

# The Curse of the Middle Atlantic League



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During World War II, more than 400 major league players together with 4,000 minor leaguers, put down their bats and gloves to serve their country. Not all of them came home.

Professional baseball failed to keep tabs on exactly how many players made the ultimate sacrifice while in military service. For many years, prior to my research over the last decade, the figure was believed to be around 40 or so. Since I started my endless digging through various archives, that figure has risen to 147. Some died on the battlefields, some in the air, others while in training, but they all had one thing in common, professional baseball had been a part of their lives, and whether it was as a volunteer or through being drafted, they courageously served their country to the end.

In addition to the two major league players (Elmer Gedeon and Harry O'Neill), players who died in service came from all levels of minor league baseball, from the lowly Class D circuits to Class AA, the highest classification at the time. And one league, the Class C Middle Atlantic League – which was an eight-team circuit of clubs from Ohio, Pennsylvania and West Virginia when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor - led the way with 20 players passing through its ranks and losing their lives while associated with the military. This is the story of those 20 young men who would never again get the opportunity to swing a bat or throw a baseball on a summer's afternoon.

Based in America's industrial heartland, the Middle Atlantic League (often referred to as the Mid-Atlantic League) grew from a semi-pro Pittsburgh-area league and began operating in 1925. It was a gritty, tough league that thrived during the depression years and remained in operation until 1951 (not including 1943 to 1945, when it shut down during the war). Almost every team in the league had the support of affiliation to a major league club, it toiled with its own feeder league for a while (the Class D Penn State Association) and earned a reputation as the toughest Class C circuit in the history of Organized Baseball.

The Middle Atlantic League wasn't a career league. Most players came and went in a single season as they endeavored to climb the parent club's farm system. Such stars as Bob Lemon, Whitey Ford, Joe Cronin, Marty Marion and Eddie Stanky have graced Middle Atlantic ballfields over the years and the 20 players who died in service played right alongside them or against them.

Every season of the Middle Atlantic League between 1935 and 1942 (with the exception of 1937), included at least one player who would later lose his life in military service. Therefore, I have chosen to list the players by the year they played in the league.

[editor's note] For my own personal interest, the only professional player with virtually the same last name as mine – Marcus Beddingfield – began his career with the Akron Yankees in the Middle Atlantic League in 1936. He spent seven seasons in the minors and won 24 games with the Southeastern League's Jackson Senators in 1938.

# Class of '35

In 1935, the league operated with eight teams and featured future Yankee great Tommy Henrich, Browns outfielder Wally Judnich, Reds first baseman Frank McCormick, Senators outfielder Jimmy Wasdell and White Sox right-hander Johnny Rigney. The Huntington Red Birds won the first half title, while the Dayton Ducks clinched the second half. The Red Birds went on to win the playoffs, four games to two.

## Jim Grilk – First Base

*1935 Huntington Red Birds (22 games, 3 HRs, 13 RBIs, .315)*

James M. Grilk was born to American parents in Manila in the Philippine Islands, and was raised in San Francisco, California. He attended the University of California at Berkeley, where he was a standout first baseman for the Golden Bears with a conference-leading .377 batting average in 1935. Grilk attracted offers from the Yankees and Indians but it was the St. Louis Cardinals that got him to sign in May 1935. That summer he joined the Bloomington Bloomers of the Class B Three-I League, where he got off to a sensational start, batting .407 after 12 games. Sixty-three games into the season, he had a .306 batting average, seven home runs and 35 RBIs, but was sent in August to the Huntington Red Birds - the Cardinals' affiliate in the Middle Atlantic League – to help with the playoff bid. Despite the drop in classification, it proved a good move for Grilk. The Red Birds had won the first half of the season but were the basement team during the second half and needed all the help they could get for the upcoming playoffs. Taking over the first base job from struggling George Silvey, Grilk homered against Johnstown in his first game and batted .315 in the remaining 22 games of the season.

In the playoffs against the Dayton Ducks, the series was tied at a game apiece when Grilk led a hitting attack that gave the Red Birds a 13-4 win and a 2-1 lead in the series. Grilk was 4-for-5, with three doubles, a single and four runs scored. The Red Birds went on to clinch the Middle-Atlantic League championship in six games.

The following year, Grilk made the jump all the way to Double-A ball, joining the Sacramento Solons in the Pacific Coast League, playing 158 games and batting .258 with 10 home runs and 76 RBIs. By 1940, Grilk was enjoying a career-year with the Solons. Having made the switch to catcher, he batted .299 in 125 games and was on loan to the New Orleans Pelicans of the Class A1 Southern Association in 1941.

By the spring of 1942, the United States was at war, and Grilk was on loan again, but this time as a civilian athletic director at the Sacramento Army Air Depot, where he was player/manager with the depot baseball team. On Monday, July 13, 1942, Grilk (who had just applied for a commission with the Army Air Force) and Lieutenant John Corcoran were driving back to Sacramento after a day's fishing. At around 4:30 P.M., 20 miles northwest of Sacramento, near Woodland, with Corcoran at the wheel, they collided with an oncoming vehicle. Grilk suffered multiple injuries including a fractured skull that rendered him unconscious. He was taken to the nearby Yolo Hospital for treatment. Corcoran was also treated for cuts and a possible skull fracture. The occupants of the other vehicle, Charles Fields and his 15-year-old son Edward, had been enroute to Knights Landing to look for work. Charles

suffered minor injuries while Edward suffered a fractured left arm. Grilk was still unconscious when he was moved to Sutter Hospital in Sacramento for further treatment. He died, without regaining consciousness, three days after the accident, on Thursday, July 16, 1942.

Grilk was buried at East Lawn Memorial Park, Sacramento, on July 18. He was survived by his wife, Elizabeth, a sister, Dorothy, a brother, Arthur, and his mother, Elizabeth.

## **Class of '36**

In 1936, the Zanesville Grays clinched the first-half pennant and tied with the Dayton Ducks for the second half. They then defeated Dayton in a three game series for the second half title and league championship. The league featured future Tigers outfielder Barney McCosky, Indians outfielder Jeff Heath, Indians infielder Oscar Grimes, Reds outfielder Frankie Kelleher, Cubs second baseman Eddie Stanky and Cardinals shortstop Marty Marion.

### **Ernie Holbrook – First Base**

*1936 Canton Terriers (less than 10 games)*

Another Californian, Ernest J. Holbrook was a star athlete in basketball and baseball at Long Beach Polytechnic High School, before being a high-scoring forward on the first undefeated USC freshman basketball team. Holbrook was on the varsity team for three years, and in March 1935, he was the hero of the Pacific Coast Conference play-off series against Oregon State, looping his only field goal of the game in the last 30 seconds to give the Trojans a 32–31 win. Holbrook also played baseball as a rangy first baseman with the Trojans, and batted over .300 each season, helping coach Sam Berry clinch the championship in 1935.

On May 6, 1935, amid much publicity, Holbrook traveled to Cleveland for a tryout with the visiting Boston Red Sox. He signed a professional contract the following week and joined the Charlotte Hornets of the Class B Piedmont League, where he batted .284 with 70 RBIs in 125 games. In 1936, the Charlotte Hornets left the Piedmont League and joined the independent Carolina League, so Boston began a working agreement with the replacement team, Rocky Mount. Great things were expected of Holbrook but his batting average nose-dived to .214 in 50 games, and on June 16, he was assigned to the Canton Terriers of the Middle-Atlantic League. Despite getting a hit in each of his first three games for the Terriers in their series against Zanesville, Holbrook saw little action. He retired from baseball at the end of the season and returned to California, where he coached basketball at George Washington High School. He took over coaching duties of the court team at USC in 1943–1944, and led the quintet to a 31–17 record to clinch the Pacific Coast Conference's Southern Division title.

On January 17, 1944, and after being rejected on three previous occasions, Holbrook relinquished his coaching position to enter military service with the Army. As a replacement infantryman, he left his wife Melva, and young son Ronnie, at home in Hermosa Beach, California, and served with the 109th Infantry Regiment of the 28th "Keystone" Infantry Division in Europe. On December 16, 1944, snow, ground fog

and freezing weather engulfed the Ardennes in Luxembourg, where Private Holbrook was stationed. An early morning enemy artillery and mortar barrage ripped into the division's line as the Fifth Panzer Army launched an attack in what later became known as the Battle of the Bulge. Holbrook was reported missing in action that first day. It was later confirmed he had died during the opening salvos of the Ardennes offensive. He is buried at the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery in Belgium.

"Ernie was a fighter, but at all times a sportsman," reported the Los Angeles Times, after his death was announced. "He played to win—he hated to lose, no matter how small the stake—yet he never belittled the opposition. His spirit was contagious."

## **Stan Klores – First Base/Outfield**

*1936 Huntington Red Birds (15 games, 1 HR, 7 RBIs, .269)*

Stanley P. Klores was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and grew up in West Allis, a suburb of the city. While he was a youngster in the 1920s, there was no youth baseball in West Allis, so the resourceful Klores set about organizing his own team. With the help of a local playground director, Klores established a six-team league. He was with the 52nd Street All-Stars. "None of the kids had any dough," he recalled some years later, "so when we were asked to put up a five-dollar forfeit fee, I had to kick in with \$4.17 of it. The other eight on the team scraped up 83 cents between them. When the league was abandoned because of a lack of balls for the games, I lost my dough. Boy, that was heartbreaking!"

Klores attended West Allis High School where he starred on the varsity baseball team, and in 1934 he played with the Holy Assumption CYO team that won its section championship and went to the national playoffs at Wrigley Field, Chicago. In the final game, Klores hit a single, double and triple to help Holy Assumption win. That performance drew the attention of Cubs vice president John Seys. Klores wrestled with the idea of a career in professional baseball but chose instead to enroll at Northwestern University at Evanston, Illinois, in the fall of 1934. He quickly made his mark on the athletic field at Northwestern and was ranked as the best end on the freshman football team. Furthermore, he was a certainty to play first base the following spring, but the Chicago Cubs were still interested, and when he realized he could play baseball in the summer and study during the fall and winter, he signed his first professional baseball contract. Together with University of Wisconsin pitcher Carl Vaicek, Klores joined the Cubs at Catalina Island, California, for spring training in 1935. The two youngsters trained there with Stan Hack, Kiki Cuyler, Chuck Klein and Phil Cavarretta.

For the 1935 season, Klores was assigned to the Peoria Tractors of the Class B Three-I League. The smooth left-handed hitting outfielder played 114 games for the Tractors and batted a highly respectable .283 with six home runs and 48 RBIs. The following year he began the season playing first base with the Portsmouth Cubs of the Class B Piedmont League, before joining the Asheville Tourists of the same league. In June of that same year - after 42 games in the Piedmont League that saw him batting .278 - Klores was on the move again, joining the Huntington Red Birds of the Middle Atlantic League. He hit a three-run homer against Portsmouth on June 15, and

played 15 games (batting .269) with the Red Birds before moving to the Martinsville Manufacturers of the Class D Bi-State League, where he batted .330 in 66 games.

Klores continued to play minor league baseball through 1938, and wisely, had not neglected his education, continuing his studies at Northwestern's College of Liberal Arts each fall semester. At this point he was quite far along toward a college degree and chose to pursue that route. The decision, however, did not spell the end of his relationship with baseball. Klores spent the summer of 1939 batting cleanup for the Chicago Spencer Coals, pennant winners of the semi-pro Tri-State League. Then, in February 1940, Northwestern University's athletic director, K. L. "Tug" Wilson, announced that Klores would take over duties as the Wildcats' head baseball coach, succeeding Burt Ingwersen, also an assistant football coach, who had decided to concentrate on spring practice in that sport.

For many years, Northwestern had been the smallest and the only private school in the Big Ten Conference, and the baseball team had endured a mixed record. They had never finished better than third and had finished in fourth place winning seven out of 12 games in 1939. Klores brought new promise to the team. He inherited one of the largest squads to report for baseball in March 1940, when 33 players, including 10 varsity athletes, tried out for 18 places that were available for an eight-game preseason trip to Alabama and Louisiana. Klores firmly believed in developing his players' fundamentals and felt there was no room at the college level for fancy plays and showboating. "All that I ask of a player is that he possesses a fairly good arm, speed on the bases and fair judgment," he explained. "If he is ambitious to make a career of baseball he should master the fundamentals in college and leave the tricky stuff until he gets in the minors." Encouraged by his squad's early showing, Klores must have been surprised to see the Wildcats get off to an inauspicious start in conference play, losing two games to Illinois. But then the team settled down to win two games each from Chicago, Minnesota, Iowa and Wisconsin. In the final series with Ohio State University, the Wildcats lost the first game, 3–2, but rallied to win the second game, 6–5. This gave Northwestern a record of nine victories against three losses and a tie for the Big Ten championship with Illinois. Five players from the 1940 Wildcats went on to play in the minor leagues.

Klores earned his bachelor of science degree in June 1940, and was back with the Chicago Spencer Coals during the summer. He returned to coach Northwestern in 1941, but the loss of five regulars from the previous year's championship team proved too big a handicap for the Wildcats. The team dropped to fourth place in the Big Ten conference with five wins against six defeats. "During my freshman year at Northwestern," recalled John Eshbach, "I was invited to become freshman baseball manager and during the spring of 1941 I got to know Stan. Everyone had great respect for him—as an outstanding athlete, a bright, congenial person, and all-round good man."

Klores received his master's degree at the beginning of June 1941. Then on June 7 he enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve and, soon after, enrolled at Northwestern's Midshipman's Naval Training School. It was during this time that the Japanese launched their attack on Pearl Harbor. With the nation thrust into war, Ensign Klores was among 800 who graduated from midshipman's school at the beginning of

January 1942. Shortly afterwards he married his college sweetheart, Martha Whitehouse (May Queen of 1940, student leader of Northwestern's Women's Athletic Association, and daughter of a music faculty professor) and the couple left for Annapolis, Maryland, where Klores took a five-month special training course in naval communications.

In October 1942, Klores received his first active duty assignment as a communications officer with the newly built 2,100-ton destroyer USS Conway (DD-507). The Conway cleared Norfolk, Virginia, on December 5, 1942, bound for New Caledonia in the Pacific, arriving there on January 13, 1943. Later that month, she was part of a force that met Japanese ships evacuating troops from Guadalcanal. Throughout February 1943, she patrolled between Espiritu Santo and Guadalcanal, and it was around this time Klores received word from the Red Cross that Martha had given birth to a son, Stanley Whitehouse Klores, on December 5, 1942. The family had sought without success for six weeks to make contact with Klores. Finally, his wife appealed to the Red Cross. It took them just five days to let him know the good news.

On March 4, the Conway participated in the bombardment of Vila-Stanmore in the Solomon Islands, and on March 15, she sailed in support of the Rendova Island landings, escorting supply ships before becoming involved in the New Georgia operations. Life on a destroyer in the Pacific, so far away from family, was a difficult time. "The innings are too long in this ball game," wrote Klores in a melancholy letter to Northwestern on May 12, "and we haven't even started to bat." In another letter received in June 1943, Klores revealed his feelings of uncertainty about his situation while reflecting on the deaths in battle he had witnessed: "You seldom get an icky feeling, because so much activity and work keeps your mind from thinking of it. However, now and then a cloud of sentimentalism does center over your head, and you wonder what the future holds in store. You never do forget that the other guys were made of the same flesh as yours."

