

65th Anniversary of D-Day

Welcome to the 21st issue of the Baseball in Wartime e-newsletter - a special edition commemorating the 65th anniversary of the D-Day Normandy Landings.

Baseball's contribution to D-Day has never before been explored in any detail and I felt it was time this oversight was corrected. By the start of the 1944 season, around 340 major league players were in military service, plus more than 3,000 from the minors, and with the vast manpower shortage, just 10 minor leagues were in operation. Every branch of the service had an abundance of former ballplayers helping to fill their ranks and many were in Britain as part of the pre-invasion preparations.

Among them was major leaguer Larry French, and minor leaguers Yogi Berra, Lefty Brewer, Syl Sturges, Elmer Wright, Morrie Martin, Hal Cisgen, John Fessler, Lloyd Rice, John McNicholas, Joe Marco and Frank Labuda. Five of them would be dead before the end of the month.

The following page provide an historical account of D-Day interwoven with biographical details of ballplayers who were there. I hope you enjoy this account of baseball's contribution to D-Day. I would love to hear from you and to hear your thoughts on this project, and would especially like to hear of any players that may have been omitted.

On a different subject I'd also like to say a word of thanks to everyone who contacted me following my announcement in the last issue of my redundancy at work. Your words of encouragement have helped me take a positive view of the situation and I have a very exciting interview lined up in the next couple of weeks. Here's hoping!

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NORMANDY LANDINGS

People of western Europe! A landing was made this morning on the coast of France by troops of the allied expeditionary force, This landing is part of the concerted United Nations' plan for the liberation of Europe, made in conjunction with your great Russian allies. Although the initial assault may not have been made in your own country, the hour of liberation is approaching.

General Eisenhower June 6, 1944



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Baseball's Contribution to D-Day

On June 6, 1944, at the beaches of Normandy, France, Allied forces made one of the largest amphibious assaults ever conducted. Nearly 160,000 troops crossed the English Channel to launch an invasion of mainland Europe that would begin the liberation of the people of mainland Europe who had lived under Nazi rule for over four years.

On the 65th anniversary of D-Day, Baseball in Wartime takes an in-depth look at the game's contribution to June 6. Whilst this is something that may not at first be evident, closer inspection shows that in addition to claiming the lives of three former professional players, the game weaved an integral thread through every stage of the preparation, invasion and subsequent fight against German forces.

The Commanders

General Dwight D. Eisenhower



Eisenhower was the Supreme Allied Commander of the Allied Expeditionary Force and was charged with planning and carrying out of the invasion. It is believed that Eisenhower played minor league baseball for Junction City of the Kansas State League in the years prior to WWI. "I was a centerfielder," he told reporters in 1945. "I went into baseball deliberately to make money, and with no idea of making it a career. I wanted to go to college that fall, and we didn't have money. But I wasn't a very good centerfielder, and didn't do too well at it."

While at West Point, Eisenhower tried out for the baseball team but did not make it. He

did, however, make the football team.

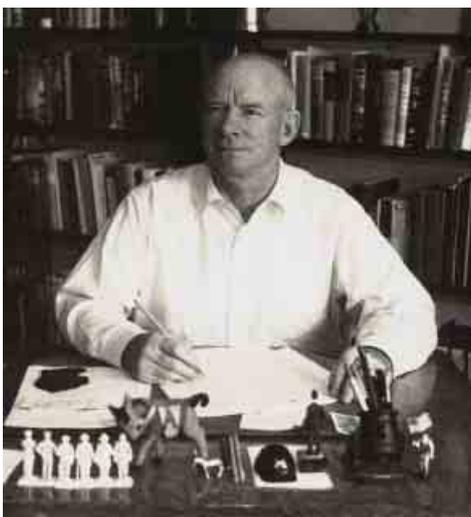
General Omar Bradley



Bradley was in charge of the 1st U.S. Army at Normandy, and during the months before the invasion, he supervised the refinement of assault plans and troop training.

Bradley had been a star on the baseball team at Moberly High School in Missouri. He enrolled at the United States Military Academy at West Point in the fall of 1911 and became an alternate on the freshman baseball team the following spring. He went on to letter three years in baseball and one in football. "It is almost trite to observe," he said, "that in organized team sports one learns the important art of group cooperation in goal achievement. No extracurricular endeavor I know of could better prepare a soldier for the battlefield."

