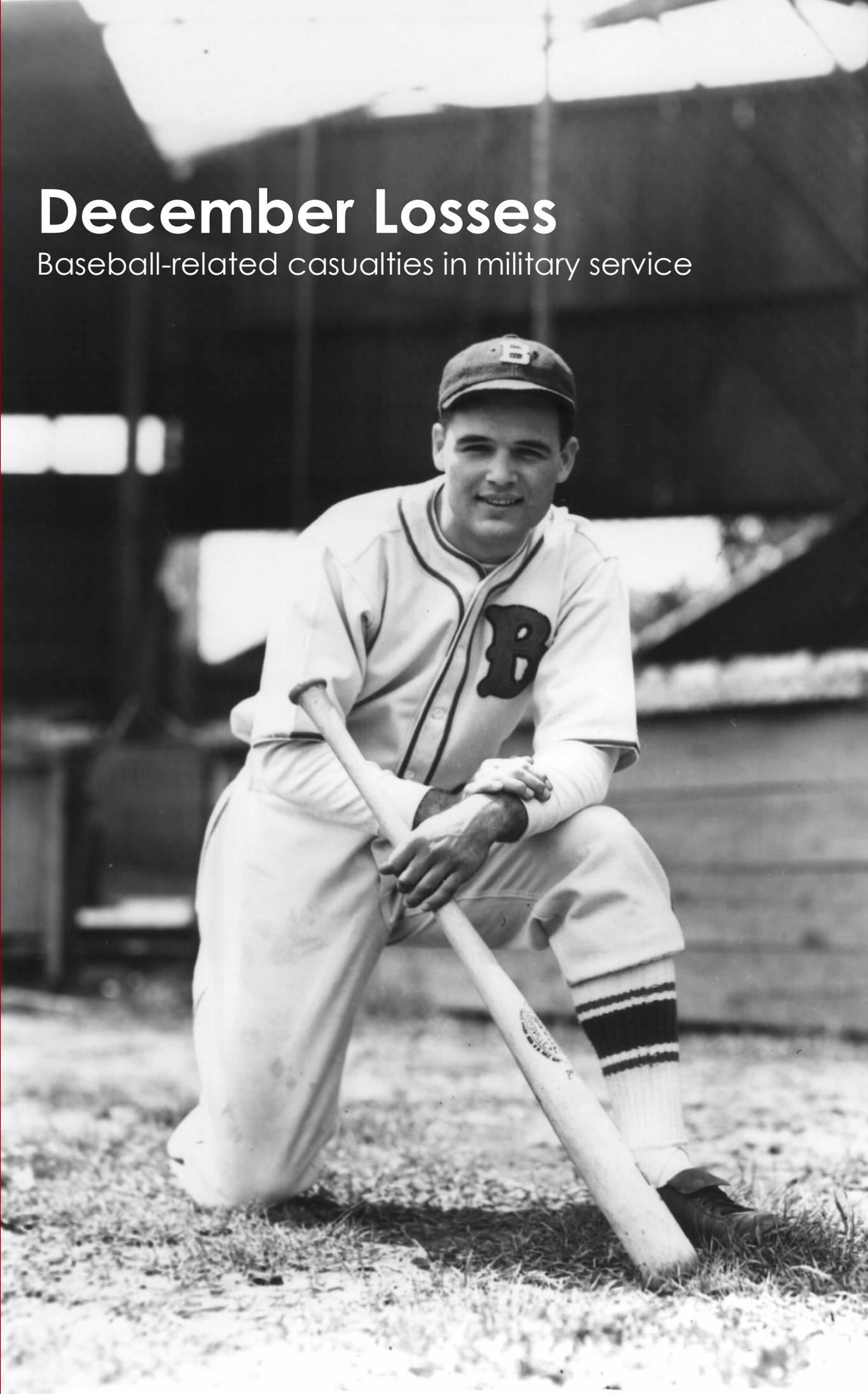


December Losses

Baseball-related casualties in military service



December Losses

When dark December glooms the day,
And takes our autumn joys away;
When short and scant the sun-beam throws,
Upon the weary waste of snows...

Walter Scott (Scottish historical novelist, playwright and poet), 1808

The final month of the year left no reprieve from tragedy for baseball players serving in the military. In fact, during WWII, December 1944 was among the costliest months as Hitler's forces made a last desperate attempt to break the Allied forces in the Ardennes. This issue of the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter looks at December military-related losses from 1898 to 1953, spanning the months following the Spanish-American War to the Korean War.

Died in Combat

Jerry Angelich

Although Jerry Angelich never appeared in an official professional baseball game, he pitched for the Pacific Coast League's Sacramento Senators during spring training in 1935 and 1936, which included a spectacular pitching duel against a touring Japanese professional all-star team on March 18, 1935. Hurling eight innings against 18-year-old Japanese ace Eiji Sawamura, Angelich was beaten, 2-1. The Senators managed just five hits off the Japanese youngster.

Angelich went on to play for the Provo Timps of the Utah Industrial League – a thriving semi-pro circuit with six teams fielding formidable line-ups that competed throughout state – and entered military service with the Army Air Corps in August 1941. He was stationed at Hickam Field at a then little-known place called Pearl Harbor in Hawaii.

On December 7, 1941, during the surprise attack on Hawaii, Japanese planes bombed and strafed Hickam to eliminate air opposition and prevent U.S. planes from following them back to their aircraft carriers. Hickam suffered extensive damage and aircraft losses, with 189 people killed and 303 wounded. Private Angelich was attempting to operate a machine gun in a wrecked plane on the airfield when he was killed by strafing Japanese fighter planes. He is buried at the Honolulu Memorial in Hawaii, and his posthumously awarded Purple Heart was received by his sister Mrs. Militza Christopher.

Errol Stoner

Errol Stoner had a taste of military service before his professional baseball career. In 1928, aged just 17, he enlisted with the Army and served at Fort Stotsenburg, approximately 50 miles north of Manila, in the Philippines. By 1930, he was back in his native California and had a spring training tryout with the Pittsburgh Pirates in 1933. He was cut by the big-league club but pitched a few games for the Texas League's Tulsa Oilers and Middle-Atlantic League's Springfield Chicks before returning to California to play semi-pro ball for the Fullerton Merchants. He had a spring tryout with the Pacific Coast League's Mission Reds the following year and then the

Hollywood Stars in 1935. In 1936, he joined the Class D Alabama-Florida League's Union Springs Springers, and although a sore arm prevented him from pitching he played 73 games, leading the team with 11 home runs and an excellent .319 average. Stoner was back on the mound in 1937, pitching for the Class C East Texas League's Kilgore Rangers, where he was 3-5 with a 4.98 ERA in 16 appearances to end his pro career.

