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Baseball in Wartime

www.baseballinwartime.com

Minor League Baseball to Celebrate WWII Veterans

Baseball in Wartime's main goal is to preserve the memories of professional baseball players who put down their bats and gloves and served their nation in World War II.

Achieving this is done in a variety of ways including the Baseball in Wartime monthly newsletter and an extensive website that now contains in excess of 650 biographies.

But the quest to gain recognition for these men doesn't end there, and that is why Baseball in Wartime is proud to announce that it has teamed up with Minor League Baseball to remember those who served.

At every minor league ballpark across the United States on Memorial Day, May 26, there will be a Public Address announcement that will highlight the number of minor league players who served during World War II and those who made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Please, try and make it to your local minor game on Memorial Day and help to remember the 4,000 young men who served their nation and the 113 who lost their lives in military training and combat.

Baseball in Wartime is grateful to John Cook, Senior Vice President, Business Operations at Minor League Baseball for making this goal a reality.



Joe Pinder (1912 to 1944)

Minor League Pitcher from 1935 to 1941.
Posthumous Medal of Honor recipient



Art Johnson (1919 to 2008)

It is with much regret that Baseball in Wartime has to report the passing of former Boston Braves' pitcher Art Johnson.

Stan Haney, assistant director at Gale Free Library in Holden, MA, interviewed Art on behalf of Baseball in Wartime just weeks before his passing. The full biography can be seen at:

www.baseballinwartime.com/player_biographies/johnson_art.htm

Art pitched for the Braves from 1940 to 1942. He was 7-15 in 43 appearances in 1941. Serving with the Navy from November 1942 to October 1945, he was a yeoman in the Pacific aboard the light carrier *USS Langley*.

With a sore arm and knees damaged during a kamikaze attack, Johnson had no hope of returning to baseball and ran his own insurance agency in Holden.

In 1997, he was among many former Braves invited to Fenway Park to commemorate the Atlanta Braves' interleague series with the Red Sox, the first time the Braves played in Boston since they defected to Milwaukee in 1953.

Donate



Baseball in Wartime is extremely grateful for all donations

www.baseballinwartime.com/donate.htm

Baseball in Wartime Newsletter has WorldCat Listing

Thanks to Amy O'Shea at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum Research Center, the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter is now included on WorldCat, the online catalog of the Online Computer Library Center (OCLC). This means the newsletter is now available to more than 60,000 libraries in 112 countries around the world.

The Baseball in Wartime Newsletter's OCLC listing is 191870594.

What was Ted Williams' batting average with the Minneapolis Millers in 1938?

How many games did Warren Spahn win with the Hartford Bees in 1942?

How many home runs did Joe DiMaggio hit with the San Francisco Seals in 1935?

What was Early Wynn's ERA with the Springfield Nationals in 1941?

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Playing Ball in the Marianas

In September 1944, the Central Pacific Area Championship Series – better known as the Service World Series – was held in Hawaii between the Navy and Army. With Bill Dickey at the helm, the Navy pulled out all the stops to field the best possible team, going as far as bringing Phil Rizzuto and Dom DiMaggio all the way from Australia.

Unfortunately, the Army reacted with less haste and the Navy's strength was obvious when the Army crashed to a 5-0 defeat in the first game of the best-of-seven series on September 22 at Furlong Field, Pearl Harbor.

The Navy went on to win the first six games of the extended series (it had previously been agreed that all games would be played regardless of result in order to provide maximum entertainment for the troops) while the Army's reinforcement of players languished on the high seas. "The Navy was beating the hell out of the Army in Honolulu," recalled Enos Slaughter some years later. "Larry MacPhail was working with the

government then in Washington, and he got every major league player in the whole United States who was in the Army Air Corps. In seven days' time I had my orders, and I was at a base in Utah. There were 48 of us. We had Birdie Tebbetts catching, Billy Hitchcock, Joe Marty, Howard Pollett, Buster Mills, Ferris Fain, Sid Hudson, Taft Wright, Stan Rojek, Lew Riggs, Max West, Tex Hughson. We stayed there and got shots, and they were supposed to fly us to Honolulu. Instead, they took the football players and flew them over there and we went by boat.

