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Gary Bedingfield's

Baseball in Wartime

www.baseballinwartime.com

100,000 Hits for the Baseball in Wartime Website in 2008

On March 21, Baseball in Wartime received its 100,000th web page hit of the year. That means between January 1 and March 21, 2008, an average of 1,234 pages of the Baseball in Wartime website were looked at each day. That's quite an achievement for a website that began as a single-page affair eight years ago when I wanted World War II baseball to have a cyberspace presence!

Thanks to all of you who visit the site on a regular basis and thanks to all you first-time visitors - I hope you'll be coming back regularly.

Minor League Heroes

Over the last month I've been adding a number of biographies to the website for minor league players. While I've always claimed that major league players have failed to receive the recognition they deserve for their military service during World War II, this is even more true of minor league players.

I have been fascinated by the stories I have discovered about minor league players who were genuine heroes during World War II. For example, John DeJohn, a second baseman before the war, was a tail-gunner on a B-17 who was awarded the Air Medal for shooting down two Nazi fighter planes that attacked his plane after a bombing raid. Joe Chiozza, a pitcher and brother of major leaguer Lou Chiozza, was a bombardier on a B-26 that was shot down over Belgium. Pitcher, Joe Loadholtes, was a B-24 pilot and

flew 35 missions earning the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters. Outfielder Bobby Byrne, shot down six enemy fighter planes over the skies of North Africa while flying a P-40 Warhawk. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal.

Two minor league heroes of World War II are included in this month's newsletter. Bill Brenner flew 29 missions as a B-17 pilot, while Mickey McGuire earned a Silver Star as a medical aid man in North Africa, Sicily and Italy.

You can read about all the other Minor League heroes at www.baseballinwartime.com/player_biographies/player_biographies_minors.htm.

Professional Baseball Player Databases

Baseball in Wartime is proud to announce it can now offer Pat Doyle's outstanding database CD-ROMs. Packed with statistics for all minor league players dating back as far as 1920, this computer software is a "must have" item and an essential part of the arsenal of research tools used here at Baseball in Wartime. For more information see the last page of this newsletter or visit the database page at www.baseballinwartime.com/database/database.htm

Spread the Word about the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter

If you know anyone that would like to receive the Baseball in wartime newsletter simply send me their email address and I'll make sure they are included on the mailing list.



Billy Southworth Jr, son of the Cardinals manager Billy Southworth. Billy Jr flew 25 missions over Europe without a scratch, but was killed when the B-29 Superfortress he was piloting crashed into Flushing Bay, New York while attempting to land at LaGuardia Field on February 15, 1945.

Annual Georgia-Florida-Alabama Minor Leagues Baseball Reunion

August 22 and 23, 2008

A reunion for men who played in the old Georgia-Alabama, Georgia-Florida, Georgia State, Alabama-Florida, Alabama State, Florida State and Florida East Coast Leagues.

For more information contact:

Clint Chafin
Program Chairman
4789 Tallokas Rd
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Check out www.alabama-florida-league.com and see photos of past reunions and keep up with reunion info.

[Please not this is a revised date]

In this Edition of the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter

Steve Sakas: Wartime Baseball Adventures
Minor League Heroes of World War II
Cot Deal - Wartime NBC Two-Time MVP



Professional Baseball Player Database

Statistics for all Professional Players from 1920 to 2004
Available on CD-ROM for your PC

Now Available at Baseball in Wartime

Steve Sakas: Wartime Baseball Adventures

Steven P "Steve" Sakas was born in Chicago, Illinois on May 13, 1921. He was a multi-sport athlete at Amundsen High School and attended Wright Junior College where he struck out 15 consecutive batters in one game.

Despite interest from the Chicago White Sox, Sakas went to Western Michigan in Kalamazoo on a baseball scholarship, but within a year he signed with the White Sox for \$75 a month and a \$500 bonus. Sakas played his rookie year with the Lubbock Hubbers of the Class D West Texas-New Mexico League in 1941. But it wasn't only the beginning of a playing career, it was also the start of a lifelong dedication to teaching others to play ball.

"I was 13 that summer," recalls Bill Cope, who was a young ballplayer in

Lubbock in 1941. "We had a sandlot baseball league of four or five teams and played on a field across from the old Texas Tech gymnasium. Somehow, Steve Sakas and another Hubber, Gene Stack, learned about the games and started coming there some afternoons when they were in town and watched and encouraged us and gave us some pointers. We thought this was great because these were real professionals and our idols and we were at the ball park for just about every Hubbers' game."

