

Baseball's Dead of World War II

Welcome to the 23rd edition of the Baseball in Wartime e-newsletter - an abbreviated version due to work commitments and proof reading of my forthcoming book. I know that many of you are waiting to hear about a release date for *Baseball's Dead of World War II*. Whilst I still do not have a definite date at this time it would seem that an October 2009 release is most likely. The cover has now been finalized and can be seen opposite, and the book is available for pre-order from amazon.com.

I hope to get the newsletter back on schedule next month so thanks for bearing with me at this time.

Gary Bedingfield



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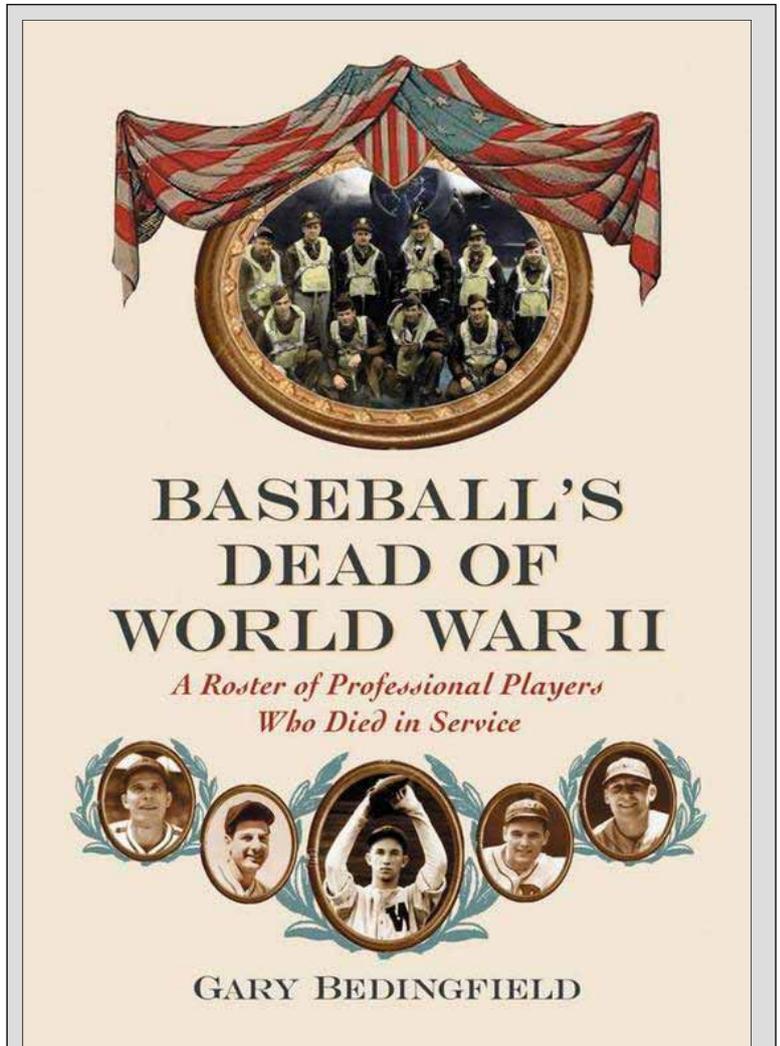
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**BASEBALL'S
DEAD OF
WORLD WAR II**

*A Roster of Professional Players
Who Died in Service*

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.

Baseball's Dead of World War II is soon to be released by McFarland - leading publishers of scholarly and reference books in the United States - and can be pre-ordered at amazon.com.



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Jack Siens - United States Navy and the Huntington Aces

Jack Siens was a hard-hitting outfielder for the Marshall College (now Marshall University) varsity team in Huntington, West Virginia, in the late 1930s. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts degree in June 1939, he signed with his hometown Huntington Aces of the Class D Mountain State League, and batted a superb .315 with 15 home runs and 91 RBIs in 127 games.

There were two significant highlights for Siens during the summer of 1939. June 27 was declared "Jack Siens Night" at the Aces' Long Civic Field, and with 1,200 fans in attendance, he contributed three hits to the 4-1 win over the Williamson Red Birds. On July 9, Siens traveled to Cooperstown, New York, as part of a contingent of minor league players representing 41 leagues of the National Association of Professional Baseball for the 100th anniversary of the birth of the national pastime. Split into two teams, the players put on a game at Doubleday Field as the Cartwrights and the Doubledays. Siens was with the Doubledays squad who won, 9-6.