Between July and August, the Conway operated out of Purvis Bay in the Solomon Islands, escorting fueling units and making night raids on Japanese shipping. Later in the month, she was back at Guadalcanal, conducting raids on Japanese barges. The Conway sailed to Sydney, Australia, for overhaul in October 1943, and after a year at sea, Klores returned to the United States and was reunited with Martha and their new-born son.

In November 1943, Klores made the somewhat unusual request for transfer to flight duty with the Navy Air Corps. Why he chose to train as a pilot is not certain, but he certainly welcomed the prospect of remaining in the states for the period needed for training, allowing more time to be with his family. He attended an 11-week pilot training course as a student officer at Dallas Naval Air Station, Texas. But experienced naval communications officers were harder to come by than aviation cadets and he soon found himself assigned to another brand new destroyer, the 2,200 ton USS Cooper (DD-695). At the time, it seemed a fortunate move as his brother-in-law Robert Whitehouse had earlier lost his life in a plane crash while training with the Army Air Corps.

"I last saw Stan in April 1944," said Eshbach, the freshman baseball manager from Northwestern, who had become engaged to Martha's sister Barbara in early 1944. "He had invited us to have dinner with him on the Cooper at the Brooklyn Navy Yard." By the time Eshbach and Barbara married on August 1, 1944 (making Eshbach, Klores' brother-in-law), the Cooper was at sea, arriving at Pearl Harbor on September 4. After operational training, she proceeded to the active war zone in the western Pacific and joined the action. The Cooper screened aircraft carriers involved in air attacks on Luzon, Ormoc Bay, and Manila Bay in the Philippines, and participated in patrols in Leyte Gulf until December 2.

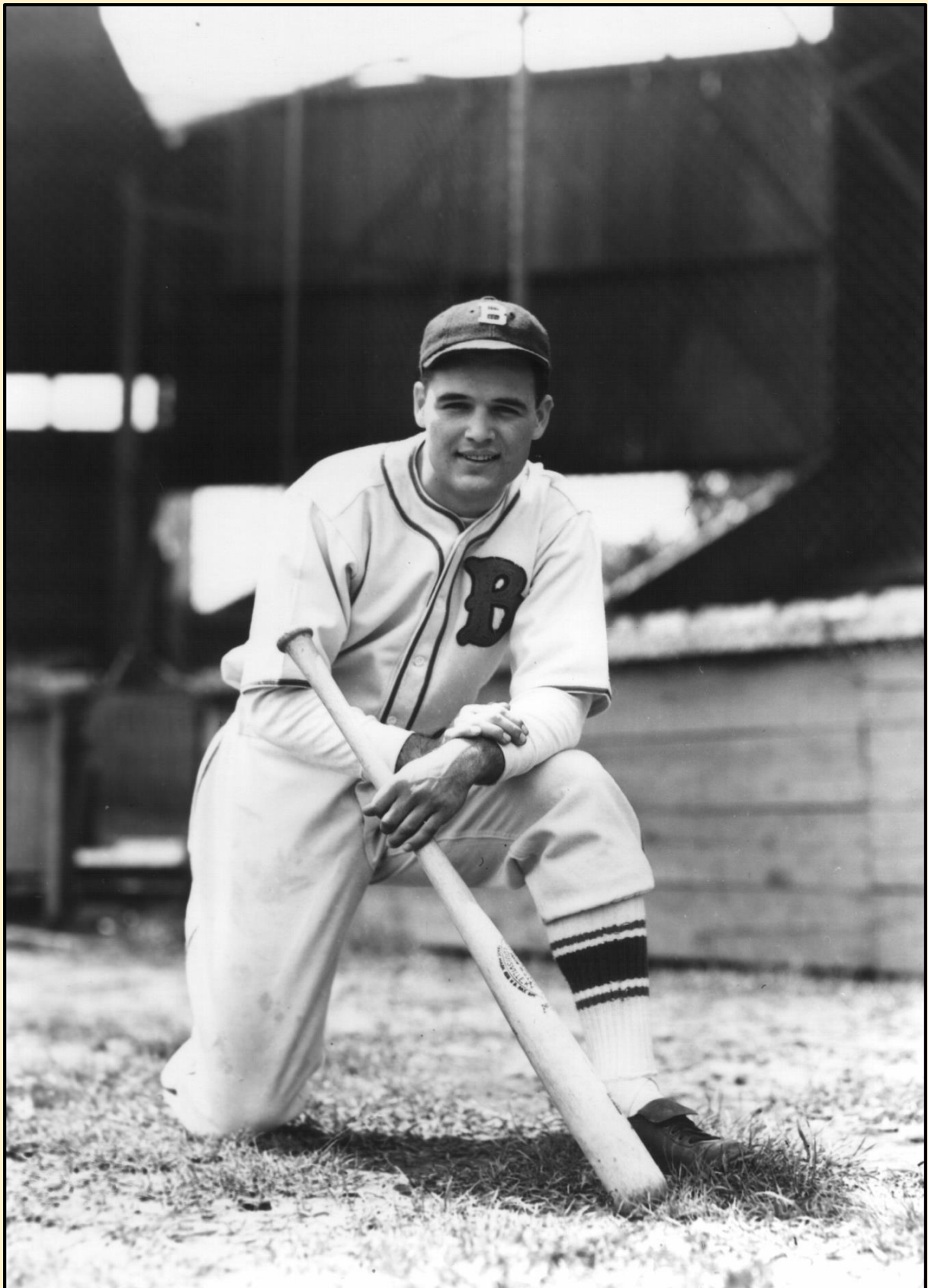
It was during this time that General MacArthur led the Allied forces on their return to the Philippines, marked by the landing, on October 20, 1944, at Tacloban on the east coast of the island of Leyte. The Japanese, however, maintained a strong position on Leyte's west coast and were re-supplying their troops through Ormoc Bay. During the night of December 2-3, the Cooper, along with two other destroyers, sailed into Ormoc Bay to intercept Japanese shipping. An engagement with Japanese warships ensued and, just after midnight, the Japanese destroyer Take launched her torpedoes at the Cooper, which suffered a massive explosion on her starboard side, broke in two, and sank almost immediately. Klores, who ordinarily was stationed on the bridge, was on duty in the Combat Information Center at the time. The Cooper had just disposed of one enemy vessel and had trained its guns on another when she was hit. Every man in the Combat Information Center perished. Japanese ships in the area prevented rescue of survivors for 14 hours, but eventually 168 crew members were saved. Klores was among the 191 that were lost.

"My ship, the USS Rooks, sailed to Pearl Harbor early in December 1944," recalled Eshbach. "As soon as I was able, I went to the destroyer headquarters to inquire about the location of the Cooper, hoping that it, with Stan, might still be in the area. It was a very severe shock to learn that the Cooper had been torpedoed just a few days earlier. We had been brothers-in-law for just four months and had not seen each other during that time."

It was three weeks after the Cooper sank, on December 26, 1944, that Martha Klores received word from the Navy Department that her husband was missing in action. The family held out a faint glimmer of hope for his safe return until January 10, 1945, when a telegram officially listed him as killed in action. Klores' body was never recovered. He is remembered at the Manila American Cemetery in the Philippines.

On April 7, 1945, four months after Stan's death, Martha gave birth to a daughter, Judith Klores, their daughter. Stan, of course, had been aware that their second child was on the way, but he would not see her. Their son, Stanley, graduated from Northwestern, like his parents, and today the Rev. Stanley Klores is the Pastor at St. Patrick's Church in New Orleans, Louisiana. He was just two years old when his father was killed. "I have no first-hand memories of him," The Reverend Klores recalled. "However, everything that I have ever heard or read about him has described him as a fine man, a man of character and virtue, a natural leader."





Stan Klores with the Bloomington Bloomers in 1938

## Kappy Scott – Pitcher

*1936 Canton Terriers (less than 45 innings)*

Carl H. "Kappy" Scott was born in the village of Transfer, western Pennsylvania, and was one of the best pitchers ever to come out of the Shenango Valley area. A left-hander, Scott dropped out of school three days into his freshman year to join a section gang on the Erie Railroad. He first started playing baseball at the age of 14 with the Transfer Juniors and by the age of 21 (1933) he was the star pitcher with the Oakhursts team of Greenville, Pennsylvania. The Oakhursts, who also featured Kappy's brother Walter and cousin Earl Scott, were Mercer County champions in 1933, and four of their regulars, including Scott, tried out for minor league teams the following spring. Scott had his first brush with the Middle Atlantic League when he was signed by the Zanesville Greys in May 1934, and sent to the Monessen Indians of the newly-formed Class D Penn State Association. As a teammate of future Yankees star Tommy Henrich, Scott made 10 appearances for the Indians and was 3-4 with a 6.86 ERA.

Scott returned to the Oakhursts in July 1934, and remained with the team through 1935. In 1936, he tried out with the Middle Atlantic League's Akron Yankees, but failed to make the grade and caught on with the Canton Terriers, a new entry in the same circuit. However, after appealing for pitching help to the parent Boston Red Sox in May, the Terriers received two experienced pitchers from the Class B Piedmont League and Scott was released. He remained in Ohio, joining the semi-pro Lansingville club of Youngstown's Slovak League, and on May 31, 1936, he hurled a 2-0 no-hitter for Lansingville against Holy Name, striking out 16. Later in the year he was back in Pennsylvania pitching for the Franklin Steelers of the Venango County League.

When Scott was inducted by the Army on December 31, 1943, he was 31 years old. He served with the 330th Infantry Regiment of the 83rd "Thunderbolt" Infantry Division, and arrived in Europe on July 8, 1944. The division struggled forward through Normandy against strong resistance until it reached the outskirts of Saint-Lo on July 25. The following day, Private Carl Scott was killed in action in the vicinity of Marchesieux. He was buried at the Normandy American Cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer, France.



# Class of '38

In 1938, the Portsmouth Red Birds clinched the league championship, defeating the Akron Yankees in seven games. The league featured future Red Sox right-hander Tex Hughson, Cardinals right-hander Ernie White, Cardinals third baseman Whitey Kurowski, Browns infielder Johnny Lucadello, Braves catcher Phil Masi, Indians catcher Jim Hegan and Browns shortstop Vern Stephens.

## Walt Lake – Catcher

*1938 Springfield Indians (less than 10 games)*

Walter E. Lake was one of the most promising young ballplayers in Richmond, Indiana, in the late 1930s. An outstanding catcher for Morton High School and the local American Legion team, he also played for numerous semi-pro clubs as well as playing basketball with the Bell and Wallace team of the city's Industrial League.

Lake was 19 years old when he signed with the Cleveland Indians' organization in 1938. His brush with the Middle Atlantic League was to be a brief one. He was initially assigned to the league's Springfield Indians, but soon moved to the Oswego Netherlands of the Class C Canadian-American League. The Netherlands' attendance in 1938 was just 16,522, second-worst in the league, and they finished sixth among eight teams. It was a miserable year for the team but among the few highlights were the .313 batting average of Walt Lake, and the hitting of 17-year-old shortstop Bob Lemon, who would later convert to a pitcher on his way to a Hall of Fame career with the Cleveland Indians.

Lake played in the East Texas and Evangeline Leagues in 1939, joining the Cedar Rapids Raiders of the Class B Three-I League in 1940. On January 29, 1941, Lake was inducted into the Army at Fort Benjamin Harrison, Indiana. He was sent to Fort Custer, Michigan, later in the year and then to Camp Forrest, Tennessee, for maneuvers. He trained with the 605th Tank Destroyer Battalion and advanced to private first class, then corporal, before attending Officer Candidate School at Fort Benning, Georgia. In September 1942, Lake graduated as a second lieutenant and enjoyed an 18-day furlough with his wife, Virginia, before being assigned to Company E of the 9th Infantry Regiment, 2nd "Indian Head" Infantry Division at Fort Sam Houston, Texas. Lake would also serve at Camp Bullis, Texas, and Camp McCoy, Wisconsin, where he was reassigned to the Anti-Tank Company of the 9th Infantry Regiment.

In October 1943, the division left the United States for Northern Ireland, where it underwent extensive training before moving to England, and then to Normandy, France, on June 8, 1944 (D-Day plus two) where it came ashore at Omaha Beach. The 9th Infantry Regiment advanced inland through the hedgerows of Normandy where the enemy was well dug in and casualty lists mounted steadily. The regiment took St. Germain d'Elle, and then battled for nearly a month to take Hill 192, a heavily defended vital strongpoint on the way to Saint-Lô. On July 26, as the Germans were making a desperate stand against the Allied forces near the village of Les Haies in the Cerisy Forest, First Lieutenant Lake was fatally wounded. He was evacuated to an Army hospital where he died later in the day.

His wife, Virginia, received a telegram from the War Department, stating that her husband had been "seriously wounded in action." A letter that followed on August 11 (16 days after his death), said "knowing your desire to have a letter reach him as soon as possible, you should use the following temporary address."

This cruel glimmer of hope was followed by a further telegram and letter dated August 17: "I deeply regret that it is necessary to confirm ... the death of your husband, First Lieutenant Walter E. Lake ... who died on 26 July 1944 in France as a result of wounds received in action on that date."

Not surprisingly, Virginia was shocked and dismayed. Was Walt wounded or dead? She immediately wrote to her husband's commanding officer wanting to know what had happened. The letter was forwarded to the War Department for reply. "I fully appreciate your desire to know the circumstances attending your husband's death," wrote Brigadier General Edward W. Witsell, "and I regret the confusion occasioned by the letter of 11 August 1944. An additional report has been received in the War Department which states that Lieutenant Lake was seriously wounded in action on 26 July 1944 and was evacuated to an Army hospital, where every possible medical assistance was administered, but his death occurred later that day as a result of his wounds."

Walter Lake was buried at the United States Military Cemetery in St. Laurent, France. In February 1945, he was posthumously awarded the Bronze Star. His citation read: "He distinguished himself by heroic achievements in connection with military operations against the enemy in Normandy, on 26 July 1944."

Not until January 1947 did Virginia see the place where her husband rests, in a photograph of the cemetery at St. Laurent sent by the War Department. "It is my sincere hope that you may gain some solace from this view of the surroundings in which your loved one rests," wrote Brigadier General G. A. Horkan. "As you can see, this is a place of simple dignity, neat and well cared for."

In December 1947, Walter Lake's remains were returned to the United States and now rest at Earlham Cemetery in Richmond, Indiana.

## **Elmer Wright – Pitcher**

*1938 Johnstown Johnnies (6-14, 6.00 ERA)*

Elmere P. "Elmer" Wright was the son of Bedford, Virginia's deputy sheriff, Howard P. Wright. Elmer was a standout athlete at Bedford High School, a tackle in football and a hard throwing pitcher on the baseball team. After graduating from high school, the fun-loving right-hander pitched for a number of local semi-pro teams and, like many youngsters, he also joined Company A of the local National Guard, if for no other reason than it paid a couple of dollars at a time when money was hard to come by.

