

Former Minor Leaguers' Airplane Wreckage Found

Welcome to the third year of publication for the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter. If you have been with us since the beginning then thank you for your support. If you're a new subscriber, then welcome aboard and I hope you enjoy the ride!

Over the coming year the aim of the newsletter will be to continue bringing you the obscure and unknown side of WWII baseball, combined with a healthy portion of stories regarding the big names in the game.

Until now, the content of the newsletter has been pretty much decided by myself. But I would like to hand things over to you, the readers, and have you tell me what you would like to see in the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter in 2009. So, please take this opportunity to drop me an email and let me know what you hope to see in forthcoming issues. I'll gladly schedule your ideas into the future months while continuing to surprise you with some little known facts and biographies.

I hope to hear from you soon!

Gary Bedingfield

Former Minor Leaguers' Airplane Wreckage Discovered After 64 Years

On May 25, 1944, Technical Sergeant John Regan was the radio operator/gunner on Consolidated B-24J Liberator "Zoot Chute" that was bound for Chabua, India. The last radio contact was made 30 minutes east of its destination. It was never heard from again. One year later the crew of 10 were officially declared dead and due to the mountainous terrain where the plane was lost, it was believed that if the plane were located, it would be impossible to recover the remains.

On October 26, 2008, 64 years after "Zoot Chute" disappeared, it was discovered by aviation archaeologist Clayton Kuhles. Kuhles, of Prescott, Arizona, conducts regular expeditions to Burma, India, Bangladesh and China to locate and document missing-in-action (MIA) allied aircraft lost in that area during World War II. He discovered the B-24 at over 11,000 feet elevation on a rugged mountain north of Damroh. The nearest village was Milang, a 5-day trek. Kuhles next task is to locate and notify the surviving family members.

John Regan was a pitcher on the varsity baseball team at Mount Carmel High School, an all-boys Catholic school on Chicago's South Side. In 1942, he was signed by the Chicago Cubs' organization and assigned to the Ashland Colonels of the Class C Mountain State League. After a brief stay he joined the Janesville Cubs of the Class D Wisconsin State League, where he made two appearances.

Regan's fledgling baseball career was put on hold in November 1942, when he entered military service with the Army Air Force, and trained as a radio operator.

To learn more about Clayton Kuhles visit his website www.miarecoveries.org

John Regan will be featured in Gary Bedingfield's forthcoming book for McFarland Publishers on professional baseball players who died in World War II.

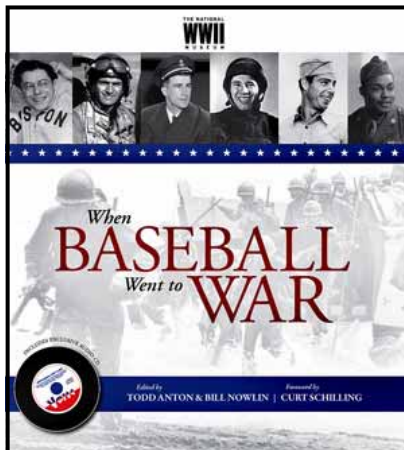
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Babe Ruth in World War II

He stood impatiently in the shadows of the home team dugout at Griffith Stadium. His metal cleats scraping against the concrete floor as he chewed on another fat cigar. Out on the field Al Schacht, the Clown Prince of Baseball, was entertaining the capacity crowd with one of his memorable acts. The figure in the shadows smiled to himself as he remembered how the crowd used to roar throughout his outstanding 20-year career as a professional ballplayer and American icon.

Schacht was nearing the end of his routine. Standing at home plate he stared at the imaginary pitcher and waived his bat like a conductor leading an orchestra. As the imaginary pitcher hurled his make-believe baseball towards home, Schacht wound the bat around his contorted body and swung with all his might. The crowd, many in military uniform, raised a cheer as Schacht stood watching as if the ball were sailing over the left field fence. Then suddenly the cheer turned to thunderous applause. The great Babe Ruth appeared from the shadows and replaced Schacht in a home run trot around the bases. Doffing his cap and waving with every step, the fans were on their feet to welcome the most famous athlete in the country. Looking a little fuller in the cheeks and larger around the waist, Ruth still had that familiar short-step run and every ounce of charm. There was no doubt, America loved Babe Ruth and the crowd would seemingly do anything for this man. On this occasion, he wanted them to buy War Bonds, and they did - lots of them.



