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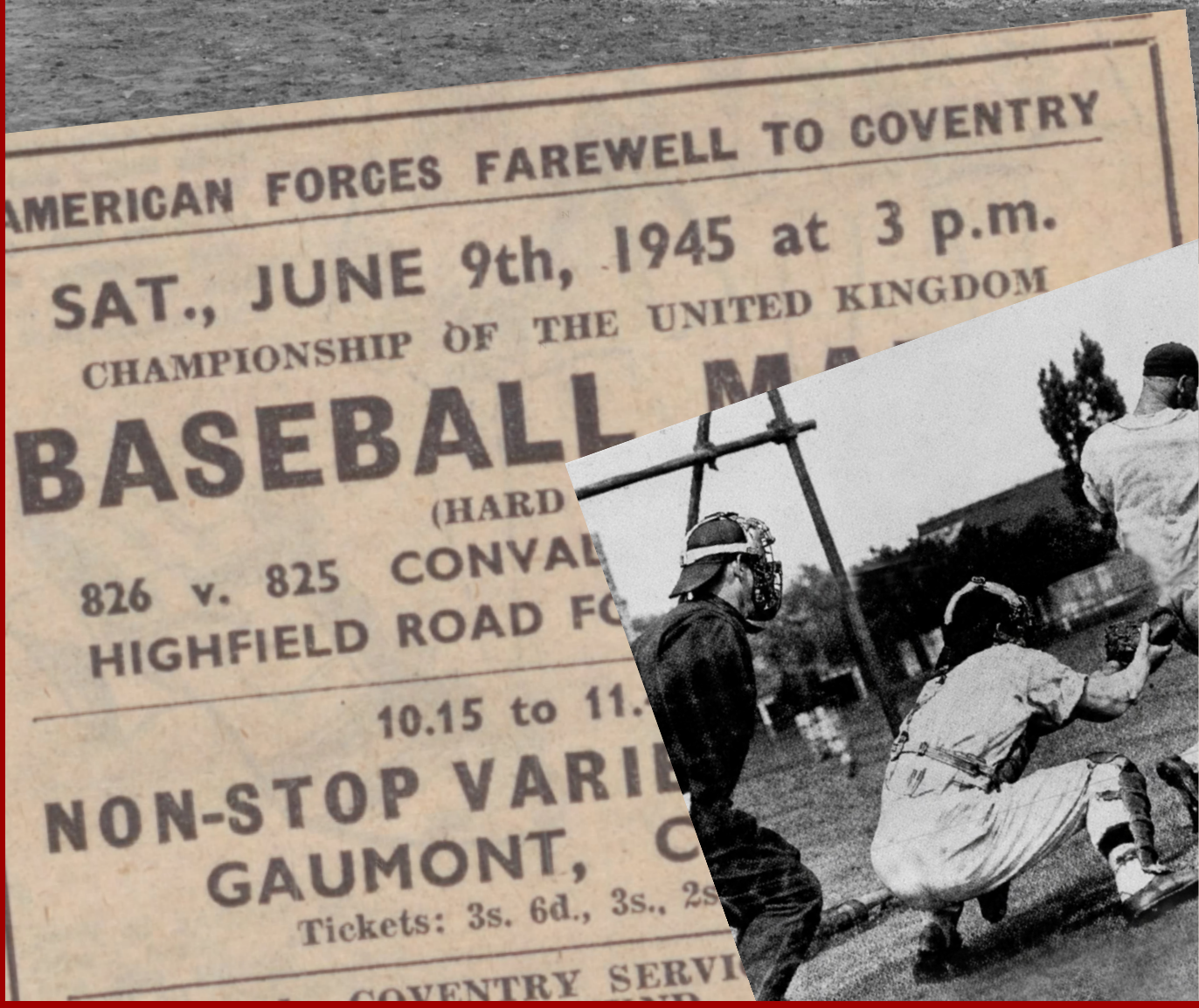
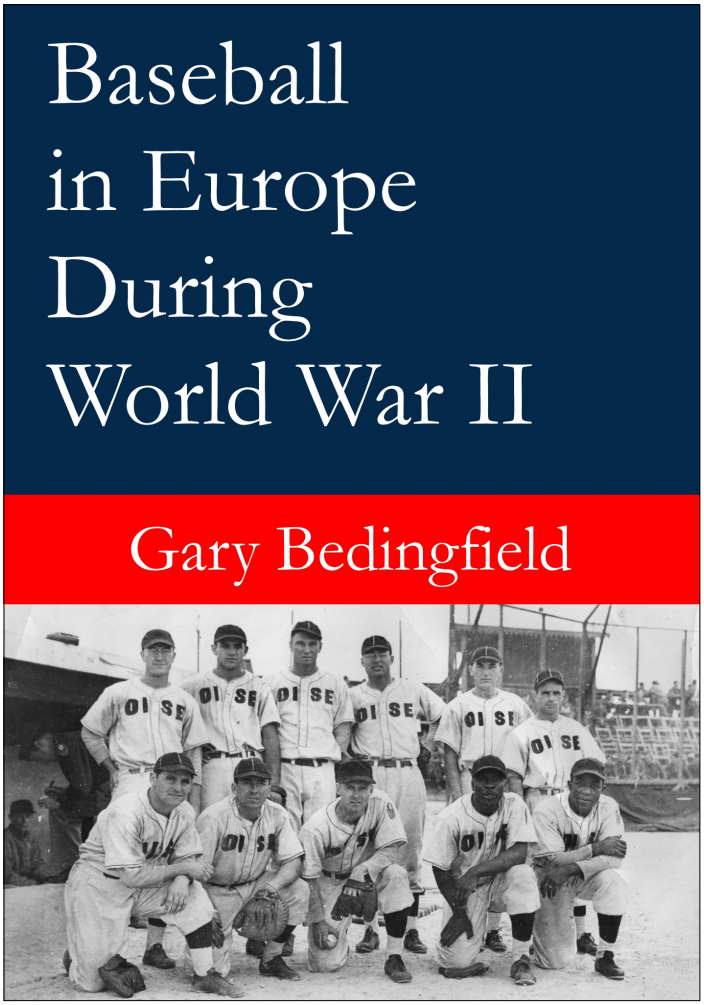