In the spring of 1937, Wright, age 21, attended the Ray L. Doan baseball school at Hot Springs, Arkansas. From there he was signed by the St. Louis Browns and played for the Terre Haute Tots of the Class B Three-I League, and the Mayfield Clothiers of

the Class D Kitty League, pitching the last three innings of the Kitty League all-star game in July.

His stint in the Middle-Atlantic League came in 1938, when he joined the Johnstown Johnnies. He made 30 appearances for the basement-hugging Johnnies for a 6-14 record and two of those victories occurred on the same day. He beat Dayton, 4-1, in the opening game of a June 30 doubleheader, then pitched the first four innings of the second game to take the victory in an 11-3 win. Wright had shown enough to be called to the Class A1 Texas League San Antonio Missions' spring training camp in Brownsville, Texas, for 1939, but was assigned to the Jackson Senators of the Class B Southeastern League for the regular season, where he pitched 32 games for a 7-11 record and 5.45 ERA. He was back with the Missions for spring training in 1940, but was a late cut, being sent to Meridian of the Class B Southeastern League. However, Wright did not report and sat out the season.

As the war in Europe took hold during 1940, the United States began to expand its fighting forces. In October, it was announced that Bedford's National Guard Company A would be mobilized into the federal Army for a period of one year, and on February 3, 1941, Wright and the other members of Company A reported to the Bedford Armory. They were sent to Fort Meade, Maryland, home of the 29th Infantry Division, and during the summer of 1941, Wright regularly had the opportunity to pitch for the Fort Meade post team. While at Fort Meade, news was received of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor. It ended all hope of being home in a year.

In August 1942, Company A, as part of the 116th Infantry Regiment, 29th Infantry Division, left Fort Meade bound for Camp Blanding in Florida. Less than a month later they boarded a train that took them to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, staging post to Britain. A staggering total of 11,000 troops boarded the Queen Mary for the Atlantic crossing with an escort of five destroyers and a British cruiser, HMS Curacao. As the Queen Mary approached Scotland, the Curacao guided her to the Forth of Clyde. It was a routine operation but at 12:12 P.M. on October 2, 1942, disaster struck. The Queen Mary collided with the Curacao. The huge ocean liner suffered minimal damage but the Curacao sank almost immediately and the lives of 338 British sailors were lost.

Shaken, but safely on dry land in Scotland, the division moved by train to London, England, and from there to Tidworth Barracks just ten miles from historic Stonehenge. It was the beginning of the division's training program that would last until May 1944, the longest of any American infantrymen in World War II. Elmer Wright still found a little time for baseball in England. In September 1943, he played for the 116th Infantry Regiment Yankees in a four-day U.S. services baseball tournament in London. The Yankees were a dark horse team at the outset of the tournament - unknown to most of the other teams who were already playing in well-established military leagues around Britain. Wright, together with outfielder Frank Draper and catcher Tony Marsico (who were also from Bedford, Virginia) were the backbone of the team. Draper had grown up desperately poor on the wrong side of the tracks in Bedford. A superb, naturally-gifted athlete, he had been the lead-off hitter with the semi-pro Hampton Looms mill team before military service. Marsico was 34 years old and a talented catcher who had played for the Piedmont Label team. [1] Wright's pitching

guided the Yankees to an unexpected place in the final against the Army Air Force's 78<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group Thunderbolts. He started the game for the Yankees and yielded four hits and a run over four innings before giving way to former Penn State Association pitcher Doug Gillette. The Yankees won the game, 6-3, for the European Theater championship title (Draper had three hits that day, including two triples). That was to be Wright's last chance to play any form of competitive baseball. For the remainder of 1943 and the first five months of 1944, it was intensive military training in preparation for the invasion of mainland Europe.

Professional baseball back home had not forgotten about Elmer Wright, however. In June 1943, he received an unexpected letter from the Toledo Mud Hens, the club to whom he had been assigned shortly before entering military service. "I just wanted to write you this note," penned Mud Hens President G. E. Gilliland, "and let you know that I am mighty proud of the fact that you are serving our country and to wish you the best of luck. You boys over there are certainly doing a grand job.... After throwing hand grenades at those Japs and Germans, your control should be perfect and that is all that you ever needed to win anywhere so hurry up and get this thing over with and get back over here because I could use a good pitcher right now."

Wright also found time to keep in touch with his parent club, the St. Louis Browns. A reply from Browns' vice-president, William O DeWitt, dated March 16, 1944, read:

Dear Elmere:

We have your very interesting letter of recent date and assure you it was a pleasure to hear from you and to know something about you. You certainly have spent quite a long stretch in the Army and if the newspaper stories are correct, perhaps you will get a chance to return to this country in the not too distant future.

We are mighty glad that you played some baseball and that you won the Championship. Your record was certainly impressive: In fact, by not losing any your record was perfect. I am glad to know that your curveball and your control are better, even though your fastball is not as good as it used to be. I think you will be a much better pitcher and I know you will be ready for some high class baseball when you get back.

The Browns and Toledo begin spring training together at Cape Girardeau, Missouri on Monday, March 20, with the American League season opening on April 18 and the American Association on April 19.

The envelope in which your letter was sent to us is different from any other envelopes we have received from overseas. Can you tell us the reason your outfit uses this kind of envelope, or is that a military secret? Can you tell us where you are stationed?

Thanking you for your letter and with continued good wishes, we are,

Sincerely yours,

William O DeWitt  
Vice-President

On May 18, 1944, the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division were taken in trucks to containment camps on the south-east coast of England. The countdown to D-Day had begun and Wright's military skills were soon to be tested. Movement outside the camps was strictly forbidden as absolute secrecy regarding invasion details was essential and it was a boring and anxious couple of weeks for the men of Company A. "Whenever we had time, I put on a glove and [Elmer Wright] pitched to me," recalls former college catcher, Hal Baumgarten in Alex Kershaw's *The Bedford Boys*. "Wright was fast. I had to put a double sponge in the glove."

On the morning of June 6, 1944, Staff Sergeant Wright was on a landing craft heading for Omaha Beach at Normandy. Company A of the 116th Infantry Regiment was to lead the D-Day assault. As the landing crafts approached the beach the enemy opened fire with artillery, mortar, machine-gun and small arms fire. Frank Draper, the outfielder from Bedford, was on another landing craft, and the Army had been the making of the 25 year-old. He was resourceful, calm and decisive under pressure, yet totally unprepared for what was about to happen. Draper's craft violently shook with the horrifying impact of an anti-personnel shell that ripped through the metal side and tore off his upper arm. Rapidly losing blood, the young soldier slumped to the floor and died in a pool of blood, seawater and vomit.

Wright's landing craft made it to the beach and as the ramp dropped the men were met with a hail of enemy fire. Most were killed outright. Others lay critically wounded, screaming for help. Those that could, jumped in to the six-foot of water and desperately tried to make their way to the beach. Wright was killed in the hail of gunfire almost as soon as he hit the beach.

It was not until July 16 that news of the horrendous losses suffered by Company A reached the townsfolk of Bedford. Nineteen local boys died in the first bloody minutes at Normandy. Two more died later in the day. No other town in America suffered a greater loss.

Elmer Wright is buried at the Normandy American Cemetery at Colleville-sur-Mer in France.



Elmer Wright (center) in 1937, with (from left to right) Browns coach Charles O'Leary, Dizzy Dean, Rogers Hornsby and Lon Warneke

# Class of '39

In 1939, the Canton Terriers clinched the league championship, defeating the Springfield Indians, four games to one. The league featured future Yankees catcher Aaron Robinson, Indians outfielder Paul O'Dea, Reds first baseman Hank Sauer, Braves right-hander Max Surkont and Indians right-handers Bob Lemon and Allie Reynolds.

## Bob Hershey – First Base

*1939 Springfield Indians (124 games, 14 HRs, 85 RBIs, .308)*

Robert K. Hershey was born in Turtle Creek, Pennsylvania, and grew up in nearby Penn Hills. He attended Union High School, where he played three years of baseball and football, and was co-captain of the football team his senior year. Following graduation, he enrolled at Bucknell University in Lewisburg, Pennsylvania, and played freshman football.

In 1938, Hershey signed with the Cleveland Indians' organization and the left-handed hitting first baseman enjoyed an all-star season, batting .343 in 108 games with 18 home runs and 108 RBIs his rookie season with the Logan Indians of the Class D Mountain State League.

During the off-season he enrolled at the University of Pittsburgh and was the standout baseball player at the school although he was unable to play for Ralph Mitterling's Panther squad because of his previous professional experience.

In 1939, Hershey was back in pro ball, this time with Cleveland's affiliate in the Middle Atlantic League, the Springfield Indians. Hershey hit .308 with 28 doubles and 14 home runs that season. His 124 game appearances led the squad, while his batting average was second best on the team behind future major league outfielder Paul O'Dea, and twelfth best in the league. He helped Springfield defeat Charleston, three games to one in the league playoffs, before the Indians were defeated by the Canton Terriers, four games to one in the finals.

Hershey progressed to Class B baseball with the Cedar Rapids Raiders of the Three-I League in 1940, and continued to hit well. In 126 games with the Raiders he batted .318 with 15 home runs. He also hit 30 doubles and nine triples, and his 99 RBIs was third best in the league, helping the Raiders to the league championship. In 1941, a season in which the Three-I League was dominated by a young left-handed pitcher named Warren Spahn, Hershey batted .313 in 120 games with 11 home runs and a circuit second-best 100 RBIs as the Raiders clinched their second successive league championship.

Hershey, who had a minor league career average of .320 over four seasons and had a chance of becoming Cleveland's next first baseman, enlisted in the Navy in September 1941. He trained as an aviation cadet at Naval Air Station Pensacola, Florida, and received his wings in August 1942. As a lieutenant junior grade, he served in the Caribbean with Patrol Squadron VP-204, flying out of NAS Trinidad. During the night of July 30/31, 1943, Bob Hershey was the third pilot aboard a Martin PBM-3S Mariner twin-engined flying boat that located a Japanese submarine on



radar. Dropping flares as it made an approach to depth charge the sub, the Mariner was hit by 30-caliber machine-gun fire from the submarine. One bullet passed through the waist hatch and mortally wounded Hershey. The pilot, Lt. L.D. Crockett decided to call off the attack and immediately return to base in an attempt to save Hershey. The 420-mile journey took a little over two hours and Hershey died just after they reached NAS Trinidad.

Bob Hershey is buried at Plum Creek Cemetery in Plum, Pennsylvania.

## **Jack Moller – Pitcher/Outfielder**

*1939 Dayton Wings (less than 10 games)*



John T. "Jack" Moller, the son of William and Suzette Moller, grew up in Mount Vernon, New York, where he earned a reputation as an outstanding athlete at A.B. Davis High School. He quarterbacked the football team and won the LeRoy N. Mills football kicking trophy in 1932 and 1933. In baseball, he was a hard-throwing right-handed pitcher, and on May 16, 1933, he hurled a one-hitter against Gorton High School, retiring the first nine batters he faced and allowed the only hit of the game in the final inning. He repeated the feat the following year, in helping the Mount Vernon Robins, clinch the city's Senior League baseball championship.

Moller entered Columbia University in 1934, where he starred for the varsity team. A superb, naturally talented pitcher who was also a real threat with a bat, he was playing for the Mount Vernon Scarlets when signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers' organization in June 1939, and joined the Middle Atlantic League's Dayton Wings. Moller was used in a relief role by the Wings until being sent to the Olean Oilers of the Class D PONY League in mid-July, where he pitched eight games for a 2-1 record and also batted .500 (9 for 18).

Moller retired from the game in 1940 to attend Fordham Law School, but returned to the Oilers in 1941, and pitched 27 games for an 11-10 record and 3.50 ERA. He also played a further 30 games in the outfield and batted .350 with seven home runs and 53 RBIs. On September 1, 1941, in a game against the Bradford Bees, Moller pitched and won both ends of a doubleheader while driving in the winning run in both contests.

On December 23, 1941, Moller entered military service as an aviation cadet with the Army Air Force. After training at Maxwell Field, Alabama; Turner Field, Georgia, and Fort Myers, Florida, he earned his bomber pilot's wings and was assigned to overseas duty with the 321st Bomb Squadron of the 90th Bomb Group, Fifth Air Force, based at New Guinea in the Pacific.

On August 8, 1943, Moller was piloting a Consolidated B-24 Liberator, nicknamed Big Emma, which took off from Wards Airfield on a patrol along New Guinea's northern coastline. It was his first mission. Moller and his crew of 11 successfully completed the

patrol but encountered poor weather as he attempted to return to base. The late afternoon quickly descended into darkness and Moller radioed the control tower to say that visibility was so poor he could not see the searchlights at Port Moresby, a popular landmark for pilots returning at night. He searched hopelessly in the dark for an hour and a half before advising that he was going to instruct his crew to bail out rather than continue the seemingly hopeless search. Shortly afterwards all radio contact was lost. The following day the wreckage of Big Emma was discovered in a mosquito-infested swamp 20 miles from the airfield. All crew members were dead.

On September 21, 1943, the Mount Vernon Daily Argus published a letter from Sergeant Vallario, a former Mount Vernon resident, who was serving with the US Army at McAlester Internment Camp in Oklahoma:

"Editor,

The Daily Argus:

Recently I received a letter from my brother informing me of the death of Jack Moller while on duty in the Pacific war zone. The information has touched me deeply and I feel that in his loss Mount Vernon has suffered a great loss.

"Here was a young man who possessed all the natural ability that any one person could possibly have. Not only was he a fine athlete and student, but his strong character and gleaming personality made him a leader of his fellow man. When his country called, it was due to these fine traits that he became a member of the air force which at present is carrying the brunt of the heavy duty of the war.

"It was also these leading qualifications which, at the time of his death, found him in the middle of activities on the Pacific war front. I feel it a tragedy that Jack has passed on but I'm sure that his memory shall linger on in the hearts of us who knew him.

"In closing, I wish to extend through your newspaper my sincerest sympathy to those closest to him. Jack again was out there leading, and we can thank him and others like him for saving the lives of many American boys.

"Yours,

Sgt. Larry Vallario"

Moller, who was married to Mary Burman and had a son, John, Jr., (born June 11, 1943) whom he never saw, was buried at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii. He was posthumously awarded the Air Medal. The wreckage of Big Emma can still be seen today, half submerged in the swamp near the village of Gaile on New Guinea.

## **Norman Smith – Pitcher**

*1939 Dayton Wings (11-10, 3.34 ERA)*

Norman K. Smith, the son of Jim and Lidie Smith, grew up in Edison, Georgia, where he attended Edison High School and first demonstrated his skill as a pitcher.

Following graduation in 1934, he attended Norman Park Junior College and helped guide the varsity team to the Georgia Junior College league championships in 1934

and 1935. Smith was 6-1 and 7-2 respectively, with two one-hitters in the latter year. He transferred to Mercer University in the fall of 1935 as a pre-law student and suffered a broken right arm that Christmas, but was fully fit to try out for the baseball team in the spring of 1936. In his first exhibition game for the Mercer Ramblers, against former Yankees pitcher Cy Moore and the Elberton Athletic Club, Smith hurled an impressive two-hitter with 16 strikeouts in the 5-0 win.

