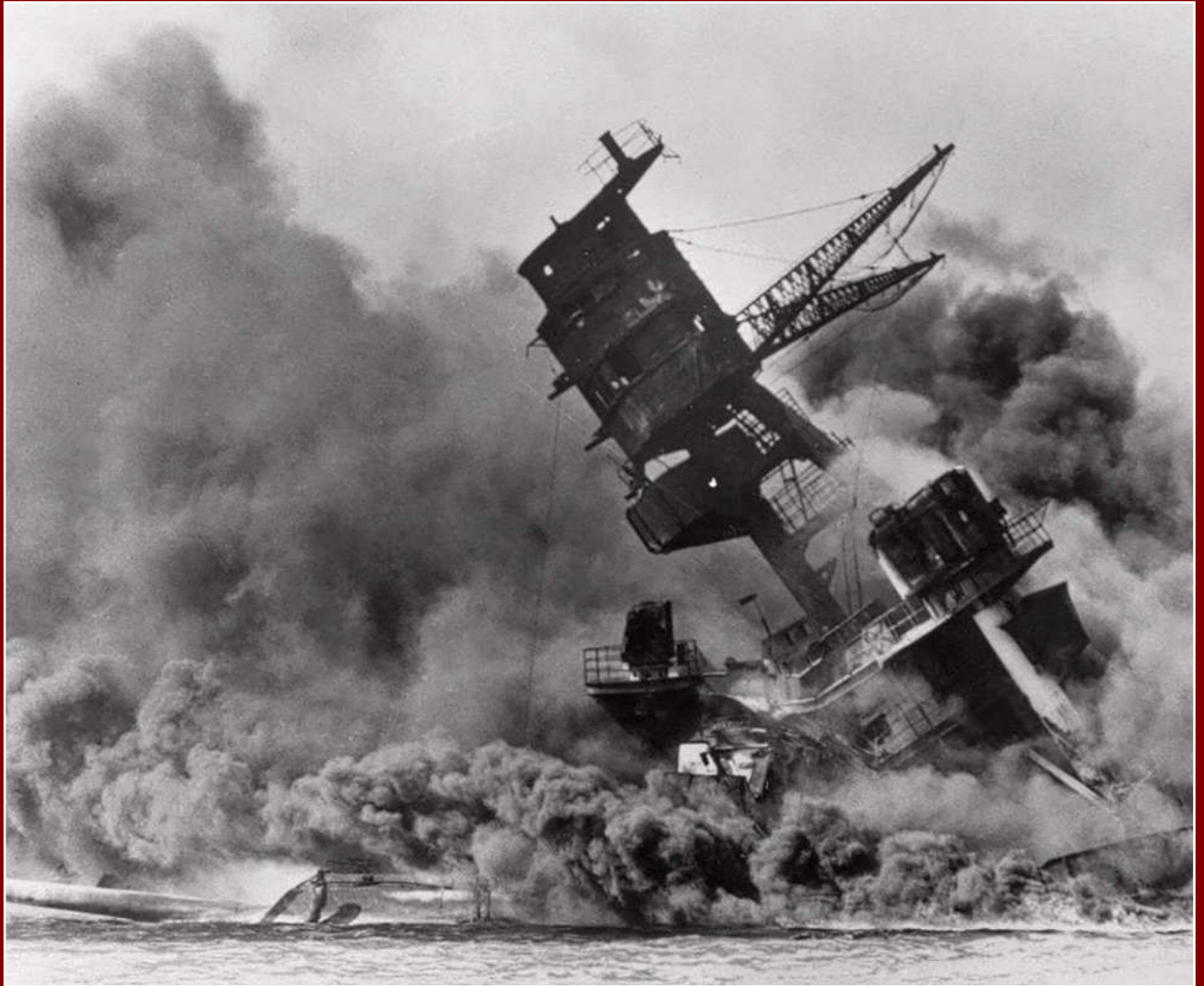


Baseball in Wartime Newsletter Vol. 13 No. 57 December 2021

# Pearl Harbor 80th Anniversary

By Gary Bedingfield



1941—2021

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This newsletter features an adapted version of the story of baseball and Pearl Harbor that appears in my book, *Baseball in Hawaii During World War II*.