Colonel Russell "Red" Reeder



Colonel Reeder, commander of the 12th Infantry Regiment of the 4th Infantry Division at Utah Beach, was an exceptional baseball and football player at West Point in the 1920s and had a tryout with the New York Giants. He was offered a contract but chose to stay with the army. On June 11, 1944, Reeder was severely wounded when an artillery shell exploded close by, shredding his left leg below the knee. His leg was later amputated at Walter Reed Army Hospital in Washington but he went on to become athletic director at West Point in 1947.

The Airborne Invasion

The airborne assault into Normandy was the largest use of airborne troops up to that time. Paratroopers of the U.S. 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions, the British 6th Airborne Division, and the 1st Canadian Parachute Battalion took part in the assault. Numbering more than 13,000 men, the paratroopers were flown from bases in southern England to the Cotentin Peninsula in more than 900 planes. An additional 4,000 men, consisting of glider infantry with supporting weapons and medical and signal units, arrived in 500 gliders later on D-Day to reinforce the paratroopers. The parachute troops were assigned what was probably the most difficult task of the initial operation - a night jump behind enemy lines five hours before the coastal landings.

Airfields all over England were a hive of activity during the days prior to June 6. The runways were packed with Douglas C-47 transport planes adorned with black and white invasion stripes, and groups of paratroopers meticulously studied maps of the drop zones in Normandy. They packed equipment, cleaned rifles, played cards and shot dice in the hangar buildings. They attended movies, wrote letters to loved ones, and learned of their objective: to keep the Germans from reinforcing troops that were defending the beaches.

On June 4, they were ready to take off but the weather forced a delay. The following night - with their faces blackened and hearts racing - men of the 101st and 82nd Airborne Divisions boarded C-47s for the flight across the English Channel. D-Day had begun and the paratroopers would spearhead the invasion.

C-47s were stark inside. A row of hard metal bucket seats lined both sides of the plane and the roar of the engines drowned out any attempt at conversation as they trudged through the dark skies towards the Normandy coast. Once over the mainland of France the sky became illuminated with searchlights, and deadly tracer bullets

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pierced the wings and fuselage of the unarmed and unarmored planes. Anti-aircraft fire exploded all around as they neared their drop zones at an altitude of 400 feet. When the red light over the door of the plane flashed on, everybody stood up and clamped themselves onto the cable that ran down ceiling of the plane. Amidst yell's of "Go! Go! Go!" American paratroopers ascended through the darkness into chaos and confusion.

The first paratroopers to land in Normandy were the pathfinders who began to drop at 00.15 on June 6, and were assigned to set up landing zones for the main force of airborne troops. Due to low clouds and anti-aircraft fire, their planes were scattered and many never found their assigned landing zones. However, the pathfinders' radar beacons worked effectively and many of the sticks of follow-up paratroopers landed clustered near these beacons.



Among the pathfinders was Private Bill Robbins of the 507th Parachute Infantry Regiment (PIR), an outstanding high school athlete from Coldwater, Kansas, who went on to play at Kansas State Teachers College and in

the Kansas Ban Johnson League. Robbins was captured by German troops soon after landing in Normandy and remained a prisoner of war until being liberated in April 1945.



Parachuting into Normandy with the 506th PIR of the 101st Airborne Division was Lieutenant Lyn "Buck" Compton, who was portrayed in the *Band of Brothers* television series. Compton played baseball and football at Los

Angeles High School and entered UCLA on a football scholarship in the fall of 1939. A teammate of Jackie Robinson at one point, he played in the Rose Bowl in 1943, and became all-league catcher at UCLA.

Six hours after landing in Normandy, Compton led an assault against a four-gun battery of 105mm cannon that was defended by a platoon of German infantry and was firing on Utah Beach where American troops were coming ashore. Compton was awarded the Silver Star for his part.

Compton was back in England by July, but was badly wounded during Operation Market Garden in Holland in September. He was hospitalized for more than two months but returned to combat in December 1944 - in time for the defense of Bastogne. The 506th suffered heavy losses during the Battle of the Bulge. Weather conditions were treacherous and, in the heavy snow, Compton suffered a severe case of trenchfoot. He was evacuated and his combat days were over.

Compton was back at UCLA after the war and played varsity baseball in the spring of 1946. In June, he tried out with the Los Angeles Angels at Wrigley Field. On June 24, the team bus of the Western International League's Spokane Indians veered off the road and down an embankment before crashing and bursting into flames. Nine men died. Spokane was an Angels' farm team and Compton was signed to join the club but at 24 he and his wife decided he was too old to start a career in pro ball. He went on to spend five years as a detective in the Los Angeles Police Department. In 1952 he began 20 years as a prosecutor for the district attorney's office, and in 1968, he was responsible for the investigation of Robert F. Kennedy's assassin, Sirhan Sirhan. He was later appointed an associate judge in the California Court of Appeals.

