



*Gary Bedingfield's*  
**Baseball  
in Wartime**

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## Baseball's Greatest Sacrifice

The last few months have been a busy time for me. I've been researching and compiling biographies for a new book I hope to see published next year. "Baseball's Greatest Sacrifice" is the story of professional ballplayers who sacrificed their careers, and ultimately their lives, fighting for their country during World War II. Researching events of more than 60 years ago is never an easy task and the support and encouragement I have received from friends and family members of these men, as well as "experts in their field" has been overwhelming. Furthermore, it has convinced me (if at any time I had doubt) that this subject is long overdue being put in print. But, more importantly, this exercise has reminded me of what an enormous sacrifice was made by these young men. Many left behind grief-stricken wives and siblings. Some left young children. Others left children they had never even seen.

"Baseball's Greatest Sacrifice" will be a tribute to these men, and I am honored to be in a position to tell their stories. Look out for a progress update in a future issue of the newsletter.

My wife and I would like to dedicate this issue of the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter to our wonderful niece, Claire Kennedy, who passed away in October. We miss you, Claire.

**Claire Kennedy**

(November 8, 1984 to October, 16, 2008)

## Important Notice

Since it's humble origins in September 2007, the Baseball in Wartime newsletter has grown beyond my wildest expectations with more than 3,000 email addresses on the mailing list.

Whilst I'm more than happy to send the newsletter to everyone who wants to receive it, it is time for a little spring cleaning to ensure the newsletter is getting to the right people. Therefore, during the month of November you will receive an email from me to confirm you wish to continue receiving the newsletter. All you will need to do is reply to that email and you will be included in the updated mailing list. If I don't hear from you your email address will be removed from the list, although you can drop me a line and rejoin at any time.

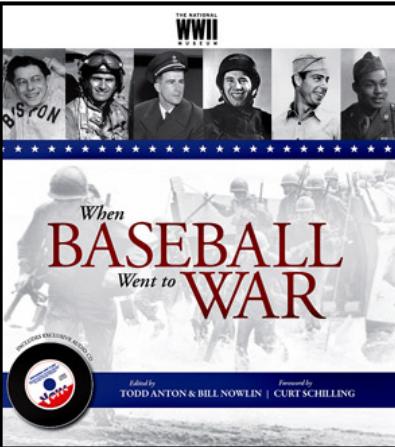
Thank you.

### Just Released!

## **When Baseball Went to War**

With contributions from Todd Anton, Gary Bedingfield, Frank Ceresi, Bill Nowlin, Bill Swank and many others.

See page 6 of this newsletter for further details



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## Baseball Hero - John "Jocko" Thompson

John S "Jocko" Thompson was born in Beverly, Massachusetts on January 17, 1917. The tall lefthander hurled at Northeastern University and was signed by the Boston Red Sox in 1940.

Thompson won 19 games during his rookie season for the Centreville Red Sox in the Eastern Shore League. The following year he was in the Army and joined the paratroopers, attached to the 504<sup>th</sup> Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division.

On September 17, 1944, Lieutenant Thompson played a vital role in Operation Market Garden - the largest airborne operation in history. As platoon leader, he and his men landed only 600 hundred yards from the southwestern edge of the bridge at Grave that spanned the Maas River in Holland. He could hear erratic firing from the town itself but everything around the bridge was quiet. Thompson was unsure whether he should attack with the 16 men in his platoon or wait for the remainder of the company. "Since this was our primary mission, I decided to attack," he told author Cornelius Ryan.

Thompson led his platoon to cover in nearby drainage ditches, before wading in water up to their necks as they worked their way towards the bridge. They soon began receiving fire from a tower on the bridge and also noticed a lot of other activity around a building on the bridge that Thompson thought might be a powerplant. Thompson believed the Germans might be preparing to blow up the bridge so he deployed his men to attack the building. "We raked the area with machine guns, overran the power

plant, found four dead Germans and one wounded," recalled Thompson.