Smith was a natural athlete and when he tried his hand at cross-country running at Mercer - something he had not done before - he was so impressive he was made captain of the team. In addition to pitching for Mercer he hurled during the summer months with East Griffin of the Middle Georgia Textile League, and in late 1936, he signed with the Macon Peaches of the Class B South Atlantic League. After 12 unmemorable appearances for the Peaches at the start of the 1937 season, he was assigned to the Cordele Reds of the Class D Georgia-Florida League, where he was 9-1 with an earned run average of 3.00. Back with Macon in 1938, Smith was 3-6 in 17 outings and returned to Cordele where he was 2-8.

He joined the Dayton Wings of the Middle Atlantic League in 1939, and was 11-10, with a team-leading 121 strikeouts as the Wings finished 17 games out of first place. In 1940, he was with the Americus Pioneers of the Georgia-Florida League and was 8-8 in 23 games. Back with the Pioneers for 1941, Smith enjoyed his best professional season as the backbone of the team's pitching staff. He had a 14-10 won-loss record, a 3.25 ERA and 151 strikeouts in 202 innings. He joined the Nashville Vols of the Class A1 Southern Association at the end of the year and was 0-2 in four appearances.

After six years of playing professional baseball during the summer and teaching school in the off-season, Smith entered military service on January 22, 1942. He served as an ensign with the Navy aboard the heavy cruiser USS Quincy (CA-39). As the flagship of Rear Admiral Norman R. Scott, the Quincy arrived in the South Pacific in July 1942, providing close fire support for the Marines during the landing at Guadalcanal.

On August 9, 1942, the Quincy, as part of an Allied naval force, was on patrol between Florida Island and Savo Island. Unknown to them, a Japanese force of seven cruisers and one destroyer was heading straight for them and made a surprise attack. Known as the Battle of Savo Island, the Quincy was caught unprepared for action, hit heavily and set afire. As she changed direction two torpedoes hit her, and further incoming shells killed or wounded almost all of her bridge crew, including the captain. At 2:38 A.M., less than 30 minutes after the attack began, the Quincy sank, bow first. Ensign Smith was among the 370 that died on the Quincy, with a further 167 wounded. The American cruisers USS Vincennes and USS Astoria, and the Australian cruiser HMAS Canberra were also sunk that day.

Norman Smith's body was never recovered, but he is remembered at the Manila American Cemetery at Fort Bonifacio in the Philippines. He was survived by his mother, four brothers (J.T., Marvin, Russell and Agnew) and two sisters (Mrs. Francis Bugg and Mrs. George Chambers).

On January 14, 1947, a memorial plaque was unveiled at Mercer University in honor of the 44 Mercer students who lost their lives in World War II. In 1961, a plaque, requested by Norman's brother, Agnew, was placed in Mars Hill Cemetery in Edison, Georgia.

## **Billy Southworth, Jr. – Outfield**

*1939 Springfield Indians (19 games, 0 HR, 5 RBIs, .197)*

William H. "Billy" Southworth, who guided the St. Louis Cardinals to two World Series titles during the 1940s, was an outfielder with the Portland Beavers of the Pacific Coast League when his son, Billy, Jr., was born on June 20, 1917. The senior Southworth went on to enjoy a 13-season playing career in the major leagues before turning his hand to managing and earning posthumous selection to the Baseball Hall of Fame in 2008.

Billy, Jr., a standout athlete at East High School, in Columbus, Ohio, who spent the summers with his dad on the minor league circuit, signed in 1936 with the Asheville Tourists of the Class B Piedmont League, where his father was in his second season as manager. Billy, Jr., who looked more like a Hollywood movie star than a ballplayer, played 29 games and was batting .253, before joining the Martinsville Manufacturers of the Class D Bi-State League, where he hit an impressive .340 in 65 games. In 1937, Southworth was back with Asheville but after a poor start he was again optioned to Class D ball, playing with the Daytona Beach Islanders of the Florida State League and then back with Martinsville for the end of the season.

In 1938, the 20-year-old outfielder joined the Kinston Eagles of the Class D Coastal Plain League and had an opportunity to show what he could do. In 103 games, he batted .283 with 78 RBIs, and led the team with 14 home runs and 22 stolen bases. His performance was good enough to advance to Class B baseball for 1939, joining the Columbus Red Birds of the South Atlantic League, but a slow start saw a move to the Springfield Indians of the Middle Atlantic League. Vying for a place in an outfield that included future big leaguers Paul O'Dea and Chuck Workman, Southworth batted just .197 over 19 games, prompting another move, this time to the Rome Colonels of the Class C Canadian-American League. Southworth blossomed with the Colonels and batted .342 with 15 home runs, 85 RBIs and 20 stolen bases in 102 games to earn league MVP honors.

Southworth was a rising star and in 1939 he was sold to the Toronto Maple Leafs of the Class AA International League - one level below the majors. He began the following season in Toronto and despite getting five hits in his first 11 at-bats he soon cooled down. At about the same time his father took over from Ray Blades as manager of the St. Louis Cardinals, Billy, Jr., was on a southbound train for Wilmington, Delaware, where he spent the remainder of the season with the Blue Rocks of the Class B InterState League. Southworth batted .291 in 62 games and returned to Toronto for the last few weeks of the season.

Meanwhile, war was raging across Europe and Southworth had been paying particularly close attention. "I think it's my duty to enlist, because they're going to need us," he told his father. The senior Southworth persuaded his son to wait until after the baseball season to think it over, and Billy, Jr., took his father's advice,

enlisting with the Army Air Corps on December 12, 1940, in the hope of training to be a pilot.

Joining the Air Corps was an easy choice for Southworth. He had always had a fascination with aviation - building model airplanes and reading books given to him by Warren Giles, business manager of the Rochester Red Wings where Billy's father played between 1928 and 1932. Southworth began his training at Parks Air College in East St. Louis, Illinois, and then Randolph Field, Texas. He was transferred to Brooks Field, Texas, on August 29, 1941, where he received his bomber pilot's wings and commission as a second lieutenant. He continued his training, transferring to Orlando Army Air Base, Florida, on February 2, 1942, then to Pendleton Field, Oregon, where he joined the newly activated 303rd Bomb Group.

In March 1942, the 303rd moved to Gowen Field in Boise, Idaho, and Southworth took command of his first Boeing B-17 Flying Fortress - the four-engine heavy bomber that would prove so effective in the daylight precision strategic bombing campaign against Germany. Southworth was promoted to first lieutenant at this time and the bomb group continued training in California, New Mexico and Texas.

Towards the close of the 1942 baseball season, Billy, Jr., visited his father in Chicago where the Cardinals were playing the Cubs. It was their last time together before he left for combat duty in Europe in October 1942. The 303rd Bomb Group was part of the Eighth Air Force and based at Molesworth in England. They flew their first mission on November 17, 1942, against U-boat submarine pens at St. Nazaire, France. Newly promoted Captain Southworth did not fly on that mission but received his baptism of fire the following day when he piloted his B-17F - nicknamed Bad Check- against the same target amid intense anti-aircraft fire. During December and January Southworth continued to fly missions against targets in France, and Bad Check lived up to its name because it kept coming back.

On a mission to St. Nazaire on January 3, 1943, Southworth flew as co-pilot to the group commanding officer Colonel James Wallace, with an Army Air Force Brigadier General and Cy Peterman of the Philadelphia Enquirer, riding along as observers. In a detailed report by Peterman, it was revealed how seriously Southworth took his role, and how good at it he was. "He's all seriousness, no hijinks with Southworth," explained Peterman. "There is a definite rule against chatter in his plane. No wisecracking, no intercom monkey business." Peterman went on to explain how Southworth was "one of the finest formation flyers." Later on, Southworth's bomber was attacked by German fighters and Peterman described how "cannon shells clipped a hunk from one wing," and the "rat-a-tat-tat blew off the upper windshield, the rush of air increasing the din of the Fort's counter-fire."

Southworth's seventh mission, on January 23, 1943, was against U-boat pens at Brest, France, and Bad Check was hit by flak, causing the starboard engine to fail. The plane was also hit by cannon fire from German fighters and limped home, making a safe landing at Exeter, the first available landing field in England, after returning across the English Channel. On January 27, 1943, the target was Wilhelmshaven Naval Base. It was the first time American bombs, from American planes with

American crews, ventured into Germany. Southworth flew a different B-17 that day because Bad Check was still being repaired.

Southworth was reunited with Bad Check a week later as the 303rd continued its relentless onslaught against Germany. On March 22, 1943, the bomber's good fortune finally ran out when the cylinder head cracked on the No. 3 engine and Southworth had to abort and return to base. It was not until April 17, 1943, that he flew again. It was his twelfth mission and his new B-17F was nicknamed Son. He would fly this airplane on six missions until taking charge of Winning Run on June 13, 1943. Winning Run clearly referred to his baseball background, as did his habit of wearing a Cardinals baseball cap that had been given to him by his father. The baseball cap rather than regulation headwear provided better shade from the sun and allowed for the tight fitting of radio ear- phones. Southworth completed his tour of duty (25 missions) - on July 17, 1943, without a single injury to any member of his crew, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal. "I was just another Joe, occupying a lucky seat with a fine crew," he later said. "I tried to manage 'em like Dad manages his Cardinals."

Southworth returned to the United States on January 28, 1944, and was stationed at the Santa Monica Air Force Distribution Center in California, awaiting assignment. He had missed three seasons of baseball and reflected on what might have been. "I suppose if there had been no war I might have made the major leagues," he said, "but since grabbing an airplane stick instead of a bat, I want to stick to aviation and be just another baseball fan."

Not long after arriving in Santa Monica, Southworth attended a boxing match at the Hollywood Legion stadium, where he was recognized as the returning war hero and called into the ring for an introduction. As he graciously smiled through the applause, Hunt Stromberg, a movie producer, took an immediate interest in the suave-looking pilot. Stromberg talked with Southworth and they agreed on a Hollywood movie deal that would begin after the war.

Meanwhile, Southworth would put his combat experience to good use. He was promoted to the rank of major and served as a bomber crew instructor, before becoming deputy commanding officer of a newly organized task force of the Second Air Force. Nevertheless, Southworth had not forgotten his baseball roots. While stationed at Salt Lake City, Utah, he was interviewed by Private First Class Howard Green, former Abilene Reporter-News sports writer, who was also stationed at the base and asked about possible animosity of soldiers toward civilian sports being played during the war. "Baseball is the universal language of our troops overseas and should be continued in the face of all obstacles," Southworth answered. "Our fighting men are not concerned with the player personnel but still follow their favorite team as fervently as ever. Baseball is something they have in common and the national pastime is doing a tremendous job as a morale factor in deviating their minds from the problems of warfare."

In October 1944, Southworth was a guest of his father's at the World Series, where he watched the Cardinals defeat the Browns in six games. On November 28, 1944, he visited his father at home in Sunbury, Ohio, before leaving for duty at Grand Island

Army Air Field in Nebraska, an operational training base for heavy bomber crews. It was to be their last time together.

Major Southworth was training pilots to fly the Boeing B-29 Superfortress, the same four-engined bomber that would drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. On February 15, 1945, he was piloting a B-29 that left Mitchel Field in New York, bound for Florida. Major W. L. Anken, an observer aboard the B-29 noticed that one of the engines was throwing a heavy stream of smoke and he reported this to Southworth over the intercom. "Keep an eye on it," Southworth replied. At 3:50 P.M., the Superfortress appeared over LaGuardia Field with the left outboard engine stopped. Southworth radioed the control tower to prepare for an emergency landing. Struggling at the controls of the crippled plane, he overshot the runway, and attempted to climb above Flushing Bay, but a wing clipped the water and the 37-ton bomber somersaulted and burst into flames.

Heavy acrid smoke quickly blanketed the whole area, as police launches rushed to the scene and battled to rescue five crew members. But another five, including Major Billy Southworth, Jr., were missing in the front section of the plane which sank in 30 feet of water. Every effort was made to recover the bodies of the missing airmen but strong currents and a high tide hindered the work of grapplers and divers. The following day, Southworth's grief-stricken father - who was said to be prouder of his son's military achievements than of the pennants he had won with the Cardinals - flew to New York. Comforted by his wife, Mabel - Billy, Jr.'s stepmother - he looked out at Flushing Bay and asked reporters to point out the spot where the crash had happened.

Rescue efforts continued for weeks and Billy Jr.'s father remained in New York during that time. "It has been my privilege to go aboard the ship from which the search is being made for the missing crew members of the plane," he said. "The close personal contacts that I have had with the officers and men of the various units, conducting the search was most gratifying. The divers are hampered by strong currents and freezing air lines, but every officer and man is doing a heroic job and their loyalty to lost comrades is present in their every act."

On August 4, 1945, 24 weeks after the crash, an unrecognizable body washed ashore at the confluence of the East River and Long Island Sound in New York. Dental records identified the body as that of Southworth. He was buried on August 7, 1945, at Green Lawn Cemetery in Columbus, Ohio. The following year the Rome Colonels erected a plaque at Colonels Field in memory of their 1939 Most Valuable Player. His father managed the Cardinals in 1945, then he skippered the Boston Braves for six years, guiding them to the National League pennant in 1948. He died of emphysema in 1969, at the age of 76.



Billy Southworth, Jr., while still in military training

## **Class of '40**

In 1940, the league dropped from eight to just six teams, with Springfield and Erie both departing. The Akron Yankees were crowned league champions after defeating the Dayton Wings, three games to two. The league featured future Browns infielder Bob Dillinger, Yankees first baseman Steve Souchock, Pirates outfielder Wally Westlake, Browns left-hander Hooks Iott and Browns right-hander Max Surkont.

### **Frank Schulz – Pitcher**

*1940 Charleston Senators (3-3, 2.13 ERA)*

Franklin C. Schulz had two passions in life while growing up in Clarkson, Nebraska - music and baseball. His father, Frank "Yank" Schulz, had been a standout pitcher for the Clarkson Baseball Club during the 1920s, and young Frank was showing great promise hurling for the Fremont Merchants. In late 1939, he sold his beloved saxophone to get enough money to travel to Charleston, West Virginia, for a tryout with the Charleston Senators of the Middle Atlantic League. The sacrifice proved worthwhile as Schulz joined the team for spring training in 1940, and was then



assigned to the Flint Gems of the Class C Michigan State League. The 18-year-old was 4-4 in 15 appearances with a 4.69 ERA, and one of those wins was a 1-0 one-hitter against St. Joseph on August 6. The Gems were a powerhouse team in 1940, seven players either had previous major league experience or would later play in the majors and they easily clinched the league pennant. Schulz rejoined Charleston in mid-August, making six starts for a 3-3 record and nifty 2.13 ERA. He also made relief appearances in the playoffs against the Dayton Ducks.