An exciting announcement about a new book in development!

Welcome!



Welcome to the latest edition of the *Baseball in Wartime Newsletter*! This one is a little extra special, as I'm excited to share news about my newest book project—*Baseball in Europe During World War II*. Serving as a companion to *Baseball in Hawaii During World War II*, this book will revisit and substantially expand upon my earlier work, *Baseball in World War II Europe* (Arcadia Publishing, 1999).

It's hard to believe nearly three decades have passed since that original publication. In the years since, I've uncovered a wealth of new material on wartime baseball across Europe, making it the right time for a fresh, updated edition. This new version will not only incorporate that additional research, but will also broaden the scope to include North Africa and Italy alongside mainland Europe. While there's still much to be done, I wanted to give you an early look by sharing a draft chapter in this newsletter.

Titled *Black American Baseball at War*, this chapter represents, to my knowledge, the first in-depth account of Black American ballplayers in the European Theater. It explores Negro League players in service overseas, the role of integrated baseball, the experiences of the 92nd Infantry Division Buffalo Soldiers, connections to the Tuskegee Airmen and the Red Ball Express, as well as pivotal and often overlooked events such as the tragedy of the Wereth 11, and baseball's link to the little-known Battle of Bamber Bridge.

I hope you enjoy this preview chapter (as well as the sample cover above), and I'd be delighted to hear your thoughts or any comments you may have.

Gary Bedingfield

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What's inside?

Black American Baseball at War

A draft chapter from my forthcoming book: *Baseball in Europe During World War II*

> "If a Negro can enter the Army and work his way up to lieutenant, there is no reason why he should not wear the uniform of the Montreal baseball club."
> *Branch Rickey talking about the signing of Jackie Robinson to the Inter-Faith Clergy Council of Freeport, Rhode Island in December 1945*

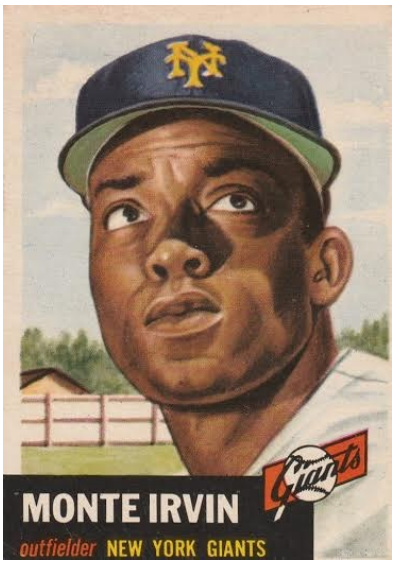
As American forces pushed across Europe and fought their way through the Mediterranean, the contributions of Black servicemen unfolded largely beyond the spotlight afforded to their white counterparts. Serving in segregated units and often assigned to labor, engineering, or support roles, Black Americans nonetheless found themselves at the center of the largest overseas military theaters of World War II. From the beaches of North Africa to supply routes in Italy and France, they endured the same dangers of war—enemy fire, exhaustion, loss—while also carrying the weight of a nation that denied them full equality even in uniform.

Men of the 826th Aviation Engineer Battalion, enjoy a ball game between building an airfield in Northamptonshire, England in 1943.

Yet amid the hardships and constraints of military life, baseball persisted as a vital refuge and a quiet act of affirmation. Diamonds sprang up near airfields, supply depots, and encampments, offering moments of normalcy and shared purpose. For many of these men, the game was not a novelty discovered overseas but a continuation of a life already shaped by baseball. Before donning military issue, some had played in the Negro Leagues, on formidable industrial teams, in semi-professional circuits, or on sandlots that served as proving grounds for talent and resolve. Their wartime service carried those experiences forward, blending the rhythms of baseball with the realities of war, and anchoring the sport as an essential thread in the broader story of Black Americans in World War II.