Shortly afterwards, Thompson heard two trucks approaching from the town. The driver of the lead vehicle was killed and the other vehicle quickly came to a halt. German soldiers poured out of the back of both vehicles and were met with a hail of fire from Thompson's platoon. The Germans soon retreated back towards the town.

Thompson's bazooka man then dealt with the machine-gun fire coming from the tower on the bridge, and the platoon set up a road block, securing the bridge until the arrival of further elements of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne.

Lieutenant Thompson was wounded in action twice during the war and in addition to being awarded the Silver Star and Bronze Star, he also received decorations from the French, Dutch and Belgians. He saw action during the Battle of the Bulge and at the end of the war he served as an aide to General James Gavin in the occupation of Berlin.

Thompson was back playing baseball in 1946 and posted a 15-7 record with the Scranton Red Sox of the Eastern League. He was with the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1947 and remained with the Maple Leafs in 1948 when the working agreement with Boston ended and he became the property of the Philadelphia Phillies.

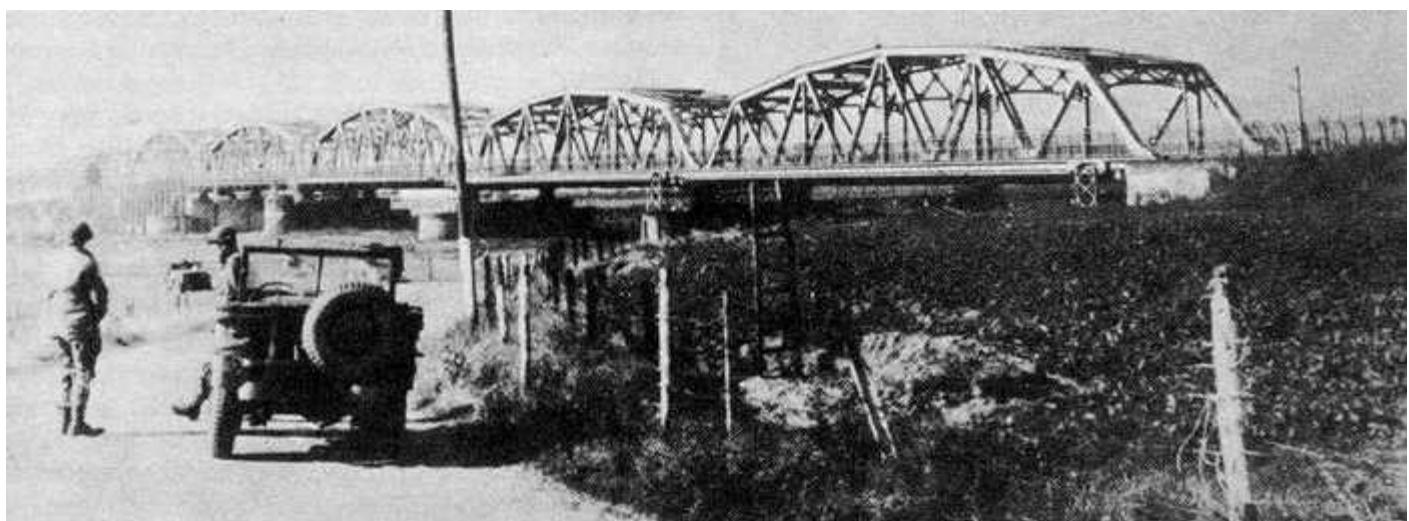
He was 13-8 with Toronto in 1948, and on September 21, 31-year-old Thompson made his major league debut



with the Phillies, beating the Reds, 6-1, on a five-hitter.

Thompson was 14-5 with Toronto in 1949 and made eight appearances with the Phillies posting a 1-3 record. In 1950 he was 10-14 in Toronto and made two relief appearances in Philadelphia. At 34, pitched in 29 games for the Phillies in 1951, with a 4-8 won-loss record and a 3.85 ERA.

Jocko Thompson passed away in Olney, Maryland on February 3, 1988. In September 17, 2004 – 60 years after Thompson's platoon captured the bridge at Grave - it was renamed Lieutenant John S Thompson Bridge. His widow and many WWII veterans were present at the ceremony.