The West Texas-New Mexico League was a notorious hitters' paradise at the time and Sakas' 9-18 won-loss record and 4.25 ERA looks a lot worse than it was. In 1942, he moved up to the Superior Blues of the Class C Northern League where he was 9-12 with a 3.96 ERA.



Military Service

Sakas was forced to put his career on hold when he entered military service at the end of the season. He was inducted at Fort Sheridan, Illinois and took basic training with the Army Air Corps at Miami Beach as a physical instructor. Sakas was then assigned to Hammer Field, a 4th Air Force training base, near Fresno, California. From there he was relocated to Ephrata Army Air Base in Washington, where he coached the baseball team.

As the war progressed, every able-bodied man was needed for overseas service and Sakas quickly found himself in the infantry. "We had a warrant officer who tried out for the baseball team," says Sakas. "He didn't make the grade and I cut him from the team, but he really got me back when he sent me to the Army. That was the dumbest cut I ever made!"

Heading for Europe

Sakas was soon on his way to Europe aboard the Queen Elizabeth. He was briefly attached to a replacement depot in England before being assigned to the 119th Infantry



Steve Sakas (right) with the Lubbock Hubbers of the West Texas-New Mexico League in 1941. On the left is first baseman Kauzlerich.

Steve Sakas: Wartime Baseball Adventures

Regiment of the 30th Infantry Division. Not only did Sakas find himself in the thick of the Battle of Bulge but he also found out that he was the new bazooka man, even though he'd never fired a bazooka in his life! "Do you know what beat the Germans?" Sakas asked. "The thought of this crazy Greek coming at 'em with a bazooka!" Sakas was with the 30th Division as they crossed the Rhine, then the Ruhr, and captured Magdeburg on the Elbe River on 17 April, 1945, where they were forced to wait to allow the Russians to be the first in to Berlin.

Playing Ball in Germany

Following the German surrender, Sakas got back to doing what he did best, organizing sports and recreation for the troops, which included a softball team. One day, Colonel Stewart asked Sakas if he could put together a baseball team. Another division had a hot team that included Billy Johnson of the Yankees and were looking games. Sakas told the Colonel he didn't have any baseball players but he'd do his best. He held tryouts among his softball players and selected the best, including the company cook, who became the team's catcher and always ensured Sakas had the best steak whenever he wanted.

The next step was to find somewhere to play. Sakas requisitioned a large mansion house and grounds in the German town of Schleiz, assuring the family that his players would take great care of everything. He then set about finding uniforms and approached a German dress factory which just happened to be owned by the family who owned the house his baseball team had taken over. While the factory started making uniforms, Sakas approached a cobbler, who made baseball spikes following the



Steve Sakas (right) at Gray Field, Fort Lewis, Washington with Herm Reich. Reich played first base with Portland of the Pacific Coast League before the war. He later played with Washington, Cleveland and the Cubs.

ball player's careful instruction. "They looked great but they must have been the heaviest spikes in the world!" recalls Sakas.

Caps were next on the list and Sakas had these made by a German

manufacturer who decided to use cardboard for the peak inserts. "Just like the spikes," says Sakas, "the caps looked great, but we would sweat a lot and the cardboard peaks would just flop down in our faces while we were playing."

Steve Sakas: Wartime Baseball Adventures

Sakas was getting a dozen baseballs sent every month by Bill DeWitt, owner of the St Louis Browns, but balls were always in short supply, and some German women even tried making these – the experiment was a disaster and ended very quickly.

Dressed and ready to go, Sakas' ball team christened their home ground Colonel Stewart Field and played a number of games including a heartbreaking, 1 to 0, loss to Sam Nahem's All-Stars who went on to be the European Theater champions. Nahem asked Sakas to come and play for his team in Rheims, France, but Sakas was more interested in getting home to the States and picking up where he left off with his baseball career.

Coming Home

He was back home by November 1945. "I went to spring training with the Milwaukee Brewers in 1946," recalls Sakas. "They felt I wasn't ready and sent me to Greenville, South Carolina."

Sakas only spent a short time with Greenville and joined Vicksburg of the Southeastern League where he was 5-4 with a 3.89 ERA. In 1947, he went to spring training with Shreveport of the Texas League and was assigned to Texarkana of the Big State League for the rest of the year, where he had a career-year. Sakas was 13-5 during the regular season and won another two games in the playoffs. His career looked to be on the right track. He joined was back with Shreveport in 1948, won his first start against Oklahoma City, 9-4, on April 29, then beat Dallas, 3-1, on May 4, but a shoulder injury brought everything to a sudden halt. He simply couldn't throw without pain and held out for the rest of the season before retiring from pro ball.