Stoner was approaching 29, when he entered military service for the second time in September 1940. Attached to Company C of the 33rd Quartermaster Truck Regiment, Private Stoner returned to the Philippines. On December 8, 1941, the Japanese attacked the Philippines. On December 12, during the defense of Clark Field, Stoner suffered fatal shrapnel wounds to his back and hips. He was buried at the Fort William McKinley Cemetery (now Fort Bonifacio) in Manila, two days later. However, the location of his remains was lost between that time and when the cemetery's remains were disinterred following their liberation from the Japanese in 1945. Private Stoner's remains have never been recovered, and he is remembered at the Manila American Cemetery and Memorial at Fort Bonifacio.

Wilbur Ueck

Wilbur Ueck, from Benton Harbor, Michigan, played on the House of David ball team in 1940. Batting third and making some dazzling defensive plays in centerfield, Ueck helped the team clinch the Michigan League championship that season.

Ueck entered military service after the 1940 season and was stationed at Camp Livingston, Louisiana, where he was assigned to the Anti-Tank Company, 126th Infantry Regiment of the 32nd Infantry "Red Arrow" Division. In 1942, the division was sent to Australia to train for jungle warfare for six months. The next stop for Corporal Ueck was New Guinea, where Australian forces were fighting the Japanese. Ueck was among the troops who made the difficult trek across the Kapa Kapa trail over the Owen Stanley Mountains in November 1942. The following month the 32nd Infantry Division was among the first U.S. divisions to engage in a ground assault against the enemy in World War II, and Corporal Ueck was killed in action on December 4, 1942, near the village of Buna.

His remains were returned to the United States in 1948, and burial was made at the Lincoln Charter Township Cemetery in Stevensville, Michigan.

John Eggleton

Before entering military service in March 1941, John Eggleton had played varsity baseball, as well as basketball and football, at Alfred University in Alfred, New York. As platoon leader with C Company, 701st Tank Destroyer Battalion attached to the 1st Armored Division, he was part of Operation Torch, the British-American invasion of French North Africa in late 1942. On December 11, 1942, while engaging German tanks and artillery in Tunisia, Second Lieutenant Eggleton was killed in action.

His remains were returned home in 1948, and rest at Holy Cross Cemetery, Brooklyn, New York.

Bernard Healey

Bernard Healey was described as a "Babe Ruth type hitter, a game wrecker," on his way to winning the Omaha American Legion batting title in 1937. He went on to play baseball and football at Creighton University for two years before enlisting as an aviation cadet with the Army Air Corps in 1941. After training as a bomber pilot and receiving his wings and commission as a second lieutenant in 1942, he was assigned to the 423rd Bomb Squadron of the 306th Bomb Group and sent to England.

On December 30, 1942, Healey was co-pilot to Captain John B. Brady aboard a Boeing B-17F Flying Fortress. The target that day was the Keroman Naval U-boat base at Lorient, France. On the way back, German fighters attacked and Brady's B-17 was set on fire. All crew members safely bailed out, but the German fighter planes then turned their attention to the descending parachutes. Bernard Healey, together with Captain Brady and six other crew members were mercilessly killed as they descended to the ground that day.

Healey's body was never recovered. He is memorialized at the Cambridge American Cemetery in England, and the Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Omaha, Nebraska.

Fred Yeske

Fred Yeske of Canton, Connecticut, began his professional baseball career in 1941 with the Goldsboro Goldbugs of the Class D Coastal Plain League, pitching 28 games for a 9-8 record and 3.58 ERA. In 1942, he was assigned to the Welch Miners of the Class C Mountain State League where he was 7-5 in 21 games and entered military service at the end of the season.

Assigned to the 143rd Infantry Regiment of the 36th "Texas" Infantry Division, the division first saw action on September 9, 1943, near Salerno, Italy. On December 1, 1943, Yeske found time to write a brief note of thanks to the Canton War Council. The council had sent gifts to all Canton servicemen. "Just a few lines to let you know that I received your Christmas gift and was very happy that the people back home take interest in the boys in the service," he wrote. Christmas was fast approaching and like the majority of troops on the front lines all over the world, he was thinking about getting home. "We all hope that peace will come soon and that everyone can enjoy a Christmas at home," he wrote.

On December 21, 1943, Yeske was killed in action at the Italian village of San Pietro. "[He] died single-handedly attacking an enemy position on a hill in Italy that was wreaking havoc with his unit," recalls his cousin Stephanie K. Moore. Fred Yeske is buried at Calvary Cemetery in Collinsville, Connecticut.

L. V. Allen

L. V. Allen was playing sandlot baseball in his hometown of Fort Worth, Texas, when signed by the Brownsville Charros of the newly reformed Class D Texas Valley League in March 1938. The 22-year-old shortstop batted .222 (12 hits in 54 at-bats) before joining the Wink Spudders of the Class D West Texas-New Mexico League, where he hit .190 in 17 games.

That was Allen's only experience with professional baseball. He returned to Fort Worth where he continued to play with sandlot teams and entered military service at the start of WWII. Training to be a pilot with the Army Air Force, he received his commission in June 1943, and served with the 704th Bomb Squadron, 446th Bomb Group, in England.

First Lieutenant Allen piloted a Boeing B-24H Liberator nicknamed "Buzz Buggy". On December 31, 1943, "Buzz Buggy" went missing during a raid on the Luftwaffe-controlled Chateau Bernard airfield in Cognac, France. It remains unclear exactly what happened to the four-engined bomber - was it hit by flak, had engine trouble or shot down by fighters? It crashed into the Atlantic Ocean about 50 miles off the coast of Carcan, southwest of Bordeaux, France. Of the crew of 10, there were no survivors. Five remain missing in action. Allen's body washed ashore further down the coast at Mimizan on January 20, 1944, and together with two of his crew members he was buried in the local cemetery before being moved to the U.S. military cemetery at Luynes, France, in June 1945.

Charlie Pescod

Charlie Pescod was born in Ecuador, south America, and grew up in Panama, a country that had strong links with the United States. The Panama Canal had been completed in 1914 and the United States was responsible for its administration, fortification and defense. Consequently, Panama was a hotbed of American sports; baseball in particular.

He excelled in all sports, including baseball, at Cristobal High School and went on to play for the Panama national team in 1934. He became a star pitcher in Panama's Isthmian League, setting a league record by striking out 17 batters in a single game, and was league MVP in 1935 with an 8-1 record and 2.25 ERA. In 1937, Paul Richards, then manager of the Atlanta Crackers of the Southern Association, saw Pescod playing ball and persuaded him to come to America for the 1937 season. This move would make Pescod probably the first Panama-based player to play organized baseball in the United States and almost definitely the first Ecuadorian to play.