When the United States entered the war in December 1941, Babe Ruth was 46 years old. His playing career had ended six years before in 1935 and he had been out of organized baseball altogether since quitting his job as a Dodgers' coach at the end of the 1938 season. Almost immediately, Ruth began appearing in golf tournaments and exhibition games to help raise money for the war effort. Many of these events have been forgotten with the passing of time, but there is little doubt that the appearance of The Babe at a fund-raising event - his name of the billboard advertising - would attract more fans and raise extra vital dollars.

Probably Ruth's first baseball-related fund-raising appearance was on August 23, 1942. Before a huge crowd of 69,136 at Yankee Stadium, 47-year-old Babe Ruth donned the Yankee pinstripes for the first time in seven years and faced 54-year-old Walter Johnson formerly of the Washington Senators. Johnson threw 17 pitches to Ruth. On the fifth pitch, Ruth hit a drive into the lower rightfield stands as the crowd thundered its approval. On the final pitch, Ruth hit a towering upper-deck shot that was just foul. He circled the bases doffing his cap and saluting the roaring crowd with every step. Ruth and Johnson then left the field together to a thunderous ovation. The Senators beat the Yankees, 7-6, in the first game of the double header and the Yankees won the nightcap, 3-0. But the results were incidental to the between-games show put on by Ruth and Johnson. \$80,000 was raised for the Army-Navy relief fund.

The following year, on May 24, 1943, a charity event was staged between the Washington Senators and the US Navy All-Stars. Shirley Povich, who covered the Senators for the Washington Post promoted the event, and Povich had a surprise for the unsuspecting crowd. [Al Schacht](#), the Clown Prince of baseball, had been putting on one of his much-loved performances, which culminated with a simulated a home run. But just as Schacht was about to run the bases, the



Babe Ruth in uniform shortly after the First World War

Babe appeared, and, in full uniform, circled the bases of Griffith Stadium to rapturous applause. Later, Ruth took the microphone and urged fans to buy more War Bonds.

On July 12, 1943, Ruth managed a service all-star team that pounded out a 9-8 exhibition victory over the Braves as part of Boston Mayor Maurice J Tobin's annual charity field day program. Playing at Fenway Park, the service all-stars put on a good show for 12,000 fans. Before the game, [Ted Williams](#) and the 48-year-old Ruth squared off in a home run-hitting contest. Williams parked three balls in the right-field bleachers but Ruth, bothered by an aching knee, could not come close to the fences. Ruth did, however, give in to the demands of the crowd, and pinch-hit in the eighth inning. He flied out to right field.

It was to be Ruth's last appearance in uniform. The year after the war he was diagnosed with throat cancer. In March 1947, the new commissioner of baseball, A B "Happy" Chandler, declared that April 27 would be Babe Ruth Day in the major leagues. Ceremonies were held in all the ballparks and at Yankee Stadium, the Babe, his voice ravaged by the cancer addressed the crowd of 60,000, saying, "There have been so many lovely things said about me. I'm glad I can be here to thank everyone. Thank you."

Sixteen months later, Babe Ruth died. He was 53 years old. In the hearts and minds of countless baseball fans around the world, his legacy will never be forgotten.

Al Schacht Entertains the Troops



Alexander "Al" Schacht was born on November 11, 1892 in the Bronx, New York. The Clown Prince of Baseball, as he would become known, was a self-confessed baseball addict who had pitched for the Washington Senators between 1919 and 1921. A sore arm ended his playing days but he turned to coaching and also developed a comedy routine that consisted of comic acts, jokes and player impersonations. During rain delays he was famous for plopping down in a mud puddle with two bats, and rowing as if he was in a boat. He was also known for staging mock boxing and tennis matches on the field.

"It was not until the summer of 1942," Schacht wrote in *GI Had Fun*, his autobiographical account of his wartime tours, "some six months after Pearl Harbor, that World War II first affected me personally.

"A lot of us knew there was a war going on but we weren't taking it any too seriously. The general feeling was that this was a ball game between the major leagues and a Class D outfit, and that as soon as our side got warmed up, we'd take care of Japan in a couple of months."