With the 501st PIR of the 101st Airborne



508th Parachute Infantry Regiment baseball team at Camp Mackall, North Carolina in 1943.

Division was Tom Niland, and outstanding baseball and basketball player from Tonawanda, New York, who had just enrolled at Canisius College when he was drafted. Niland went on to earn a Silver Star at the Battle of the Bulge but suffered a severe arm wound. After the war he served as a coach and then athletic director for 43 years at LeMoyne College in Syracuse.

Landing in Normandy with the 82nd Airborne Division were 26 members of the 508th PIR baseball team. Among them was Private Forrest "Lefty" Brewer, a minor league pitcher who won 20 games with St. Augustine in 1938; Private Elmer Mertz was a star infielder on Sheboygan's Gmach softball team; Corporal William Maloney was a high school ballplayer from Hartford, Connecticut; Private Okey Mills was a semi-pro pitcher who played in the Coalfield League in West Virginia; Sergeant John Judefind had been a star infielder with St. James High School in Chester, Pennsylvania; Private Merle Blethen was the son of Clarence Blethen who played for the Red Sox and Dodgers in the 1920s; Private Joe Laky was a sandlot player from Ottawa, Illinois; Private First Class Rene "Punchy" Croteau was a semi-pro player from Holyoke, Massachusetts; Corporal Frank Labuda was a star shortstop with the Chicago Heights Owls in the late 1930s and briefly played minor league baseball with the Ogden Reds; Corporal Walt Lupton was a New York sandlotter; and Private First Class John McNicholas was a minor league outfielder with the Oneonta Indians in 1942.

Lefty Brewer was involved in the successful assault on German troops entrenched at La Fièrè manor but was killed later the same day during a German counterattack. William Maloney was killed on June 7, John Judefind

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died on June 8, Elmer Mertz was killed on June 13, and Rene Croteau was killed July 4. Merle Blethen was seriously wounded on July 7, and Joe Laky and Walt Lupton both lost their lives later in the year in Holland.

Also with the 82nd Airborne Division, but attached to the 505th PIR was Private First Class Joe Makuch, who, using the name Joe Marco, hit .334 as a minor league outfielder with the Paragould Browns in 1940. Private First Class Arthur "Dutch" Schultz, who, after the war played varsity baseball at San Francisco State and had a tryout with the Philadelphia Phillies, was also with the 505th PIR. Two days after landing in Normandy, Makuch was wounded and lost a finger. He never played baseball again. Dutch Schultz would earn a Bronze Star for his heroics at Normandy.



Staff Sergeant John Fessler parachuted into Normandy with the 507th PIR. Fessler was an infielder from Pine Grove, Pennsylvania, who had played three years of minor league baseball before the war. In 1941, he played 116 games as a shortstop with the Goldsboro Goldbugs and batted .279. He had been an outstanding member of the 507th PIR basketball team since entering military service. Fessler was killed in action on June 10, 1944.

Among the C-47 pilots that delivered the paratroopers to their drop zones on D-Day was Second Lieutenant Syl Sturges, an outfielder who had played three seasons in the minors prior to military service. By 1944, Sturges was in England with the 314th Troop Carrier Group and at 03:25, on June 7, 1944 – the day after the invasion - Sturges was the co-pilot of a C-47 that took off from Saltby Airfield in England, in light rain and ground haze. The plane was heading to Picauville, France, as part of Operation Freeport - a mission to drop supplies to troops on the ground. Shortly after take off, the plane was lost out of formation in the low cloud and not seen again. At 17:00 that evening, the burnt out wreck was discovered about a mile northeast of Sébeville in France. The badly burned bodies of Sturges and pilot, Second Lieutenant George Riskey, Jr., were still at the controls.

Omaha Beach

Elements of the U.S. 1st Infantry Division and U.S 29th Infantry Division faced the veteran German 352nd Infantry Division at Omaha, the most heavily fortified beach, with high bluffs defended by mortars, machine guns, and artillery.

As infantry disembarked from the landing craft, they had to wade through water sometimes neck deep. Those that made it to the shingle did so at a walk, because they were so heavily laden, and had to brave the full weight of enemy gun fire. Within minutes of the ramps being lowered, troops were leaderless and almost incapable of action. It had become a struggle for survival and rescue.