Negro League Players in Europe and the Mediterranean

Like their white major league counterparts, many Negro League players sacrificed years of their prime athletic careers to serve their country during World War II, often doing so under far more restrictive and inequitable conditions. Hundreds of Black ballplayers enlisted or were drafted and deployed to Europe and the Mediterranean. Some found opportunities to continue playing baseball in uniform, while many spent the war performing demanding noncombat roles—engineering, transportation, logistics, and labor—facing discrimination in housing, promotion, and recognition. The physical strain of military service, battlefield injuries, and years away from regular league play permanently altered or shortened many careers, costing players statistics, income, and visibility. Nevertheless, their wartime experiences strengthened arguments for racial integration in sports and society, as Black servicemen returned home having proven their discipline, leadership, and excellence under the most extreme circumstances.



Among the Negro League players serving in Europe and the mediterranean were Russell A. Awkard, an outfielder with the Newark Eagles and New York Cubans, Hall of Famer Willard J. Brown, and Byron E. “Mex” Johnson of the Kansas City Monarchs, who served with the Quartermaster Corps; William Carter of the Birmingham Black Barons was in North Africa and Europe; William A. “Babe” Charter, a first baseman with the Chicago American Giants was in France; Hall of Famer Leon Day landed supplies at Utah Beach, Normandy with the 818th Amphibious Truck Company; Hall of Famer Monte Irvin was with the 1313th Engineer General Service Regiment during the Battle of the Bulge (the regiment was positioned at Reims, France forming a secondary defensive line in case the Germans broke through); Leonard L. Lindsay, a first baseman with the Cincinnati Clowns and Birmingham Black Barons was stationed in Germany; James R. “Red” Moore, a first baseman with the Newark Eagles and Baltimore Elite Giants, and John F. Ritchey, a catcher with the Chicago American Giants, were both with the combat engineers in Europe; Joseph B. Scott, a first baseman with the Memphis Red Sox, served with the 46th Field Artillery Brigade—the first US Army brigade composed entirely of Black American troops; Lonnie Summers, an outfielder with the Baltimore Elite Giants, served with the highly decorated 614th Tank Destroyer Battalion; Hank Thompson, an outfielder with the Kansas City Monarchs who went on to play nine years in the majors, was with the 1695th Engineer Combat Battalion during the Battle of the Bulge; and Ed Young, a first baseman with the Chicago American Giants was stationed in Italy.

Buffalo Soldiers

The 92nd Infantry Division, known as the Buffalo Soldiers, occupies an important place in World War II as the only Black American infantry division to engage in sustained ground combat in the European Theater. Activated in 1942 and deployed to Italy in 1944, the division served primarily along the rugged terrain of northern Italy, including the Apennine Mountains and the heavily fortified Gothic Line. Over the course of the campaign, approximately 14,000 Black American soldiers served with the division, conducting patrols, assaults, defensive operations, and extended engagements against well-entrenched German and Italian Social Republic fascist forces. Combat conditions were demanding, and the division sustained more than 3,000 casualties, including several hundred killed in action.

The wartime experience of the 92nd Infantry Division had consequences that extended beyond its combat operations. The division demonstrated on a large scale that Black American troops could perform effectively in front-line roles, influencing military leaders and policymakers during and after the war. Members of the division received thousands of individual decorations, including Silver Stars, Bronze Stars, Purple Hearts, and other commendations for valor and service; decades later, acts of heroism by 92nd soldiers were further recognized with Medals of Honor awarded retroactively. The division's service contributed directly to the growing body of evidence that segregation weakened military efficiency, helping shape the environment that led to President Harry S. Truman's 1948 executive order desegregating the US armed forces. In this way, the 92nd Infantry Division played a measurable role in the transformation of the American military during and after World War II, bridging combat service and institutional change.

> "I needed the 92nd and if anyone had tried to take it from me I would have protested loudly."
> *General Mark W. Clark, Commander US Fifth Army*

Serving with the 92nd in Italy were John Q. A. "Bud" Barbee, a first baseman with the New York Black Yankees, Philadelphia Stars, and Baltimore Elite Giants; James E. "Joe" Greene, a catcher with the Atlanta Black Crackers, and the Kansas City Monarchs; Johnny L. Hundley, an outfielder with the Cleveland Buckeyes; Frank L. Duncan, Jr., catcher and manager of the Kansas City Monarchs; Willis "Red" Applegate, a post-war pitcher with the Newark Eagles, who was also a professional boxer and fought the legendary Rocky Marciano in 1951; Joseph J. Siddle, a post-war first baseman with the Carolina Negro League's Greensboro Red Wings; Robert "Bob" Branson, a windmill-style southpaw with the Spartanburg Sluggers, and Atlanta Black Crackers; Isaac L. "Ike" Wheeler, an outfielder with the Jax Red Sox, and New Orleans Black Pelicans; Jesse E. Armour, a third baseman with Xavier University, New Orleans and various local semi-pro teams; and Robert A. Pelham, who played semi-pro baseball in Washington, DC., was the son of the founder and editor of the Detroit Plaindealer, and brother of Sara Pelham Speaks, the first Black woman to be a major party's nominee for a Congressional seat.