In the middle of Schacht's clowning tour in 1943, he was asked to visit Portsmouth Naval Hospital to entertain the sick and wounded. This proved to be the inspiration to go overseas and entertain the troops away from home.

On July 28, 1943 he left LaGuardia Airport on board a clipper bound for Port Lyautey in Morocco, North Africa. Schacht traveled light. All he took with him was a Yankees' uniform, top hat, frock coat, oversized ball glove, regular

glove and his spiked shoes.

Port Lyautey is 60 miles from Casablanca and served as an anti-submarine base, with PBYS flying against German U-Boats. Schacht staged his first overseas performance at the port, an impromptu show at a ball game where he performed his "nearsighted pitcher" routine.

Schacht then headed by Jeep to Casablanca for his first official show at the 69th Station Hospital with wounded men from the battles in North Africa and Sicily. "I'm here to entertain you fellows," he told the crowd, "and I'll do the best I can. After all, I won the First World War and I know how you fellows feel. When I was drafted in 1918, our side was losing. When they gave me my discharge, our side had won. That proves I had something to do with it." The crowd laughed and one soldier yelled out, "What did you do in the last war, Al?" Schacht replied, "I was a secret weapon. They hid me in a hospital at Fort Slocum. I won the Battle of Influenza."

Schacht went on to do a show at a ball game in the afternoon, and did an evening show for Navy men. He then headed for Oran in Algeria, where the first person he met was Zeke Bonura. "When the runs, hits and errors of this war are totaled up," wrote Schacht, "and they look around for unsung heroes of the ball game, I'm sure they'll pin a medal on the broad chest of Zeke Bonura. What he has done for the morale of the American soldier can never be fully revealed except by the GI himself."

Schacht staged shows at camps and hospitals throughout the area before moving on to Algiers which was home to Allied Headquarters and an embarkation point for troops who would be heading to Sicily.

Again, Schacht staged a number of official and impromptu shows and even gave a performance on the cruiser *USS Savannah*.

Tunis, the capital city of Tunisia, was Schacht's next stop and he toured here with a band, before departing for the island of Sicily where he put on performances in Catania and Messina.

Schacht then returned to Tunisia and staged a show at a baseball game in Bizerte between the 61st and 26th Station Hospitals. He also spent a lot of time at the 81st General Hospital entertaining the wounded. Schacht performed before a crowd of 20,000 at a baseball game in Bona and put on his last official show at a hospital in Constantine, Tunisia, before heading back to Port Lyautey for the journey home to the United States.

Schacht returned home on September 27, 1943 and was soon involved in Bond rallies, shows at Army camps, appearances for the USO and Red Cross and visits to hospitals.

On September 3, 1944, almost a year after returning from North Africa, Al Schacht left the United States for another tour. This time he was headed for New Guinea in the Pacific. His first show was held for 500 GIs at Natzab, before moving on to Oro Bay where he put on

There's Only **ONE** Al Schacht

... AND HE CAN'T BE EVERYWHERE AT ONCE



Al Schacht Entertains the Troops



Field Hospital. He performed for the 97th Engineers, 14th AAA, 382nd AAA, and at the first anniversary of overseas duty of the 91st Naval Construction Battalion.

Hollandia was Schacht's next destination in New Guinea. It was here that the 24th Infantry Division were waiting to invade the Philippines. On October 1, 1944, Schacht performed at the New Guinea World Series before

performances for the 363rd, 362nd and 139th Station Hospitals. Schacht entertained servicemen at ball games staged by the 38th Infantry Division, 1st Training Center, 278th Quartermaster Corps and 5th Replacement Depot, where he met up with major leaguer Morrie Arnovich.

"I awarded the nose championship to Morrie Arnovich," Schacht wrote. "I got him up on the stage with me, dramatically measured his nose with my fingers, and then measured mine, and gave him the title. It takes quite a nose to beat me."

Schacht also put on a show at a football game in Oro Bay, it was the first game of American football ever staged on New Guinea.

Schacht's next port of call was Finschhaven at the northeast tip of New Guinea.

"Finschhaven is the only place in the world where you can be knee-deep in mud and still get dust in your eyes," wrote Schacht. He covered fourteen hospitals including the 126th Station Hospital, 4th and 60th General Hospitals, and the 2nd

major league players Hugh Mulcahy, Ken Silvestri, Al Flair, Al Kozar, George Byam, Irv Dusak and Louis Rosen.