Pescod joined the Clarksdale Red Sox of the Class C Cotton States League and made 22 appearances for a 10-8 record. He was back with Clarksdale in 1938, and had a 14-7 won-loss record to accompany a .293 batting average. He moved up to Class B baseball in 1939, joining the Rocky Mount Red Sox of the Piedmont League and was 15-10 with a team-leading 131 strikeouts in 227 innings.

In 1940, Pescod joined the Scranton Red Sox of the Class A Eastern League and struggled on the mound before being optioned to the Montgomery Rebels of the Class B Southeastern League in June. Still struggling with an ailing arm, the 25-year-old's record dropped to 4-5 in 22 games with a 4.88 ERA. One consolation, however, was his .324 batting average.

Pescod began the 1941 season with the Rebels and had a 2-1 record when he was assigned to the Hot Springs Bathers of the Cotton States League. He regained his form at Hot Springs and led the pitching staff with a 17-6 record (league leading .739 winning percentage) and 3.00 ERA. On July 15, he combined with Vicksburg hurler

Alfred Kelly to defeat Helena in the Cotton States League All-Star game. His outstanding year saw a jump to the Nashville Vols of the Class A1 Southern Association, but after five appearances and a 0-2 record (including a defeat to Paul Richards' Atlanta Crackers) he was assigned to the Charleston Rebels of the Class B South Atlantic League in May. Pescod was 11-13 with the league-winning Rebels and had a 2.98 ERA. With the disbandment of the South Atlantic League after the 1942 season, Pescod was sold to the Portsmouth Cubs of the Piedmont League and assigned to the Erwin Aces of the Class D Appalachian League for 1943. He was the most talked about player at spring training, and club president H. H. Spears, used the veteran hurler to work with the team's youngsters during April. But the 1943 season never arrived for Pescod. The 27-year-old was in military service when the opening day cheers were heard from the bleachers of Erwin Aces ballpark.

In 1944, Pescod left his wife Elizabeth and their daughter, Charlotte Anne, at the family home in Dumas, Arkansas, to serve with the U.S. Army. After receiving basic training at Camp Roberts, California, he went overseas in May 1944 to Europe with Troop A, 121st Squadron of the 106th Cavalry Group, which acted as the eyes and ears of the Army, using their jeeps and M8 armored cars to scout ahead of slower units and seek out the enemy. The group first entered combat in France on July 4, 1944, mopping up enemy forces that had been cut off in the Normandy peninsula. In late 1944, the group was executing a delaying action against the 130th Panzer Division in northeast France, when Private Pescod was killed in action on December 2, near Eckartswiller, in the Alsace region of France.

The 30-year-old was buried at a temporary U.S. military cemetery at Hochfelden, France. His remains were probably returned home to the United States after the war, but I have been unable to confirm his final resting place.

Stan Klores

Stan Klores signed his first professional baseball contract with the Chicago Cubs in 1935. Assigned to the Peoria Tractors of the Class B Three-I League, the smooth left-handed hitting outfielder played 114 games for the Tractors and batted a highly respectable .283 with six home runs and 48 RBIs. The following year he began the season playing first base with the Portsmouth Cubs of the Class B Piedmont League, before joining the Asheville Tourists of the same league. In June of that year - after 42 games in the Piedmont League that saw him batting .278 - Klores was on the move again, joining the Huntington Red Birds of the Class C Mid-Atlantic League. He played 15 games with the Red Birds before moving to the Martinsville Manufacturers of the Class D Bi-State League, where he batted .330 in 66 games.

In 1937, Klores joined the Montgomery Bombers of the Class B Southeastern League and hit .276, with a team-leading 69 RBIs. The Milwaukee Brewers of the American Association claimed the first baseman at the end of the season and assigned him to the Bloomington Bloomers of the Three-I League, the same league where he had begun his professional career in 1935. His season got off to a good start, but a mid-season leg injury seriously hampered his play and as his batting average began to slip. So did his hopes of reaching the major leagues. Klores ended the 1938 season batting .231 over 97 games. It was the worst of his four years in the minors and caused the 22-year-old to consider opportunities outside of baseball.

Wisely, Klores had not neglected his education and had continued his studies at Northwestern's College of Liberal Arts each fall semester. At this point he was quite far along toward a degree and chose to pursue that route. The decision, however, did not spell the end of his relationship with baseball. Klores spent the summer of 1939 batting cleanup for the Chicago Spencer Coals, pennant winners of the semi-pro Tri-State League. Then, in 1940, he became head coach of Northwestern University's varsity baseball Wildcats.

For many years, Northwestern had been the smallest and the only private school in the Big Ten Conference, and the baseball team had endured a mixed record. They had never finished better than third and had finished in fourth place winning seven out of 12 games in 1939. Klores brought new promise to the team, firmly believing in developing his players' fundamentals and felt there was no room at the college level for fancy plays and showboating. Northwestern mustered a record of nine victories against three losses and a tie for the Big Ten championship with Illinois. Five players from the 1940 Wildcats went on to play in the minor leagues.

Klores earned his bachelor of science degree in June 1940, and was back with the Chicago Spencer Coals during the summer. He returned to coach Northwestern in 1941, received his master's degree at the beginning of June, and promptly enlisted in the U.S. Naval Reserve. In October 1942, Klores received his first active duty assignment as a communications officer with the newly built 2,100-ton destroyer USS Conway (DD-507), seeing action in the Pacific. A year later he returned to the United States and was assigned to another brand new destroyer, the 2,200-ton USS Cooper (DD-695). After operational training, the Cooper proceeded to the active war zone in the western Pacific, screening aircraft carriers involved in air attacks on Luzon, Ormoc Bay, and Manila Bay in the Philippines.

During the night of December 2–3, the Cooper, along with two other destroyers, sailed into Ormoc Bay to intercept Japanese shipping. An engagement with Japanese warships ensued and, just after midnight, the Japanese destroyer Take launched her torpedoes at the Cooper, which suffered a massive explosion on her starboard side, broke in two, and sank almost immediately. Klores, who ordinarily was stationed on the bridge, was on duty in the Combat Information Center at the time. As the Cooper sank, Japanese ships in the area prevented rescue of survivors, but eventually 168 crew members were saved. Klores was among the 191 that were lost.