Sakas also worked with his father in the family tavern business and bought his own place on Rand Street in Des Plaines, called Steve's Lounge (which he owned until his retirement in 1986). In 1970, he had the honor of having a street named after him in Des Plaines. Sakas Drive is a small street running alongside his bar.

But Sakas wasn't through with baseball. He continued to pitch, when his arm would allow, and hurled for the semi-pro Michigan City Cubs of the Michigan-Indiana League in 1949. In the meantime, he became a scout for the White Sox and Milwaukee Brewers. In 1951, he formed the AHEPA All-Stars, a collection of Greek-American ballplayers. The team had great success in semi-pro leagues. Sakas was also player-manager for the semi-pro Skokie Indians in the late 1950s and 1960s.

During the 1970s, Sakas was a pitching coach with high school and college kids. He served as the pitching coach for the Lincolnwood Big league All-Stars youth team which won the World Championship in Florida in 1973. In served as pitching coach for the Niles West Indians in the mid-1970s when they won two AA State Championships.

During the 1980s he coached the pitching staff of the semi-pro Maryville Shamrocks and the Barnstormers, who won the AABC Illinois state title two years in a row.

Still Teaching Kids to Pitch at 87

In the late 1980s he served as pitching coach for Northeastern University and began giving lessons at the Grand Slam USA Baseball Academy in Palatine. At 87, he is still teaching pitchers to throw. He firmly believes in teaching control and for pitchers to master the fastball, curve

and change up. He won't teach a kid how to throw a slider or a circle change. "Those pitches are too hard on your elbow," says Sakas who knows too well the devastating effects of a pitching injury.

And what about that shoulder injury he suffered back in 1948? Well, Sakas suffered a heart attack in 1998. Talking with his doctor one day, he mentioned how he used to play pro ball and hurt his shoulder. The doctor offered to take a look at his shoulder with an MRI scan and discovered that he'd torn his rotator cuff. "At 78, is it too late to make a comeback?" Sakas wondered.

Steve Sakas lives in Skokie, Illinois and continues to teach young ballplayers with the North Shore Baseball Academy.

Thanks to Steve Sakas who shared this information with me during a telephone conversation in February 2008. Thanks, also, to his sons, Jim and Peter, for helping with additional information and photos.



Steve Sakas (right) at Paine Field, Washington in 1943.

Minor League Heroes of World War II

Bill Brenner



Distinguished Flying Cross Air Medal

William W "Bill" Brenner was born in Olympia, Washington in 1920. A graduate of Oregon University, he was signed to a Hollywood Stars

contract by Red Killefer in 1939 and sent to Bellingham of the Western International League, where he batted .288.

The young catcher was sold to Tacoma of the same league in 1940 and batted .310 with 15 home runs and 76 RBIs. He was purchased by Los Angeles of the Pacific Coast League in 1941 and made spring training at Ontario but was farmed to Vancouver where he batted .271 before entering military service on December 17, 1941.

Brenner served with the Army Air Force as a B-17 pilot and flew 29 missions over Europe as a squadron group leader. "I was just as scared on my last mission as I was on the first," he told *The Sporting News* on August 2, 1945. "I had a mighty fine crew. We were lucky, too. We had four planes shot up, but none of us got more than minor scratches and we always managed to land back at our base."

Brenner describes his toughest mission: "We were on a bomb run over Brux, Czechoslovakia. We were up for nine and a half hours. We lost a lot of planes and crews that day, but we were lucky. Got back okay, but our plane looked like a sieve and had to be junked. Some of us were

so badly shaken up mentally the flight surgeons wanted to send us to a flak home for a rest, but we out-talked 'em." Then he recalled: "Of course, going over Berlin was always rugged – always plenty of flak and fighter opposition."

Captain Brenner was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross with two Oak Leaf clusters and the Air Medal with three clusters. He was honorably discharged in July 1945 and returned to baseball to play with Los Angeles, appearing in 22 games before the end of the season.

Brenner remained in baseball as a player-manager until the late 1950s with such teams as Vancouver, Yakima, Lewiston, Seattle and Portland. He also turned his hand to pitching late in his career and enjoyed three successive 20-win seasons between 1952 and 1954.

Bill Brenner passed away in Portland, Oregon on May 17, 1979.

Lloyd "Mickey" McGuire



Silver Star

Lloyd F "Mickey" McGuire was born in Waukegan, Illinois. As a third baseman he signed with the Chicago Cubs organization and played for the Hopkinsville Hoppers of the Class D Kitty League in 1937, where he batted .242 in 122 games. In 1938, he raised his average to .285 with the Hoppers, and his .334 batting average in 1939 was among the best in the Kitty League. In 1940, McGuire was with the Madison Blues of the Class B Three-I League where

his manager was Merv "Bud" Connolly, a former Red Sox infielder. He batted .237 in 121 games that season and entered military service at the end of the year.

