

# Gary Bedingfield's BASEBALL IN WARTIME

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[WWW.BASEBALLINWARTIME.CO.UK](http://WWW.BASEBALLINWARTIME.CO.UK)

## Merry Christmas to you all!



Lou Brissie, Johnny Pesky, Jerry Coleman, Curt Schilling, Herb Simpson and Tommy Lasorda. So I will always look back on 2007 with fond memories.

I am stunned at the success of the newsletter. What was originally planned as a quarterly publication quickly became monthly through popular demand and is now distributed to a mailing list that is barely manageable!

January's issue is already in production and will focus on the players that served in the Battle of the Bulge

But, looking ahead to 2008, there's plenty more work to be done. I hope to add many more player biographies and put together some accounts of the big service teams of WWII - like Great Lakes, Norfolk NTS, Fort Riley and the teams in Hawaii. I would also like to hear what you - the website visitors and newsletter readers - are

looking for. Sometimes, when trying to put together the history of wartime baseball I seem to get overwhelmed by the vast amount of information I still need to add. If you are looking for something in particular then please let me know. You can email me any time at [garybed@gmail.com](mailto:garybed@gmail.com). I'd be happy to hear from you.

One project for early next year is to get to the Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum in Cooperstown in an effort to include some of

their vast resources on this website. I will also be visiting La Fiere, in Normandy, France, where Forest "Lefty" Brewer (a minor league pitcher in the Senators' organization) lost his life on D-Day 1944.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who has assisted me with the Baseball in Wartime website. The list is far too big to name you all but I want to assure you that this project would not be possible without your support. Thank you.

So, as we approach that magical time of the year, I want to wish you all a Very Merry Christmas and a Happy and Prosperous New Year!

*Gary Bedingfield*

*(founder and editor of Baseball in Wartime)*

**A**nother year passes and this has been by far the most successful year for the Baseball in Wartime website and newsletter. I have added something in the region of 300 new biographies this year, almost finalized the list of minor league players killed in WWII and taken part in the *Duty, Honor, Country: When Baseball Went to War* conference in New Orleans.

In New Orleans I had the opportunity to meet many people I have previously only communicated with by email. They include: Bill Swank, Todd Anton, Bill Nowlin, Ted Spencer, Brad Brech, Gary Moore, Kerry Nakagawa and S Derby Gisclair. I've made many new friends including Lenny Yochim, Carrie Corbett and Bill Detweiler, and been in the company of Bob Feller, Morrie Martin,



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## Ray Champagne and the Third Marine Division All-Stars



Ray Champagne batting for the Third Marine Division All-Stars in the Pacific.

Third baseman Ray Champagne was born in the small industrial town of Woonsocket, 15 miles north of Providence, Rhode Island in 1921. At the age of 15 he played for the Kornstein Juniors who won the Junior Twilight League. He also played high school baseball at Franklin High and American Legion ball in Providence.

After leaving high school, Champagne played for the Model Dairy team that won

In 1942, Champagne played for Marquette in the New England League. He joined the Marines in July 1942 and served in the Pacific with the Third Marine Division.

Following the Guadalcanal campaign in 1943, Corporal Champagne helped guide the HQ Battalion baseball team to the Third Marine Division pennant. The team's line-up included Art Manush (nephew of Hall of Famer Heinie Manusch and a minor league player before the



3rd Marine Division team on Guam in 1945  
(Ray Champagne is front row, fourth from left)

the Twilight League title.

In 1941, he went to Albany, Georgia for a tryout with the St Louis Cardinals, playing in an exhibition game against the major league club which was coming up from spring training. He remained in Albany for three weeks before returning to Rhode Island to play with American Wringer in a semi-pro league.

war), James Trimble (an outstanding high school pitcher signed by the Senators before enlisting) and Bobby Schang (a minor league player and son of former major league catcher Wally Schang). Champagne - along with Manush, Trimble and Schang - were selected to play for the Third Marine Division all-star team that lost

to the Army all-stars, 4-3, in 12 innings, in the Pacific World Series in 1944.

Champagne left Guadalcanal for Guam in July 1944. After the Guam campaign ended the following month, the Third Marine Division baseball team was back in action on the ballfield. They played a series of exhibition games, and even traveled by air to neighboring islands for games against the Second Marine Division.

In February 1945 it was back to business as the Third Marine Division were involved in the invasion of Iwo Jima. During this battle, pitcher Jimmy Trimble was killed in action.

When the Marines returned to Guam after securing Iwo Jima, the Third Marine Division baseball field was renamed Trimble Field in honor of Jimmy.

Ray Champagne returned to the United States in 1945. The Marines wanted him to play for their team in San Diego, but he chose to play for the naval air station at Quonset, Rhode Island which was much nearer home. He played in the 1<sup>st</sup> Naval District League and helped defeat the Portland (Maine) Navy team for the championship.

During his time at Quonset in 1945, Champagne - along with about 30 other players - was invited to Ebbets Field by the Dodgers, where he met Brooklyn general manager Buzzy Bavasi.