Staff Sergeant Walter Houston was with the 365th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division. Before military service he had worked in New York as a butcher, while occasionally playing first base for the New York Black Yankees in the late 1930s. In early April 1945, Houston was the senior non-commissioned officer of an 18-man long-range combat patrol that went ahead of advancing forces to identify German withdrawal routes and locate machine-gun nests and minefields during the Apuan Alps offensive. Pinned down by enemy machine-guns, the patrol was forced to dig in and wait for American forces to break

through. Houston was one of only four of the 18-man patrol to survive. He was awarded the Bronze Star medal for “meritorious achievement in direct support of combat operations.”

Private First-Class Grady G. Mabry had played semi-pro baseball before the war with the Colored Lindale Dragons in Georgia. He served with the 366th Infantry Regiment, 92nd Infantry Division. When a massive German assault was launched on the windswept Italian mountain village of Sommocolonia on December 26, 1944, a scant two platoons of American infantrymen were dug in there. For twenty critical hours, the tiny complement of 70 GIs—all of them Black—held up a major German offensive. When it was over, most of the GIs were dead, including 33-year-old Mabry.

With the war over in Italy, baseball played a leading role in keeping the men of the 92nd occupied. The 92nd Infantry Division Buffaloes—with Barbee, Greene, Hundley, Applegate, Siddle, Branson, and Wheeler in the line-up—were the powerhouse team of Zone 4 (Livorno-Pisa). During September 1945, in front of regular crowds of 20,000 fans at Yankee Stadium in Livorno, the Buffaloes eased their way through the mostly-white competition in a double elimination tournament and were crowned Mediterranean Theater champions.

At the end of September, the European Theater champions, Oise All-Stars—led by major league pitcher Sam Nahem, along with Negro League stars Leon Day and Willard Brown, and boosted with the presence of ETO major leaguers Maurice Van Robays, Harry Walker, and Ewell Blackwell—arrived in Livorno for the best-of-five GI World Series with the Buffaloes. Despite strengthening their line-up with a number of players from the other Italian zones, the Buffaloes were no match for the big league line-up and were defeated in three straight games.

Tuskegee Airmen

The Tuskegee Airmen (99th Fighter Squadron and the 332nd Fighter Group) played a pivotal role in World War II as the US Army Air Forces’ first operational all-Black flying units. Formed in the face of entrenched racial segregation and skepticism about Black pilots’ abilities, the Tuskegee Airmen trained at Tuskegee Army Air Field in Alabama, and deployed to the Mediterranean Theater (North Africa, Sicily, and Italy). They built an exceptional record escorting bombers over occupied Europe, earning a reputation for discipline, effectiveness, and reliability. The group flew thousands of sorties, destroyed enemy aircraft and ground targets, and earned numerous decorations.

Captain Edward C. Gleed had played baseball and basketball at the University of Kansas before enlisting in military service in February 1941. He graduated as a fighter pilot with the Army Air Force in December 1942 and became the first Black pilot to fly the Bell P□39 Airacobra—an unconventional fighter noted for its mid□engine design and nose□mounted cannon. In 1944, Gleed went overseas as commanding officer of the all-Black 302nd Fighter Squadron, 332nd Fighter Group, based at Montecorvino Airfield, near Salerno, Italy. In April 1944, he was sent to North

Africa as a test pilot for high altitude flying and was the first Black American to fly the North American P-51 Mustang and the Lockheed P-38 Lightning twin-boom fighter. Returning to the 332nd, Gleed became the Group Operations Officer, second in command to Colonel Benjamin O. Davis, Jr. On July 17, 1944, Gleed and his fellow Tuskegee Airmen were escorting bombers when enemy fighters attacked. He shot down two Focke-Wulf FW190s and damaged a third, earning him the Distinguished Flying Cross. Gleed was the eighth Black American to receive the DFC at that point. He later served in the Korean War and Vietnam, retiring from the Air Force in 1970 with the rank of colonel.

First Lieutenant Samuel M. "Sammie" Bruce, from Seattle, Washington, had played third base for the Yakima Giants, a Black team that won the Yakima Twilight League title in 1934, and the Puget Sound League's Seattle American Giants, league champions in 1938. He was also a standout quarterback at North Carolina A&T from 1939 to 1941, and was selected All-CIAA quarterback in 1939. Entering military service in 1942, he trained to be a fighter pilot as part of the Tuskegee Airmen and was with the 99th Fighter Squadron in the Mediterranean Theater.