Schulz was back at Flint in 1941, and proved to be one of the best pitchers in the Michigan State League. He finished the year with an excellent 17-4 won-loss record and 3.19 ERA. Along with teammate Steve Gromek (who was 14-2 with a 2.90 ERA), the team dominated the league, finishing with a nine game lead over the second place St. Joseph Autos. He beat Saginaw, 6-1, on a three-hitter on June 3; combined with Gromek to beat the Cleveland Indians, 3-2, in an exhibition game on July 7; and bettered Saginaw again in a 3-0 four-hitter on August 12. Schulz may have won 20 games had he not been sidelined for a while when he was struck in the leg by a line drive in mid-August. During that summer a romance was also in the air for the young pitcher. Dorothy Caister, a Flint girl and devotee of the baseball team, was named "queen" of the Michigan State League and began dating Schulz. They married later that year and had a son, Franklin, Jr., in 1943.

Schulz jumped to Class A ball in 1942 when he joined the Wilkes-Barre Barons of the Eastern League. Despite some control problems he made 29 strong appearances and was 14-12 for the Barons with a 2.74 ERA. When he entered military service on September 16, 1942, the Cleveland Indians' placed him on their National Defense Service list.

Schulz served with the Army Air Force and attended Officer Candidate School at Camp Davis, North Carolina. He received his commission as a second lieutenant on April 15, 1943, and trained as a bomber pilot, receiving his wings in June 1944. He was stationed at various camps in Texas including Camp Hulen; San Antonio Army Air Field; Coleman Field; Perrin Field; and Ellington Field, and was based at March Field, California, before leaving for overseas duty in the Pacific Theater in March 1945.

Operating from New Guinea and Samar in the Philippines, Schulz was a Consolidated B-24 Liberator pilot with the 394th Bomb Squadron of the 5th "Bomber Barons" Bomb Group, Thirteenth Air Force, flying long-range, unescorted formation missions. On June 17, 1945, Schulz piloted a B-24 from Samar Island on a bombing run to Balikpapan on the island of Borneo as part of the pre-invasion softening up of the island. The plane with its crew of nine was never seen again. Schulz was posthumously awarded the Air Medal and Purple Heart, and is remembered at the Manila American Cemetery at Fort Bonifacio in the Philippines.

Following his death, Schulz' widow, Dorothy, heard from his former Flint teammate, outfielder Clint Conatser, who, after military service, was playing for the Dallas Rebels of the Texas League, and would later play for the Boston Braves (1948 and 1949). A romance blossomed between them and they were married in Dallas in September 1946. They had three daughters together.

# Class of '41

The 1941 Middle Atlantic League returned to eight teams and the season was dominated by a new entry – the Erie Sailors – who were the only independently operated team in the league. The Sailors, who had previously played in the league as a Reds affiliate in 1939, and finished in last place, clinched the league championship by defeating the Canton Terriers, four games to one. The league featured future Yankees catcher Gus Niarhos, Reds infielder Dee Phillips, Braves outfielder Clint Conatser, Indians catcher Ralph Weigel, Giants right-hander Bill Voiselle, Red Sox right-hander Pinky Woods and Browns left-hander Joe Ostrowski.

## Chatty Etherton – Pitcher

*1941 Zanesville Cubs (3-3, 5.01 ERA)*

Charles "Chatty" Etherton, Jr., was the son of the postmaster in Carbondale, Illinois, and a right-handed pitcher of local fame. He signed with the Mayfield Clothiers of the newly formed Class D Kitty League in 1936, and made one brief appearance before returning to Carbondale to play for the Bridge 4-H softball team that won the county championship.

Between 1938 and 1940, Etherton had brief trials with teams in the Arkansas-Missouri League, South Atlantic League, Kitty League, and Alabama State League, but it was following an outstanding season with the sandlot Red Wings of Murphysboro, Illinois, that he secured a regular place in organized baseball, joining the Zanesville Cubs of the Middle Atlantic League in 1941. Etherton started in style for the Cubs with a 16-strikeout performance in a pre-season game against Muskingum College on April 24. "Etherton ... used a fast breaking curve and a fair fastball to bewilder all the Muskie batsmen," declared the local newspaper the following day. He made 22 appearances with the basement-dwelling Cubs for a 3-7 record and a 5.01 ERA, and finished out the year making seven appearances for the Lake Charles Skippers of the Class D Evangeline League. In 1942, Etherton joined the Winnipeg Maroons of the Class C Northern League, where he posted a 4-2 won-loss record, before entering military service on June 12.

Corporal Etherton served in the Pacific Theater with the 382nd AAA Auto-Weapons Battalion and returned home in late 1945. On December 23, he boarded a troop train at Camp Stoneman, California, bound for discharge at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Nobody knows what horrors the 26-year-old faced on the battlefields of the Pacific, but other soldiers on the train said he was despondent and, today, doctors might diagnose his condition as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Four days after the train left California, Etherton locked himself in a wash room and cut his throat with a double-edged razor blade. His body was found when the train stopped at Jefferson City, Missouri, only a few hours from home.

Charles "Chatty" Etherton is buried at Oakland Cemetery in Carbondale, Illinois.

## Whitey Loos – Catcher

*1941 Dayton Ducks (44 games, 0 HR, 14 RBIs, .243)*

Walter G. Loos, Jr., was born in Craffton, a neighborhood located west of downtown Pittsburgh. Known as "Gus" or "Whitey", Loos was the eldest of four sons born to Walter, Sr., (a law firm office manager) and Margaret Loos. Gus attended Craffton High School where he and his brother, John (known as "Jock"), lettered in baseball, football and basketball. He graduated in 1935, and won an athletic and academic scholarship to Carnegie Institute of Technology (now Carnegie Mellon University) in Pittsburgh, where he played football (end), basketball (center), baseball (catcher) and also ran the 440-yard dash on the track team. In the 1930s Carnegie Tech was among the top football programs in the country and in his senior year, 1939, Loos was on the squad that played in the Sugar Bowl held at Tulane University's stadium in New Orleans on January 2, 1939. The Carnegie Tech Tartans (ranked #6) played the Texas Christian University Frogs (ranked #1) and were defeated 15 to 7 before a crowd of 44,308.

Between 1936 and 1938, Gus and Jock spent the summer months playing baseball with the Methodists in the Craffton Church League and for Craffton Heights in the Pittsburgh City League.

After three-and-a-half years at Carnegie Tech, Loos accepted an offer to join the Brooklyn Dodgers' organization in the spring of 1939. Brooklyn sent the 22-year-old to the Gloversville-Johnstown Glovers of the Class C Canadian-American League. Making his debut on May 30 at Amsterdam's Mohawk Mill Park before the second largest crowd to see a Can-Am game, Loos was used as a pinch hitter in the first game of a double header, cracked a double and scored his team's only run in a 5-1 loss. In the second game he was behind the plate for the Glovers going 2-for-4 with a stolen base. "Loos looked good behind the bat," reported the Gloversville and Johnstown Leader-Republican the following day, "and showed signs of having a strong arm and an accurate peg."

Unfortunately, Loos' time with the Glovers didn't work out, as explained by the Leader-Republican upon his release on June 22. "Loos' departure will be regretted by many for he is a fine fellow, tried hard but wasn't just what the club wanted. Loos had hard luck, too, for he came in as a catcher. He caught just one game as relief to [Mike] Diffley and then Bill Dick and Hal Palmer came along. Loos did not have the experience to compete with either of these boys and manager [Elmer] Yoter tried him at shortstop.

"He was a combination of good and bad, but mostly the latter because he could not bend over for the low ones and hard hoppers and at times his arm, while strong, was inaccurate and he made many errors. To the credit of the big boy, he tried like nobody's business but did not improve.

"Loos might have remained here a while longer . . . but Bill Buckley, manager of Batavia in the [Class D] PONY League, wanted a catcher and wrote asking for Loos."

In 21 games with the Glovers – mostly as a shortstop - Loos batted .243. However, he showed what he could do as a catcher for Batavia. In 66 games he batted .271 for

the Clippers and drove in 21 runs. As their first string catcher, he was behind the plate for 62 games and handled a pitching staff that included future major leaguers Dick Fowler, Joe Cleary and Frank Colman.

Still with Batavia in 1940, Loos batted .290 with 49 RBIs in 76 games, and was sold in August to the Cincinnati Reds together with Stanley Baran for \$1,000. Loos briefly returned home to Crafton following the sale and was joined by a hoard of Crafton Church Leaguers at Penn Station to wish him well on his journey to Durham, North Carolina, where he was to report to the Bulls of the Class B Piedmont League. "I've watched a lot of 'em come and go," Phil Weaver of the Church League told the Pittsburgh Press. "But Loos is one of the few who has the stuff to go up [to the major leagues]."

In 12 games with the Bulls, Loos batted .400 (12 for 30) as the team went on to capture the Piedmont League's playoff championship despite finishing fourth in the regular league standings. Loos joined the Dayton Ducks of the Middle Atlantic League at the start of the 1941 season, where he batted .243 in 44 games, and finished the year with the Columbia Reds of the Class B South Atlantic League, hitting .298 in 47 games, handling a pitching staff of future major leaguers including Arnold Carter, Hal Erickson and Johnny Kucab, and helping the club win the league championship.

The 24-year-old had made steady progress through the minor league system, and was keeping in shape during the off-season playing basketball with the league-leading Young Republicans in Pittsburgh's Municipal League when news of Japan's devastating attack on Pearl Harbor reached the American mainland. Two weeks later, Loos turned his back on professional baseball and enlisted with the Army Air Force.

Loos completed navigation training at the Pan American Airways Navigation School, Coral Gables, Florida, southwest of downtown Miami, graduating as a second lieutenant and was assigned to the municipal airport in Long Beach, California, where an area on the south side of the runway had been converted into an Army Air Base operated by the 6th Ferrying Group of the Air Transport Command. Loos served with the 9th Ferrying Squadron, helping deliver various tactical and support aircraft from factories to overseas departure points in the Pacific area. Between July 1942 and June 1944, ferry crews from Long Beach made 1,258 overseas deliveries. In addition, they delivered over 40,000 aircraft to destinations within the United States.

During this time, Loos played for the formidable 6th Ferrying Group baseball team. Often having gaps in his flight assignments which allowed him to play for days at a time, Loos found himself on a ball team that included Red Ruffing (Hall of Fame pitcher for the New York Yankees) as manager and player, Harry Danning (all-star catcher for the New York Giants four consecutive years), Chuck Stevens (first baseman for the St. Louis Browns), Max West (all-star outfielder with the Boston Braves), and Nanny Fernandez (shortstop with the Boston Braves). The 6th Ferrying Group were a real powerhouse team and Ruffing pitched them to a 4-1 victory over

Camp Pendleton for the Southern California service championship on October 11, 1943, defeating fellow future Hall of Famer Ted Lyons.

The 26-year-old also found time for romance. On September 10, 1943, he married 19-year-old Alice Marie Goodwin of Apex, North Carolina.

In January 1944, 1/Lt. Loos was the navigator for 1/Lt. Thomas M. Palmer, who was the ferry pilot of a Consolidated B-24J Liberator bomber that was one of five planes to be delivered to the Eighth Air Force Service Command in the United Kingdom. From Long Beach, California, the planes traveled to Lincoln, Nebraska, then to Presque Isle, Maine. From there they headed south to British Guyana in South America. At approximately 10:00 A.M. on January 16, 1944, they departed from Atkinson Field, near Georgetown in British Guyana, bound for Belem, Brazil, where they would refuel and complete the next leg of the journey to Europe. No contact was made with Loos' plane after take-off from Atkinson Field.

Once time had elapsed for the fuel reserve to be depleted, a search was made for the missing plane. On January 17, two North American B-25 Mitchells searched the route between Georgetown and Suriname, while the Navy Patrol Squadron at Zandery Field in Suriname, searched as far as Clevelandia in southern Brazil. In addition, all transient planes were briefed to be on the look-out for the missing bomber. The search continued until January 19, when wreckage was spotted by aircraft in a large swamp in an isolated area 37 miles southeast of Atkinson Field. There was evidence from the air of an explosion and fire.

A rescue party reached the wreckage via the Abary River on January 26, but was unable to locate the bodies of the crew. A second investigating party reached the scene on February 12 (almost a month after the crash), and was successful in recovering the bodies of five of the seven airmen, including Lieutenant Loos.

Following an investigation, it was assumed that an explosion had taken place aboard the B-24, causing it to fall from the sky. What caused the explosion will never be known.

At the Batavia Clippers home-opener on April 30, 1945, Loos, who was posthumously awarded the Air Medal, was remembered in a flag-raising ceremony and moment of silent prayer.

After the war, Loos family were visited by one of his former 6th Ferrying Command baseball teammates. "Nanny Fernandez was playing with the Boston Braves and they were visiting Pittsburgh to play the Pirates," remembers Richard Loos. "Nanny came to our house for dinner. It was a wonderful gesture on his part and my parents were deeply touched."

1/Lt. Loos' body was returned home to Pennsylvania in 1948 and is resting in the Smithfield East End Cemetery in Pittsburgh.



Whitey Loos with the Columbia Red Birds in 1941

### **Ted Maillet – Pitcher**

*1941 Erie Sailors (11-4, 2.12 ERA)*

Theodore C. "Ted" Maillet attended Livermore Falls High School in Maine, where, under the direction of coach John P. "Paddy" Davan he became an outstanding southpaw pitcher. As a sophomore he pitched the high school team to the 1936 state baseball championship, and the following year he won 18 games, including two no-hitters in as many days against Wilton Academy and Winslow High. In his senior year in 1938, Maillet again pitched Livermore Falls High to the state finals where he was beaten, 6-0, by Lewiston High. He got Livermore Falls' only base hit of the day.

Maillet was signed by the Cincinnati Reds following graduation and joined the Durham Bulls of the Class B Piedmont League late in 1939, appearing in two games and being credited with a win. He joined the Tyler Trojans of the Class C East Texas League in 1940, and finished the season with a 12–8 record and 3.41 ERA. In 1941, he was with the Columbia Reds of the Class B South Atlantic League, and was 4–3 in nine games before joining the Erie Sailors of the Middle Atlantic League where, in 18 appearances he produced an excellent 11–4 won-loss record with a 2.12 ERA. The Sailors finished second in the regular league standings - two-and-a-half games behind the Akron Yankees - then swept the Springfield Cardinals in three games in the playoffs and clinched the league title in five games against the Canton Terriers. Maillet defeated the Terriers, 5–2, in the opening game of the series, holding them hitless over six innings and allowing just three hits in the game. He then clinched the title for the Sailors in the fifth game, outdueling future Red Sox right-hander Lou Lucier, 4–3. In the top of the sixth, with a 2-1 lead, he struck out three in a row with runners on second and third, generating a huge cheer from the home town crowd.

Maillet, who had a 1-A draft classification, expected to be called for military service at any time following the 1941 season, and instead of joining the Sailors for 1942, he chose to retire from baseball and took employment in defense work at the General Electric plant in Erie while awaiting his call. Maillet, however, did not hear from the military all summer and played semi-pro baseball for local teams while working at General Electric.