[front cover shows Stan Klores with the Bloomington Bloomers in 1938]

George Gamble

George Gamble got his first taste of professional baseball as an outfielder with the Sydney Mines Ramblers of the Class D Cape Breton Colliery League in the summer of 1937. He played 46 of the scheduled 48 games with the Ramblers that year and hit .305 (fifth best in the league) with 22 RBIs. In 1938, he joined the Rome Colonels of the Class C Canadian-American League, but appeared in just 14 games and batted .178, marking the end of his professional career.

Gamble was the proprietor of a gasoline filling station in Rochester, New York, when he entered military service with the Army Air Force in 1942. He earned his pilot's wings as a fighter pilot and served overseas flying a North American P-51B Mustang out of Kunming, China, with the 26th Fighter Squadron of the 51st Fighter Group, 14th Air Force. The 51st Fighter Group's duties involved defending the Chinese end of the "Hump", the air supply route between India and China, as well as supporting the Chinese army. It also carried out attacks on Japanese shipping.

On December 4, 1944, flying his 29th mission, Second Lieutenant Gamble was wingman to First Lieutenant Shirley G. Wilson on a reconnaissance flight over French Indo-China (now Vietnam). They were heading southwest, following the railroad just out of Lang Son when they spotted a Japanese troop train. Lt. Wilson went in to attack; Lt. Gamble followed close behind. Shortly afterwards there was a huge explosion and Wilson believed Gamble had made a direct hit on the locomotive but did not see his wingman pull up.

"I started calling him [on the radio], but with no answer," Wilson later reported. "I had previously had good radio contact with him."

Wilson then made at least ten passes and spotted what he thought were small pieces of wreckage. His last pass over the target area was with flaps down and at a very slow speed. This time he could clearly see pieces of wreckage strewn everywhere and one large piece was a wing tip with part of the Army Air Force insignia showing. Gamble's P-51 had been caught in his own explosion as he attacked the target.

George Gamble is buried at Holy Sepulchre Cemetery in Rochester, New York.

Spud Young

Spud Young signed with the Concord Weavers of the North Carolina State League in 1941. After just a couple of appearances with the team, he joined the Paducah Indians of the Class D Kitty League, and appeared in 29 games for the last-place club, playing third base and batting .250.

In 1942, Young joined the Springfield Rifles of the Class A Eastern League, but was optioned to their Class C Canadian-American League affiliate, the Utica Braves, at the start of the season. Alongside future major leaguers Reggie Ortero and Jorge Comellas, Young played every game of the regular season for the Braves, and batted .242 with 59 RBIs as the team finished in third place. In a game against Pittsfield on June 28, he handled a league record 16 chances with seven putouts and nine assists. On July 6, Young was the starting shortstop for the Northern squad in the Canadian-American League all-star game. He rejoined Springfield at the end of the season and appeared in 12 games, batting .125.

Young joined the Marine Corps in December 1942, and, from June 1943, served as part of the Marine Corps detachment aboard the light cruiser USS Nashville (CL-43) in the Pacific. On December 12, 1944, the Nashville set sail for Mindoro Island on the west coast of the Philippines. There were many operational Japanese airfields located on Mindanao, Negros and other small islands flanking the route and most of

the Marines were stationed midship on the boat deck manning the anti-aircraft guns. On the morning of December 13 - one day shy of Private First-Class Young being in the service two years - a Japanese kamikaze plane appeared from nowhere and crashed into the Nashville's port-side five-inch gun mount on the main deck. Both bombs carried by the plane exploded and fire raged in the mid-section of the ship. Marion Young was among the 133 men that were killed that day. A further 190 were wounded. Despite the damage, the Nashville remained afloat and limped to safety.

Young was originally buried at USAF Cemetery Leyte #1, in the Philippine Islands. In late 1948, his remains were returned to the United States and now rest at Glendale Cemetery in Des Moines, Iowa.

Ernie Holbrook

Ernie Holbrook was a star first baseman with the University of Southern California Trojans in the 1930s, and amid much publicity, traveled to Cleveland for a tryout with the visiting Boston Red Sox in May 1935. He signed a professional contract the following week and joined the Charlotte Hornets of the Class B Piedmont League, where he batted .284 with 70 RBIs in 125 games. In 1936, the Charlotte Hornets left the Piedmont League and joined the independent Carolina League, so Boston began a working agreement with the replacement team, Rocky Mount, and great things were expected of Holbrook. However, his batting average nose-dived to .214 in 50 games, and on June 17, he was assigned to the Canton Terriers of the Class C Mid-Atlantic League, where he was used sparingly before the season was over.

Holbrook retired from baseball after the 1936 season and returned to California, where he coached basketball at George Washington High School. He took over coaching duties of the court team at USC in 1943–1944, and led the team to a 31–17 record to clinch the Pacific Coast Conference's Southern Division title.

On January 17, 1944, and after being rejected on three previous occasions, Holbrook entered military service with the Army. As a replacement infantryman, he served with the 109th Infantry Regiment of the 28th "Keystone" Infantry Division in Europe. On December 16, 1944, snow, ground fog and freezing weather engulfed the Ardennes in Luxembourg, where Private Holbrook was stationed.

An early morning enemy artillery and mortar barrage ripped into the division's line as the Fifth Panzer Army launched an attack in what later became known as the Battle of the Bulge. Holbrook was reported missing in action that first day. It was later confirmed he had died during the opening salvos of the Ardennes offensive. He is buried at the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery in Belgium.

Bill Hansen

Bill Hansen signed with the Greenville Lions of the Class D Alabama State League in 1941, and was batting .339 with seven home runs in 55 games with the last-place club, when he was assigned to the Fort Pierce Bombers of the Class D Florida East Coast League. The Bombers were vying for a position in the league playoffs and Hansen, an outfielder, batted .276 in 53 games to help them finish in third place.

Unfortunately, the Bombers were defeated in the first round of the playoffs by the Miami Beach Flamingos.

In 1942, Hansen batted an eye-catching .393 after 16 games with the Bombers, and joined the Statesville Owls of the Class D North Carolina State League. His stay there, however, was short-lived and he spent the majority of the season with the Green Bay Bluejays of the Class D Wisconsin State League. Hansen batted .310 in 88 games and led the team with 72 walks and 17 stolen bases.

Hansen entered military service in September 1942, and was attached to HQ Company, 311th Infantry Regiment, 78th Infantry Division in Europe. On December 17, 1944, having been overseas for just one month, he died of wounds received in combat in Belgium during the Battle of the Hurtgen Forest.

In December 1947, Hansen's body was returned home, and he is buried at the Waldheim Cemetery (now known as the Forest Home Cemetery), in Chicago, Illinois.