Allied commanders considered abandoning the beachhead, but small units of infantry, often forming ad hoc groups, supported by naval artillery, eventually infiltrated the coastal defenses by scaling the bluffs between strongpoints. Further infantry landings were able to exploit the initial penetrations and by the end of the day two isolated footholds had been established. American casualties at Omaha on D-Day numbered around 5,000 out of 50,000 men, most in the first few hours,

Approaching Omaha Beach during the early hours of June 6th were the landing crafts of the 116th Infantry Regiment of the 29th Infantry Division. Aboard these were Frank Draper, a superb, naturally-gifted athlete, who had been the lead-off hitter with the semi-pro Hampton Looms mill team in Bedford, Virginia; Elmer Wright, a minor league pitcher in the St. Louis Browns' organization; Lou Alberigo, a semi-pro third baseman from Rhode Island; Hal Baumgarten, a catcher at New York University; Private Robert Marsico, a catcher with the Piedmont Label team of Bedford, Virginia; and Carl "Chubby" Proffitt, a semi-pro first baseman from West Virginia.



Frank Draper

As they approached the beach the enemy opened fire with artillery, mortar, machine-gun and small arms fire. Draper was on a craft that violently shook with the horrifying impact of an anti-personnel shell that ripped through the metal side and tore off his upper arm. Rapidly



Hal Baumgarten

losing blood, the young soldier slumped to the floor and died in a pool of blood, seawater and vomit. The landing craft's of the other men made it to the beach but as the ramps dropped they were met with a hail of enemy fire. Many were killed outright.

Others lay critically wounded, screaming for help. Those that could jumped in to the six-foot of water and desperately tried to make their way to the beach. Elmer Wright and Lou Alberigo were killed in the hail of gunfire almost as soon as they hit the beach. Baumgarten had his jaw shattered by a shell that exploded nearby. In shock he gradually moved forward using the bodies of dead GIs as cover eventually making it to the sea wall. "When our ramp went down it was a signal to every machine gun on that beach," Baumgarten said, "and there were a lot of them to open up on our little boat."

Marsico suffered severe wounds to his right arm and leg. He was hospitalized in England for three months and spent the next year at a rehabilitation center in Norfolk, Virginia. Carl Proffitt miraculously survived D-Day and was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross for gallantry.



Coming ashore at Omaha Beach with the 1st Infantry Division was Technician Fifth Grade Joe Pinder, a stockily-built right-hander from McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania. Pinder had played in the minor leagues since 1935 and was a

17-game winner with Sanford of the Florida State League in 1939.

For Pinder, June 6 was a special day - his birthday. He was 32. As the landing crafts approached the beach an artillery shell exploded close to Pinder's landing craft, tearing holes in the boat and causing carnage among the men inside. For those that survived - Pinder included - panic set-in as the vessel filled with water and began to sink. Still 100 yards from the beach the ramp was dropped and they were instantly met with a hail of deadly machine-gun fire, killing

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many outright as they struggled to reach the shore. As in baseball, Pinder took his work very seriously, and despite the chaos, he was determined to do what he was there for – to ensure vital radio equipment made it to the beach so a line of communication could be established. He grabbed a radio and placed it on his shoulder and amid the deafening sound of gunfire, made his way down the ramp and into the waves.

With the air filled with small arms fire and exploding artillery it was only a matter of time before Pinder was hit. As he desperately waded through the water, a bullet clipped him, causing him to stumble, but he did not stop. Another bullet ripped through the left side of his face and he held the gaping flesh in place as he carried on. Pinder made it to the beach, dropped the radio and returned to the water to retrieve more equipment. Then, instead of looking for somewhere to protect himself from the relentless enemy barrage, he returned a third time to collect essential spare parts and code books. Again he was hit - a burst of machine gun fire tore through his upper body and he fell, then somehow struggled to his feet, and with his last ounce of energy made it to the beach and his radio equipment. Moments later he passed out from loss of blood and died later that morning. Joe Pinder had made the ultimate sacrifice in helping to establish vital radio communication on Omaha Beach.

On January 4, 1945, Pinder was posthumously awarded the Medal of Honor for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity above and beyond the call of duty. "The indomitable courage and personal bravery of T/5 Pinder," claimed his citation, "was a magnificent inspiration to the men with whom he served."



Landing at Omaha Beach with the 5th Ranger Battalion was Sergeant Bill Fennhahn, who had excelled in baseball at Hillisdale High School in Columbia County, New York. Surviving that day unscathed, he was wounded three

separate times as the Allied forces advanced through Europe. The second occasion was a bizarre incident that occurred while the Rangers were involved in capturing the town of L'Hopital in France. Fennhahn, who spoke German, was interrogating a German civilian when an American soldier in another unit heard the German and simply started shooting at close range! On the third

occasion he was in Germany when machine-gun fire broke both his legs and severed vital nerve fibers. Fennhahn was in hospitals in Europe and the United States for sixteen months.