Piloting a Curtiss P-40 Warhawk, Bruce flew patrol and bomber escort missions and attacked enemy ground targets on the Italian islands of Pantelleria and Sicily, as well as the Italian mainland. The 99th transferred to Licata, Sicily, in July 1943, and Bruce was named among the "eight best Negro fighter pilots" by Thomas W. Young, a correspondent with the New Journal and Guide. "Sam Bruce is just as a good a competitor in the cockpit of a fighter plane," wrote Young, "as he ever was in the boxing ring, on the football field, or baseball diamond. He still knows how to make the most of his chances and keep from grumbling when the going gets tough."

The 99th moved to Capodichino Airfield (now Naples International Airport), Italy, in January 1944. On January 27, 1944, Bruce was part of a formation of 16 fighter planes that spotted German Focke-Wulf FW190s dive-bombing shipping near Anzio. During the attack, Bruce's P□40 was hit by flak, and although he bailed out, he was killed when his parachute failed to open.

The Wereth 11

Technician Fourth-Class Aubrey Stewart, who served with the all-Black 333rd Field Artillery Battalion, had played for more than two decades for the Piedmont Colored Giants. The Giants were a semi-pro team that played all-comers in West Virginia and surrounding states with Stewart doing much of the pitching and playing first base when he wasn't.

The 333rd, equipped with 155mm howitzers, entered combat in Europe in July 1944, providing artillery support through Normandy, Brittany, and Northern France. It faced the full brunt of the German offensive at the Battle of the Bulge in December 1944. Cut off from Allied forces on the second day, Stewart and ten other men from the 333rd walked 10 miles in deep snow and freezing conditions before reaching the apparent safety of a farmhouse in the tiny hamlet of Wereth, Belgium. The farmhouse was owned by the mayor of Wereth, Mathias Langer, who gladly took them in and fed them. But someone in town—a Nazi sympathizer—tipped off the nearby German forces. An hour later, a four-man SS patrol arrived and escorted the 11 Black Americans into a cow pasture under guard, where they were brutally murdered.

For two months, the body of 37-year-old Aubrey Stewart and his comrades lay in the snow until villagers directed a unit of the US 99th Infantry Division to the site. Army autopsies later showed signs of torture with broken bones and bayonet wounds inflicted. In May 2004, a memorial was dedicated to the men who had become known as the Wereth 11 on the site where the massacre took place and a sign now stands in Piedmont, West Virginia, honoring Aubrey Stewart.

Integrated Baseball

On June 17, 1945, an all-professional game was staged at Stamford Bridge, home of Chelsea Football Club in London, England. Competing in the game were the Greys and the Whites—teams that combined the talents of the US Army and Army Air Force. The line-ups included two former major leaguers—pitcher Ted Kleinhans of the Cincinnati Reds and first baseman Paul Campbell of the Boston Red Sox, along with one Black American—pitcher John F. "Ford" Smith of the Kansas City Monarchs. All three played for the Greys, while the majority of other players in the game were minor leaguers.

With the Whites ahead, 5-3, in the sixth, Smith—a six-foot-one-inch right-hander—entered the game and closed out the inning for the Greys. In the top of the ninth, with the Whites still holding a two-run lead, a couple of errors and a single clawed back one run. Smith, at the plate, then drew a walk to load the bases and a double turned the game on its head with the Greys taking a 7-5 lead. In the bottom of the ninth, Smith, who had not allowed a hit in the previous two-and-two-thirds innings, continued his dazzling performance and retired the Whites in order to secure the win. Smith played three seasons with the Kansas City Monarchs after the war.

Sam Nahem—major league pitcher with the Dodgers, Cardinals, and Phillies—didn't mind including Black American players on the Oise All-Stars because racial integration was already a core part of his personal values and political beliefs. As a Jewish American who had faced prejudice himself and as a left-leaning activist who believed deeply in equality, Nahem saw segregation in baseball as both morally wrong and fundamentally irrational. During World War II, he viewed the fight against fascism abroad as inseparable from the fight against racism at home, aligning with the wartime "Double V" ideal of victory over tyranny and discrimination. As player-manager of the Oise All-Stars in 1945, he insisted on welcoming elite Negro League stars Leon Day and Willard Brown, valuing talent, teamwork, and fairness over Jim Crow customs.

Day was almost 29 years old and had been the ace of the Newark Eagles' pitching staff before entering military service in 1943, while Brown, 30, was a hard-hitting outfielder with the Kansas City Monarchs. They joined Nahem's ragtag ball team of minor leaguers, semi-pros, sandlotters, and high school stars with one aim in mind—to win the ETO World Series.