Schacht roomed with war correspondents Bill Chickering of *Time* and photographer Frank Prist in Hollandia. Both were killed during the invasion of the Philippines. Schacht performed for the 71st and 79th General Hospitals before moving on to the island of Biak, where he performed for the 41st Infantry Division, at a championship ball game at Bosnek Field and at an airfield at Owi.

Schacht returned to New Guinea and entertained troops at ball games, hospitals and for sailors at the docks around Milne Bay before returning home on October 26, 1944.

A year later, Schacht was again off to the Pacific. This time he went to Manila, in the Philippines where he entertained troops at camp mess halls and ball games. From Manila, he went to Japan and staged his act before a game in Osaka. In all Schacht gave more than 120 shows during the eight-week tour.

"While I was with them," Schacht said of his overseas tours, "I had more fun than when I was home. I went over to entertain and they entertained me."

In 1946, Schacht was given the Bill Slocum Memorial Award. The Slocum Award is presented annually by the New York Baseball Writers Association to a person judged to have a long and meritorious service to baseball. His comedic act both for baseball fans and GIs brought him a well-deserved reward.

After the war Al Schacht concentrated on his successful New York restaurant and continued to perform at ball games. He retired in 1969 and passed away on July 14, 1984, in Waterbury Connecticut. He was 92 years old.



Johnny Grodzicki - 17th Airborne Division



John "Johnny" Grodzicki was born in Nanticoke, Pennsylvania on February 26, 1917.

By 1937 he was playing professional baseball with the Houston Buffs of the Texas League and won 18 games. During the Texas League all-star game on July 17, 1937 at Houston, Grodzicki struck out six batters in a row.

The tall right-hander was again with Houston in 1938 and spent 1939 and 1940 with the Rochester Red Wings, joining the Columbus Red Birds in 1941. Grodzicki led the league in winning percentage that year with a remarkable .792, which was assembled from his 19-5 record.

Grodzicki also made five appearances with the Cardinals in 1941. He pitched 13.1 innings over five games for a 2-1 record and an impressive 1.35 earned run average. Grodzicki was one of the top prospects in the Cardinals organization but on January 14, 1942, Grodzicki followed in the footsteps of his two brothers and entered military service with the army.

He was initially based at Fort Knox, Kentucky, and on May 24, 1942, Grodzicki was selected by Bob Feller – along with fellow servicemen Cecil Travis, Zeke Bonura, Emmett Mueller and Ken Silvestri – to join Dizzy Dean's

all-stars in an exhibition game at Wrigley Field against Satchel Paige and the Kansas City Monarchs.

On July 7, 1942, Grodzicki was selected for an All-Service team that played against an American League all-star squad at Cleveland's Municipal Stadium. Before 62,059 fans, the American League beat the servicemen, 5-0.

The All-Service pitchers before the game against the American League all-stars at Cleveland. Left to right: Fred Hutchinson, Johnny Grodzicki, Bob Feller and Mickey Harris.

Grodzicki later transferred to the paratroopers and joined the 17th Airborne Division. The 17th Airborne Division was sent to England in August 1944. They remained there until December, when they were flown to the Reims area in France took over the defense of the Meuse River sector from Givet to Verdun. In January 1945, they marched through the snow to Morhet, relieving the 28th Infantry Division. The 17th entered the Ardennes campaign (better known as the Battle of the Bulge) on January 4 at the Battle of Dead Man's Ridge.

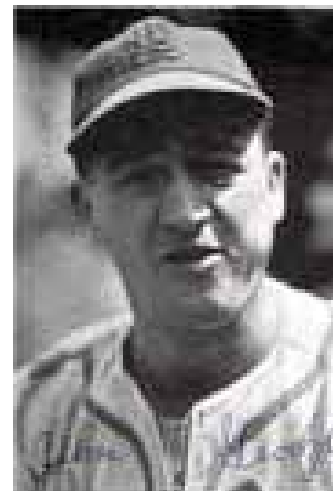
On March 24, 1945, the 17th Airborne Division took part in their first airborne assault. Taking off from marshalling areas in France, nearly 4,000 aircraft from the British 6th Airborne Division and the American 17th Airborne Division dropped fighting men – including Grodzicki - behind enemy lines, into Westphalia in the vicinity of Weselon which was east of the Rhine River. Their mission was to capture key points and so assist the advance of the ground troops. It was the first airborne invasion over the Rhine into Germany itself. On March 25, the 17th Airborne Division had secured bridges over the Issel River and had entrenched itself firmly along the Issel Canal. Moving eastward, it captured Haltern on March 29, and advanced on Munster the following day. It was on this day that a shell exploded

nearby, shrapnel flew, and a large, jagged piece cut deep into Grodzicki's flesh just below the right hip, and another piece entered his lower right leg.