## Calm Before the Storm

In 1941, Honolulu, on the island of Oahu in the Hawaiian Islands was a bustling city with a population of over 250,000. The sidewalks were crowded with men in uniform strolling among the swaying palm trees, lei vendors, souvenir hawkers and newsboys. At that time, amidst the glamor and allure of life in the Islands, there was no better place for recent draftees to be posted. Although it was an important strategic outpost, military personnel in Hawaii prior to December 1941, enjoyed a relaxed and blissful lifestyle with a wonderful climate, beautiful scenery, pristine beaches and hospitable people. There was surfing and bathing at



Waikiki Beach with its spectacular view of Diamond Head, along with fishing, movies and dancing at the waterfront hotels like the Royal Hawaiian and the Moana. And baseball was everywhere in the Islands. When Bob Considine of the *New York Daily Mirror* visited Oahu he noted, "There's probably more baseball played here per capita than anywhere on the mainland." By mid-1941, 42,000 Army personnel, 4,500 Marines and around 58,000 US Navy personnel were based in Hawaii.



**EBBETS FIELD  
FLANNELS** EST. 1988

## December 7, 1941

On the morning of Sunday December 7, 1941, 25-year-old draftee Private Jerry Angelich was at Hickam Field near Pearl Harbor with the Army Air Force. It was a beautiful morning, and he was surprised by the sound of what he thought was thunder. He had not been in Hawaii for long and was looking forward to pitching for Hickam Field's 17th Air Base team the following spring. The team had finished the 1941 season in eighth place in the Sector-Navy League with a 9-13 record and he was determined to make them a contender in 1942. Until now, his job in the peacetime military in Hawaii had been to help organize the brand-new library at Hickam Field which had opened its doors on December 4. It was a newsworthy event and was mentioned in the *Honolulu Star-Bulletin* on December 6. The article even had a photo of Angelich and his librarian colleagues. His sister Millie would love that, and he promised himself he would send her the press clipping.



*Jerry Angelich*

Before military service, Angelich had been a much-touted high school pitcher in Lomita, California. In 1935, he had been given a trial with the Pacific Coast League's Sacramento Senators and pitched in several exhibition games in the spring. On March 18, he was selected by manager Kettle Wirts to start for the Senators against a touring Japanese all-star team that would later become the Tokyo Giants. Before a crowd of 4,200 at Sacramento's Moreing Field, Angelich was locked in a pitching duel with 18-year-old Japanese ace Eiji Sawamura. In Japan, the previous November, Sawamura had been immortalized by Japanese fans for striking out Charlie Gehringer, Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig and Jimmie Foxx in succession in an exhibition game against the visiting major leaguers. In Sacramento, Angelich, who hurled eight innings before being relieved in the ninth, was beaten by Sawamura, 2-1. The Senators managed seven hits off the Japanese youngster, while Angelich yielded just five to the visitors.

Despite Angelich's strong performance he was not offered a contract by the Pacific Coast League team and spent the season playing semi-pro baseball with the San Pedro Knights of Pythias. In September 1935, the Knights beat a team representing the Navy repair ship USS Vestal, 2-0. Angelich did the hurling, allowing just four hits and striking out eight. Like Angelich, the Vestal and its crew was at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Angelich had a further trial with Sacramento in the spring of 1936 but was back with the Knights of Pythias for the summer. He continued to play semi-pro baseball around Los Angeles, before taking a

job on a dam project in Provo, Utah, where he played for the Provo Timps of the Utah Industrial League – a thriving semi-pro circuit with six teams fielding formidable line-ups that competed throughout the Beehive State. Back in California in 1940, Angelich pitched for the San Pedro Longshoremen, and worked as an operating engineer for the Griffith Company in Wilmington. He was drafted into military service with the Army Air Force in August 1941, and soon found himself at Hickam Field in Hawaii.

The sound that Angelich heard on that mild and sunny December morning of 1941, was not thunder but Japanese airplanes. In a meticulously planned surprise attack, fighters, dive bombers and torpedo planes were wreaking havoc in the skies above Oahu. On the ground they left in their wake confusion, death and destruction.