Despite these severe injuries, Fennhahn's pre-war ambition to play professional baseball remained with him. "He tried out for the Giants in Phoenix, Arizona, and accepted an offer to play with Peekskill," recalled his widow, Terry Fennhahn. Fennhahn made 13 appearances with the Peekskill Highlanders in the North Atlantic League in 1946, and posted a 4-3 record with a 5.18 ERA. The following year - 1947 - he made three appearances with the Quebec Alouettes in the Canadian-American League and was 2-0, but recurring leg problems kept him off the mound for most of the season. He was back with Quebec in 1948 and made 20 appearances with a 4-5 record and 4.60 ERA.

"A lot of guts," said his manager Tony Ravish, "I always pitched him in seven-inning ball games because he had shrapnel in the back of his legs ... then his legs would get tired naturally. But for seven innings, boy, he could fire that ball for me!"

"As much as he wanted, he couldn't continue playing professionally," recalled his widow.

Utah Beach

Utah Beach was added to the invasion plan toward the end of the planning stages, when more landing craft became available. It was about 3 miles long, and the westernmost of the five landing beaches, located between Pouppeville and the village of La Madeleine.

Despite being substantially off course, the U.S. 4th Infantry Division landed with relatively little resistance in contrast to Omaha Beach. There were approximately 200 casualties.



"Because we were combat engineers," Morrie Martin told Bill Swank in *When Baseball Went to War*, "we were the first to land on Utah Beach at H-Hour just as dawn was breaking on June 6. Artillery was flying overhead, but we didn't fire a shot

because the Germans didn't know we'd come ashore."

Martin was born in Dixon, Missouri, and was signed by the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1941 after scout Wally Schang watched him pitch two shutouts and strike out 43 batters in one afternoon. He was assigned to the Grand Forks Chiefs of the Northern League and was 16-7 with a league-leading 2.05 ERA. He was with the St. Paul Saints of the American Association for 1942 but was in military service by the end of the year.

Martin served with the 49th Engineer Combat Battalion and was involved in amphibious landings at North Africa and Sicily prior to Normandy. Martin earned his first Purple Heart at Normandy. "I got hit by shrapnel guarding a crossroads going into Saint-Lô," he recalled. "They patched me up, put in a few stitches."

"I got my second purple heart on March 23, 1945 at a crossroads near Bonn. I was shot in the leg. I don't remember much after that. I woke up once and heard a doctor say, 'That's one sick man.' They wanted to saw off my leg. A nurse from Georgia looked at my records and saw I was a ballplayer. She told me not to let them cut my leg off. They had a new drug - penicillin. She told me I had over 150 shots, one every four hours, and that finally stopped the infection. I wish I knew who she was to thank her.

Martin received his medical discharge in October 1945. He made it to the major leagues as a 26 year-old rookie in 1949. He pitched 10 games for the Dodgers and had a 1-3 record. He was back in the majors in 1951, this time with the Athletics. It was to be his best season with an 11-4 record and 3.78 ERA, beating every American League team at least once. In total, Martin pitched 10 seasons in the majors with the Dodgers, Athletics, White Sox, Orioles, Cardinals, Indians and Cubs. Primarily a relief pitcher, he hurled a career-high 58 games in 1953 with the Athletics, posting a 10-12 record and 4.43 ERA



Coming ashore at Utah Beach with the 4th Infantry Division was left-handed pitcher, Staff Sergeant Pete Petropoulos, who was a batting practice pitcher with the

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Brooklyn Dodgers in 1938. He signed a professional contract in 1939 and was assigned to the Daytona Beach Islanders of the Class D Florida State League, where he posted a 10-9 won-loss record. In 1940, Petropoulos was with the Fort Lauderdale Tarpons of the Florida East Coast, and had a 7-4 record. On June 7, Petropoulos was badly wounded by an exploding enemy artillery shell. He suffered severe leg wounds and was picked up by German troops the following day and was held prisoner without food or medical aid in Montebourg, France. Eleven days later, on June 19, Petropoulos was repatriated when Allied troops overran Montebourg.

Petropoulos was shipped back to the United States with a Silver Star and Purple Heart. He was sent to Rhoads General Hospital in Utica, New York, where it was feared he might have to have both legs amputated. Seven major operations followed and the former ball player's legs were saved.