Aubrey Stewart

Aubrey Stewart, an African-American who worked at the Westvaco Paper Mill in Piedmont, West Virginia, also played semi-pro baseball for more than two decades with the Piedmont Colored Giants.

In 1942, despite being 36 years old, Stewart volunteered for military service. He was inducted by the U.S. Army in December and trained with the 333rd Field Artillery Battalion - an all-black outfit - at Camp Gruber, Oklahoma. In January 1944, the Battalion left for Europe and landed at Utah Beach, Normandy on June 29.

By December, the Battalion was in the Ardennes area of Belgium and faced the full brunt of the German offensive that was launched on December 16. Cut off from Allied forces on the second day of the battle, Stewart and ten other men from the Battalion walked 10 miles in deep snow and freezing conditions before reaching the apparent safety of a farmhouse in the tiny hamlet of Wereth. The farmhouse was owned by the town's mayor, 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 pulled up and the 11 African-Americans were marched into a cow pasture where they were executed. 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 U.S. 99th Infantry Division to the site. Army autopsies later showed signs of torture with broken bones and bayonet wounds inflicted upon the American soldiers. Years later, they became known as the Wereth 11.

In May 2004, a memorial was dedicated to the Wereth 11 on the site where the massacre took place and a sign now stands in Piedmont, West Virginia, honoring Aubrey Stewart. Aubrey Stewart is buried at the Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery in Belgium.

Link Berry

Leonard "Link" Berry signed with the Macon Peaches of the Class B South Atlantic League in 1937. The Peaches sent him to the New Bern Bears of the Class D Coastal

Plain League and he had three wins and three losses in 18 appearances. In 1938, the Bears were league champions, and Berry led the pitching staff with 31 appearances for a 12–4 record. The following year, the Bears slipped to fifth place despite Berry's 18–8 record and 3.06 ERA.

During the winter of 1939-1940, Berry played winter ball in Panama, before starting his fourth season at New Bern. Yet again, he was the mainstay of the pitching staff and posted a 17–8 record and 3.08 ERA, despite the club's sixth-place finish. Berry had won 50 games against just 23 losses over four seasons and was sold to the Charleston Rebels of the South Atlantic League at the end of the season. Moving up to Class B, Berry had a 12–14 record with the Rebels in 1941. Only Irv Stein (who pitched for the Athletics in 1932) and Mack Stewart (who would pitch for the Cubs in 1944) won more games for the Rebels.

A promising career was interrupted when military service called in April 1942. Berry was inducted into the Army at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, and joined Company B, 264th Infantry Regiment of the 66th "Black Panther" Infantry Division. The division sailed for England in November 1944, and, following a brief spell of training, Sergeant Berry was among 2,235 troops who boarded the SS Leopoldville - a Belgian passenger ship converted into a transport - that left England bound for the port of Cherbourg in France on Christmas Eve 1944.

Just five miles from France, the Leopoldville was spotted in the darkness by German U-boat U-486. At 5:55 P.M., undetected by the escorting destroyers, the submarine launched torpedoes at the Leopoldville. One of the torpedoes hit the ship on the starboard side and ripped a gaping hole below the water line. Bitter cold seawater poured into the troop compartments causing chaos and panic, but it was soon announced that the ship was not sinking, and no effort was made to abandon ship. Then, at some time after 8:00 P.M., two large explosions were heard from the bowels of the vessel and she immediately began to descend into the water.

Confused and distressed, men jumped into the rough sea and struggled to stay afloat against the weight of their equipment. Approximately 515 troops went down with the ship. Another 248 died from injuries, drowning or hypothermia. Berry was among those lost that evening. After the torpedo struck, he remained in his compartment and assisted in evacuating the wounded. He then descended into the hold of the ship to aid other men who were trapped. It was the last time he was seen alive.

The sinking of the Leopoldville resulted in the worst loss an American infantry division suffered from a U-boat attack during the war. Allied authorities, afraid of what the news would do for morale, buried the case. News that Berry was missing was received by his family in January 1945, but the circumstances remained a secret for many years. His mother, Metta Berry, who passed away in 1976, never learned how her son died, and documents about the incident remained classified until 1996.

Howard DeMartini

Howard DeMartini, a stocky right-hander, signed with the Beatrice Blues of the Class D Nebraska State League in 1937, and finished the year with an unimpressive 3–5

won-loss record and 5.46 ERA, prompting a return to his home state of New Jersey to play semi-pro ball with teams around Bergen and Rockland County. In late 1939, approaching his 25th birthday, DeMartini had a tryout with the New York Giants at the Polo Grounds, and was assigned to the Milford Giants of the Class D Eastern Shore League for 1940. He finished the year with a superb 16–6 won-loss record and a 2.74 ERA. The New York Giants assigned DeMartini to the Salisbury Giants of the Class D North Carolina State League in 1941, where he continued to pitch well. He finished the season with a 17–7 won-loss record and his 2.31 ERA was among the best in the league.

After winning 33 games in two seasons, DeMartini began the 1942 campaign with the Jersey City Giants of the Class AA International League. He made two brief appearances before being sent to the Jacksonville Tars of the Class B South Atlantic League, where he won five of his first six decisions. On June 29, DeMartini received little hitting support from his teammates and dropped a 2–0 decision to Ray Yochim of the Columbus Red Birds. It was to be his last professional game as he left immediately afterwards to be inducted into the Army at Newark, New Jersey, on July 1, 1942.

DeMartini, who was carried on the New York Giants' National Defense Service List when he entered military service, received basic training at Camp Lee, Virginia, and was then assigned to Holabird Ordnance Base, three miles from downtown Baltimore. Holabird was a repair center and supply depot for automotive parts, and DeMartini had the opportunity to play basketball and baseball throughout 1943. On April 8, he pitched a close game against the International League's Syracuse Chiefs, losing, 3–1, but held the Chiefs to six hits and scored Holabird's only run. On May 2, he pitched a 5–0 shutout over the Hagerstown Owls of the Interstate League, allowing just two hits and striking out 10.

DeMartini was later assigned to Company F, 262nd Infantry Regiment of the 66th "Black Panther" Infantry Division, and sailed for England on November 15, 1944. On Christmas Eve 1944, DeMartini joined Link Berry on the ill-fated SS Leopoldville. The torpedo that struck the Leopoldville, hit exactly where DeMartini and Company F was quartered. Only 19 of 175 troops assigned to the company survived. The body of Howard DeMartini was never found.

Grady Mabry

African-American Grady Mabry was employed at a textile mill in his hometown of Rome, Georgia, and played semi-pro baseball with the Colored Lindale Dragons.

