

## San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

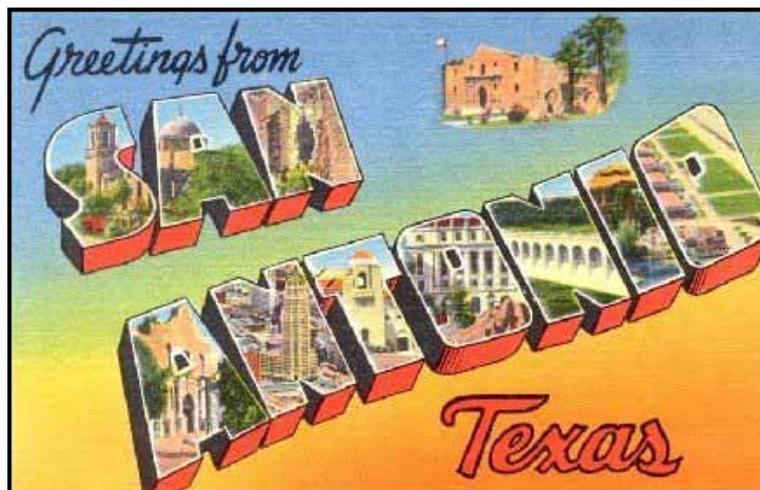
Welcome to the April issue of the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter, which coincides with the start of the major league baseball season.

A new feature is launched with this issue. From now until September, each issue will contain details of the **San Antonio Service Baseball League** for the corresponding month from 1945. I have always wanted to take a close look at a military baseball league season, and I could think of no better way than to include a month-by-month account in the newsletter. Each issue will bring highlights, news, standing and stats, together with in-depth player profiles.

This year is the 65th anniversary of D-Day and the June issue will feature an exclusive article on baseball's role at Normandy. If you have any stories or anecdotes about ballplayers who were at Normandy on June 6, please get in touch so we can include them.

This month I can reveal the title of my forthcoming book with McFarland. *Baseball's Dead of World War II: A Roster of Professional Players Who Died in Service*, draws on extensive research, and interviews with surviving family members to give the first published insight into the personal lives, baseball careers and tragic sacrifices made by 127 minor league players during World War II. Future issues of this newsletter will confirm the publish date.

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## San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

Throughout 1943, 1944 and 1945, the San Antonio Service Baseball League was among the most competitive leagues in Texas military baseball. Consisting predominantly of Army Air Force teams, the likes of Enos Slaughter, Howie Pollett, Boo Ferris, Clint Hartung, Rip Russell, Clarence Beers, Jerry Witte, Tex Aulds, Dick Midkiff and Del Wilber played their service baseball there.

The league consisted of eight teams in 1943, dropped to six for 1944 and stood at seven in 1945. The SAACC

Warhawks were the league champions in 1943 and 1944, but lost Enos Slaughter and Howie Pollett before the 1945 campaign began.

Each month between now and September, the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter will bring you the news and action of the corresponding month from the 1945 San Antonio Service Baseball League, starting right here with the season's opening month of April.

*Play Ball!*



### Meet the teams of the San Antonio Service Baseball League

#### Brooks Field Ganders

Seven miles Southeast of San Antonio, Brooks Field was an Army Air Force Central Flying Training Command base. The Ganders were managed by Carl Kott, a minor league infielder between 1929 and 1947. The team's top players included former Evangeline League pitcher Joe Janowski, North Carolina State League second baseman Richard Gable and Western League outfielder Paul Rinschen.

#### Fort Sam Houston Rangers

Fort Sam Houston was the home of Army Medicine at San Antonio. The Rangers played at Christy Mathewson Field. 1945 was the Rangers' first season in the league. The team was managed by American Association catcher George Lacy, and the line-up included major leaguers Mel Almada, Dutch Dietz and Alex Hooks.

#### Hondo Comets

Hondo Army Air Field at Hondo, Texas, was used to train navigators. The Comets were managed by Texas League infielder Sam Davis. Top players included Eastern League second baseman Frankie Madura, and major leaguers Clint Hartung and Rip Russell.

#### Kelly Field Fliers

Kelly Field was an Advanced Flying School at San Antonio. The Fliers played at Tech Field and were managed by future major leaguer Jerry Witte. The line-up included fellow big leaguers Paul Chervinko and Clarence Beers as well as Three-I League pitcher Homer Gibson and Texas League pitcher Frank Sansoti.