Working on a communications system with the Signal Corps at Hickam Field during the attack was 18-year-old Private First-Class John Andre, who would pitch for the Chicago Cubs in 1955. Andre was blown off a telephone pole during the attack, suffering a head wound that earned him the Purple Heart. Also receiving a Purple Heart was Sergeant Delmas “Bud” Bise, an outfielder who had played baseball in Hawaii with the 11th Bomb Group Gray Geese. As Bise ran from his barracks at Hickam Field a bomb dropped close by, burying him under an avalanche of dirt. “Only one of my legs remained above ground,” he later recalled. “If it hadn’t been for the quick action of my buddies in digging me out my Army career would have ended right there.”



Delmas “Bud” Bise  
11<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group Gray Geese

Private Joseph H. Guttman, a baseball fanatic who had taken out a \$25 lifetime subscription to the *Sporting News* in August 1941, was killed during the attack while serving with the 19th Transport Squadron at Hickam Field. Private First-Class Louis Jorda, Jr., son of National League umpire Lou Jorda, was wounded at Hickam. Four days later, on the one-year anniversary of Jorda’s entry into the service, his parents received the telegram at their St. Petersburg, Florida home, notifying them of his wounding in defense of his country. Jorda, Jr., went on to serve in Korea and Vietnam. Even the ballpark at Hickam Field was targeted – albeit not intentionally. Information acquired by the Japanese when planning the attack showed that the ground where the baseball diamond stood was the original site planned for the installation of underground fuel tanks.

Bill Ermolovich, third baseman on the USS Whitney Vikings ball team, was sleeping below the main deck of the destroyer tender when he was awoken by a banging sound. He asked another sailor what was happening. “They’re bombing the shit out of us!” was the reply. “Who?” he asked. “We don’t know.”

The sound Ermolovich heard was in fact the ammunition locker being forcibly opened with a sledgehammer because no one could find the key. He hurried to his battle station, which was at a 5-

inch gun on the port side, but there was little he could do to fight back as the weapon was a surface gun and couldn't be elevated to shoot at the incoming Japanese planes.



*USS Whitney Vikings  
Bill Ermolovich is front row, far right*

Reuben Eichman of Springfield, Ohio, was the catcher for the battleship USS Utah ball team and had a game scheduled that morning. "I was getting in [my] baseball uniform," he recalled. "I had one leg in. And that's when the first torpedo hit."

Eichman initially thought the sounds came from a nearby ammunition dump but when he got up to topside, he realized they were under attack. After seeing a lieutenant killed by machine-gun fire right in front of him and aware the Utah had begun to list to port, Eichman and other crew members abandoned ship and swam to Ford Island. The Utah was then hit by a second torpedo and rolled over onto her side. Two members of the Utah baseball team were not as fortunate as Eichman. Second baseman Jack Blackburn of Columbus, Ohio, and the team's ace pitcher Elmer Ulrich from Detroit, Michigan, were both killed in the attack. "[Ulrich] had a ten-cent brain and a million-dollar arm," recalled his batterymate, Eichman. "About knocked me down every time he threw the ball in there."

A total of 58 officers and men were killed on the Utah, and she remains at Pearl Harbor as a war grave.

The USS Oklahoma, its baseball team having won the US Navy battleship championships back in June of 1941 and narrowly missing out on the Pacific Fleet crown to Pearl Harbor Submarine Base just 10 days before the attack, was sunk by several torpedoes with a loss of 429 lives. The USS Arizona that had also competed in battleship competition was hit by Japanese torpedo bombers. One torpedo hit the magazine causing a devastating explosion that lifted the 30,000-ton battleship out of the water before it sank to the bottom of Pearl Harbor with the loss of 1,177 officers and crewmen. Among them

was Al Konnick, who had just one more week of duty aboard the Arizona before he returned home to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in the hope of pursuing a career in professional baseball.



*USS Oklahoma Indians baseball team in Hawaii in 1944.*

*Despite the Oklahoma being sunk at Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, some of the surviving crew remained in Hawaii and competed in the Pearl Harbor League.*

Joseph Medure was a shortstop from the Bronx, New York, who had played semi-pro baseball with the Allentown Red Sox before entering service with the Army. Stationed at Fort Kamehameha with the 41st Coastal Artillery on the east side of the entry to Pearl Harbor, he was eating breakfast when he heard a loud explosion and the whole building shook. Moments later, a sergeant came running in to the mess hall saying, “The Japs are attacking Pearl Harbor and Hickam Field.”