Mabry was among the first men drafted in the area after Pearl Harbor in early 1942, and served with Company F of the all-black 366th Infantry Regiment attached to the 92nd Infantry Division in Italy. 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 Private First-Class Mabry.

Grady Mabry was the first African-American from Rome to be killed in World War II. His remains were returned home in 1948, and originally buried at Callier Springs Cemetery, before his body was exhumed in 1956, and placed at Shadyside Memorial Gardens, Rome, Georgia.

Ed Leneve

Ed Leneve signed with the Oakland Oaks of the Pacific Coast League in June 1947, and was farmed out to Phoenix Senators of the Class C Arizona-Texas League. He saw very limited playing time at Phoenix but was back with the Oaks for spring training in 1948, getting two hits in a practice game against USC on February 28.

Leneve was assigned to the Stockton Ports of the Class C California League at the start of the season but joined Visalia (a Chicago Cubs farm team) of the same league midsummer. In 41 games, the 18-year-old catcher batted just .128 (14 for 109).

Leneve entered military service at the end of the season and served as a private First Class with 1st Battalion, 7th Marines. On September 21, 1950, the 1st Battalion made an amphibious landing at Inchon, Korea. On December 2, 1950, Private First-Class Leneve was killed in action during the Battle of Chosin Reservoir - a brutal 17-day battle in freezing weather against Chinese forces.

Edward Leneve, the first professional baseball player to be killed in the Korean War, is buried at Arlington National Cemetery in Virginia.

Killed in Plane Crashes

Pete Viselli

Like Jerry Angelich, Pete Viselli had already experienced a stint in military service before playing professional baseball. In 1938, he was at Randolph Field, Texas, with the Army Air Corps, where he was the shortstop and lead-off hitter with the Squadron 53 Bears and helped the Randolph Field Ramblers clinch their sixth successive Army League championship.

Viselli left military service in 1939, and tried his hand at Organized Baseball. At the start of the season, he joined the Palestine Pals of the Class C East Texas League. He was batting just .206 over 12 games but was called up to the Lima Pandas of the Class D Ohio State League on May 12, because they needed a shortstop. Viselli lasted just a week with the Pandas; after going hitless in six at-bats he received his release on May 18. He spent the remainder of the season with the Landis Senators of the Class D North Carolina State League, where he batted .198 over 24 games.

Viselli did not return to professional baseball after 1939, but returned, instead, to military service. With the Army Air Corps, he was deployed to Clark Field at Luzon in the Philippine Islands, as aircrew with the 28th Bomb Squadron. Operating with the Martin B-10 and the Douglas B-18 Bolo - obsolete twin-engine bombers of the tight military budgets of the 1930s - the squadron functioned as the long-range strike arm of the Far East Air Force. Viselli was soon playing shortstop for the Clark Field team in the Manila Bay League, and played in the league championships at Rizal Stadium.

On December 7, 1941, despite Pearl Harbor having been attacked earlier in the day, Clark Field was caught off-guard as Japanese bombers roared overhead, showering high explosives on the grounded bombers, destroying many and wrecking hangars and runways. In their wake came fighter planes, which made low-level attacks on ground forces and anti-aircraft batteries. They left behind a burning mass of wreckage and, though some aircraft were saved, the main strength of the Far East Air Force in the Philippines was gone. Nevertheless, two days later, the remnants of the group attacked and destroyed a troop transport and severely damaged another off the Philippine coast, making it the first American air unit to strike back at the Japanese.

On December 12, 1941, Staff Sergeant Viselli boarded a B-18 at Clark Field. First Lieutenant Ted Fisch was taking the bomber up on a reconnaissance flight to locate the exact position of the Japanese fleet that was rapidly approaching the Philippines. To get a good view and at the same time avoid danger, Fisch intended to fly as high and as fast as he could. Viselli was the crew chief, responsible for overall maintenance of the plane. The plane roared down the runway at Clark Field and was never seen again. Whether the plane succumbed to enemy action or mechanical failure is not known.

Alan Grant

Alan Grant played varsity baseball at the University of Illinois and captained the team his senior year, 1941. His five wins for the year tied him for first place among Big Ten pitchers and he signed with the Chicago Cubs' organization in June. The Cubs assigned the stocky right-hander to their Class D South Atlantic League team at Macon, and he made nine appearances during the season for an 0–1 record.

In January 1942, Grant entered military service with the Army Air Force, beginning training as an aviation cadet at Grider Field, Pine Bluff, Arkansas. At Kelly Field, near San Antonio, Texas, on November 5, 1942, he earned his bombardier's silver wings and a commission as a second lieutenant.

Grant was later assigned to the 19th Bomb Group at Pyote Army Air Field, Texas, where he was involved in training bombardiers to use the Norden bombsight fitted in the Boeing B-17 Flying Fortresses - the four-engine bomber being used by the Eighth Air Force in Europe. Perhaps his time with B-17s gave Grant a desire for combat because he put in a request for overseas duty and, in October 1943, he was assigned to the 334th Bomb Squadron, 95th Bomb Group in England.

Three months after arriving in England, Grant had completed his 25-mission tour of duty and was ready to go home. On December 29, 1943, he was one of 20 airmen who boarded a B-17F for the first leg of their journey home. The first part of the flight was uneventful, but the weather quickly deteriorated. Heavy clouds, icy conditions and thick fog cut visibility down to 100 yards and the pilot relied on his navigator to track their location. Estimating they had reached the coast, the navigator instructed the pilot to begin his descent. In fact, they were still four miles from the coast, and as the plane emerged out of the fog at around 2:45 P.M., a mountain appeared before them. The collision was violent. Two loud explosions were heard and all 21 aboard the plane perished in the burning wreck.

Second Lieutenant Alan Grant is buried at Cambridge American Cemetery in England.

Felix Little

Felix Little played varsity baseball at Lenoir-Rhyne College in Hickory, North Carolina. In his senior year, 1939, he co-captained the Mountain Bears and was the mainstay of the pitching staff. Following graduation, he made a handful of appearance for the Hickory Rebels in the newly formed Class D Tar Heel League.

In 1940, he joined the Newton-Conover Twins of the same league and was 4–7 in 16 appearances with a 5.27 ERA. His career as a professional baseball player ended after the 1940 season, and Little accepted a position as a teacher and athletic coach at Balls Creek High School in Newton, North Carolina.

Little entered military service with the Navy in 1941, and graduated as a bomber pilot at Jacksonville Naval Air Station in Florida. Lieutenant Little served with Patrol Bombing Squadron VPB-134 flying Lockheed PV-1 Ventura twin-engine bombers, and in January 1944, the squadron relocated to Brazil, South America. The northern coast of Brazil provided ideal locations to cover the vital South Atlantic shipping routes.