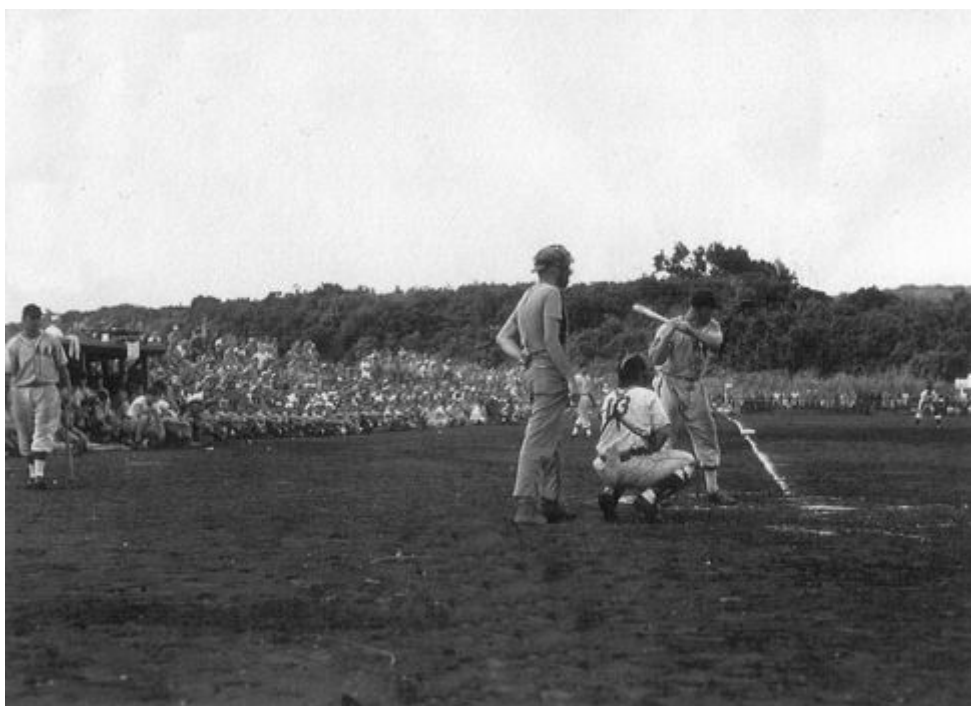
"When we got there, it was too late; all the Navy was gone."

The Navy had succeeded in winning nine of eleven games against the Army and at the beginning of 1945 set off



for a tour of forward areas of the Pacific to play exhibition games for the troops.

Upon their eventual arrival in Hawaii, the Army Air Force players were assigned to various bases including Hickam Field, Wheeler Field and Bellows Field. But later in the year they embarked on their own tour of Pacific islands. Forty-eight players were divided between three teams representing bombardment wings of the 20th Air Force – the 58th Bombardment Wing Wingmen, led by Tigers' catcher Birdie Tebbetts and featuring Enos Slaughter, Joe Gordon, Joe Marty, Billy Hitchcock, Howie Pollett and Chubby Dean; the 73rd Bombardment Wing Bombers, managed by Buster Mills of the Cleveland Indians and featuring Stan Rojek, Taft Wright, Mike McCormick,



58th Wingmen playing the 73rd Bombers on Saipan, August 1945. Joe Marty of the 58th Wingmen is at-bat. Charlie Silvera is the catcher and Joe Gordon is on deck (far left).

Playing Ball in the Marianas (continued)



Enos Slaughter of the 58th Wingmen signs baseballs for fans.

Tex Hughson and Sid Hudson; and the 313th Bombardment Wing Flyers, managed by Lew Riggs of the Dodgers and featuring Johnny Sturm, Max West, Walt Judnich and Stan Goletz.

“We were sent to Tinian and Saipan,” says Rugger Ardizoia, who pitched for the 313th Flyers. “In order to boost morale we entertained the troops while the B-29s were on their way to bomb Japan, and the soldiers morale improved by being able to talk to and see some of their favorite players.”