Everyone in the mess hall carried on eating their breakfast. Nobody believed him. They all laughed and told him to sit down and have a cup of coffee. Eventually, out of curiosity, Medure looked outside and saw a Japanese fighter plane pulling out of a dive. He ran back inside: “The Japs! It is the Japs!” he yelled. “I just saw one go by.”

Medure retaliated with rifle fire, then a machine-gun, and by the time the second wave came into attack he had secured a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). As part of a small group of men armed with another BAR and a First World War vintage machine-gun, they opened up on a Japanese fighter plane that had just levelled off after attacking Hickam Field. “Smoke started spewing out of the plane,” recalled Medure, “and he disappeared over the line of trees.”

Like most people on Oahu, Jerry Angelich thought that it was a military maneuver when he saw planes in the sky over Hickam Field. Then he noticed the big red circles painted on the underside of the wings as Hickam was bombed and strafed by low flying fighter planes. Amid the smoke and flames,

he put library books, press clippings and baseball to the back of his mind. He knew he had to do whatever he could to fight back and ran to a wrecked airplane in the hope of operating its machine-gun. Seconds later a Japanese fighter plane swooped down and Angelich was riddled with machine-gun fire instantly ending the 25-year-old's life. Private Angelich – the first to have worn a minor league uniform and be killed by enemy action in World War II - was among 189 military personnel that lost their lives at Hickam Field that day.

Millie Angelich never did receive the press clipping from her brother, but she did receive his posthumously awarded Purple Heart and his personal effects, including a ball glove and two baseballs.



*Jerry Angelich's grave marker at the National Memorial Cemetery of the Pacific in Hawaii.*

In addition to the fleet and military installations at Pearl Harbor that were being attacked, three other Oahu military bases were targeted by the Japanese. Naval Air Station Kaneohe on the Mokapu peninsula on the windward side, Wheeler Field at Schofield Barracks and Bellows Field at Waimanalo, east of Honolulu.

Within two hours, 18 American warships had been sunk or damaged, 188 aircraft destroyed, and 2,403 American servicemen and women killed. Additionally, more than 300 Oahu civilians were wounded and over 50 died.

Following Japan's raid on Pearl Harbor, they also attacked British Malaya, Thailand (which signed a military alliance with Japan), the Dutch East Indies, Singapore, parts of Shanghai that were not already occupied, the Philippines, Guam, Wake Island and Midway Island. Just 1,300 miles northwest of Hawaii and the northernmost point of the Hawaiian archipelago, Midway Island was bombarded by Japanese ships. Within months, the conquests of the Imperial Japanese forces encompassed an alarmingly vast area of south-east Asia and the western Pacific.

Guam was 3,800 miles west of Hawaii and under American jurisdiction. It was captured by the Japanese shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack with the loss of 21 American servicemen, while over 400 Americans were taken prisoner. Six Navy seamen evaded capture but five were later found by the Japanese and beheaded.

American Marines and civilian construction workers on Wake Island, 2,500 miles west of Hawaii, were attacked by bombers and pounded by the guns of off-shore Japanese naval vessels. Frank “Curley” Mace, a graduate of Medical Lake High School near Spokane, Washington, where he had excelled as a pitcher, was among those at Wake Island. Mace was part of close to 1,200 civilians who were there to build a seaplane base when the attack started. To help defend the island they were conscripted into the Marines, provided with weapons and did all they could to fend off the Japanese landing parties. “We sighted three objects moving in the lagoon,” Mace explained in his book, *The Story of Wake Island*. “I took some hand grenades and eight men with 30-caliber machine guns and went to investigate. There were three barges that the Japanese had pushed over the coral reefs at high tide...When they were about 150 feet from shore, my baseball pitching came in handy. I threw a hand grenade into each barge. The barges were all loaded with explosives and ammunition. When they blew up, all the Japanese who were pushing them were either killed or were machine-gunned down as they tried to make it to shore.”