During the summer of 1945, Champagne also played for the Worcester Nortons in the semi-pro New England League, and was signed by Red Sox scout Jack Egan, receiving a \$200 bonus. He was also offered a contract by Torchy Torrance - vice-president of the Seattle Rainiers - who had

managed the Third Marine Division team in the Pacific. Champagne chose to join the Red Sox and went to spring training in 1946. His wife, Violette, was expecting their first child at the time, and the Red Sox wanted to send Champagne to Scranton, Pennsylvania, but he wanted to stay close to home and requested to play for the Lynn Red Sox in the New England League which had attained Class B status in organized baseball for 1946. The Red Sox would not allow this and Champagne chose instead to play for a local semi-pro club.

Between 1947 and 1950, Champagne played baseball with the PQ team in the Suburban League and Jennie's Ice Cream in the Providence Amateur League. In his last time at bat at Roosevelt Park, Blackstone (Massachusetts), Ray hit a home run!

Ray worked as a salesman for 38 years with the International Supply Company in Cranston, Rhode Island. Ray and Violette still live in Woonsocket. They celebrated their 62nd wedding anniversary in May 2007.



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## Professional Baseball Player Database by Pat Doyle

Probably the most valuable research tool I have in my ever-growing collection is Pat Doyle's Professional Baseball Player Database.

This clever piece of software contains year-by-year records for major and minor league players between 1922 and 2004. Every player who is listed in the Official Baseball Guides for those seasons is included, and many who

were omitted from the Guides because of limited playing time have been researched and added to the database.

This full-featured software program includes batting (BA, HR, RBI) and pitching (W-L, ERA) statistics for each player as listed in the Guides or other sources. It enables users to search and sort information in a variety of ways. Players may be listed alphabetically, ranked by

statistical categories, or sorted by career, team, or league.

A new version featuring enhanced statistical information for the years 1920 to 1945 will be available in March 2008.

For further information and ordering details visit [www.baseball-almanac.com/minor-league](http://www.baseball-almanac.com/minor-league) or contact at [baseballdata@earthlink.net](mailto:baseballdata@earthlink.net)



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\$45.00 (plus shipping)

## Harvey Riebe and the Sinking of the SS Leopoldville



One of the most tragic and little-known events of World War II occurred on Christmas Eve 1944. The sinking, by a German submarine, of the troopship *Leopoldville* in the English Channel off Cherbourg, France, when 763 American soldiers of the 66<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division were killed. Detroit Tigers' catcher, Harvey Riebe was there.

Harvey Riebe was born in Euclid, Ohio on October 10, 1921. He graduated from Euclid Shore High School in April 1939 and signed with the Detroit Tigers for a \$250 bonus. By August 1940 he was hitting .348 with Muskegon (Michigan State League) and spent the remainder of the year with Henderson (East Texas League) where he hit .325. In 1942 Riebe was with Beaumont (Texas League) where he hit .274 and impressed onlookers with his rifle-arm behind the plate.

On August 12, he was called up by the Tigers and played 11 games before the season ended, batting .314 in 35 at-bats.

Riebe – 21 – entered military service with the Army in October 1942 and was stationed at Fort McClelland, Alabama. By 1944 he was in England with Company K, 262nd Infantry Regiment of the 66th Infantry Division.

On December 24, 1944, 2,235 men from the division embarked on board the Belgian troopship *SS Leopoldville* at Southampton, England for the journey across the English Channel to Cherbourg, France. A few minutes before 6:00PM, a German submarine, *U-486*, fired one torpedo that struck the *Leopoldville* on her starboard side. Even though the ship was only five nautical miles from Cherbourg, the Captain of the *Leopoldville* anchored his ship rather than try to make port. Her crew began to abandon ship while the servicemen remained in the troop compartments not knowing that the ship was sinking.

At 8:30PM, the *Leopoldville* sank by the stern to the bottom of the English Channel. Riebe spent 45 minutes in the icy waters before being fished out by an English boat. However, many were not so fortunate. Seven hundred and sixty-three Americans lost their lives,

including two minor league ballplayers Howard DeMartini (a pitcher in the Giants' organization) and Leonard Berry (a pitcher with Charleston in the South Atlantic League).

Sergeant Riebe rejoined his unit after recovering from this traumatic ordeal. In early 1945, the 66th Infantry Division was assigned to do mop-up work against pockets of German resistance around St Nazaire. During that time he was awarded the Bronze Star and took a piece of shrapnel in the right shoulder, but walked to a field hospital where it was removed.

After the war ended, Riebe caught for his unit's team, they defeated several service teams in southern France and later won the championship of the 16th Corps. He listened to the Tigers win the 1945 World Series on Armed Forces Radio. "Listening on the radio from a tent in France," Harvey recollected, "I heard my Tigers win that World Series. It was great!"

Returning from the battlefields of Europe in 1946, Riebe spent the season with Dallas (Texas League) and was back with the Tigers in 1947 where he served as a backup to Bob Swift and Aaron Robinson.

Riebe stayed with the Tigers until 1949. He retired

from professional baseball after spending the 1950 season with Toledo in the American Association.

In 1951, Riebe became a purchasing agent for the Cleveland Brass and Copper Company and worked there until 1977.

Harvey Riebe - major league catcher, disaster survivor, Bronze Star and Purple Heart recipient - passed away on April 16, 2001 in Euclid, Ohio. He was 79.

For further information on the SS Leopoldville disaster see Allan Andrade's *Leopoldville Troopship Disaster Website* at [www.msnusers.com/ssleopoldville](http://www.msnusers.com/ssleopoldville)



SS Leopoldville

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