Grave Bridge in Holland in 1944. The bridge was renamed Lieutenant John S Thompson Bridge in 2004.

## Baseball Hero - Bobby Byrne Jr

Robert J "Bobby" Byrne Jr was born on January 24, 1917 in St Louis, Missouri. The son of former major league third baseman, Bobby Byrne, he attended Our Lady of Lourdes grade school and went from there to Beaumont High School, where he played baseball and football.

Byrnes signed his first professional contract with Knoxville of the Southern Association in 1939 and spent most of the season with Ashland of the Mountain State League. In 67 games he batted .269. He was with Ashland and Salem-Roanoke of the Kitty League in 1940, and batted .230 in 61 games with Ashland in 1941, before enlisting at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri on August 12.

Byrne served as an aviation cadet with the Army Air Corps and was assigned to Hemet, California and then Taft, California. He received his pilot's wings at Luke Field, Arizona on March 6, 1942, and was an instructor at Tallahassee, Florida, before going overseas in September 1942.

"I always figured Bobby would be a flier," Bobby Sr told *The Sporting News* on November 19, 1942. "When he was a boy he was always interested in planes. Later on, he put together miniature planes – the kind you bought in five and ten cent stores, and then assembled. I think he won a prize or two for building the best toy bombers. When the war came, it was only natural for Bobby to turn toward aviation."

Second Lieutenant Byrne arrived in Egypt with the 64<sup>th</sup> Fighter Squadron of the 57<sup>th</sup> Fighter Group in September 1942. "I'll get a Jerry for each one of you at home," he wrote in a letter received by his father on October 10, 1942.

On his first sortie flying a Curtis P-40 Warhawk protecting a fighter-bomber attack on enemy landing grounds at El Daba in Egypt, Byrne shot down a German Messerschmitt 109 fighter. He later described to the Associated Press how he maneuvered against one German fighter for a burst from his guns, pulled away and

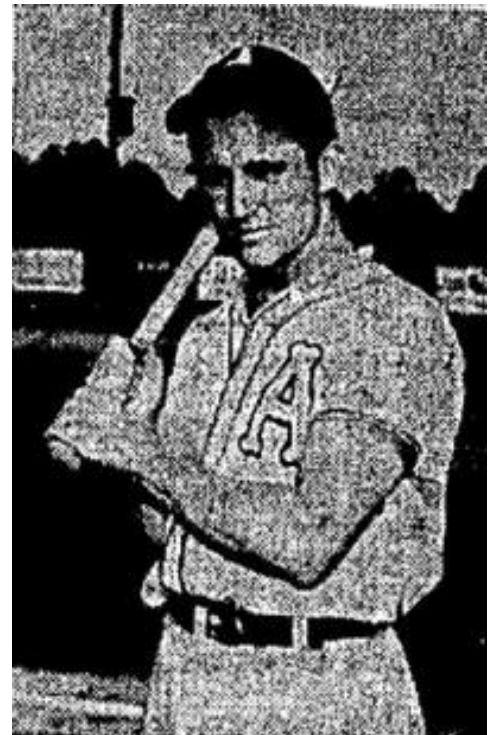
saw three more below him, which he plunged into with guns blazing. He saw one burst into flames.

"It thrilled me to tears," his mother told *The Sporting News*, "when the newspapers called me early in the morning to tell me what Bobby had done in his first combat in Egypt. Of course, I've steeled myself to expect good news with the bad, but after all I'm a mother and when you've got your only two boys in the aviation service, it puts you a little on edge."

On January 12, 1943, Byrne was wounded during aerial combat. Shortly afterwards he received the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal to accompany the Purple Heart.

On April 18, 1943, Byrne shot down a further three enemy airplanes over Tunisia and added another two on April 26 to bring his tally to six and make him one of the leading aces in the Army Air Force at the time.