James Kroptavich, a Marine Corps private from Lake Winola, Pennsylvania, was also at Wake Island. During the summer of 1941 he had pitched for the Pearl Harbor Marines in the Navy-Sector League on Oahu and had been sent to Wake Island just six weeks before the Japanese attack.

Heroically, the men at Wake Island held out as long as possible in the hope that relief would come. It never did. A further amphibious assault by the Japanese overran the defenders on December 23, and 1,500 Marines and civilian workers were shipped to a prison camp near Shanghai, China. Among them were Mace and Kroptavich.

President Roosevelt called the unprovoked attack “a date which will live in infamy” in an address to the nation delivered the following day, and control of the Hawaiian Islands was handed over by Governor Joseph Poindexter to Lieutenant General Walter C. Short, who immediately imposed martial law (military rule by military authorities). In less than two hours, an attack on a place that most Americans couldn’t point to on a map had changed the world forever, and life in Hawaii had been turned upside down.

Would the Japanese aggressors return? “SABOTEURS LAND HERE!” was the banner headline in the *Honolulu Advertiser* the following morning, indicating that they had. Another headline stated boldly, “RAIDERS RETURN IN DAWN ATTACK.” The story reported that Hickam Field had been bombed at 6 am on December 8, and enemy parachutists had landed at Kalihi, just north of Honolulu. None of this was true and the newspaper was told by the newly appointed military government it would be shut down if such irresponsible reporting were to happen again. The situation was chaotic enough without the press further alarming the public.

Beaches were soon strewn with barbed wire, trenches were dug as places to take cover during an air attack, households were instructed to build their own shelters, and public air raid shelters began to appear in parks and open spaces. Furthermore, the sale of liquor was stopped, bars and saloons were closed, sporting events were suspended, and blackout restrictions were rigorously enforced. A curfew meant you couldn’t go out after hours without a pass, and everyone over the age of six had to always carry an identification card with them. Because the Japanese had previously used mustard gas



and the blister agent Lewisite against Chinese troops, everyone in Hawaii was issued with a gas mask which also had to be carried everywhere, always.

In the dark days that followed the attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaiians lived with the real threat of invasion, and before the end of the month, two convoys had left San Francisco loaded with troops ready to defend the Islands.

Attitudes quickly changed towards Japanese-Americans in Hawaii as well as on the mainland. Attitudes that ranged from suspicion to outright hatred. The men of the 298th Infantry Regiment – whose baseball team, the Warriors, had competed all summer in the North Sector League and was made up mostly of Japanese-Americans - were put to work digging trenches, their weapons and ammunition confiscated. Japanese-Americans were under constant surveillance for fear they would side with the enemy - something that proved to be mostly unfounded. One story that demonstrated their loyalty concerned two young Japanese-American men who were working on a defense project at Hickam Field. When they saw a soldier having trouble setting up his machine-gun during the attack, they ran to help, anchored the gun and then fed ammunition to him while he fired. They loaded so fast that both had to be given emergency treatment for burns to their hands.

### Let's Be Calm!

Hawaii has been attacked by Japanese forces and is now under martial law. We advise all Japanese residents to be cool and calm, obey all the laws as they have done heretofore, rely on American officials for protection, and support the United States to their utmost in the defense of these islands.

*The Nippu Jiji, leading Japanese newspaper in Hawaii, December 8, 1941*

The *Nippu Jiji* was shut down from December 11, 1941, until January 8, 1942. On November 2, 1942, it was renamed the *Hawaii Times*.

In California, 120,000 people of Japanese descent were interred after President Roosevelt issued Executive Order 9066, and the 160,000 people of Japanese descent in Hawaii – about a third of the population – were only spared from a similar fate due to the challenging logistics and the belief of Lieutenant-General Delos C. Emmons - the newly appointed military governor of Hawaii - in the loyalty of the vast majority of them. In the end, only 1,875 Hawaiian residents of Japanese ancestry were interred on the mainland. Among them, was Honolulu-born Jay Moriguchi who had pitched for the Tokyo Senators in the Japanese Professional League from 1937 to 1939, before returning to Hawaii in 1940.