After Petropoulos left hospital he went to work for the New York Giants as a scout, and in 1948 he became a goodwill ambassador to servicemen and veterans, conducting *The Sporting News Sports Caravan*, which, in conjunction with Liggett & Myers the makers of Chesterfield cigarettes, visited veterans' hospitals in the New York metropolitan area. "I know from my long years of association with Pete Petropoulos," David Woodside told *The Sporting News*, "that he can talk the language of any vet either in or out of a hospital."

This tour was later expanded to take in veterans' hospitals in southern states, and Petropoulos also managed the Chesterfield-Sporting News (later Chesterfield Satisfiers) baseball team that played at veterans' hospitals for the next 12 years.

Also with the 4th Infantry Division was First Lieutenant Ordway "Hal" Cisgen, who had signed with the Yankees' organization in 1939 and was last with Utica in 1942, where he posted a 5-3 record and 2.32 ERA. Cisgen was born in Lorain, Ohio, about 30 miles west of Cleveland, and had attended Lorain High School, where he starred in basketball and baseball. He was killed in action on July 11, 1944.

Other D-Day Casualties

Among the 2,500 killed on D-Day was Private First Class Gordon S. Cochrane, Jr., the son of Hall of Fame catcher Gordon "Mickey" Cochrane. Former major league pitcher, Elden Auker, wrote in his autobiography, *Sleeper Cards and Flannel Uniforms*: "The

bullet that killed him [Gordon, Jr.] had some kind of range. It traveled all the way across the Atlantic, lodged itself into the spirit of Gordon's father, the great Mickey Cochrane, and slowly killed him. Mickey's gravestone shows he died June 28, 1962, but he started dying June 6, 1944. Consider his another life claimed by World War II."

Coming ashore at Omaha Beach a few hours after Morrie Martin was his cousin Private First Class Ralph Hickey of the 1st Infantry Division. He never made it to the beach and his body was never recovered. "We were born and raised together," Martin recalled. "He was like a brother."

First Lieutenant Lloyd Rice was wounded in the shoulder while coming ashore on D-day. Rice, a minor league outfielder, had batted .363 in 97 games with Federalsburg Athletics in 1940. He returned to the minors in 1946 and played two seasons with the Wilmington Blue Rocks.

Also among the D-Day wounded was Sam Colacurcio, Jr., mascot for the Jersey City Giants from 1931 to 1934 when his father operated the team.

The Navy

The Invasion Fleet was drawn from eight different navies, comprising 6,939 vessels: 1,213 warships, 4,126 transport vessels (landing ships and landing craft), 736 ancillary craft and 864 merchant vessels. Warships provided supporting fire for the land forces.



Aboard one of four LCS(S) rocket boats that were attached to the attack transport APA-33 *USS Bayfield*, and positioned 300 yards off shore of Utah Beach on D-Day was Seaman Second Class Yogi Berra. The vessels

had rendezvoused with nine others and were firing rockets at targets to try to take out machine-gun nests and land mines in support of the troops going ashore. "It was just like a Fourth of July celebration," he later recalled.

Just 19 years old, Berra had played one season in the minors with the Norfolk Tars before being called to service. "Yogi was very personable," recalled fellow sailor Lou

Putnocky. "Of course it always would come up in conversation when you had new people, 'What are you gonna do after the war? What did you do before the war?'"

"And [Yogi] said, 'Oh, I played ball, at Norfolk, in the minors.'"

"And we looked at him, with his bandy legs. What the hell kind of ballplayer is this; are you pulling our leg? Were you a batboy or something? And we never paid much attention. He didn't elaborate on it too much. It would come up every now and then, and we would kid him about it."

He would be back in baseball in 1946 for the first of 18 years as a catcher in Yankee pinstripes, World Series winning manager and Hall of Famer.



Playing a critical role for the Navy during the build-up to D-Day was Lieutenant Larry French, with the U.S. Navy Supply Corps. Based in England, French – who had won 197 games over 14 seasons in the major leagues prior to entering military service in 1942 – was responsible for the provision of spare parts for landing craft. French would later serve in the Pacific Theater aboard the *USS New York* during the Okinawa invasion. He was recalled to active service during the Korean War and made the Navy a career, retiring in 1969 having attained the rank of captain.



I am sure you will agree that, as with other major battles during WWII, baseball made no small contribution on D-Day. For that reason, I hope you will remember these heroes of our game on this 65th anniversary of the Normandy Invasion.

San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

June 1945

Sunday June 3rd

Sunday is underdogs day as SAACC halts Randolph Field's winning streak at 13 games with a stirring 3-2 win; Steve Colosky earning the win over Walt Nothe. Brooks Field put an end to their losing streak at 12 with a 6-5 victory over Fort Sam Houston.