Promoted to the rank of captain, he returned home to the United States during the summer of 1943. On September 11, he married Miss Bonnie Dean at Kellogg Field, Michigan, and then took up an assignment as an instructor at an army air field in New York. He was later stationed in North Carolina and worked as a test pilot rising to the rank of major.



His younger brother, Bernie Byrne, also served with the Army Air Force in WWII, he was stationed in the Mediterranean and China-Burma-India Theaters as a fighter pilot and was credited with two enemy planes shot down.

Bobby Byrne passed away on April 10, 1993. He was 76 years old and is buried at Philadelphia Memorial Park in Pennsylvania.



Bobby Byrne Jr flew a Curtis P-40 Warhawk in North Africa

## Baseball Hero - Joe Chiozza

Joseph P "Joe" Chiozza was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1920. He was the youngest of three baseball-playing brothers. His eldest sibling, Lou, had begun a professional career in the Phillies organization in 1934. Lou played for the Philles from 1934 to 1936 and was with the New York Giants from 1937 to 1939. He was the first man to bat in a major league night game as the leadoff hitter for the Phillies when they met the Reds at Cincinnati's Crosley Field on May 24, 1935. Dino, two years younger than Lou and eight years older than Joe, joined the Phillies organization in 1934 and made two appearances as a shortstop with the National League team in 1935.

Joe was just 17 years old when he signed as a pitcher with the Memphis Chicks in 1937. "He may be two or three seasons away from the majors," said Memphis manager Billy Southworth, "but I believe he will reach the big show."

Memphis assigned young Chiozza to the Paragould Rebels of the Northeast Arkansas League his rookie year. He appeared in 22 games and was 3-6 with a 4.83 ERA. He was out of organized baseball in 1938 but returned with the Clarksdale Red Sox of the Cotton States League in 1939 where he posted a 3-3 record.

1939 was to be Chiozza's last year in baseball. He entered military service with the Army Air Force and served in Europe with the 494th Bomb Squadron of the 344th Bomb Group. Lieutenant Chiozza was the bombardier of Martin B-26 Marauder "*Coral Princess III*," that flew 58 successful missions.

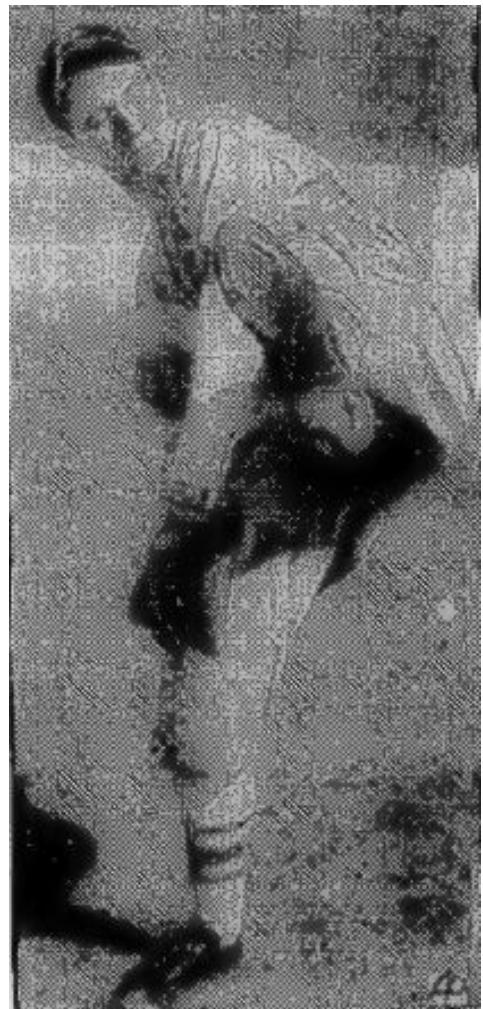
On the morning of November 19, 1944, *Coral Princess III* flew a mission to the South of France. The target was the railroad bridge across the Rhine at Colmar. They flew through clouds most of the way, but about 25 miles from the target they broke into the clear blue skies. The twin-engined plane made its bomb run and left the bridge in ruins, then returned to base at Pontoise, near Paris. Later that day, Chiozza was informed he was scheduled to fly again that afternoon, despite not having been to the briefing, and knowing nothing of the mission or target.