As an indication of how popular Maillet was as a pitcher for the Sailors, he was convinced to come out of retirement on July 8, 1942, to rejoin the club in an exhibition game against the Cleveland Indians. In front of 3,000 fans at Erie's Ainsworth Field, Maillet yielded four hits in the first inning which sent the Indians away to a five-run lead. He blanked the major leaguers on two hits during the next five innings, but a seventh-inning double by second baseman Ray Mack and a home run by shortstop/manager Lou Boudreau, which landed on top of the schoolhouse in right field, produced a pair of runs. The Indians came away from the contest as 10–1 winners.

Maillet remained at General Electric until entering military service on November 8, 1943. Serving with the 386th Infantry Regiment of the 97th "Trident" Infantry Division, he arrived in France in March 1945. On March 28, the division moved into Germany and crossed the Rhine River on April 5. Two days later the regiment crossed the Sieg River and faced counterattacks by German forces. Private First Class Maillet was killed that day. He is buried at the Ardennes American Cemetery in Neupre, Belgium.

## **Bob Nieman – Shortstop**

*1941 Akron Yankees (signed but did not play)*

Robert F. "Bob" Nieman, the son of Lawrence and Mary Nieman was born in the Northside district of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. A graduate of Oliver High School, he played semi-pro baseball with the Bellevue club of the Allegheny County League from 1935 to 1940 (Bellevue were league champions in 1940).

In 1941, Bellevue joined the Greater Pittsburgh League and was counting on the contributions of their hard-hitting, 180-pound shortstop, Bob Nieman, but professional

baseball had their eyes on the 22-year-old. In April 1941, Nieman signed with the Akron Yankees, a New York Yankees farm team in the Middle Atlantic League.

The Akron club was strong, with a line-up that featured future major leaguers Gus Niarhos, Joe Buzas, Monk Dubiel, Joe Lutz, Joe Murray and Ed Sauer. Whether Nieman would have been able to hold his own against these players we will never know because on May 15, military service beckoned before he had an opportunity to play a game.

Nieman spent 11 months in England with the U.S. Army's Medical Corps before returning to the United States in July 1943 to enter service with the Army Air Force. He was assigned to the 421st Base Unit at Muroc Army Air Field (now Edwards Air Force Base) in southern California, for combat flight training as an aerial gunner.

At around 9:00 P.M. on Wednesday, August 23, 1944, Corporal Nieman was aboard a Consolidated B-24D Liberator bomber that lifted off the runway at Muroc to give both its pilots some instrument flying time and to practice dropping bombs. Piloted by Lieutenant John L. Graves and Flight Officer James L. Redd, the B-24 flew without incident for the first couple of hours, but around 10:55 P.M. the crew had problems with number three engine and were forced to shut it down. This, however, didn't stop it from catching fire and Lt. Graves gave the order to abandon ship. A short time later there was an enormous explosion and the flame-engulfed right wing of the bomber was ripped off.

As the bomber spiraled to the ground, and amid unimaginable terror, the crew struggled to escape. Of the ten airmen onboard that night, five remained trapped in the falling wreckage, and died upon impact with the desert below. Bob Nieman, along with Lt. Graves, Flight Officer Clifton C. Watts, Cpl. Bernard D. Fogel and Pfc. James W. Flitcroft all lost their lives that night.

Bob Nieman's body was returned to Pittsburgh, where a Requiem High Mass was held at St. Cyril of Alexandria Church on September 1, 1944, and burial took place at Saint Mary's Cemetery.

## **Jack Patterson – Pitcher**

*1936 Zanesville Grays (less than 45 innings)*

*1937 Zanesville Grays (4-7, 6.15 ERA)*

*1941 Erie Sailors (4-5, 4.60 ERA)*

Jack H. Patterson, who had two stints in the Middle Atlantic League, was a product of Zanesville's Milk Fund Baseball League. The Zanesville Milk Fund provided fresh milk to undernourished children and the league's profits benefited the fund. Patterson was pitching for the Merchants when he was signed by Buzz Wetzel of the Cleveland Indians in August 1936, and joined the Zanesville Grays of the Middle Atlantic League for the last few weeks of the season. The 18-year-old right-hander made a couple of brief appearances on the mound for the Grays, and joined the Springfield Indians of the same league for spring training in 1937, when Cleveland moved their affiliation to that city.



In April 1937, the Indians assigned Patterson to the Owensboro Oilers of the Class D Kitty League, but after a couple of appearances he joined the Troy Trojans of the Class D Alabama-Florida League where he pitched 12 innings for a 1-0 record before receiving his outright release in June. Later that month the Zanesville Greys – now a Boston Bees' farm club – re-signed the youngster and he made 19 appearances for a 4-7 record and 6.15 ERA.

In the spring of 1938, Patterson rejected a contract offered to him by the Boston Bees to play for the Erie Sailors of the Middle-Atlantic League, and pitched, instead, for the semi-pro Armco Regulars of the Zanesville City League. After a great start he was back in professional baseball with the Huntington Bees of the Class D Mountain State League, where he was 2-6 with a 4.27 ERA for 1938. Back with the Huntington club in 1939, Patterson enjoyed his best season in organized baseball with a team-leading 18 wins against 10 defeats, a 4.68 ERA, and 206 strikeouts in 223 innings. He was signed by the Nashville Vols of the Class A1 Southern Association for 1940, but when they wanted to send him to Greenwood in the Class C Cotton States League, he chose to return home to Zanesville and played semi-pro baseball with the Hazel-Atlas Glassers of the Central Baseball League. Patterson, however, was back in organized baseball in 1941, and back in the Middle Atlantic League, joining the Erie Sailors – the club he chose not to play with in 1937. In 13 games he was 4-5 with a 4.60 ERA, before returning to the Hazel-Atlas club in June.

Patterson enlisted with the Marine Corps on October 1, 1941, and took basic training at Parris Island, South Carolina. He was later at Quantico, Virginia, and went overseas with the 22nd Marines, 6th Marine Division in the fall of 1943, where he was involved in the campaigns of the Carolinas, Gilbert, Marshall, Mariana, Pelelieu and Guam islands. Reports at the time stated that Patterson was killed in action. In reality, while working on the construction of an athletic field on Guadalcanal he was accidentally killed by a bulldozer on November 2, 1944. He was survived by his wife, Dorothy, and their son Jimmy, who was three at the time of his father's death. In December 1944, the athletic field on Guadalcanal, consisting of a baseball diamond and two softball diamonds, was named in his honor.

Patterson's body was returned to Zanesville in March 1949, and services were held in the city for both he and his mother (who died March 23) on March 26. Jack Patterson is buried in Memorial Park, Zanesville.

## **Bill Sarver – Outfielder**

*1940 Akron Yankees (less than 10 games)*

*1941 Akron Yankees (54 games, 0 HR, 22 RBIs, .210)*

William A. Sarver was born in Kansas City, Missouri, and attended Central High School, where he was recognized as an outstanding baseball player. At the age of 17, and making a name for himself playing third base for Lapetina of the Ban Johnson League, Sarver attended a New York Yankees tryout camp in 1937. There were 500 attendees at the camp; Sarver and future Yankees catcher Ralph Houk were among the seven who received a contract with the American League club and he was assigned to the Joplin Miners of the Class C Western Association.

Sarver joined the Neosho Yankees of the Class D Arkansas-Missouri League for 1938, and got off to a slow start. By mid-June he was batting only .192 (15 for 78) and had a fielding percentage at third base below .800. But as the summer progressed the youngster found his stride and finished the season batting .254 over 94 games, although he made 41 errors. In 1939, Sarver was back with Neosho, and manager Dennis Burns, who was with the Philadelphia Athletics in the mid-1920s, moved the fleet-footed 19-year-old to centerfield. He responded by hitting .284 in 123 games and led the league with 40 doubles and 48 stolen bases. Teammate Ralph Houk also had a strong season batting .313 and playing solid defense behind the plate.

Sarver began 1940 with the Akron Yankees of the Middle Atlantic League but was optioned to the Amsterdam Rugmakers of the Class C Canadian-American League on May 4. He made an immediate impact the following day in a pre-season exhibition game at Mohawk Mills Park. Playing in right field against Ithaca College, he hit a triple and handled three chances, one a difficult catch up against the outfield fence. Both offensively and defensively he continued to impress. "If you know of a smoother all-around performer than Bill Sarver, the Rugmakers' centerfielder," wrote sports editor Jack Minnoch of the Amsterdam Evening Recorder in June 1940, "we have our best ear cocked to catch the name."

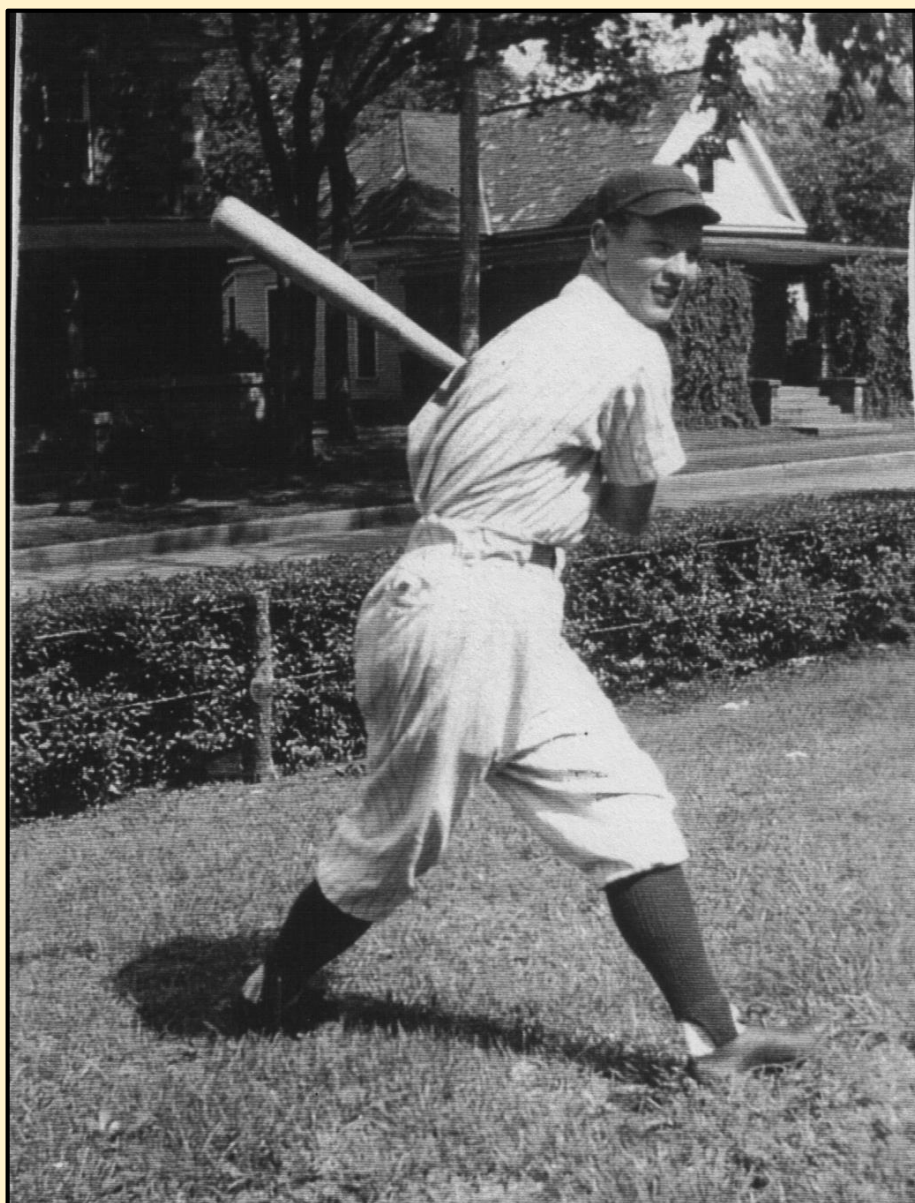
By July, Sarver was hitting .333 (seventh best in the league), and although he tailed off as the season progressed, he finished the year with a promising .287 average, 10 home runs and 67 RBIs over 119 games. He was optioned to Norfolk of the Class B Piedmont League in September, but began the 1941 season with the Augusta Tigers of the Class B South Atlantic League. Sarver was only with the team for a little over a month but that time resulted in a reunion with Ralph Houk, and the young catcher introduced Sarver to local girl Marian Smith, whom he married in Kansas City on December 8, 1942.

Sarver was back with the Middle Atlantic League's Akron Yankees in late May 1941, but failed to hit consistently - batting just .210 in 54 games - and found himself back with the Rugmakers for the latter part of the season where he batted .226 over 41 games, but received honorable mention on the Canadian-American League all-star team.

Sarver was 21 years old and had completed four seasons in the minors. But his career was now on hold as he entered military service with the Army on November 3, 1941. Initially stationed at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, Sarver was selected for Officer Candidate School at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, and was commissioned a second lieutenant in November 1942.

In January 1945, Sarver bid farewell to his wife, Marian, and his young daughter, Kathleen (William, a son would be born in September 1945), and departed for Europe with the 67th Field Artillery Battalion, 3rd Armored "Spearhead" Division. The division broke through to the Rhine River and captured Cologne in Germany, on March 7, 1945. Two weeks later it crossed the Rhine and moved north to capture Paderborn on April 1. The 3rd Armored then pushed on against disorganized resistance. On April 6, 1945, Second Lieutenant Sarver was serving as a forward observer when he was killed by small arms fire. He was buried at the Netherlands

American Cemetery in Maargraten, Holland. Sarver was posthumously awarded the Silver Star, which was presented to his wife and children at Fort Gordon, Georgia.



Bill Sarver

## **Class of '42**

In 1942, the Erie Sailors made it two-in-a-row, defeating the Canton Terriers, four games to none in the league championships. The league featured future Red Sox catcher Matt Batts, Dodgers outfielder Marv Rackley, Indians left-hander Bob Kuzava, Red Sox left-hander Mel Parnell and Pirates left-hander Paul LaPalme.

### **Hal Cisgen – Pitcher**

*1942 Charleston Senators (6-6, 2.35 ERA)*

Ordway H. "Hal" Cisgen was the son of Harold and Lillian Cisgen, and was born in Lorain, in northeastern Ohio, on Lake Erie, about 30 miles west of Cleveland. His father was originally from Rochester, New York, and had moved to Lorain in 1913 as a conductor on the B&O railroad that ran through Willard and Akron.

Ordway attended Garfield Elementary School, Hawthorne Junior High School, and was a graduate of Lorain High School, where he starred in basketball and baseball. "I knew Ordway ever since I was a child because we grew up in the same neighborhood," recalled Alex Olejko, a childhood friend and former mayor of Lorain. "Ordway was always mild-mannered. He was a good kid, an excellent student, and a great ball player."

During his high school years, the left-hander played with coach Mike Telatnik's Lorain Elks, a premiere team of 15- and 16-year-olds that won three city Class D League championships (1936, 1937 and 1938). It was a strong league that produced a number of professional players including Joe Kruppa and Ray Mize.