Tinian and Saipan are in the Mariana Islands and American forces invaded both islands in mid-1944 and immediately began construction of what came to be the world’s largest airfield for the Boeing B-29 Superfortress bombers of the 20th Air Force. The B-29s had previously been stationed in mainland China, but supplying them with adequate fuel was a logistic nightmare. The Marianas were seized to stage airborne strategic bombing of the Japanese homeland, about 1,500

miles northwest of the Marianas.

The 313th Flyers team was based at North Field on Tinian, along with the 58th Wingmen, who were at West Field, while the 73rd Bombers were at Isley Field on Saipan. When the ballplayers arrived they helped engineers in the construction work of ball fields.

“We have been busy building our own tents to live in and our own park to play in,” Tex Hughson of the 73rd Bombers told Joe Cronin in a letter dated July 20, 1945. “The ball park is no beauty, but will answer the purpose. Of course, there is no grass and seats for ‘customers’ are made exclusively of bomb crates, of which we have plenty here.”

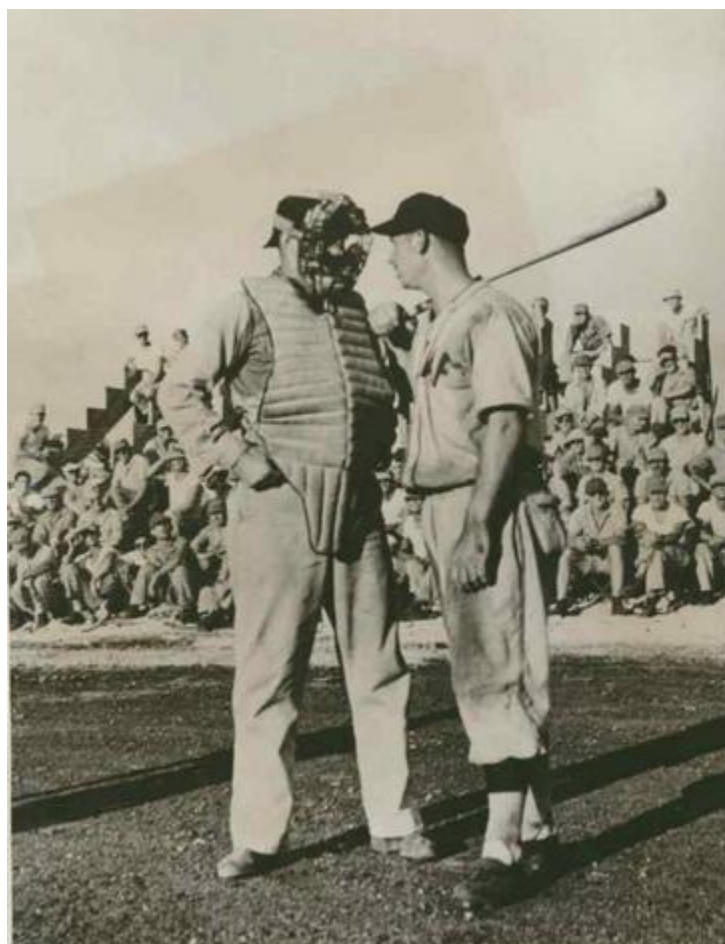
Herm Reich, a first baseman with Portland of the Pacific Coast League before the war, was also with the 73rd Bombers and clearly remembers the conditions on the islands. “The places we played were pretty primitive, they’d throw down a home plate, make a pitcher’s mound and we’d go at it.”

The three teams played a round-robin series of games starting at Tinian on July 27, 1945. “They’d just bring in the Army trucks and jeeps and so forth and park ‘em around the outfield grass beyond the little fence they built,” Billy Hitchcock, third baseman for

the 58th Wingmen, explained to Brent Kelley, author of *The Pastime in Turbulence*. “The soldiers would pack all on those trucks. It was 12,000 there for that opening. Just scattered everywhere, all over the field. Didn’t have much of a foul line because they were sittin’ there in foul territory.”

Buster Mills’ 73rd Bombers beat Birdie Tebbetts’ 58th Wingmen, 4-3, in that opening game with a ninth inning home run from Ferris Fain, and won the round robin series with a second win against Lew Riggs’ 313th Flyers.