The Oise All-Stars, based in Reims, France, had clinched the Communications Zone (Com Z) title in early August 1945, by defeating tough opposition including the AAC (Assembly Area Command) All-Stars, which is where Nahem first saw Day and Brown play. Both men joined Nahem's team as they battled through the quarter finals and semi finals to reach the ETO World Series, where they would face the mighty 71st Infantry Division Red Circlers (representing the US Third Army); a team that featured no less than nine former major leaguers, including Ewell Blackwell, Harry "The Hat" Walker, Ken Trinkle, Maurice Van Robays, and Benny Zientara.

As predicted, and with 50,000 fans cheering them on at Soldiers' Field, Nuremberg, Germany, the 71st Red Circlers dominated the first game of the best-of-five series with an 9-2 win over the Oise All-Stars behind the pitching of Ewell Blackwell. The ETO crown seemed secure, but everything changed with the second game. In front of 45,000 at Soldiers' Field, Leon Day handcuffed the 71st hitters, while Brown drove in the All-Stars first run in a 2-1 victory. Against a major-league packed line-up Day struck out 10, allowed four hits and walked two.

With Nahem on the mound for the third game at Headquarters Command Athletic Field, Reims, Brown again scored the All-Stars first run in another tight, 2-1, win, to give them an unexpected two-games-to-one advantage in the series. In the fourth game, it was hoped Leon Day would work his magic again and clinch the ETO title for the All-Stars in front of their home crowd, but he didn't have his stuff. Day didn't see out the fourth inning in the 5-0 defeat that tied the series at two apiece, sending the series back to Germany for the final game. In front of their opponent's home crowd the integrate underdog Oise All-Stars were able to clinch the series with a 2-1 win.

Fund-Raising Games in England

Baseball and softball played by Black American military teams participated in numerous fund-raising events in Britain during the war, and on August 7, 1944, at Long Eaton, Derbyshire, troops stationed nearby even competed in a distance throwing contest using a cricket ball. Sergeant Hatfield set a local record by hurling the ball 351 feet.

The highest exposure event involving Black American troops in Britain was the elaborate "American Games Day" in Glasgow, Scotland on October 31, 1942. Before a crowd of 29,750 at Hampden Park soccer

stadium, there was a quarter of football, a five-inning baseball game and a softball game that was staged by two locally based black military teams. Known for the day as the Homestead Grays and the Harlem Eagles, they put on a crowd-pleasing exhibition of crazy antics and helped raise £2,000 ($8,000) for the Scottish Red Cross Prisoners of War Fund.

The Battle of Bamber Bridge

Edwin D. Jones attended City College New York between 1935 and 1939—a tuition-free public college known for strict academic standards and a large population of working-class students. He played football and was on the varsity boxing team at CCNY but played baseball in the summer months in Mexico and with the Dunseith Colored Giants in Dunseith, North Dakota.

The Colored Giants had a remarkable history. The team originated as the Shreveport Acme Colored Giants, a Louisiana-based barnstorming club. In 1936, they traveled north on a summer tour but their journey took an unexpected turn when their bus broke down in Dunseith—a small town with a population of around 700, located in northern North Dakota near the Canadian border. The team's manager promptly disappeared, leaving an unpaid garage bill, the players stranded and no means to continue their tour. However, local white business leaders in Dunseith stepped in, paid the bills, housed the players, and reorganized the club under a new name—the Dunseith Acme Giants, but more often referred to in the press as the Dunseith Colored Giants. Free of the Jim Crow restrictions they faced in the South, the Dunseith Colored Giants—with future Negro League star and Hall of Famer Buck O'Neil - played more than 100 games across North Dakota, Montana, Idaho, and Canada, during the summer of 1936. Although many of the team members returned home after that summer, the Dunseith Colored Giants existed until 1939, often with white players outnumbering their black teammates. While playing for the Colored Giants, Edwin Jones was often one of only two black players on the team.

Following his graduation from CCNY, Jones became head football coach at Central Colored School in Shreveport. He entered military service in December 1941 and was soon in England with the Army Air Force. He entered Officer Candidate School in 1943, an achievement that was highly uncommon for Black Americans at the time, as access to officer training in the segregated US Army was severely restricted and granted to very few. Following graduation in April 1943, Lieutenant Jones was assigned the role of Athletic and Recreation Officer with the 1511th Quartermaster Truck Regiment of the Eighth Air Force Support Command, stationed at Adam Hall, a logistics base in Bamber Bridge, Lancashire. The 1511th was made up almost entirely of Black American soldiers handling the essential over the road transportation of fuel, bombs, rations, construction material, and spare parts to bomber stations.

Jones was the only black officer with the 1511th and in his role he was responsible for maintaining morale, physical fitness, and mental resilience among his men. He organized and supervised a wide range of sports and physical activities, planned recreational programs such as dances, concerts, talent shows, film screenings, and hobby clubs, and worked closely with the American Red Cross, the USO, and British

civilian organizations to secure facilities, entertainers, and equipment. The 1511th baseball team that he organized won 17 of 19 games played in 1943, 15 of them were consecutive victories.