Following high school graduation in 1939, the 6-foot-6 hurler signed a professional contract with the New York Yankees organization and joined the Butler Yankees of the Class D Penn State Association in 1940. Early in the season, he moved to the Easton Yankees of the Class D Eastern Shore League and made a couple of appearances before being sidelined with appendicitis in June. After making a full recovery, Cisgen joined the Ashland Colonels of the Class D Mountain State League in August. As the tallest pitcher in the league, Cisgen had a 6–4 won-loss record in 12 starts with 70 strikeouts in 78 innings.

Cisgen was with the Amsterdam Rugmakers of the Class C Canadian-American league for spring training in 1941, but was back with the Easton Yankees at the start of the season. After eight ineffective outings, he joined the Fremont Green Sox of the Class D Ohio State League, where he quickly developed into a useful starter. On August 19, he beat the Lima Pandas, 3–1, allowing just four hits, and helped the Green Sox clinch the Ohio State League pennant with a 4–2 win over the Fostoria Red Birds on September 1. Cisgen finished with a 9–6 record for Fremont and struck out 114 batters in 119 innings. On September 5, in a post-season exhibition game for the Green Sox, Cisgen hurled 15 innings in beating the Negro American League Birmingham Black Barons, 6–4.

On October 28, 1941, it was announced that Cisgen had been drafted in the annual Class B draft by the Cedar Rapids Raiders, the Cleveland Indians' entry in the Three-I League. Cedar Rapids assigned him to the Wausau Timberjacks of the Class C Northern League but by mid-May he was with the Charleston Senators of the Middle Atlantic League. On May 27, he defeated the Canton Terriers, 5-3, and the Charleston Daily Mail described him as "supreme in the clutch." The Daily Mail went on to say, "Cisgen, a loose left-hander, went over with local fans. His deliberate actions gave Canton base runners large leads and they pilfered four sacks that had him in hot water. However, the giant angled his tricky curve across to whiff seven while serving only one free ticket."

Cisgen had six wins and six losses in 13 appearances for the Senators with a 2.35 ERA. In July, he was on the move again joining the Utica Braves of the Class C Canadian-American League, and making an auspicious debut by beating the league-leading Amsterdam Rugmakers, 5–2, striking out 11. Cisgen made nine appearances for the Braves and was 5–3 with an excellent 2.32 ERA.

On September 4, 1942, Cisgen entered military service with the Army. He initially served at Camp Perry — a prisoner-of-war camp on the shores of Lake Erie in northern Ohio — where he pitched for the post team. He went on to earn a commission as a second lieutenant and was with the 22nd Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry "Ivy" Division when it arrived in England in early 1944. The division landed at Utah Beach on D-Day, and relieved the isolated 82nd Airborne Division at Sainte-Mère-Église. The division then cleared the Cotentin Peninsula and took part in the capture of Cherbourg on June 25.

In July 1944, the division was involved in fighting near Périers. The 22nd Infantry Regiment launched an attack against German defenses at 9:00 A.M. on July 11, and met with heavy resistance, during which First Lieutenant Cisgen was killed.

"I had the chance to see Ordway once [before going overseas] when he came back to Lorain in uniform to visit his family," said Olejko. "Soon after that, we heard the devastating news of his death. I can clearly remember how broken up his family was at this untimely loss. Ordway Cisgen was always a gentleman and a superior athlete. I am proud to have known him and to have had the opportunity to play against such a great man."

Cisgen is buried at the Elmwood Cemetery in Lorain, Ohio. In February 1998, Cisgen was among 11 athletes inducted into the Lorain Sports Hall of Fame.

## **Joe Palatas – Outfield**

*1942 Springfield Cardinals (less than 10 games)*

Joseph M. Palatas, the son of Michael and Anna Palatas, was born in Cleveland, Ohio, and signed with the St. Louis Cardinals' organization in 1942. That year, he was assigned to the Springfield Cardinals of the Middle Atlantic League, where he played a handful of games in centerfield under player/manager Walt Alston. On May 8, Palatas had three hits in a doubleheader against the Zanesville Cubs, but in late May, he was optioned - along with Johnny Griggs and Ed Moran - to the Washington Red Birds of the Class D Penn State Association and batted .278 with 56 RBIs in 107 games. Palatas was expected to join the Springfield Cardinals of the Class C Western Association for the 1943 season but entered military service on October 7, 1942.

Palatas trained as a bombardier with the Army Air Force, and after earning a commission as a Flight Officer, he trained other bombardiers in the United States. In January 1944, he was assigned to the 325th Bomb Squadron of the 92nd Bomb Group, Eighth Air Force at Poddington, England. On April 11, 1944, on only his second mission, Palatas was the bombardier on a Boeing B-17G Flying Fortress, piloted by Second Lieutenant Robert Rasmussen, that was headed for a bombing raid over the industrial center of Stettin, north of Berlin, Germany. Severe anti-aircraft fire was encountered over the target area, and the B-17 was crippled, forcing the crew to bail out. Critically wounded, Palatas was captured by German troops and taken to the hospital at Stalag 11a Prisoner of War camp in Altengrabow, Germany, where he succumbed to his wounds the same day. His remains were later returned to the United States and now rest in Calvary Cemetery, Ohio.



Joe Palatas (back row, third from left)

### **Walt Schmisser – Catcher**

*1942 Dayton Ducks (less than 10 games)*

Walter J. Schmisser, Jr., was born in Belleville, Illinois, and won letters in baseball, football and track at Belleville Township High School. He went on to play two years of varsity baseball at Milliken University, where he also enlisted in the Naval Reserve Officers' Training Course. Schmisser later worked as a plumber and a farm hand, and in 1941 he hit .300 with the Belleville Stags semi-pro team.

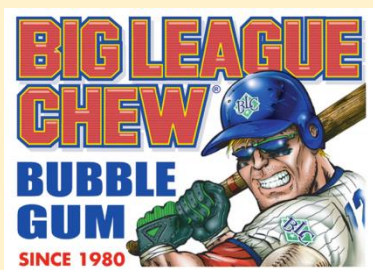
He was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers' organization in 1942, and joined the Olean Oilers of the Class D PONY League. "Uncle Sam will get Walt Schmisser before the war reaches a climax," announced the Olean Times-Herald in May 1942, "but meanwhile he hopes to do a lot of catching for the Olean Oilers."

Schmisser quickly earned the starting spot behind the plate with the Oilers and regularly demonstrated an uncanny ability for hitting in the clutch. The likeable catcher also became a local hero following the Olean flood of July 1942. The Allegheny River flooded the town and War Veterans' Park was under seven feet of water. Two men were in a boat that capsized in the park, and Schmisser risked his own life to swim out to the boat in a desperate attempt to save them. Unfortunately, both men drowned, as did a six-year-old boy, who was swept away when his mother's car plunged into swollen Haskell Creek.

In 77 games with the Oilers, Schmisser batted .278 with 51 RBIs, and was an all-star selection. The Oilers' fans were sorry to see him leave when, on August 9, the Brooklyn organization sent the 21-year-old to the Dayton Ducks of the Middle Atlantic League, to help them in their run for the league flag. Playing behind former big league catcher Paul Chervinko, Schmisser made just a handful of appearances for the Ducks during the regular season, but when Chervinko was called for military service after the second game of the playoffs against the Erie Sailors, Schmisser was behind the plate for the final three games. The Sailors clinched the playoffs in five games on their way to their second successive league title.

Schmisser entered military service with the Navy after the 1942 season. He trained as a fighter pilot and served in the Pacific with Bombing Fighting Squadron VBF-9 on the aircraft carrier USS Lexington (CV-16). On February 19, 1945, Ensign Schmisser took off in a Grumman F6F-5 Hellcat on a mission over Chichi Jima in the Bonin Islands, supporting assaulting troops landing at Iwo Jima. He was forced to bail out when his plane was badly damaged by enemy anti-aircraft fire, and reported missing in action. "He was seen landing in the water," explained a message to his parents, "and when last seen was in an inflated life raft. He later disappeared from sight of rescue planes circling the area, and no later trace having been found, his death must be assumed."

Schmisser's body was never recovered and on April 5, 1946, the young athlete was officially declared dead by the Navy Department. Walt Schmisser was awarded the Air Medal and Purple Heart, and is remembered at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Honolulu, Hawaii.



## ... and some came home

It's difficult to estimate the number of players who passed through the Middle Atlantic League and went on to military service, but what is certain is that many more came home than were lost on far-off battlefields. The following is a sampling of the rich variety of military activity experienced by former Middle Atlantic League players.

### **Bill Atwood (Catcher)**

*1935 Johnstown Johnnies (87 games, 19 HRs, .355)*

*1936 to 1940 Phillies*

With 1,400 hours of flying time already under his belt as a civilian pilot, Atwood enlisted with the Army Air Force in October 1942, and initially attended the Central Instructors' School of Aviation. He later served as an instructor at Kelly Field and Randolph Field in Texas. He received his flight officer warrant and Army service pilots wings at the graduation exercises of the 20th Ferrying Group, Air Transport Command at the Municipal Airport, Nashville, Tennessee in July 1944, and became a C-46 flight officer stationed at Sookertang, India, where he flew "The Hump" with Ferry Command. The Hump was a vital, but extremely dangerous, high altitude military aerial supply route between the Assam Valley in northeastern India, across northern Burma, to Yunnan province in southwestern China. This operation was the first sustained, long range, 24-hour around the clock, all weather, military aerial supply line in history.

### **Ed Chapman (Right-handed Pitcher)**

*1929 Scottsdale Scotties (1-3), 1930 Scottsdale Scotties (19-9 3.62 ERA)*

*1933 Senators*

Chapman entered military service with the United States Navy in 1941. He served in the Pacific as a Chief Carpenter's Mate with Company C of the 6th Naval Construction Battalion, better known as the Seabees, and helped keep Henderson Field operational, which was under constant Japanese attack during the Battle of Guadalcanal in 1942. He was stationed at New Caledonia during 1943 and 1944, and by the end of the war he had attained the rank of Chief Petty Officer.

### **Merv Connors (Outfielder/First Baseman)**

*1934 Beckley Black Knights (46 games, 9 HRs, .265)*

*1937-1938 White Sox*

Connors served in Europe as a private with HQ Company, 1st Battalion of the 517th Parachute Regimental Combat Team. He saw action during the Battle of the Bulge and received a Bronze Arrowhead for participating in an airborne combat assault.



## **Ray Hathaway (Right-handed Pitcher)**

*1939 Dayton Wings (4-1, 3.86 ERA), 1940 Dayton Wings (11-14, 4.33 ERA)*

*1945 Dodgers*

Hathaway served in the Pacific as a Seaman Second Class with Company A of the 6th Naval Construction Battalion. He arrived in Guadalcanal in September 1942, helping to keep the Henderson Field airstrip operational despite continuous Japanese opposition. The battalion left Guadalcanal in January 1943 and was in Auckland, New Zealand for two months of rest and recuperation before departing for Noumea, New Caledonia in March. During 18 months at New Caledonia, he was involved in the battalion's heavy construction work. The battalion returned to Camp Parks, California, in September 1944. After 26 months of overseas service and a Bronze Campaign Star for his part in the Battle of Guadalcanal, Hathaway received a medical discharge.

## **Millard "Dixie" Howell (Right-handed Pitcher)**

*1938 Springfield Indians (2-4, 3.00 ERA)*

*1940 Cleveland Indians, 1949 Cincinnati Reds, 1955-1958 Chicago White Sox*

On November 23, 1943, Howell entered military service with the Army. He was assigned to an infantry training unit at Camp Wolters, Texas and was then at Camp Shanks, New York before leaving for Europe. Advancing with the 60th Infantry Regiment of the 9th Infantry Division through Belgium on September 6, 1944, Private First-Class Howell and other infantrymen had to cross the River Meuse in boats because all bridges had been destroyed by the retreating German troops. On the other side of the river they were surprised by the enemy and 150 Americans, including Howell, were taken prisoner.

Howell, who was married with two young daughters at the time, was taken to the Stalag VIIA prisoner-of-war camp at Moosburg, Germany – about 40 miles northeast of Munich. "In the morning," he recalled, "we got nothing except bad coffee. The noon fare was usually some sort of soup and in the evening we'd get minced ham ... the fellows called it horse meat ... potatoes and bread.

"The Red Cross would give us chocolate bars and other things hard to get and some of us would trade these things for bread. The camp officials would deal out the bread about five men to a loaf.

"If you worked at cleaning up the buildings, on the farms or on the railroad, you would get better food.

"We slept on straw beds without adequate covering, so we would use our clothes to help keep warm at night.

"But I stood it all pretty good and I don't think I lost much weight. We didn't realize how near the war was to ending. Now and then we would get information from the guards, but it was never accurate."

In April 1945, Howell – 75 pounds lighter than his usual 210 – was liberated by advancing Allied forces. He returned to the United States and was discharged from military service on November 8, 1945.

## **Art Johnson (Left-handed Pitcher)**

*1938 Erie Sailors (2-6, 5.03 ERA)*

*1940 to 1942 Braves*

On November 9, 1942, Johnson entered military service with the Navy. He was at Newport, Rhode Island for boot camp, then Washington, DC. He was then assigned to Philadelphia to await the final construction of the light aircraft carrier USS Langley (CVL-27). In late 1943, Johnson went to Pearl Harbor aboard the Langley and on to the Marshall Islands. "I worked in the Captain's office and was a gunner's mate," he said.

Yeoman Johnson was at Saipan, Tinian, Eniwetok and went through a cyclone to get to Iwo Jima. "I never experienced anything like it in my life," he said. "It tilted the carrier as far as it could go. It was a petrifying experience."

When they reached Iwo Jima, the Langley's planes were involved in the attempted destruction of Japanese defenses on the island. "We were about a mile off shore," he recalls. "Our bombers spent six days bombing the island, but it didn't bother them [the Japanese] a bit because they were deep in the caves. We didn't know that. We found out later, unfortunately, when our marines went ashore."

Johnson was later wounded, when fragments from a Japanese kamikaze plane that hit the deck of the Langley, tore into his knees. Johnson was discharged from service in October 1945.

## **Vern Kohler (Left-handed Pitcher)**

*1939 Springfield Indians (11-12, 4.45 ERA)*

Kohler was drafted into military service in October 1941, and served with the 135th Infantry Regiment of the 34th Infantry Division. He was initially at Camp Claiborne, Louisiana and went overseas in April 1942. The 34th Infantry Division was based in Northern Ireland and the division baseball team played a number of well-attended exhibition games in Belfast before leaving for the shores of North Africa in October 1942. During the North African campaign, Kohler suffered shrapnel wounds in his legs, but returned to service and later saw action in Italy at Monte Cassino.

## **Bob Kuzava (Left-handed Pitcher)**

*1942 Charleston Senators (21-6, 1.72 ERA)*

*1946-1947 Cleveland Indians, 1949-1950 Chicago White Sox, 1950-1951 Washington Senators, 1951-1954 New York Yankees, 1954-1955 Baltimore Orioles, 1955*

*Philadelphia Phillies, 1957 Pittsburgh Pirates and St. Louis Cardinals*

Kuzava served three years with the Army (1943 to 1945) and was stationed in India and Burma as an MP, attaining the rank of sergeant.

