, the GIs are all focused on the game.



Those Canadians will find any place to play! This photo was taken on the streets of London, England, during the early years of WWII. The Canadians were the first to bring military baseball to England during the war, although the game did already exist on a small scale. With the arrival of American servicemen, baseball became a regular sight throughout the country.



Clothing was optional on ballfields in the Pacific.



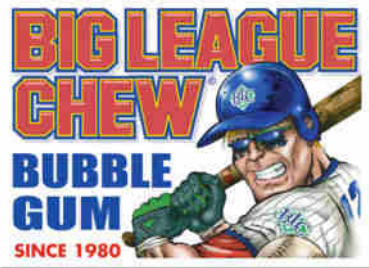
Even the Germans had a go at playing baseball during the war!



Army scoreboard humor at Camp Atterbury in Iran, 1944



Warren Spahn "swapped sides" in 1963 for an appearance in an episode of the TV show Combat.



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Some websites hold a special place in my heart, as does Baseball Almanac, run by my good friend Sean Holtz. With more than 500,000 pages of baseball history, over 1,500,000 fast facts, original research from recognized experts and material not

found or seen on any other web site in the world, Baseball Almanac is my go-to source for all information relating to major league baseball. If you haven't visited this plethora of historical nuggets, then I suggest you take a look today...and tell Sean I sent you!