Tuesday June 5th

Fort Sam Houston defeats SAACC, 4-3, in a nifty mound duel between SAACC's Mel Deutsch and Fort Sam's Woody Johnson. Matt Batts is the big hitter for Randolph Field in its 11-6 slugfest with Hondo, getting two triples and a double.

Thursday June 7th

Before a crowd of 2,000, Randolph Field beats San Marcos, 8-3. Clint Hartung wins a mound duel from Lloyd Dietz to give Hondo a 2-1 victory over Fort Sam Houston.

Sunday June 10th

The debut of Brooks Field manager, Red Morcroft, is spoiled by an 8-0 defeat to San Marcos. Morcroft took over from Carl Kott, who left for overseas duty. Randolph Field win a 3-0 thriller from a weak-hitting Fort Sam Houston team despite Mel Deutsch's five-hit hurling for the losers. Walt Nothe notches another shutout for Randolph Field.

Thursday June 21st

SAACC team faces disaster with possible transfer of eight players with post's change-over from air cadet training center to a redistribution and convalescent center.

Friday June 22nd

SAACC Shortstop Hardy Martin is transferred to San Marcos, while outfielder Neil Murphy, catcher Russell Goff and infielder Bill Knapp are transferred Brooks Field.

Sunday June 24th

To close out the first half of the season, Randolph Field move smoothly along in first place taking a 7-4 win over San Marcos in 14 innings. SAACC defeats Kelly Field 5-3, and Fort Sam Houston nip Hondo, 2-1.

Tuesday June 26th

John Lindstrom hurls a four hitter for Randolph Field beating Fort Sam Houston, 4-1. SAACC manager Del Wilber drools as he looks at a pitcher who has just arrived on the post. Johnny Beazley, World Series hero for the Cardinals in 1942, flew in from Hawaii to attend physical training school but is not eligible to play baseball and is not expected to be stationed at SAACC after his course.

Brief biographies of players mentioned:

Steve Colosky

Colosky pitched in the minors from 1938 to 1941. He was 14-10 with the Cambridge Cannors of the Class D Eastern Shore League in 1940.

Walt Nothe

Nothe pitched in the minors from 1939 to 1940, and again from 1946 to 1954. In 1940 he won 15 games with the Reading Chicks of the Class B Interstate League. He again won 15 games in 1952 and 1953, with the Miami Beach Flamingos and the Fort Lauderdale Lions.

Mel Deutsch

Deutsch pitched with the Louisville Colonels from 1942 to 1944. He hurled three games for the Boston Red Sox at the beginning of 1946 before spending the remainder of the year with Louisville. Deutsch pitched in the minors until 1949.

Woody Johnson

Johnson pitched in the minors from 1935 to 1942, and again from 1946 to 1951. He won 20 games with the Portsmouth Cubs of the Class B Piedmont League in 1942. He was 15-7 when he returned to Portsmouth in 1946.

Matt Batts

Batts hit .294 with the Canton Terriers of the Class C Middle Atlantic League in 1942. He played in the major league from 1947 to 1956 with the Red Sox, Browns, Tigers, White Sox and Reds.

Clint Hartung

Hartung was primarily an outfielder with the Eau Claire Bears of the Class C Northern League in 1942. He pitched for the New York Giants from 1947 to 1950, then returned to the minors as an outfielder until 1955.

Lloyd Dietz

Dietz began his career in the minor leagues in 1936. He pitched for the Pittsburgh Pirates from 1940 to 1943 and was traded to the Phillies in June of that year. Dietz returned to the minors in 1946 and played until 1949.

Carl Kott

Kott began his minor league career with San Antonio in 1929. He batted .309 with Pensacola in 1941 and hit .318 with Alexandria in 1946.

Neil Murphy

Murphy played briefly with the Bluefield Blue-Grays of the Class D Mountain State League in 1938.

Russell Goff

Goff played in the minors from 1937 to 1941. He batted .307 with the Mayfield Browns of the Class D Kitty League in 1939.

John Lindstrom

Lindstrom pitched in the minors from 1938 to 1941. He was 8-22 with the Moultrie Packers of the Class D Georgia-Florida League in 1940.

Johnny Beazley

Beazley began his minor league career in 1937. He was 21-6 with the Cardinals in 1942 and won two games in the World Series against the Yankees.