“My club was on Saipan,” recalls Charlie Silvera of his days with the 73rd Bombers. “Bomb crates were used as side line markers and also as fences. [Joe] Gordon and [Joe] Marty’s club [the 58th Wingmen] had the most power so we would move



Joe Gordon of the 58th Wingmen discusses a close call with an umpire on Tinian.

Playing Ball in the Marianas (continued)



"They'd just bring in the Army trucks and jeeps and so forth and park 'em around the outfield grass."

the bomb crates back 10 to 20 feet. With the other Tinian club [313th Flyers] we would move the bomb crate fence in depending on who was pitching."

During July and August, series were played on Saipan, Tinian and Guam, with one series being played on Iwo Jima – captured from the Japanese in March 1945 at a cost of 6,821 American lives, including Philadelphia Athletics' catcher Harry O'Neill and minor league players Jack Lummus, Bob Holmes, Jack Nealy and Frank Ciaffone.

In August 1945, Seabees cut a baseball field in the side of a hill on Iwo Jima, built stands and named it Higashi Field. On August 29, Tex Hughson then hurled the 73rd Bombers to a 3-2 win against the 313th Flyers in the opening game. The following day the 58th Wingmen beat the 313th Flyers, 5-4. Enos Slaughter's seventh-inning home run was the winning margin in a game that featured seventeen put outs by the two centerfielders. Swede

Jensen had 11 for the Flyers while Joe Marty hauled in seven for the Wingmen.

On August 31, Nick Popovich threw a 3-0 three-hitter for the 58th Wingmen over the 73rd Bombers to clinch the

Iwo Jima round-robin series. Two days later the three teams were split into National and American League all-star teams for the final game of the tour. Lew Riggs gave the Nationals a 1-0 lead with a homer in the first inning. The American League tied in the bottom of the inning with doubles from Bob Dillinger and Taft Wright. The Nationals then took a 3-1 lead in the second when Nanny Fernandez singled, moved to second on an infield out and scored when Birdie Tebbetts threw into centerfield trying to pick him off. The National League added two more runs in the ninth when Enos Slaughter doubled, Swede Jensen walked, then Herm Reich and Bill Leonard singled. The final score was 5-1 to the senior circuit.

During the tour, a total of 27 games were played before an estimated 180,000 soldiers, sailors and marines. Although not all spectators were Allied as Charlie Silvera explains: "Japanese soldiers would watch the games from the jungle in the background and go back and hide when the game was over."



Relaxing after a game. Max West of the 313th Flyers is standing, far right.

Playing Ball in the Marianas (continued)



Bananas were plentiful on Saipan for the 73rd Bombers.
 (Back row, left to right): Tex Hughson, Dario Lodigiani, Ferris Fain,
 Mike McCormick, unknown.
 (Front row, left to right): Charlie Silvera, unknown, Chet Kehn.

A question often asked regards the amount of effort professional players put into these wartime exhibition games. "We gave everything we had," recalled Stan Rojek, Brooklyn shortstop, who played with the 73rd Bombers. "There was no loafing or protecting yourself. Not before those crowds. Some of us got razed, too, but it was all very friendly."

"[Joe] Gordon got in a fight with [Enos] Slaughter [58th Wingmen teammates]," adds Herm Reich. "Slaughter took out Stan Rojek [73rd Bombers shortstop], and Gordon told him to lighten up. Joe said, 'We're over here fighting for our country; not among ourselves.' Slaughter just played that way. He was an animal.

You couldn't reason with him."

One day, on Saipan, Captain Birdie Tebbetts thought he recognized the deep bleat of a fan who used to get on him every time he played in Cleveland. When Tebbetts came to bat in the seventh inning, he spotted his tormentor and hollered back to the bench: 'That fellow,' he said, pointing, 'has followed me all the way from Cleveland to give me the works.'

Sure enough, it was the same fan who always picked on Tebbetts when the Tigers played in Cleveland. He was a pilot and

succeeded in wrangling some assignments to Tinian or the other islands the ball teams played on just to keep razzing Tebbetts!

Furthermore, the travel was hard work. "God, we traveled all the time," Max West, centerfielder with the 313th Flyers, explained to Todd Anton, author of *No Greater Love*. "We'd go and come into an island, we didn't know where the hell we were, so we'd get in line and say we had flight fatigue and get a shot of whiskey. That's my kind of medicine."