Pearl Harbor sent the United States into a wave of overwhelming patriotism. There was an immediate rush to enlist, and Cleveland's 23-year-old pitching sensation, Bob Feller, was among those who felt a need to serve their country. Despite deferment as the only support of his parents, the former Iowa farm boy went to the Navy recruiting office in Chicago on December 9, and along with thousands of other young men, became a member of America's armed forces. "I've always wanted to be on the winning side and this time I know I'm with a winner," he said upon arrival at Norfolk Naval Training Station in Virginia.

Hank Greenberg had been drafted into military service on May 7, 1941, the day after hitting two home runs for the Detroit Tigers against the Yankees. But on December 5, he had been honorably discharged after Congress released men aged 28 years and older from service. On February 1, 1942, Greenberg re-enlisted, was inducted at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and volunteered for service in the United States Army Air Force. “We are in trouble,” he told the *Sporting News*, “and there is only one thing for me to do – return to the service. This doubtless means I am finished with baseball and it would be silly for me to say I do not leave it without a pang. But all of us are confronted with a terrible task – the defense of our country and the fight for our lives.”



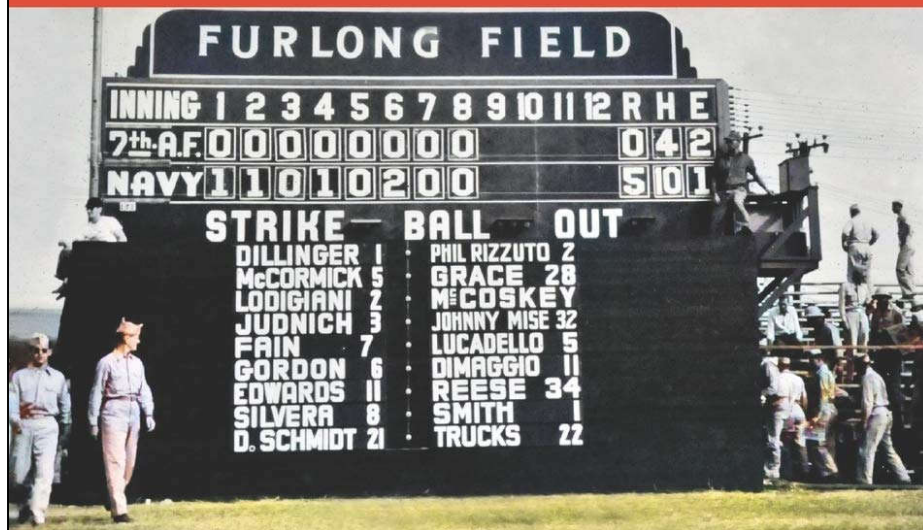
*Hank Greenberg had been on vacation in Hawaii in February 1941.*

The mood of the nation was captured in a letter by Sal Madrid, a shortstop with Yakima of the Western International League who had been sold to San Diego after a stellar 1941 season and would play for the Chicago Cubs in 1947. Instead of reporting to the Padres, Madrid enlisted with the Army at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, on December 12. “Due to the present world crisis,” he wrote in a letter to explain his position to the Yakima club secretary, L. B. Vincent. “I find it my duty as an American to enlist in the armed forces of the United States. I am very sorry the deal with San Diego concerning me won't go through. I hope that you can understand my feeling toward this situation.”

As a nation, the United States swung into action. Industrial giants across the country - including factories, workshops, mills and mines - began producing the necessities of war. Detroit's vast automobile industry unhesitatingly switched to the production of military vehicles, turning out a steady stream of trucks, jeeps, tanks and airplanes, while manufacturers who were more accustomed to handling refrigerators and vacuum cleaners turned their straight-line production techniques to the manufacture of ammunition, guns and other essential war commodities. Even the sporting goods industry was contributing to the war effort. Hillerich & Bradsby, makers of the famous Louisville Slugger baseball bats, utilized their woodturning skills to produce stocks for the M1 carbine rifle. Within months of the attack on Pearl Harbor, America was impressively living up to the pledge it had given to become the “Arsenal of Democracy,” but a long road lay ahead.