McGuire served as a medical aid man through the North African and Sicilian campaigns and the Italian invasion. He carried litters and treated wounded soldiers under heavy shellfire for which he was awarded the Silver Star.

McGuire rose from the rank of sergeant to second lieutenant in December 1943, the first medical soldier to be commissioned in the Medical Administration Corps. "A lot of soldiers," remarked McGuire to the *Stars and Stripes* at the time, "have the impression that the first aid man is a goldbrick who hasn't the nerve to carry a gun. In my own experience, I've found first aid men in the field as courageous and devoted to duty as any hero in the thick of the fight."

Fifty per cent of all medics McGuire served with were casualties themselves and his own squad spent 103 days in the frontlines treating and evacuating the wounded.

McGuire returned home in late 1945. In January 1946, he attended the Cubs' advanced spring training group for former servicemen at Lake Worth, Florida. He was assigned to the Portsmouth Cubs of the Piedmont League for the season where he batted .213 with 8 home runs and 80 RBIs in his last year in organized baseball.

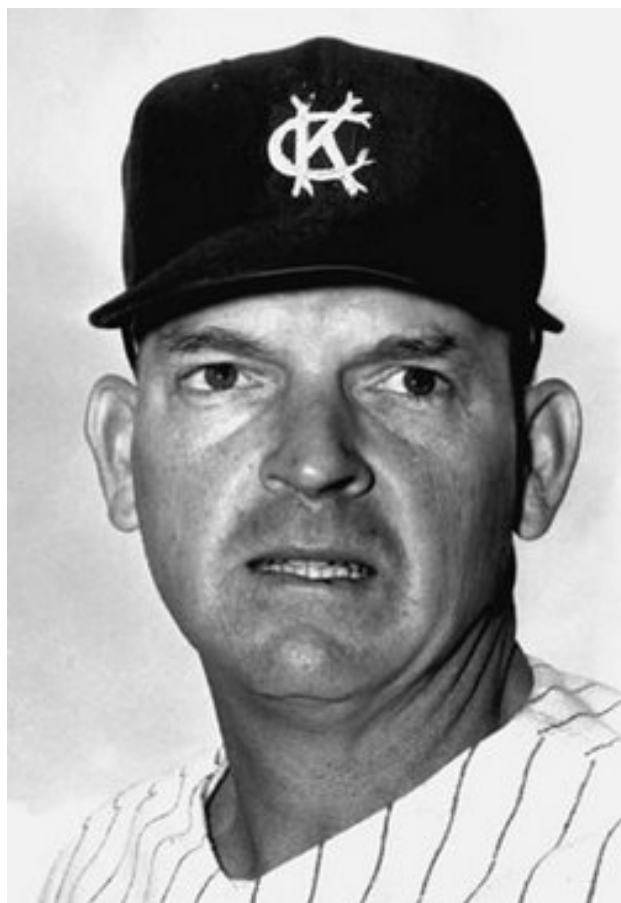


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Cot Deal - Wartime National Baseball Congress Two-time MVP



Ellis F "Cot" Deal was born on January 23, 1923 in Arapaho, Oklahoma, a small town in the western part of the state. Aged 14, he was playing for his father, Roy Deal, a legendary baseball figure in Oklahoma and manager of the semi-pro Oklahoma City Natural Gas Gassers. The young outfielder-pitcher was signed by the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1939. "The Pirate scout drove my mother, dad and me to Pittsburgh," recalls Deal. "I spent a week in the dugout, then signed. I wouldn't be 17 until January."

The Pirates sent Deal to Hutchinson of the Western Association his rookie year. Playing the outfield and third base he batted an impressive .312 in 137 games. He remained with the team in 1941 and batted .285 in addition to pitching five games. The 19-year-old switch-hitter joined Harrisburg of the Interstate League in 1942, where he batted .266, prior to entering military service with the

Army Air Force in September.

Deal was stationed at Enid Army Flying Field in Oklahoma - a Basic Flying School - where he served as a physical instructor and played ball for the Enid Army Flying School Enidairs. In 1943, the team finished second in the Victory League, second in the Oklahoma State semi-pro tournament and second in the Sooner Service League.