He was taken by jeep to the end of the runway where the *Coral Princess* was

ready to take off. The day was overcast with low clouds at 1500 feet and a second layer at 3000 feet. Chiozza studied the target photo which was the railroad yards at Cologne. The railroad yards were clearly visible about thirty miles ahead and he began to sight the Norden bombsight when there was a deafening explosion. Several direct hits severed the vertical stabilizer cable and the gas line, sending the B-26 into a terrifying dive. When Chiozza looked back he saw the entire bomb bay was blazing. Co-pilot, Lieutenant Fred Fubel, grabbed a fire extinguisher and finally got the fire out while Captain Webster Allyn, the pilot struggled with the controls and got the plane to level out at 2000 feet.

The right engine had also caught fire during this time and was feathered. The compasses were all wrecked and there were gaping holes throughout the airplane. Just to make matters worse, it was beginning to snow. Captain Allyn told his crew to make sure that their chutes were on correctly as he searched for somewhere to ditch the plane. Then the left engine began to sputter and the order was given to bail out. The tail gunner, Staff-Sergeant E K Bozack, and Captain Allyn both failed to jump and were killed when the plane crashed and exploded. Chiozza and the three other crew members who jumped landed safely and were helped back to their base in France by Belgian underground forces. Chiozza left his parachute with a young Belgian girl who wanted to use the material for her wedding gown.

Chiozza was back in the United States in February 1945. While at Miami Beach Army Air Base awaiting redistribution, he



announced he would not be returning to professional baseball because he felt he was too old to regain his pitching form.

Joe Chiozza passed away in Memphis, Tennessee on March 19, 2000. He was 80 years old.



Joe Chiozza was a bombardier aboard a Martin B-26 Marauder in Europe

## Baseball Hero - Jerry Juzek

Gerald "Jerry" Juzek was a football and baseball star at the University of Mississippi. As a freshman football player he outshone such teammates as Charley Conerly, who went on to play in the NFL, and Doug Kenna who later gained All-America recognition at West Point.

But Juzek entered military service his sophomore year at Ol' Miss and served with the Marines. He landed with the first wave of Marines to hit the beach at Guadalcanal in August 1942. Sergeant Juzek noticed that a machine gun at an advanced outpost had apparently jammed and he decided to help out. He wriggled forward on his belly and just before he reached the gun a Japanese mortar shell exploded. All four members of the gun crew were killed instantly.

"I was lucky," Juzek told *The Sporting News* on April 6, 1944. "My number just wasn't up."

But shortly afterwards another explosion followed. His left leg was peppered with shell fragments and his thigh was left with a gaping hole. Juzek managed to crawl back to receive emergency medical attention and was then flown out to Auckland, New Zealand. Navy medics told him he would never walk again. "But I swore that I would walk," he said. "I vowed I would even play baseball again."

Juzek returned to the United States on a hospital ship and docked at San Pedro, California, from where he was taken to Long Beach Naval Hospital. Recovery was slow but miraculous thanks to the finest doctors in the world and the tender care of nurses.

Juzek never gave up on his dream to play baseball again, and on April 1, 1944, less than two years after his devastating injuries, he pitched the last three innings of a 7-1 loss for the Pacific Coast League's Los Angeles Angels in an exhibition game against the Port Hueneme Seabees. He allowed only one hit and proved that he could pitch well enough to be offered a contract by the Angels. It was the beginning of an eight-year minor league career.

Juzek joined the Hollywood Stars on March 16, 1945, but was optioned to the Memphis Chicks of the Southern Association in May. In June he was traded to the New Orleans Pelicans. He was released by New Orleans in late July but picked up by the Nashville Volunteers in the same league.

On August 30, 1945, wearing uniform number 30 and pitching for Nashville, Juzek blanked the Little Rock Travelers on one hit for seven innings, enjoying a 9 to 0 lead. Just before taking the mound for the eighth inning, however, Juzek, changed to number 15 and was promptly hit by a five-run attack.