Black American soldiers were welcomed by the local residents of Bamber Bridge, and freely used the village pubs and social venues, where there was no tradition of racial segregation. They drank, socialized, and mixed openly with white British civilians and servicemen, a sharp contrast to the segregation enforced by the US military.

On the evening of June 24, 1943, Black American soldiers of the 1511th were drinking with British locals at Ye Olde Hob Inn public house. Around closing time, the US Army's Military Police responded to trouble at the pub. An argument ensued between the soldiers and the MPs and although the situation was defused, a beer was thrown at the MPs' jeep. As the soldiers made their way back to camp, they were met with more MPs who were there to arrest them. A fight broke out, the MPs opened fire and one Black soldier was shot in the back and killed. The killing caused panic and upon returning to the base rumors spread that the MPs were out to kill Black soldiers. Lieutenant Jones played an important role in de□escalating tensions at that time and in persuading the soldiers that the acting commanding officer of the 1511th would be able to round up the MPs and see that justice was done, but Jones lacked meaningful authority over white Military Police or his senior white officers, leaving him effectively marginalized both during the crisis and in its aftermath.

Around midnight, a large group of armed MPs arrived at the camp, prompting the Black soldiers to arm themselves. A firefight broke out between them and the MPs, which resulted in seven wounded—five soldiers and two MPs. Following what became known as the Battle of Bamber Bridge, 32 Black American soldiers were court-martialed and convicted of mutiny and related offences—with sentences later reduced on review—while no white Military Police were prosecuted. The Battle of Bamber Bridge came to represent the unequal and discriminatory treatment of Black American soldiers, who were punished for resisting segregation while white authorities faced no accountability.

The Red Ball Express

In the late summer and autumn of 1944, as Allied forces surged across France after the Normandy breakout, the Red Ball Express became the lifeline of the American advance in Europe—a nonstop supply network of trucks hauling fuel, ammunition, food, and spare parts from the Normandy beaches to the rapidly moving front. At the heart of this effort were tens of thousands of Black American servicemen, most serving in segregated Quartermaster and transportation units, whose skill and endurance kept the armies rolling when rail lines were shattered and ports were still coming online. Driving overloaded trucks day and night along narrow, bomb-scarred roads, often under enemy fire and with little rest, these soldiers transformed logistical necessity into operational momentum. Their contributions, vital yet long overlooked, sustained Patton's dash, underwrote Allied victories, and challenged prejudice through performance.

Black American ball players were at the heart of the Red Ball Express. Max Manning, renowned for his sidearm fastball, was a key member of the Newark Eagles in the 1930s and 40s. Nicknamed "Dr. Cyclops" for his thick glasses, he was a Red Ball Express driver. Herb Simpson, who played for the Seattle Steelheads in the West Coast Negro Baseball League after the war and spent three years in the minors with Spokane and Albuquerque, served as a dispatcher—coordinating truck movements, assigning routes,

schedules, and cargo priorities to keep supplies moving quickly and avoid congestion. Josh "Brute" Johnson, a catcher with the Homestead Grays, New York Black Yankees, and Cincinnati Tigers, served as a second lieutenant in an anti-aircraft unit providing protection for the Red Ball Express.

Barrett Field

With the cease of hostilities in Europe, the all-Black 549th Engineer Light Pontoon Company set about constructing a baseball field in Öhringen, Germany in honor of one of their fallen comrades.

The 549th was formed at Camp Hood, Texas, arrived in England in December 1944 and was in action in Germany by March 1945 as part of the 1150th Engineer Combat Group. Its soldiers built critical river crossings at the Saar, Main, Danube, Lech, Inn, and Saalach Rivers, directly enabling armored and airborne advances into Nazi Germany. Technical Sergeant Elmer G. Barrett of Philadelphia had been with the 549th since their formation in the spring of 1943. He was killed instantly on April 20, 1945, by a mine explosion while trying to remove a wrecked jeep from a minefield.

The former cow pasture in Öhringen was converted into a baseball field and dedicated to Technical Sergeant Barrett at the start of the 1150th Engineer Combat Group baseball season, complete with scoreboards, backstop, bleacher seats and white ropes fencing the field in.