Siens was sold to the Louisville



A Consolidated PB4Y-1 Liberator similar to that flown by Jack Siens

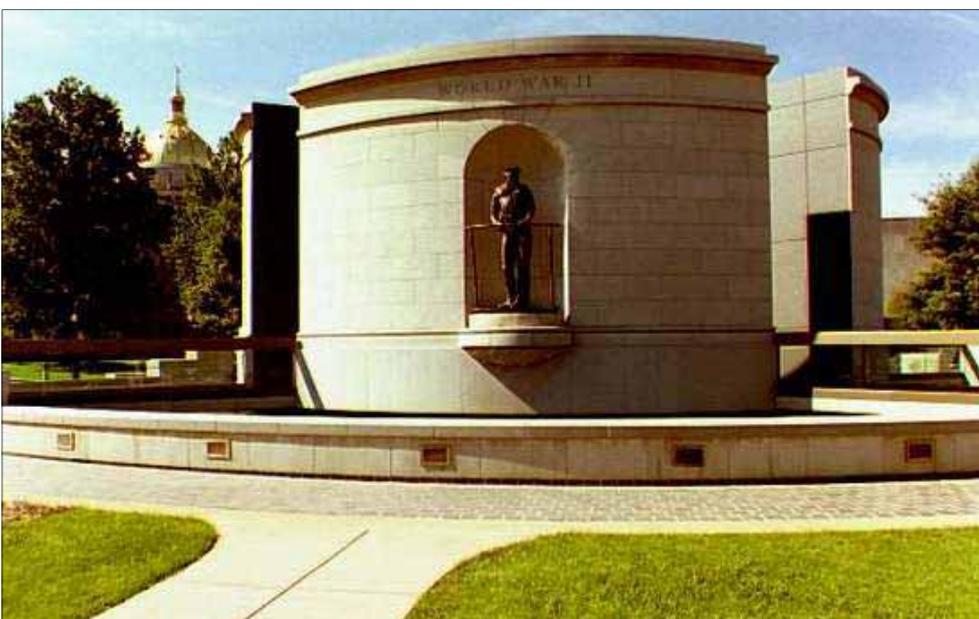
Colonels of the Class AA American Association in September 1939, and assigned to the Madison Blues of the Class B Three-I League for spring training the following year. After a handful of appearances at the start of the season, he was sent to the Owensboro Oilers of the Class D Kitty League, where he played 62 games and batted .304 with 10 home runs. He spent the second half of the season back with Huntington and

hit .318 over 52 games.

Siens joined the Navy in April 1941, and trained as a bomber pilot. He was stationed with Bombing Squadron VB-105 at St. Eval in southwest England, where he flew patrols up and down the English coast in a Consolidated PB4Y-1 Liberator.

On September 10, 1943 - with Lieutenant Junior Grade Siens as co-pilot to Lieutenant Junior Grade George Brown - they took-off for a simulated fighter attack. At 4,000 feet over the Atlantic Ocean, near St. Eval, Siens' Liberator met up with a friendly fighter to commence the simulated attack runs. Brown began evasive action as planned but lost control of the plane and crashed into the sea. All eight crew members were killed.

Siens' body was never recovered. He is memorialized at Cambridge American Cemetery in England, and the West Virginia Veterans Memorial in Charleston.



West Virginia Veterans Memorial in Charleston where Siens is remembered

Pete Viselli - Army Air Force and the Landis Senators

Armando "Pete" Viselli was born in Ansonia, on the Naugatuck River in Connecticut. He entered military service in the 1930s, and while stationed at Fort Devens, Massachusetts, in 1937, he played for the nearby Ayer Town team in the Village League, helping them clinch the league title for the first time.

In 1938, Viselli was at Randolph Field, Texas, where he was the shortstop and lead-off hitter with the Squadron 53 Bears and the Randolph Field Ramblers. In August of that year, he helped the Ramblers clinch their sixth successive Army League championship, defeating the 9th Infantry Manchus in a two-game playoff.

Viselli left military service in 1939, and tried his hand at organized baseball. At the start of the season, he joined the Palestine Pals of the Class C East Texas League. He was batting just .206 over 12 games when he was released by the club and joined the Lima Pandas of the Class D Ohio State League on May 12. Viselli lasted just a week with the Pandas, after going hitless in six at-bats he received his release on May 18. He spent the remainder of the season with the Landis Senators of the Class D North Carolina State League, where he batted .198 over 24 games.

Viselli did not return to professional baseball after 1939, but returned, instead, to military service. With the Army Air Corps he was deployed to Clark Field at Luzon in the Philippine Islands, as aircrew with the 28th Bomb Squadron. Operating with the Martin B-10 and the Douglas B-18 Bolo, obsolete twin-engined bombers of the tight military budgets of the 1930s, the squadron functioned as

the long-range strike arm of the Far East Air Force. Viselli was soon playing shortstop for the base team.

On December 8, 1941, Clark Field was caught off-guard as Japanese bombers roared overhead, showering high explosives on the grounded bombers, destroying many and wrecking hangars and runways. In their wake came fighter planes, which made low-level attacks on ground forces and anti-aircraft batteries. They left behind a burning mass of wreckage and, though some aircraft were saved, the main strength of the Far East Air Force in the Philippines was gone. Nevertheless, two days later, the remnants of the group attacked and destroyed a troop transport and severely damaged another off the Philippine coast, making it the first American air unit to strike back at the Japanese.

On December 12, 1941, Staff Sergeant Viselli boarded a B-18 at Clark Field. First Lieutenant Ted Fisch was taking the bomber up on a reconnaissance flight to locate the exact position of the Japanese fleet

that was rapidly approaching the Philippines. To get a good view and at the same time avoid danger, Fisch intended to fly as high and as fast as he could. Viselli was the crew chief, responsible for overall maintenance of the plane, while Technical Sergeant Joseph Acton was the radio operator manning the rear-gun position. The plane roared down the runway at Clark Field and was never seen again.

Whether the plane succumbed to enemy action or mechanical failure is not known. The crew, along with Staff Sergeant Viselli, are memorialized at the Manila American Cemetery at Fort Bonifacio in the Philippines.



Douglas B-18 Bolos similar to that in which Viselli served as crew chief