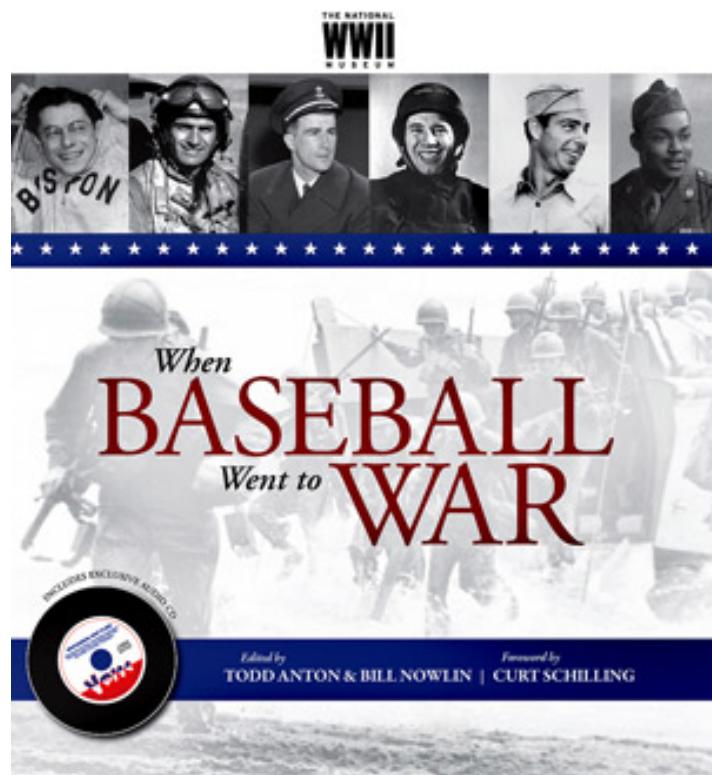
In April 1946, he was assigned to Macon, and played for the Ozark Eagles in the Alabama State League in 1947 where he was 8-10.

Juzek was with the Donalsonville semi-pro team in 1948, and was signed by the Atlanta Crackers of the Southern Association in late August 1948. In 1949 he played with the Riverside Dons in the Sunset League. This team became the Rubidoux Rubes in July 1949. By September he was with the Porterville Packers in the same league and remained with that team through 1950.

Juzek was 5-10 with the Visalia Cubs in the California League in 1951, and 1-5 with Tucson in the Arizona-Texas League. He began conducting baseball clinics near his home in Porterville, California, after his playing career ended.



## When Baseball Went to War



Would you give up a Major League Baseball career to serve your country? Well, during WWII a number of players did just that.

*When Baseball Went to War* (with contributions by Todd Anton, Gary Bedingfield, Frank Ceresi, Bill Nowlin, Bill Swank and many others (Foreword by Curt Schilling) tells the stirring and unforgettable stories of ballplayers such as Ted Williams, Dom DiMaggio, Jerry Coleman, Bob Feller, Lou Brissie, Johnny Pesky, Yogi Berra, Monte Irvin, and many more who answered their nation's call to serve their country.

These men were heroes on the baseball diamond to all their fans, but each soon discovered what true heroism really was through the servicemen and women who never made it home from the war. Many were fortunate to only have to sacrifice a few years of their playing careers; others sacrificed their lives.

never-before-published photographs, an audio CD featuring players telling their stories, and contributions from combat veterans, baseball historians, and other important figures; fans will understand once again why these men were part of what is called the Greatest Generation.

From their baseball uniforms to their military uniforms these men were selfless, inspirational and a prime example of exactly what it means to be a true hero away from the roar of the crowd. *When Baseball Went to War* is a deserving tribute that will allow each of these remarkable men to be remembered for generations to come.