#### Randolph Field Ramblers

Randolph Field was an Army Air Force pilot school at Universal City, Texas. The Ramblers were managed by former major leaguer Bib Falk. Future major leaguer Tex Aulds played leftfield with Matt Batts behind the plate. The Ramblers line-up was dotted with minor leaguers including Marty Errante, Tom Finger, Irv Fortune, Jack Lindstrom, Jim Morris, Rube Naranjo, Walt Nothe, Stan Novak, Clarence Pfeil and Jim Wright. Boo Ferris had been with the Ramblers in 1944.

#### SAACC Warhawks

The San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center was in the western area of San Antonio. It was a non-flying Army Air Force base. The Warhawks were league champions in 1943 and 1944, but lost Enos Slaughter and Howie Pollett at the end of the 1944 season. The Warhawks were managed by major league catcher Del Wilber and featured Tigers' second baseman Dutch Meyer. Minor leaguers on the Warhawks included Bill Hunnicutt, Woody Johnson, Red Kaster, Hardy Martin, Hal Nerino, Grover Resinger, Fred Scheske and Walt Widmayer.

#### San Marcos Navigators

San Marcos Army Air Field was four miles east of San Marcos, Texas, and trained navigators. The Navigators' line-up included minor leaguers McLee Baker, Hilmar Borchers, Roy Knepper and Bill Shewey.



# San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

## April 1945

### Sunday 1st

Charlie Engle's all-stars (run by the former Athletics and Pirates infielder) played the Kansas City Monarchs of the Negro National League at Tech Field. Homer Gibson of Kelly Field was the starter with Walt Nothe (Randolph Field), Clarence Beers (Kelly Field) and Joe Janowski (Brooks Field) on hand to pitch.

Over 700 fans turned out despite threatening weather to see a 4-4 deadlock over 14 innings with the last six innings scoreless. The game had to be called so that the Monarchs could get a bus to Houston for the next day.

The All-Stars jumped into a 3-run lead in the first and scored again in the seventh. The Monarchs clawed back one in the second, one in the third and two runs in the eighth to tie the game.

### Tuesday 3rd

SAACC play a practice game at Randolph Field. Randolph win 7-5.

### Friday 6th

Fort Sam Houston beats Laughlin Field of Del Rio, 9-4, in a pre-season game, while at the Brooklyn Dodgers spring training camp in Bear Mountain, New York, Branch Rickey and Leo Durocher look over Terris McDuffie and Dave "Showboat" Thomas, two Negro League players. The Dodgers decide neither are ready for the Dodgers organization.

### Thursday 12th

On the day President Roosevelt dies, SAAC beats Brooks Field, 14-8, and San Marcos beat Southwestern University, 9-1, in pre-season games.

### Friday 13th

Today's pre-season game between Fort Sam Houston and Randolph Field is cancelled as the country mourns the loss of its President.

### Saturday 14th

Lieutenant L. D. "Dutch" Meyer, a mainstay of the SAACC infield, leaves the

team to rejoin the Detroit Tigers.

### Thursday 19th

SAACC beat the Corpus Christi NAS Comets, 17-1, in a pre-season game.

## Hondo, Ft. Sam Win Service Loop Openers

### Sunday 22nd

Opening day of the Service League sees Colonel Albert M. Gudera of SAACC throw out the ceremonial first ball for the game against Hondo, while Brigadier-General Charles K Nulsen, post commander at Fort Sam Houston, throws out the first ball against Randolph Field.

Hondo go on to beat SAACC, 3 to 1 in front of a paid attendance of 1,193 at Tech Field, while Fort Sam Houston gets the better of Randolph Field, 9 to 6, before a crowd of 4,000 at their home ground.



## Nothe's 18 Strikeouts Set Army Record

### Sunday 29th

Walt Nothe pitches the season's first shutout with a 3-0 two-hitter for Randolph Field against Brooks Field at Tech Field. He also set a league record in the process by striking out 18 and eclipsing the old mark of 17 set in the previous season by Brooks Field's Dick Midkiff and Hondo's Marty Errante who is playing for Randolph Field in 1945.



SAACC second baseman Dutch Meyer re-joined the Detroit Tigers at the end of April.

## San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

### Standings at Monday April 30th

	W	L	Pct	GB
Fort Sam Houston Rangers	2	1	.667	-
San Marcos Navigators	2	1	.667	-
SAACC Warhawks	2	1	.667	-
Hondo Comets	2	2	.500	0.5
Randolph Field Ramblers	1	1	.500	0.5
Kelly Field Fliers	1	1	.500	0.5
Brooks Field Ganders	0	3	.000	2.0

# San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

## Player Profile

### Walt Nothe

Walter Nothe was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania on December 15, 1917. The hard throwing left-hander played for Salisbury in 1939 and was with the Reading Chicks of the Inter-State League in 1940.