Grodzicki was removed to a field hospital.

Examination disclosed that the sciatic nerve had been badly damaged. There was danger that he would never walk again. An operation was performed, and the shrapnel was removed. Grodzicki was then sent to a hospital in England, and finally to the United States for recuperation. He learned to maneuver with a cane and steel brace on his right leg, and after receiving his honorable discharge in October he went home to Nanticoke to rest.

But Grodzicki didn't stay home for very long. In October he headed for Panama where he pitched batting practice for the Colon club. The arrival of the New Year found Grodzicki eager and ready for spring training. Daily treatments were given his leg. Hot towels were applied, and special massages administered in the hope that he would be able to play



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Johnny Grodzicki - 17th Airborne Division

again.

On April 11, 1946, in a spring training game against the Oklahoma City Indians of the Texas League, Grodzicki made his post-war pitching debut. Wearing his leg brace and with a perceptible limp, Grodzicki pitched the last four innings and gave up four singles in the Cardinals' 8-1 win.

Grodzicki made just three regular season appearances for the Cardinals in 1946 as he continued on his road to recovery. In 1947, as a short reliever, he made 16 appearances for the Cardinals. Sports writer, Bill Corum, said of Grodzicki on April 21, 1948: "Johnny has plugged away and plugged away, hour after hour and day after day. Kind hearted Eddie Dyer has fretted over him and worked with him, and all but cried over him. Not because Grodzicki looked like one of the greatest prospects in the game before the war. But because Eddie loved his spirit and his stark refusal to accept defeat in his ambition to make the big time."

On April 13, 1948, Grodzicki was optioned to the Houston Buffs of the Texas League, the team he had pitched for back in 1937. After a couple of relief appearances he earned his first starting assignment on May 3 and it was against the Oklahoma City Indians again. Grodzicki went the distance and beat

them 7-2, scattering eight hits with seven strike outs. He also helped win the game with a single that drove in two runs. "My legs didn't get tired as I had suspected," he said in an Associated Press report on May 6, 1948, "but, boy, the rest of me was ready to call it quits for a while after the last out. That's the most pitching I've done in many a year."

In June 1949, Grodzicki left Houston and joined Rochester of the International League – another team he had played for back in the late 1930s. He made his first start for the Red Wings on July 2 and staggered to a complete game 11-7 win over the Baltimore Orioles.

Through a working agreement with the Cardinals, the Geneva Redbirds of the Alabama State League acquired the services of Grodzicki as their manager in 1950, but he was replaced in July and joined Omaha in the Western League where he pitched for the rest of the season. He posted a 3-1 record with the pennant winners.

In January 1951, Grodzicki – who had been playing winter ball in Panama for the last four years – was named player-manager of the Balboa Brewers in the Canal Zone League. Returning to the United States at the end of the winter season, Grodzicki started the 1951 season with Columbus. He was sent back to Omaha in June and in July 1951

he moved on to the Winston-Salem Cardinals of the Carolina League. Grodzicki remained with Winston-Salem in 1952.

Grodzicki became a pitching coach and scout with the Cardinals organization in 1953, touring the United States and Canada instructing young hurlers. He remained in that position until taking a coaching assignment in 1963 with the Buffalo Bisons under manager and former teammate, Whitey Kurowski.

After a season with Buffalo, Grodzicki left baseball for two years but was enticed back by the Detroit Tigers, who hired him as a minor league pitching instructor in 1966. He remained in that role until 1979, when the 62-year-old returned to the major leagues as a coach with the Detroit Tigers.

Johnny Grodzicki passed away on May 2, 1998 in Daytona Beach, Florida. He was 82 years old.



1946 St Louis Cardinals (Grodzicki is middle row, third from right)

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