In August 1943, the Enidairs made it to the finals of the National Baseball Congress Semi-Pro Tournament in Wichita, Kansas, where, on August 29, and with Cot Deal on the mound, they were

beaten, 5 to 3, by Cecil Travis and the Camp Wheeler Spokes. Before 12,000 fans - the biggest crowd in the nine-year history of the event - Deal allowed only seven hits, but his support was limited due to a makeshift lineup caused by injuries and illness to regulars in the closing days of the tournament. Deal was named on the All-American semi-pro club for his outstanding play in the tournament.

Coached by B D Booth and Bill Hankins, and featuring minor leaguers Monty Basgall, Nick Popovich, Bill Hankins, Ray Honeycutt, Odie Strain, Lew Morton and, of course, Cot Deal, the Enidairs competed in the tough Victory League in 1944. They finished the year in second place behind Fort Riley with a 54-18 record. Deal was 10 and 1 on the mound, and batted .371. Again, the team made it to the National Baseball Congress Semi-Pro Tournament. In the fourth

game of the tournament the Enidairs faced the Sioux Falls Army Air Field club with the score tied, 3 to 3, going into the eighth. That morning Cot Deal had received news from home that his wife had given birth to a baby girl. With the bases loaded and the count standing at three-and-two, Deal hit one over the center field fence and the Enidairs won, 7 to 3. The Enidairs advanced to the final of the tournament where they were beaten by the Sherman Field Flyers, 5 to 4. Deal again made the All-American team and was voted the most valuable player of the tournament.

In 1945, Deal - who batted .326 for the year - along with Lou Kretlow and Red Sox catcher Danny Doyle led the Enidairs to the Oklahoma semi-pro title on July 28, defeating Tinker Field, 9 to 3. They then claimed the National semi-pro title without a single defeat. For the third straight year he was named to the All-American team and became the first man ever to be voted most valuable player two consecutive years. Deal played outfield in all seven championship games and hurled hitless relief in two.

Sergeant Deal was discharged from military service in October 1945. "It had a maturing effect," Deal says of his years with the Army Air Force, "and I was glad to be serving."

Deal was with Toronto of the International League in 1946 and 1947, where he was used more frequently as a pitcher than an outfielder. It was on the mound that he made his major league debut with the Boston Red Sox on September 11, 1947. Deal made five appearances for Boston, including two starts, and finished the year with a 0-1 record and 9.24 ERA. He hurt his arm in spring training the

Cot Deal (continued)

following year and spent most of 1948 with Louisville of the American Association but did make four last-inning appearances for the Red Sox without allowing a run and earning his first major league victory.

Deal was traded to the Cardinals' organization in 1949 and was 15-9 with Columbus of the American Association. He started, completed and won a twenty-inning game against Louisville on September 3, 1949, allowing only one earned run. He was 10-14 with Columbus in 1950, and made three relief appearances for the Cardinals. Deal was back with Columbus in 1951, and joined the Rochester Red Wings of the International League in 1952. He was 14-9 that year and his 16-9 record and 3.72 ERA in 1953 prompted a return to the major leagues. In 1954, Deal made 33 relief appearances for the Cardinals.

Deal, aged 32, was back with the Red Wings in 1955. He became the club's player-coach under manager Dixie Walker in 1956, took over as manager in 1957 and reached the playoffs the following season. Deal joined Cincinnati as a pitching coach in 1959, and later held that position with Houston, the Yankees, Kansas City, Cleveland and Detroit. Along the way he managed in the minors and was an assistant farm director with the Chicago White Sox.

In 1994, Cot Deal was inducted into the Rochester Red Wings Hall of Fame. He remains the only person in National Baseball Congress history to win the annual tournament MVP award twice.

Cot Deal and his wife, Katie, live in suburban Oklahoma City. "We were married at 19, parents at 21, and grew up with our kids," says Cot. "We've been married 65 years."

Professional Baseball Player Databases Now available from Baseball in Wartime

Probably the most valuable research tools used at Baseball in Wartime are Pat Doyle's Professional Baseball Player Database CD-ROMs and I'm proud to be able to offer these to you via the website.

These clever pieces of software contain year-by-year records for major and minor league players. Every player who is listed in the Official Baseball Guides is included, and many who were omitted from the Guides because of limited playing time have been researched and added to the database.

The **Professional Baseball Player Database (1922 to 2004)** 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.

The **Professional Baseball Statistical Database (1920 to 1945)** is similar to the Player Database but is limited to the years 1920 to 1945 and includes in-depth statistics for batting (G, AB, R, H, 2B, 3B, HR, RBI, BA, OBP, SLG, OPS, SO, BB, SB, CS, HBP, SH, SF and Positions played) and pitching (G, GS, CG, W, L, PCT, SV, ERA, IP, H, R, ER, SO, BB, ShO, HB, WP, HR, WHIP).

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