Nothe enlisted for military service on January 21, 1941. He served with the Army Air Force at Randolph Field and pitched for ex-White Sox outfielder, Bib Falk, who was manager of the Randolph Field Ramblers who played in the San Antonio Service League in 1943.

On May 16, 1943, Nothe pitched a one-hitter against Stinson Field but lost the game 1-0. Four days later he pitched a 5-0 no-hitter against Camp Normoyle. On June 7, he was selected for the league all-star team that played against Birdie Tebbett's Waco Field Flyers. Before a crowd of 4,000 at San Antonio's Tech Field, Nothe allowed one run and two hits over three innings in helping the all-stars to a 6-5 win.

Randolph Field won 58, lost 19 and tied one during 1943. Nothe was 16 and 6. The Ramblers won the San Antonio Service League by eight and a half games but lost in the playoffs.

Back with Randolph Field in 1944, the Ramblers made it to the playoffs and faced Kelly Field in a best-of-three series. Boo Ferris won the first game for the Ramblers and Nothe started the second game, losing 3-1. Ferris came back to win game three and send the Ramblers to the finals for the second straight year.

They faced the San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center in the best-of-five finals. Nothe was used in relief in the first game as the Ramblers were beaten 5-3. In game two Boo Ferriss was beaten 7-5. In the third game Nothe went the distance but was beaten 4-2.

Nothe was discharged from military service at the end of 1945 and went to spring training with the Brooklyn Dodgers. He was a favorite of manager Leo Durocher and although he did not make a major league appearance he

remained with the Dodgers until optioned to the St Paul Saints on May 2.

Nothe pitched well for the Saints in the American Association. Despite finishing the year with a record of 3-11 he struck out 134. On July 10, 1946, Leo Durocher made a flying visit to St Paul to watch Nothe pitch against Louisville. Although Nothe was beaten by the Colonels, Durocher referred to Nothe "as good as any man on the Brooklyn staff."

On September 2, 1946, Nothe was recalled by the Dodgers and spent the last four weeks of the season with the big league team although he did not make an appearance.

Nothe continued to fine-tune his skills by playing winter ball during 1946-47 in Cuba with Cienfuegos. The plan, however, backfired. In February 1947 he was suspended from playing in organized baseball by National Association president George Trautman. It was not until August that Nothe was able to rejoin the Dodgers' organization and he spent the remainder of the season with the Montreal Royals in the International League.

Nothe was back with the Royals in 1948. On June 20, Durocher was again on hand to see him make a relief appearance, blanking Newark for three and one-third innings. "Nothe showed me more stuff than I've seen in Brooklyn in a week."

But Durocher didn't last the season with the Dodgers. On July 16, he left to manage the New York Giants, and with him went Nothe's best hope of pitching in the majors.

The next season, Nothe was gone from the Dodgers' organization, and was pitching for the Toledo Mud Hens, a Tigers' farm team in the American Association. Nothe still continued to show moments of greatness. On August 4, 1949, Nothe threw a no-hitter for the Mud Hens against the Minneapolis Millers. It came the day after teammate Hal White had allowed the Millers just one hit and created a record-breaking run of 17 consecutive scoreless innings.

In the winter of 1949-50 Nothe pitched in the Panama Canal Zone League, leading the circuit with a 2.48 ERA. He returned to the Mud Hens for spring

training and on April 20, he suffered a fracture of his pitching hand when a trunk fell on his hand as he was helping his wife pack for a trip to her Michigan home to attend the funeral of her grandmother. The Mud Hens chose not to wait for the hand to heal and gave him his release in May.

With the hand healed, Nothe picked up with the Baltimore Orioles of the International League later in the season. The Orioles sold him to the Atlanta Crackers of the Southern Association in August as the Crackers looked for help in the pennant bid. The Crackers clinched the Southern Association title with Nothe making appearances in a number of games.

Nothe was back with Atlanta in 1951, and on August 16, now 33, he threw a two-hit shutout against Little Rock Travelers and the following day Don Liddle did the same against the Travelers.

Nothe was with the Miami Beach Flamingos in 1952. On August 6, 1952, against the Miami Sun Sox, he hurled nine hitless innings, but lost the game 1-0 in the tenth. He had a perfect game going until a grounder was bobbled by the second baseman with two outs in the eighth.

With his dream of pitching in the major leagues, Walt Nothe continued to throw in the minors. He was with Fort Lauderdale of the Florida International League in 1953, and pitched for Macon Peaches in Sally League in 1954.