On December 18, 1944, Little was among nine crew and passengers aboard a PV-1 that left the runway at Pici Field in Fortaleza. As soon as it became airborne the port engine exploded and the plane crashed, killing all on board.

Felix Little's body was returned to the United States in April 1948, and now rests at the Catawba United Methodist Church Cemetery.

Leon McCaskill

Leon McCaskill attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where he was a heavy-hitting outfielder on the varsity baseball team. He entered military service during WWII and served as a pilot with the Army Air Force, stationed in Italy with the 51st Troop Carrier Squadron, 62nd Troop Carrier Group.

Between flying duties during 1945, McCaskill played baseball for the 62nd Troop Carrier Group team. The Gliders, as the team was known, reached the Mediterranean Theater of Operations (MTO) double elimination baseball finals before being knocked out, but McCaskill, along with a few other players, was then picked up by the MTO champion 92nd Infantry Division to help their chances against the European Theater of Operations (ETO) All-Stars. The 92nd Infantry Division was a segregated unit and the Buffaloes had been an all-black team, becoming an integrated squad with the addition of McCaskill. The ETO All-Stars were also an integrated team with Negro League stars Leon Day and Willard Brown. Unfortunately, the 92nd Division Buffaloes were knocked out in three straight games.

On December 14, 1945, McCaskill was piloting a Douglas C-47B Skytrain with three other crew members for a routine flight from Heraklion Field, Crete, to Athens, Greece. Following a mechanical failure, the C-47 plunged into the sea just 250 yards from the end of the airfield. His body was never recovered.

George Reeden

George Reeden had a brief professional career as a third baseman, signing with the Lexington A's of the Class D North Carolina State League in 1950, and making just a handful of appearances.

By September 1952, with the Korean War into its second year, Reeden was an air cadet at Greenville Air Force Base, South Carolina, and later transferred to the 3626th Flying Training Group at Tyndall Air Force Base, near Panama City, Florida. On December 11, 1953, Second Lieutenant Reeden was piloting a North American F-86D Sabre fighter plane that had a faulty fire warning signal. He had been trained to turn the power off but did not eject and stayed with the jet as it crashed into Saint Andrew Bay, near the DuPont Bridge, about a mile northwest of Tyndall AFB.

George Reeden is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia.

Died from other Causes

Bill Stearns

Bill Stearns was just 18 years old when he pitched for the Washington Olympics in the inaugural season of the National Association in 1871. He only made two appearances but won both times, beating Cleveland 16-3 on June 26 and Chicago 13-8 on June 30.

In 1872, he pitched for the National Association's Washington Nationals, completing all 11 of the team's games and losing them all. In 1873, with the Washington Blue Legs he managed 7 wins, but this was eclipsed by 25 losses. He spent 1874 with the Hartford Dark Blues and was 3-14, then posted a 1-14 record with the Washington Nationals in 1875 – the last year of the National Association.

The National League replaced the National Association in 1876 and Stearns was never seen again in professional baseball. He finished his career with a 13-64 won-loss record and 4.28 ERA in 84 games.

More than 20 years later, the 45-year-old ex-ballplayer volunteered for military service with the outbreak of the Spanish-American War in 1898. He served as a private with Company H, First District of Columbia Volunteers; a provisional engineering unit that trained in military engineering procedures for the Puerto Rico expedition.

On July 11, 1898, Company H boarded a transport ship and embarked for Guantanamo, where they built and dismantled piers, and loaded materials. They arrived in Guanica Harbor, Puerto Rico, on July 25, and at the request of Commander Wainwright of the USS Gloucester, disembarked into the town, with a detachment of artillery, to clear the vicinity of Spanish troops. This was the first landing of the U.S. Army in Puerto Rico. During the passage to the shore from the ship, the battalion was warned to be prepared to come under fire from the Spanish. The town was occupied by 300 Spanish troops and a skirmish line was formed and advanced, causing the Spanish troops to flee. The Americans then established outposts on the range of hills overlooking the bay. Company H remained at

Guanica, where the engineers constructed piers and roads, and landed the engineering stores of the expedition.

Stearns became ill during his time in Puerto Rico and was excused from all but light duties. One account referred to it as "poisoning of his stomach." On September 16, 1898, three weeks after arriving in Puerto Rico, Company H arrived back in United States. The three-day voyage amid severe storms had been difficult for the 500 men aboard, and must have been unbearable for an already ailing Bill Stearns.

Bill Stearns never recovered from his illness. In late December 1898, his condition worsened at his home in Washington, DC, and he died on December 30. His funeral was held on January 1, 1899, with Captain Looker and many men from Company H in attendance. He is buried at Arlington National Cemetery, Virginia.

John Zenor

John Zenor played baseball and football at the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland, graduating in 1911. He later served as commander of the USS Monterey, a double-turreted monitor and served on the USS Idaho (BB-24), a battleship, and the USS Brooklyn (ACR-3), a cruiser that served as flagship for the Commander-in-Chief of the Asiatic Fleet.

On December 20, 1917, Lieutenant Zenor was aboard the Brooklyn supervising the loading of coal at Manila, in the Philippines. A piece of hoisting apparatus gave way, and Lt. Zenor leapt for safety, falling through a hatch and fracturing his skull. He was rushed to Canacao Naval Hospital where he died shortly after arrival.

John Murtaugh

John Murtaugh attended St. Bonaventure College (now St. Bonaventure University) at Allegany, New York in 1890s. Coaching the baseball team at St. Bonaventure was future Hall of Famer John McGraw, and Murtaugh learned his baseball skills from "Little Napoleon". Aged 22, he graduated from St. Bonaventure in 1896 and entered Cornell University the same year. He graduated from Cornell in 1899, and during that time he played football and on the baseball team as a first baseman, being unanimously elected team captain his senior year.

"He was the best college first baseman that I ever had the pleasure of meeting," said future Hall of Famer and former Cornell coach, Hughie Jennings. "I urged John to make baseball a profession, he would have been one of the biggest men in the game today. I do not mean as a player alone for he was fitted as a leader and director and would have made one of the greatest baseball kings that the nation has ever known."

But baseball was not to be Murtaugh's chosen path. He had studied law was admitted to the bar in 1899, elected to the board of supervisors of Chemung County, New York, in 1900, and appointed corporation counsel of Elmira under Mayor Z. R. Brockway. Then, for four years, he served as a distinguished member of the senate of the state of New York and for a year its majority leader. Upon completion of his senatorial term in 1915, Senator Murtaugh returned to Elmira and resumed his duties in the legal profession.