Rugger Ardizoia clearly remembers how important these games were to

the troops. "One day we were playing on Iwo Jima at the same time as a big named band. Playing for the troops we had over 10,000 watching us while the big named band had only about 1,000. The band leader was so disgusted he decided to pack up and leave while we carried on playing."

Despite all the island-hopping playing baseball it should be remembered that the players were still expected to perform their military duties as members of the Army Air Force. "The problem is," Max West explained, "we had a job to do as flight/grounds crewmen and the other problem was they'd tell us about nine o'clock at night and say, 'You're leaving at six o'clock in the morning for wherever.' We didn't know if we were playing ball or getting reassigned to a new squadron."

West worked on the ground crew with the 313th Bombardment Wing. "I saw some horrific crashes ... and we on the ground crew would have to go in and, in all honesty, mop up the human carnage. One time I went in to help, we pulled out this pilot. I do



Joe Gordon of the 58th Wingmen signs baseballs for fans.

Playing Ball in the Marianas (continued)

not remember his name, but he had just flown all of us to Saipan for a ball game a few days before. We pulled him out and got him on a stretcher. He was burned pretty badly, and all I saw were his eyes. They were so white and he looked right at me, his lips kind of smiled and he just died. His face just went blank.”

After the conclusion of the 27 games, Stan Rojek of the 73rd Bombers was crowned the batting champion with a .363 average. Enos Slaughter of the 58th Wingmen finished second at .342 with teammate Joe Gordon finishing third at .328. Taft Wright of the 73rd Bombers was fourth (.319) and Lew Riggs, skipper of the 313th Flyers finished fifth (.314). Riggs led all hitters with 19 RBIs and Gordon took top honors with eight home runs.

Bill Schmidt of the 73rd Bombers was the top pitcher with a 4-1 won-loss record. Carl De Rose of the 313th Flyers was 2-0, while teammate Eddie Chandler struck out 28, but top strikeout artist for the tour was Tex Hughson of the 73rd Bombers with 41.

Following the conclusion of the tour, most of the players were shipped back to the United States and arrived in California in November 1945. The Boys were coming home.



58th Bombardment Wing (Wingmen) Based at West Field, Tinian

Cpl Art Lilly	IF	Hollywood (PCL)
Cpl Chuck Stevens	1B	Toledo (AA)
Sgt Enos Slaughter	RF	Cardinals
Cpl Joe Gordon	SS	Yankees
Cptn Birdie Tebbetts	C/MGR	Tigers
Sgt Joe Marty	CF	Phillies
Lt Billy Hitchcock	3B	Tigers
Pfc Howie Pollet	P	Cardinals
Pfc Chubby Dean	P	Indians
George Gill	P	Indianapolis (AA)
Pfc Ed Kowalski	P	Appleton (Wisc St)
Pete Layden	OF	New Orleans (SA) in 1946
Cpl Don Lang	LF	Kansas City (AA)
Pfc Tom Gabrielli	C	Olean (PONY)
Cpl Roy Pitter	P	Binghamton (Eastern)
S/Sgt Vic Wertz	OF	Buffalo (IL)
Pfc Nick Popovich	P	Waterloo (Three-I)

73rd Bombardment Wing (Bombers) Based at Isley Field, Saipan

Sgt Stan Rojek	SS	Dodgers
Pfc Bob Dillinger	3B	Toledo (AA)
Taft Wright	OF	White Sox
Mike McCormick	OF	Reds
1 st Lt Buster Mills	OF/MGR	Indians
Cpl Charlie Silvera	C	Wellsville (PONY)
S/Sgt Ferris Fain	1B	San Francisco (PCL)
Sgt Dario Lodigiani	IF	White Sox
Pfc Tex Hughson	P	Red Sox
Sgt Sid Hudson	P	Sanford (FSL)
Pfc Chet Kehn	P	Dodgers
Sgt Bill Schmidt	P	Sacramento (PCL)
Cpl Al Lien	P	San Francisco (PCL)
Cpl Johnny Mazur	C	Erwin (Appalachian)
Bill Dudley	Utility	Miami Beach (FIL) in 1946
Ralph Lamson	IF	Sheboygan (Wisc St)
Cpl Herm Reich	1B	Portland (PCL)