Walt Nothe passed away on March 1985 in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He was 67 years old.



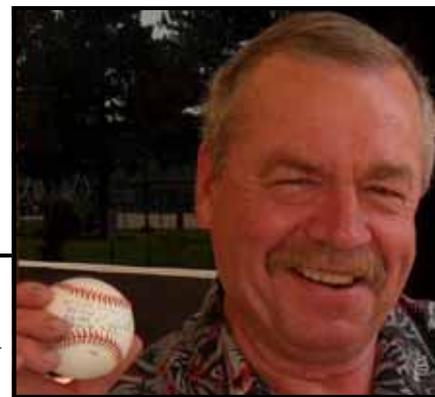
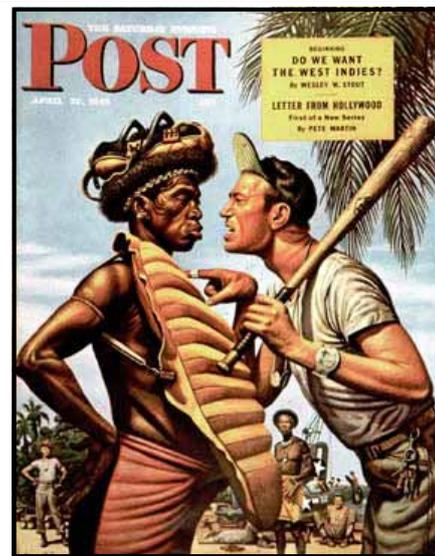
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Chris Schuehle holding Morrie Martin signed baseball

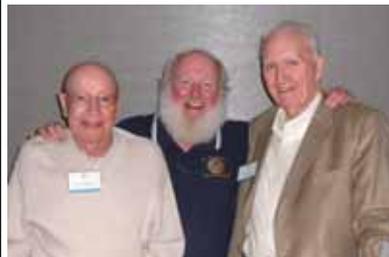
**Former Big League Pitcher Morrie Martin recognized by VA for Wartime Service**

Army surgeons in Germany wanted to amputate Morrie Martin's leg. When a nurse realized he was a baseball player, she helped convince the doctors to treat the severe infection in his leg with a new drug: penicillin. After a 150 shots and a year of rehabilitation, the young left-hander was able to resume his baseball career and pitch ten seasons in the big leagues.

Regarding WWII, Martin has remained stoic. He doesn't like to discuss his experiences as a combat engineer that began during a pre-dawn D-Day landing in France and ended on March 23, 1945 in Germany. He is reticent to talk about his two purple hearts or the frost bite he suffered during the Battle of the Bulge.

In 2007, baseball historian Bill Swank asked if he received a veterans pension. Martin reply was typically succinct, "A small one."

Swank called his friend, Chris Schuehle, a disabled Vietnam veteran who had helped others receive full VA benefits. Schuehle reviewed the brief facts as presented and said, "World War II vet, two purple hearts, frost bite at the Battle of the Bulge, combat infantry badge... I think Morrie deserves a full VA pension."



Bill Swank (center) with Morrie (left) and Lou Brissie (right)

Martin, a native of Missouri, the "Show-Me State," was sceptical and reluctantly submitted an application. Schuehle, who lives in Minnesota, guided Martin long-distance through his contacts in Missouri. A year later, Morrie Martin was awarded a 100% VA pension.

"I told Chris to come down for a visit and I'll treat him to the biggest steak dinner he's ever had," said Martin. "I was pitching for St. Paul the year Chris was born. My family and I are so thankful for what he did for us."

Schuehle was equally pleased. "I can't wait to meet Morrie. He's my hero and I can't say enough good things about the VA. They are kind and considerate. They've done so much for me. I believe all veterans should at least be in the VA system. For those who were disabled, it is very confusing and there's a lot of bad information out there. I'd be glad to help other ballplayers who served and were disabled. They should send an e-mail to Gary Bedingfield [garybed@gmail.com](mailto:garybed@gmail.com) with the facts about their situation and he can forward them to me."

*New Book Coming soon*

***Baseball's Dead of World War II: A Roster of Professional Players Who Died in Service***

*by Gary Bedingfield*

It's a well-known fact among baseball fans that two major league players made the supreme sacrifice during World War II. What is far less commonly known is that at least 125 minor league players also lost their lives while serving their country. In addition to providing an extensive overview of baseball and the home front during the war years, *Baseball's Dead of World War II* draws on extensive research, and interviews with surviving family members to give the first published insight into the personal lives, baseball careers and tragic sacrifices made by these men.

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