## **Hersh Lyons (Right-handed Pitcher)**

*1937 Portsmouth Red Birds (10-7, 3.31 ERA)*

*1941 Cardinals*

Lyons entered military service with the Army Air Force at Santa Ana Army Air Base, California, on October 21, 1942. He quickly rose to the rank of sergeant and served with the primary flying training detachment at Ontario, California, before being accepted to officer candidates' school at Miami Beach, Florida, at the end of the year. Achieving the rank of captain, Lyons served in North Africa and Italy.

## **George McKinnon (Infielder)**

*1941 Zanesville Cubs (28 games, 0 HRs, .194)*

In late 1941, McKinnon took a two months' course in communications at Annapolis following his graduation from Northwestern's Naval ROTC. He became a communications officer in the Navy and served aboard the ill-fated USS Lexington. Ensign McKinnon was soon seeing plenty of action aboard the aircraft carrier. "We were attacked by two waves of bombers, got 16 of 18, and it is doubtful if the other two got home," he told Harry Grayson in April 1942. "I saw the entire action and there was more cheering on our ship than at a Northwestern-Notre Dame football game. "It really was something to see - the real McCoy."

On May 8, 1942, things took a dramatic turn for the crew of the USS Lexington. The aircraft carrier was torpedoed and sunk by Japanese destroyers during the Battle of the Coral Sea. More than 200 crew members lost their lives, and McKinnon was reported as lost at sea – even the front page of the Zanesville Times Recorder reported his loss on July 18, 1942, with the headline "George McKinnon Down with Ship in Coral Sea." McKinnon, however, survived the sinking and was sent back to the United States to recuperate before being assigned to duties at Northwestern University.

## **Joe Ostrowski (Left-handed Pitcher)**

*1941 Canton Terriers (2-3, 4.72 ERA)*

*1948-1950 Browns, 1950-1952 Yankees*

Ostrowski served three years with the Army Air Force (1943 to 1945) as a medic and was assigned to a fighter group in Italy in 1944.

## **Army Sergiacomi (Shortstop)**

*1940 Akron Yankees (128 games, 1 HR, .244)*

Sergiacomi entered military service with the Army Air Force in late 1942. On August 18, 1944, Corporal Sergiacomi was assigned to the 766th Bomb Squadron of the 461st Bomb Group at Torretta Field in Italy. Eight days later - on August 26 - he was part of Second Lieutenant Howard O. Wilson's B-24 Liberator crew that took part in the first raid on Yugoslavia. After bombing Otopeni Airdrome near Bucharest, the B-24 was damaged by enemy flak and the crew was forced to bail out. Sergiacomi was captured by enemy forces and spent the next eight months at the Stalag Luft IV prisoner-of-war camp in what is now Tychowo, Poland.

## **Steve Souchock (Outfielder)**

*1940 Akron Yankees (128 games, 24 HRs, .310)*

*1946, 1948 Yankees, 1949 White Sox, 1951-1955 Tigers*

Souchock entered military service in January 1943. He trained at Camp Lexington, Louisiana, before being sent overseas to Europe with Company B of the 691st Tank Destroyer Battalion. He spent 16 months in France, Luxembourg, Belgium and Germany. First Sergeant Souchock earned a Bronze Star in Europe as commander of the five-man crew in an M36 tank destroyer, knocking out a couple of German tanks with their 90mm gun. He returned home with five battle stars and was discharged from military service on December 6, 1945, at Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania.

## **Max Surkont (Right-handed Pitcher)**

*1938 Portsmouth Red Birds (0-0, 13.50 ERA)*

*1939 Portsmouth Red Birds (14-13, 3.63 ERA)*

*1949 White Sox, 1950-1953 Braves, 1954-1956 Pirates, 1956 Cardinals, 1956-1957 Giants*

Surkont entered military service with the Navy in the fall of 1942. He served in the Pacific aboard a tank landing ship (LST-459) as a gunner's mate, participating in many landings. "We've hauled many Jap prisoners back to our advanced bases," he explained in a letter to National League president Ford Frick in 1944. "I started a conversation with one who talked fairly good English. I mentioned baseball and he was all smiles. He said he attended many games in Tokyo before the war and misses the game very much. They are interesting people to talk to when you can find one who can speak English."

## **Buck Templeton (Shortstop)**

*1941 Dayton Ducks (61 games, 0 HR, .251)*

*1941 Akron Yankees (27 games, 2 HR, .233)*

Military service beckoned for Templeton in 1942. He was inducted in the Army at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, on February 4, and served as an artillery spotter/radio operator with the 9th Infantry Division. The division landed in the invasion of North Africa on November 8, 1942. At the battle of Maknassy, Tunisia in March 1943, Corporal Templeton was awarded the Silver Star for gallantry. In November 1943, the 9th Infantry Division were in England and landed at Utah Beach, France, on June 10, 1944 (D-Day Plus 4). The division was involved in the Normandy, Northern France and Ardennes campaigns, during which time Buck Templeton earned the Bronze Star and also the Purple Heart for wounds received in the summer of 1944.

At the beginning of 1945, Templeton's mother was taken seriously ill and confined to Long's Hospital near the family home in Statesville, North Carolina. The Red Cross unsuccessfully tried to locate Corporal Templeton so that he might be given an emergency furlough to visit his mother. But in February 1945, news was received that he had arrived at Camp Kilmer, New Jersey, after more than 30 months' duty overseas. His mother was "overjoyed when she received word" reported the Statesville Daily Record on February 26, 1945. Templeton made it home before his mother passed away on March 22.

## **Jocko Thompson (Left-handed Pitcher)**

*1940 Canton Terriers (1-1, 3.41 ERA)*

*1948-1951 Phillies*

Thompson entered military service in 1942, and served as a paratrooper, attached to the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82nd Airborne Division. On September 17, 1944, Lieutenant Thompson played a vital role in Operation Market Garden - the largest airborne operation in history. As platoon leader, he and his men landed only 600 hundred yards from the southwestern edge of the bridge at Grave that spanned the Maas River in Holland. He could hear erratic firing from the town itself but everything around the bridge was quiet. Thompson was unsure whether he should attack with the 16 men in his platoon or wait for the remainder of the company. "Since this was our primary mission, I decided to attack," he told author Cornelius Ryan. Thompson led his platoon to cover in nearby drainage ditches, before wading in water up to their necks as they worked their way towards the bridge. They soon began receiving fire from a tower on the bridge and also noticed a lot of other activity around a building on the bridge that Thompson thought might be a power plant. Thompson believed the Germans might be preparing to blow up the bridge so he deployed his men to attack the building. "We raked the area with machine guns, overran the power plant, found four dead Germans and one wounded," he recalled. Shortly afterwards, Thompson heard two trucks approaching from the town. The driver of the lead vehicle was killed and the other vehicle quickly came to a halt. German soldiers poured out of the back of both vehicles and were met with a hail of fire from Thompson's platoon. They soon retreated back towards the town. Thompson's bazooka man then dealt with the machine-gun fire coming from the tower on the bridge, and the platoon set up a road block, securing the bridge until the arrival of further elements of the 82nd Airborne.

Lieutenant Thompson was wounded in action twice during the war and in addition to being awarded the Silver Star and Bronze Star, he also received decorations from the French, Dutch and Belgians. He later saw action during the Battle of the Bulge and at the end of the war he served as an aide to General James Gavin in the occupation of Berlin.

## **Joe Tipton (Catcher)**

*1942 Charleston Senators (81 games, 0 HR, .313)*

*1948 Indians, 1949 White Sox, 1950-1952 Athletics, 1952-1953 Indians, 1954 Senators*

Tipton lost the three years to military service, serving with the U.S. Navy aboard the escort carrier USS Kadashan Bay (CVE-76) in the Pacific. He was at Leyte, Okinawa and Iwo Jima, and survived a kamikaze attack on January 8, 1945, when the Kadashan Bay was hit amidships directly below the bridge. After an hour and a half of feverish damage control effort, fires and flooding were checked, and the Kadashan Bay limped back to Leyte for repairs.

## **Mel Wasley (Outfielder)**

*1940 Portsmouth Red Birds (96 games, 6 HR, .268)*

Wasley entered service with the U.S. Army in January 1942, and was the first professional baseball player reported to have been wounded in the invasion of France, while serving with a field artillery unit of the 90<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division. Private First-Class Wasley suffered wounds to his face, centered around his eyes and nose. He was later awarded the Bronze Star for "heroic achievements."

## **Ralph Weigel (Catcher)**

*1941 Charleston Senators (96 games, 1 HR, .221)*

*1942 Charleston Senators (116 games, 2 HR, .306)*

In 1943, Weigel joined the Coast Guard. He was stationed at Dauphin Island, off the gulf coast near Mobile, Alabama, before attending officers' school at New London, Connecticut, in October. He graduated as an ensign, and later served in the Pacific, spending 18 months as the Executive Officer/Navigator on a Coast Guard supply ship. After the Marines and Army established beachheads in the Solomons, the Marianas, and at Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, the Corp of Engineers would erect make-shift piers. The deep draft Liberty ships would then off-load their cargo onto smaller ships like, Ensign Weigel's, to take into shore.

"My Dad did tell me that he led the gun crew on his ship," explained his son, Dr. John R. Weigel, "and that he believed that they shot down a kamikaze during the Battle of Leyte Gulf. His Captain was Malcolm Bell who wrote a letter to my Mom, my sister, and me in the late 1980's to let us know how thankful he and his crew were to have had the 'Big Backstop,' especially during one horrible storm in the Pacific after the convoy had been scattered to avoid submarines. Captain Bell said that he never doubted that Dad's navigation skills would get them back to the convoy rendezvous point in spite of the storm. Weigel was discharged from service in November 1945 as a lieutenant (junior grade).

## **Ernie White (Left-handed pitcher)**

*1938 Portsmouth Red Birds (15-6, 4.25 ERA)*

*1940-1943 Cardinals, 1946-1948 Braves*

In January 1944, White was inducted in the Army at Fort Jackson, South Carolina. He took basic training at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, and then moved to Camp Butner, North Carolina, in May 1944. From there, White was assigned to Camp Pickett, Virginia, in July 1944. Commenting on basic training to Jimmie Thompson of the Spartanburg Journal, White said, "It's a lot tougher than baseball training. You do things you'd never dream of doing in a baseball camp or in the nicest nightmare you ever dreamed. But it's taking a lot of surplus off the nation's waistline and it's making fighting men out of the fellows who never thought they'd carry a rifle or throw a hand grenade."

In late-1944, Corporal White was shipped overseas with the 78th Infantry Division. He saw combat in the Battle of the Bulge and was pinned down by German forces in icy water for a day. In March 1945, White was one of two American soldiers who presented arms and fired a volley over the symbolic grave of a Russian slave laborer, in Germany.

[www.baseballsgreatest sacrifice.com](http://www.baseballsgreatest sacrifice.com)

Baseball's Greatest Sacrifice is dedicated to players who lost their lives in military service. Whether they were killed in action, died from wounds, illness or accident, detailed biographies of these men are included as part of the most comprehensive resource of its type on the Internet. There are currently 535 names listed on the website with 500 individual biographies available.

As the creator and editor of BaseballinWartime.com - the Internet's biggest resource for anything related to baseball and the military - I wanted to create a website that could serve as a memorial to all the ballplayers who lost their lives while in the service of their nation. Since the early 1990s, I've been gathering information on these men and it has never ceased to amaze me that their stories - until now - have been buried with the passing of time. Dating back as far as the Civil War, baseball players were serving and making the ultimate sacrifice for their country. Now you can learn the fascinating and heart-rending stories of these brave young men who played baseball at all levels - professional, semi-professional, college, amateur and high school - and who came from all parts of the globe including the United States, Canada, Australia, Japan and the Philippines.

Please take a minute to scan through some of the biographies on the website. Dip into the First World War casualties from the Western Front, the Second World War losses on the battleships of the Pacific, the Communist rebelling losses of Korea and from the infested jungles of Vietnam.

Each and every one of these men played baseball. Some played for money, many for the sheer love of the game. If you, like me, love baseball, these stories are bound to move you.

### Gary Bedingfield's Interview with MLB.com



I was recently interviewed for a Memorial Day feature by MLB.com. You can read the article and hear the interview at this link

<http://m.mlb.com/news/article/180898342/baseball-players-who-died-in-war>

## About Gary Bedingfield

For an Englishman, my enthusiasm for baseball may seem a tad strange. Baseball does not enjoy a big following in Britain, and yet I developed a passion for the American national pastime at a tender age. My interest in baseball begins with my father, who was born and raised in England but, as a musician, toured the American Air Force bases during the early 1960s. He developed a keen interest in baseball during this time by watching the Air Force teams play and participating in the occasional scratch games.

As I was growing up we would play catch with the gloves he had acquired from the military and I really got hooked at a very young age. By the time I was 12 I was playing in a competitive league and continued to do so for the next 20 years. Most of those years I was a catcher with the Enfield Spartans - an amateur team that reached the British finals every year from 1989 to 1994 and were British champions four of those years. I also played for the Great Britain national and Olympic teams, and coached varsity baseball at the American School in London. I am privileged to say I have played against such well-known professionals as George Foster, Tug McGraw, Graig Nettles, Mark Fidrych and Luis Tiant.

Fleeting moments of my own achievements will always be with me, but more than anything I enjoy the things that make baseball so perfect - the ballfields with their lovingly maintained grass infield, the rich brown dirt base paths, and perfectly laid white lines; the thud of a fresh white baseball hitting a well-seasoned glove; and the grace and precision of my teammates as they execute with perfection seemingly impossible plays. There's no doubt about it - I love baseball.

As my playing days came to an end, I developed an appetite for the history of the game, searching for links between baseball and my own country. I have always been interested in WWII history and it was in the mid-1990s I was thinking about American servicemen in Britain during the war and wondering what their affiliation with baseball could have been. Were there any minor league players here? Maybe even a major league player or two might have passed through Britain. A little research showed that many ball players had indeed served and also played baseball in this country during the war. I'd had professional baseball on my doorstep, albeit half a century ago!

That was really the spark I needed. The amazing thing was no one had written about overseas military baseball in WWII. I began writing articles for Army magazine, Our State, Roanoker, Die Hard and Vintage and Classic Baseball Collector Magazine. This led to the publication of *Baseball in World War II Europe* by Arcadia Publishing in 2000. October 2008, saw the release of *When Baseball Went to War* by Triumph, a book I was heavily involved in following my participation and keynote presentation at the National World War II Museum in New Orleans in November 2007. My most recent written work (apart from the *Baseball in Wartime* newsletters) was *Baseball's Dead of World War II*, published by McFarland in 2010.

I am a SABR member and a Dodgers fan. I operate two baseball-related websites ([www.baseballinwartime.com](http://www.baseballinwartime.com) and [www.baseballsgreatestsacrifice.com](http://www.baseballsgreatestsacrifice.com)) and currently live in Glasgow, Scotland, where I run my own staff development training company, Gary Bedingfield Training.