Breaking the Color Line

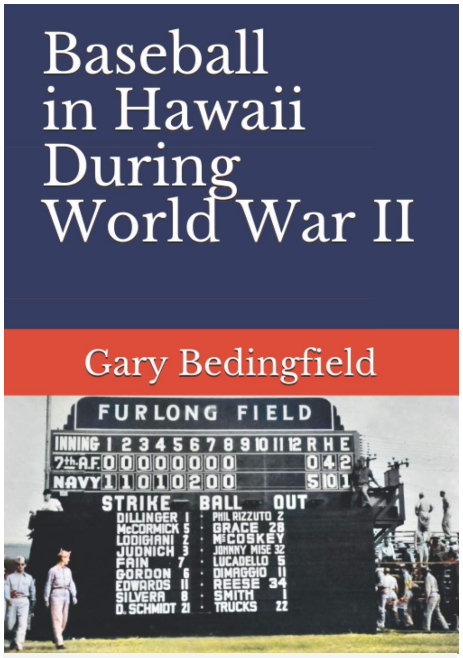
On October 23, 1945, the Brooklyn Dodgers signed Jackie Robinson, marking a turning point in American sport and society. After decades of exclusion, Black baseball players were finally given the opportunity to compete alongside their white counterparts on the national stage. Many of these athletes, including Negro League stars such as Hank Thompson and Monte Irvin, had already proven their courage and patriotism on the battlefields of Europe, fighting to defend the very ideals of democracy that had long been denied them at home. Their transition into Major League Baseball not only demonstrated their undeniable talent but also challenged entrenched racial barriers, paving the way for a new generation of Black players—among them Willie Mays, Ernie Banks, and Hank Aaron—whose excellence would permanently reshape the game and the nation alike.

"I've already done a lot of thinking about this whole racial situation in our country. As a member of the Senate Military Affairs Committee, I got to know a lot about our casualties during the war. Plenty of Negro boys were willing to go out and fight and die for this country. Is it right, when they come back, to tell them they can't play the national pastime?

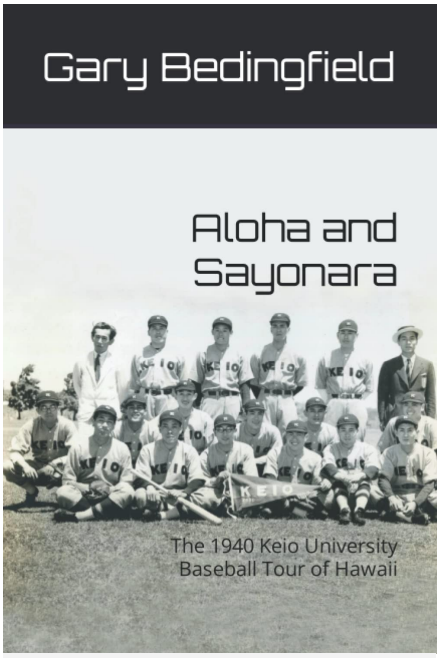
"You know, Branch, I'm going to have to meet my Maker someday. And if He asks me why I didn't let this boy play, and I say it's because he's black, that might not be a satisfactory answer.

"If the Lord made some people black, and some white, and some red or yellow, he must have had a pretty good reason. It isn't my job to decide which colors can play big league baseball. It is my job to see that the game is fairly played and that everybody has an equal chance."
A. B. "Happy" Chandler (Commissioner of Baseball) to Brooklyn Dodgers' executive Branch Rickey

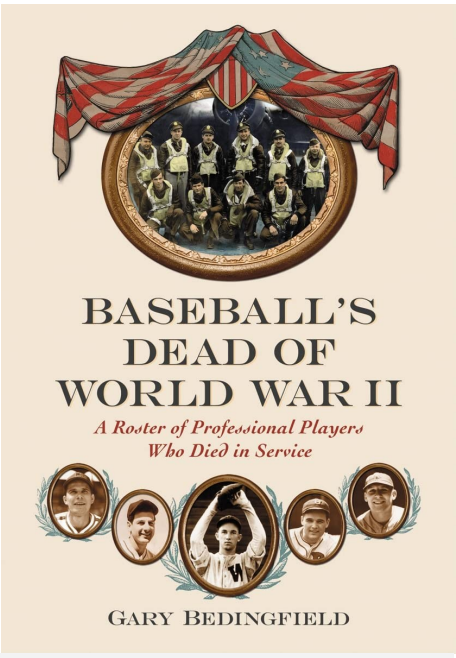
Books by Gary Bedingfield



Baseball in Hawaii During World War II
2021
Paperback
343 pages



Aloha and Sayonara
The 1940 Keio University Baseball Tour of Hawaii
2022
Paperback
47 pages



Baseball's Dead of World War II
2009
Paperback
272 pages

All books are available worldwide through amazon.

What else does Gary Bedingfield do?

Gary Bedingfield isn't just a baseball researcher—since 2009, through Gary Bedingfield Training, he has worked with organisations across the private, public, and third sectors to provide innovative, cost-effective business skills courses that support staff training and professional development. His expertise spans Train the Trainer programmes, staff and career development, employment advice, and coaching, all underpinned by a deep understanding of learning strategies and a commitment to helping people reach their full potential. This approach has made his services increasingly sought after nationwide, with clients ranging from BBC Scotland, and BP to the Ministry of Defence, NHS Scotland, universities, and major companies such as Arnold Clark and Tunnocks. In short, he plays a vital role in helping Scotland's workforce grow, adapt, and thrive.

www.garybedingfield.co.uk