*A Book of the Month Club, History Book Club, and Military Book Club selection*

**\$18.45**



With the cooperation of the National WWII Museum, whose 2007 Conference and companion exhibition inspired this book, and the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, *When Baseball Went to War* provides a comprehensive compilation of the captivating accounts of each of the most well-known ballplayers of that time who also served in the military. With many



Photo courtesy of William Swank

Former left-hand hitting catcher Billy Swank is now an Air Force C-130 navigator assigned to the 39th Airlift Squadron at Dyess Air Force Base, Abilene, Texas. Lt. Swank was presented with a "Baseball in Wartime" shirt at D.G. Wills Books in La Jolla, California upon his return from Iraq and Afghanistan in June 2008.



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## U S Military All-Stars Expand to Three Teams in 2009

In the historic Battle's of Bull Run you will remember the same ground had to be taken twice. Baseball in the armed forces is said to have begun during the Civil War back in 1860. The US Military All-Stars have been busy connecting the dots that bind their tradition through World War II to today. The team is used to facing obstacles on and off the field with the support of a distinct group of loyal corporate partners and dedicated players and staff paying all the travel expenses they have been forced to adapt and overcome some fairly significant obstacles. True to form, just like they do for our country day in and day out, they have found a unique way to execute their Mission: "To Promote the Awareness of all Americans in Support of the Honorable Sacrifices our Brave Armed Forces make at the Tip of the Spear," and what could be more efficient than to do it three times as fast!

Celebrating their 20th-year Anniversary in style the organization recently announced its partnership with Nokona to produce a new line of American Defender products which include premium high quality baseball gloves, bats and leather goods that will fully leverage an expansion to three teams in 2009. The plan will take an already proven and successful program to the next two levels, namely summer collegiate and professional with one swing.

Partnering with BBAS, LLC and former Boston Red Sox General Manager, Dan Duquette the organization has developed a bold strategy to focus on patriotism and support for our troops by keeping all 3 teams in the unique "USA" camouflage uniforms.

The US Military All-Stars will hold spring training in San Diego and commence their schedule in March at the MLB Legends Game in Clearwater, Florida before heading to Central America for the 2nd Annual Friendship Tour on behalf of U.S. Southern Command.

The new professional team will make its debut as a member of the independent Can-Am League next May in historic Holman Stadium by changing the name of the current Nashua Pride to the "American Defenders of New Hampshire."

The new summer collegiate team will debut in Nokona Stadium at Waconah Park as a member of the premier New England Collegiate Baseball League next June in the scenic hills of the Berkshires by changing the name of the current Pittsfield Dukes to the "American Defenders of Pittsfield."

The agreement also provides a state-of-the-art training facility with the Duquette Sports Academy. In addition, a retail store overlooks the very site that prompted the famous "Broken Window By-Law" in downtown Pittsfield. The store will offer official merchandise and Nokona athletic goods. Historian John Thorn discovered a reference to a 1791 by-law prohibiting anyone from playing "baseball" within 80 yards of the meeting house in Pittsfield, Ma. A librarian found the actual by-law in the Berkshire Athenaeum library, and its age was verified by researchers at the Williamstown Art Conservation Center. The so-called Broken Window By-Law is the earliest known reference to "baseball" in North America.

Feel free to send comments, suggestions or material for publication in this newsletter to:

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### Recent Passings

#### Sid Hudson

*January 3, 1915 to October 10, 2008*

Sid entered service with the Army Air Force on October 15, 1942. He was a physical instructor assigned to the 79<sup>th</sup> Air Base Squadron at Waco Army Air Base. In March 1945, he left Waco and headed to the Pacific to play for Buster Mills' 73rd Wing Bombers in a series of games in Pacific war zones.

#### Lou Stringer

*May 13, 1917 to October 19, 2008*

On October 29, 1942, Stringer entered military service with the Army Air Force. He spent his entire time at Williams Field in Arizona, and graduated from Air Force Mechanics School at Williams Field in January 1943.

#### Joe Lutz

*February 18, 1925 to October 20, 2008*

He enlisted in the Marine Corps after graduating from high school in 1942 and served in the South Pacific during the war.