# Baseball in Hawaii During World War II

Gary Bedingfield



*Baseball in Hawaii During World War II* is the first in-depth look at the wartime exploits of over 150 major leaguers and countless minor league players who found themselves stationed in the Hawaiian Islands between 1941 and 1945. With the inclusion of 150 biographies and over 80 photographs the book details every victory and every tragedy of wartime baseball in the paradise of the Pacific. Produced in a chronological order, the book first delves into the history of baseball in the Islands and how varied ethnicities shaped the structure and development of the game. Starting with 1941, the book then takes a year-by-year in-depth look at the war, Hawaii and baseball as played by civilians and servicemen.

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**Major League players who were stationed in the Hawaiian Islands during WWII**

Bobby Adams	Herman Franks	Cookie Lavagetto	Stan Rojek
Arne "Red" Anderson	Larry French	Bob Lemon	Schoolboy Rowe
John Andre	Sid Gautreaux	Wes Livengood	Red Ruffing
Rugger Ardizoia	Charlie Gilbert	Dario Lodigiani	Marius Russo
Jim Atkins	George Gill	Johnny Lucadello	Connie Ryan
Jay Avrea	Jim Gleeson	Joe Lutz	Bob Scheffing
Cramer "Ted" Beard	Joe Glenn	Al Lyons	Hank Schenz
Johnny Beazley	Al Glossop	Ted Lyons	Don D. Schmidt
Johnny Berardino	Izzy Goldstein	Duster Mails	Wes Schulmerich
Buddy Blattner	Joe Gonzales	Willard Marshall	Ham Schulte
Bob Borkowski	Joe Gordon	Walt Masterson	Ken Sears
Gil Brack	Joe Grace	Pinky May	Eddie Shokes
Al Brancato	Dick Hahn	Johnny McCarthy	Clyde Shoun
Mace Brown	Chet Hajduk	Mike McCormick	Charlie Silvera
Mike Budnick	Jack Hallett	Barney McCosky	Enos Slaughter
Tom Carey	Ralph Hamner	Eddie McGah	Vinnie Smith
Jim Carlin	Ray Hamrick	Mickey McGowan	George Staller
Bob Carpenter	Bob Harris	Roger McKee	Chuck Stevens
Hugh Casey	Lum Harris	Red McQuillen	Johnny Sturm
Ed Chandler	Ned Harris	Russ Meers	Tommy Tatum
Fred Chapman	Clint Hartung	Sam Mele	Harry Taylor
Lou Ciola	Rollie Hemsley	Dee Miles	Birdie Tebbetts
Ray Coleman	Billy Herman	Buster Mills	Wayne Terwilliger
Jack Conway	Billy Hitchcock	Johnny Mize	Lou Tost
Bobby Coombs	Gil Hodges	Dee Moore	Steve Tramback
Cliff Dapper	Fred Hofman	Stan Musial	Virgil Trucks
Alvin Dark	Bill Holland	Vern Olsen	Eddie Turchin
Jim Davis	Lee Howard	Ike Pearson	Bob Usher
Chubby Dean	Sid Hudson	Eddie Pellagrini	Johnny Vander Meer
Bill Dickey	Ben Huffman	Johnny Pesky	Mickey Vernon
George "Skeets" Dickey	Tex Hughson	Jack D. Phillips	Dick Wakefield
Bob Dillinger	Fred Hutchinson	Whitey Platt	Ed Walczak
Dom DiMaggio	Rankin Johnson, Jr.	Boots Poffenberger	Ed Weiland
Joe DiMaggio	Dale Jones	Howie Pollett	Charley Wensloff
George Earnshaw	Jake Jones	Jerry Priddy	Dick West
Hank Edwards	Nippy Jones	Mel Queen	Max West
Del Ennis	Walt Judnich	Wimpy Quinn	Hal White
Aubrey Epps	Ken Keltner	Pee Wee Reese	Ted Williams
Eddie Erault	Bob Kennedy	Johnny Rigney	Max Wilson
Ferris Fain	Ralph Kiner	Lew Riggs	Tom Winsett
Marv Felderman	Bob Klinger	Phil Rizzuto	Gene Woodling
Nanny Fernandez	Bert Kuczynski	Sherry Robertson	Taffy Wright
Tom Ferrick	Ray Lamanno	Eddie Robinson	Ray Yochim
Elbie Fletcher	Don Lang	Packy Rogers	