In May 1918, Attorney Murtaugh voluntarily enlisted in the army and was given a commission as a major on September 10, serving in the judge advocate's department and based at Governor's Island, New York. It was the intention of the government to send Murtaugh overseas, first to France, then to Constantinople, Turkey, but on December 1, 1918, Murtaugh was the victim of a tragic and fatal accident.

Staying at the Ansonia Hotel on Broadway, New York, where he occupied a suite of rooms with Major Jed Adams, Murtaugh was feeling unwell and sent the bell boy for Rochelle salt, a form of potassium sodium tartrate, which was popular as a mild laxative. However, the bell boy returned with Roach salt, an insecticide made of sodium fluoride, which Murtaugh consumed with deadly consequence.

It took three agonizing hours for the poison to kill John Murtaugh. There was nothing doctors could do to help him. He was 44 years old. Following a requiem high mass at St. Patrick's Church in Elmira, John Murtaugh was buried at St. Peter and Paul's Cemetery.

Bob Price

Bob Price signed as an outfielder with the Pacific Coast League's San Francisco Seals in 1938. The Seals farmed him out to the Tucson Cowboys of the Class D Arizona-Texas League and he enjoyed an excellent rookie season with the Cowboys, batting .291 with 74 RBIs in 130 games. Price advanced to the Salt Lake City Bees of the Class C Pioneer League for 1939 and continued to impress. Playing left field and batting in the number three spot, hit .346 with 38 doubles and stole 27 bases. It was a great season for the 20-year-old and he fully expected to be joining the Seals in 1940, but in late September, Price suffered a ruptured appendix that required emergency surgery and numerous blood transfusions. He spent several weeks at the Mount Zion Hospital in San Francisco, and the incident drastically affected his baseball career.

At spring training with the San Francisco Seals in 1940, Price was a contender for Dom DiMaggio's vacated center field berth, but the after-effects of hospitalization hampered his performance. Although he managed to earn a place with the Seals when the regular season began and remained until late June, he appeared in only 14 games, primarily as a pinch-hitter and defensive replacement. Price was then optioned to the Ogden Reds back in the Pioneer League, where he failed to hit and was sold to the Boise Pilots of the same league on July 18. Price appeared in 72 games for the season and his batting average dropped 135 points from .346 in 1939 to .211 in 1940.

Price began the 1941 campaign with Boise, and although there were occasional highlights such as three hits against Twin Falls on May 4, he was batting just .231 when Boise owner Haydn Walker sold him to the Oklahoma City Indians of the Texas League. The Indians immediately optioned Price to the Salina Millers of the Class C Western Association, where he continued to struggle at the plate, and he finished the season with the Clarksdale Tigers of the Class C Cotton States League, where he batted an improved .263 in 55 games.

Price was in military service the following year and served with the Navy in the Pacific as an aviation machinist's mate first class. Bob Price was lost at sea on December 31, 1944.

Chatty Etherton

Charles "Chatty" Etherton signed with the Mayfield Clothiers of the newly formed Class D Kitty League in 1936, and made one brief appearance before returning to his hometown of Carbondale, Illinois, to play for the Bridge 4-H softball team that won the county championship.

Between 1938 and 1940, Etherton had brief trials with teams in the Arkansas-Missouri League, South Atlantic League, Kitty League, and Alabama State League, but it was following an outstanding season with the sandlot Red Wings of Murphysboro, Illinois, that he secured a regular place in organized baseball, joining the Zanesville Cubs of the Class C Middle-Atlantic League in 1941.

Etherton started in style for the Cubs with a 16-strikeout performance in a pre-season game against Muskingum College on April 24. Etherton made 22 appearances with Zanesville for a 3-7 record and a 5.01 ERA. He finished out the year making seven appearances for the Lake Charles Skippers of the Class D Evangeline League. In 1942, Etherton joined the Winnipeg Maroons of the Class C Northern League, where he posted a 4-2 won-loss record, before entering military service on June 12.

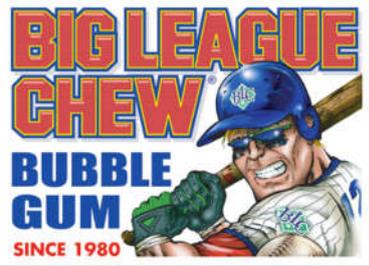
Corporal Etherton served in the Pacific Theater with the 382nd AAA (Anti-Aircraft Artillery) Automatic Weapons Battalion, serving time in both New Guinea and Luzon in the Philippines. He returned home in late 1945. On December 23, he boarded a troop train at Camp Stoneman, California, bound for discharge at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. Nobody knows what horrors the 26-year-old faced on the battlefields of the Pacific, but other soldiers on the train said he was despondent. Four days after the train left California, Etherton locked himself in a wash room and cut his throat with a double-edged razor blade. His body was found when the train stopped at Jefferson City, Missouri, only a few hours from home.

Charles "Chatty" Etherton is buried at Oakland Cemetery in Carbondale, Illinois.

A little help please!

In my endeavor to memorialize every baseball player who lost their life while in military service, there remain a few names for whom I do not have enough information to confirm they were indeed a military casualty. Two players I'm keen to add to the website are Ernest "Rusty" Payne and Ralph Johnson. Both men played Negro League baseball before the war. Rusty Payne was with the Cincinnati Tigers in 1937 and the Indianapolis Crawfords in 1940. Ralph Johnson was with the Philadelphia Stars in 1940 and 1941. Neither of these gentlemen played ball after the war and Payne reportedly died from a bayonet wound, while Johnson died in service in Italy. If anyone can provide information to confirm their military-related deaths, I'd be honored to add them both to the Baseball's Greatest Sacrifice website.

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Some websites hold a special place in my heart, as does Baseball Almanac, run by my good friend Sean Holtz. With more than 500,000 pages of baseball history, over 1,500,000 fast facts, original research from recognized experts and material not

found or seen on any other web site in the world, Baseball Almanac is my go-to source for all information relating to major league baseball. If you haven't visited this plethora of historical nuggets, then I suggest you take a look today...and tell Sean I sent you!

Here are a few sections worth checking out:

The Ballplayers www.baseball-almanac.com/players/ballplayer.shtml

Team Histories www.baseball-almanac.com/teammenu.shtml

Year-by-Year www.baseball-almanac.com/yearmenu.shtml

World Series History www.baseball-almanac.com/ws/wsmenu.shtml

All information contained in this newsletter is accurate to the best of my knowledge. However, the majority of this information has been obtained from first-hand recollections of events that happened more than 70 years ago, family memories and contemporary published articles. If you can correct any information, I'd be very pleased to hear from you gary@baseballinwartime.com



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