313th Bombardment Wing (Flyers) Based at North Field, Tinian

Johnny Sturm	1B	Yankees
Cpl Bob Adams	2B	Syracuse (IL)
Lew Riggs	3B/MGR	Dodgers
Cpl Nanny Fernandez	SS	Braves
Cpl John "Swede" Jensen	LF	San Diego (PCL)
Cpl Max West	CF	Braves
Sgt Walt Judnich	RF	Browns
Cpl Bill Leonard	C	Oakland (PCL)
Burl Storie	C	Tallahassee (GA-FL)
Cpl Ruggier Ardizoia	P	Kansas City (AA)
1 st Lt Stan Goletz	P	White Sox
Cpl Eddie Chandler	P	Pocatello (Pioneer)
Cpl Carl DeRose	P	Amsterdam (Can-Am)
Cpl Al Olsen	P	San Diego (PCL)
Don Loeser		University of Wisconsin football player

Niles "Sonny" Jordan (1925 to 2008)



Niles C "Sonny" Jordan was born on December 1, 1925 in Lyman, Washington. He excelled in sports at Sedro-Woolley High School and enlisted in the Navy upon graduation in 1943.

Jordan served as a radioman second-class on the destroyer *USS Bennett* (DD-473) in the Pacific, taking part at Iwo Jima and Okinawa. On April 7, 1945, the *Bennett* was hit by a Japanese kamikaze fighter, killing seven men and wounding 18. Jordan was not among the casualties.

After being discharged from military service he attended Mount Vernon Junior College where he played baseball and football. Jordan was also pitching for Sedro-Woolley in the local city league and in 1948 he was signed by Philadelphia Phillies' scout Don McShane.

The Phillies sent the 22-year-old left-hander to Klamath Falls of the Far West League where, in 1949, he was 19-7 with a 4.35 ERA. In 1950 he advanced to Terre-Haute of the Three-I League where he was 17-6, and then produced an incredible 21-3 record with Wilmington of the Interstate League in 1951. Jordan pitched 20 complete games, had two one-hitters, four three-hitters, three five-hitters, and earned a late-season call-up to Philadelphia.

He made his major league debut in the second game of a doubleheader against the Cincinnati Reds on August 26, 1951, hurling a 2-0 three-hit shutout. He made a further four starts before the close of the season and finished with a 2-3 record and 3.19 ERA.

Despite his promising debut the Phillies traded Jordan to Cincinnati in December 1951. He was 10-12 with Tulsa of the Texas League in 1952 and returned to the majors with the Reds in September making three brief appearances.

Jordan was back with Tulsa and then Rochester of the International League in 1953. He pitched for Richmond of the same league in 1955 and 1956, joined pennant-winning Toronto in 1957 and ended his playing days with Portland of the Pacific Coast League in May 1958.

Jordan returned to Washington after retiring from baseball and worked briefly at Skagit Steel before starting a long career in the shake/lumber mill industry with Willis Rogers and Pearson.

An avid golfer and a former member of the Skagit Golf and Country Club, Sonny Jordan passed away at the

Life Care Center of Skagit Valley in Sedro-Woolley, Washington on March 15, 2008. He was 82 years old.

Charley Ridgeway (1923 to 2008)

Charley Ridgeway served as a P-51 Mustang pilot during World War II before playing in the minor leagues from 1946 and 1953. His best seasons were with the Fitzgerald Pioneers of the Georgia State League. In 1950 with the Pioneers he batted .322 with 81 RBIs. Then in 1952 he hit .361 (second best in the league) and drove in 74.

After retiring as a player, Ridgeway spent 45 years as a radio sportscaster for Fitzgerald High and Irwin County High schools in Georgia.

In 1997 he was awarded the Beverly Sanders Raines Award by the Georgia Athletic Coaches Association.

Charley Ridgeway passed away at the Life Care Center in Fitzgerald, Georgia on April 19, 2008. He was 84.

Thanks to Clint Chafin of the Deep South Class D Baseball website for bringing this to my attention.

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