Del Wilber

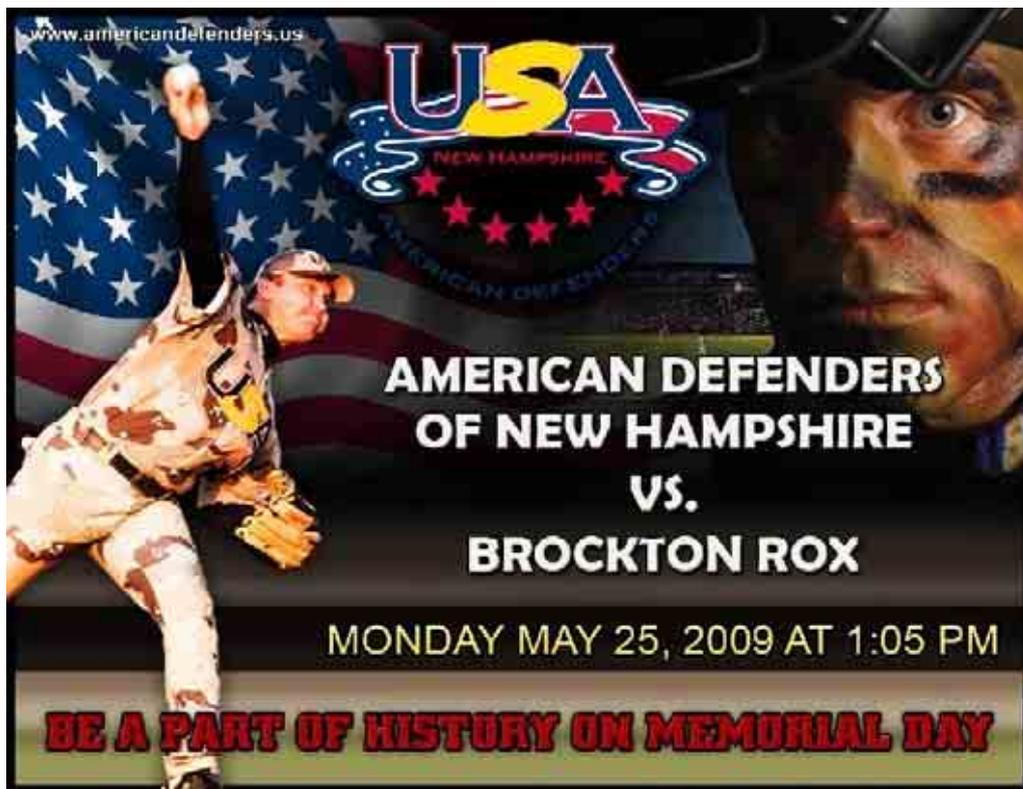
Wilber began his minor league career in 1938 with the Findlay Browns of the Class D Ohio State League. He batted .332 with Findlay in 1939. Wilber joined the Cardinals in 1946 and remained in the majors until 1954 playing with the Phillies and Red Sox along the way.

San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

Standings at June 30th

	W	L	Pct	GB
Randolph Field Ramblers	20	5	.800	-
SAACC Warhawks	17	9	.654	3.5
San Marcos Navigators	15	11	.577	5.5
Kelly Field Fliers	12	12	.500	7.5
Hondo Comets	12	14	.462	8.5
Fort Sam Houston Rangers	11	14	.440	9.0
Brooks Field Ganders	2	24	.077	37.0

www.americandelenders.us



**AMERICAN DEFENDERS
OF NEW HAMPSHIRE
vs.
BROCKTON ROX**

MONDAY MAY 25, 2009 AT 1:05 PM

BE A PART OF HISTORY ON MEMORIAL DAY

Baseball in Wartime Newsletter

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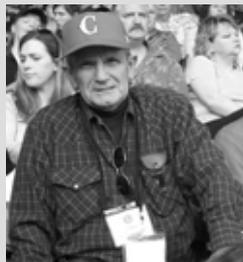
Bud Kerr

On May 9, 2009, Bud Kerr passed away following a lengthy hospitalization. Bud was a baseball historian in Vancouver, BC, Canada, whom I had the pleasure of communicating with over the last few years in connection with the Baseball in Wartime website.

Bud was the team historian for the Vancouver Canadians of the Northwest League and was a friend to all visitors to Nat Bailey Stadium, offering stories that would help fans learn a little bit more about the game of baseball and its relevance in Vancouver.

In 2008, Bud's commitment to baseball in Vancouver was honored with the creation of the Bud Kerr Museum at Nat Bailey Stadium.

In the time that I have had the pleasure of knowing him, Bud has been a gracious, kind and generous man with a willingness to help that is exceeded by few. I will miss his letters and emails but will endeavor to keep his memory alive through the Baseball in Wartime newsletter and website.



Gary Bedingfield

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by Gary Bedingfield

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