



Decorated in Combat

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Decorated in Combat

Since starting my research on wartime baseball back in the 1990s, I'd like to think I've contributed to the history of the world's greatest game. Prior to the release of my book, "Baseball's Dead of World War II", only a handful of names were known with regards to players who lost their lives during WWII. Between the book and the website, there are more than 150 biographies of professional players who died in military service in WWII. Furthermore, the list has been expanded to semi-pro and college players, as well as covering all other military conflicts from the Indian Wars to today's fight against terrorism.

This issue of the Baseball in Wartime newsletter, brings another first. The first ever listing of professional baseball players decorated during World War II. From Medal of Honor recipients to those who received Bronze Star Medals and battlefield commissions, the list covers major league and minor league players, with over 150 awards detailed.

This newsletter contains a small selection of biographies from Decorated in Combat as well as a list of all players that have, so far, been included on the website. Medal of Honor recipients Joe Pinder and Jack Lummus are here. Among the decorated major leaguers are Jake Jones and Jocko Thompson, and Lefty Johnson, recipient of a battlefield commission. Included in this newsletter is Mike Auer, a minor league pitcher, who received the highest decoration of any ballplayer that was not given posthumously – the Distinguished Service Cross.

And what is the purpose of this venture? To ensure the incredible bravery demonstrated by these heroes of our game are never forgotten.

http://www.baseballsgreatestssacrifice.com/decorated_in_combat.html

Gary Bedingfield

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Decorated in Combat

Medal of Honor (highest and most prestigious personal military decoration that may be awarded to recognize military service members who distinguished themselves by acts of valor)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
1/Lt.	Andrew J. "Jack" Lummus	Outfield	Minor League	US Marine Corps	Iwo Jima (March 8, 1945)
T/5	John J. "Joe" Pinder, Jr.	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Normandy (June 6, 1944)
Medal of Freedom (to honor civilians whose actions aided in the war efforts of the United States and its allies.)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
n/a	Morris "Moe" Berg	Catcher	Major League	Office of Strategic Services	Europe (1944)
Distinguished Service Cross (the second highest military award that can be given to a member of the United States Army for extreme gallantry and risk of life in actual combat with an armed enemy force)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
Cptn.	Michael J. Auer	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	France (January 1945)
Navy Cross (awarded primarily to a member of the United States Navy, US Marine Corps, and the US Coast Guard (when operating under the Department of the Navy) for extraordinary heroism)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
Lt Cdr	Arnold C. Traxler	Outfield	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (March 19, 1945)
Lt(jg)	Thomas J. Woodruff	Shortstop	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (October 24/25, 1944)
Distinguished Service Medal (presented to any person who, while serving in any capacity with the United States military, has distinguished himself by exceptionally meritorious service to the Government in a duty of great responsibility)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
Lt(jg)	Walter E. Shinn	Outfield	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (1944)
Legion of Merit (given for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
M/Sgt.	Henry J "Zeke" Bonura	First Base	Major League	US Army	North Africa
Mjr.	Alfred H. "Fritz" Von Kolnitz	Third Base	Major League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1943)
Col.	Richard T. "Dick" Aldworth	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	USA (1943)
CMoMM	Spalding E. "Mike" Michot	Catcher	Minor League	US Coast Guard	Europe (1944)

Fritz Von Kolnitz, who played for the Reds and White Sox prior to the First World War, served with the Army Air Force in England during World War II, and was awarded the Legion of Merit for perfecting a sand-table that he used to familiarize his air crews with their targets.

Yankees' second baseman Jerry Coleman, was a fighter pilot in both World War II and the Korean War. During WWII he flew 57 missions as the pilot of a Douglas SBD Dauntless dive-bomber. Following service in the Korean War, he had been awarded two Distinguished Flying Crosses, 13 Air Medals and three Navy citations.

Distinguished Flying Cross (awarded to any officer or enlisted member of the United States Armed Forces who distinguishes himself or herself in support of operations by "heroism or extraordinary achievement while participating in an aerial flight)

Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
Captain	Gerald F. "Jerry" Coleman	Second Base	Major League	US Marine Corps	(2) Pacific (1945)
Captain	John K. "Buddy" Lewis, Jr.	3B/Outfield	Major League	US Army Air Force	China-Burma-India (1944)
Lt.	James M. "Jake" Jones	First Base	Major League	US Navy	(2) Pacific (1944/1945)
1/Lt.	Robert E. "Bert" Shepard	Pitcher	Major League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1945)
Ensign	Constantine G. "Gus" Bebas	Pitcher	Minor League	US Navy	Battle of Midway (1942)
1/Lt.	Keith F. Bissonnette	Infield/Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	China-Burma-India
Major	Bernard R. "Bernie" Byrne	Second Base	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Italy (1944)
Major	Robert J. "Bobby" Byrne	3B/OF/2B	Minor League	US Army Air Force	North Africa (1942/1943)
T/Sgt.	John T. "Tex" Deets	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe
1/Lt.	Michael Feduniak	Catcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	(2) China-Burma-India
Unknown	Raymond V. Heitz		Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe
Lt.	Victor F. Hoff	Unknown	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe
1/Lt.	William J. "Joe" Loadholtes	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1944)
2/Lt.	James P. Martin	Second Base	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Pacific (1945)
Lt(jg)	Walter E. Shinn	Outfield	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (1944)
Captain	Marshall M. Sneed	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	North Africa (1943)
Major	William H. "Billy" Southworth	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1943)
Colonel	Robert W. "Bob" Stephens	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1943/1944)
Lt Cdr	Arnold C. Traxler	Outfield	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (1945)
1/Lt.	Verne E. Williamson	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Italy
2/Lt.	Stanford G. Wolfson	OF/Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1944)
Lt(jg)	Thomas J. Woodruff	Shortstop	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (November 1944)

Soldier's Medal (awarded to any person of the Armed Forces of the United States who distinguished himself or herself by heroism not involving actual conflict with an enemy)

Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
Cptn.	Elmer J. Gedeon	Outfield	Major League	US Army Air Force	North Carolina (August 1942)
T/Sgt.	Angelo P. DeLucia	Infield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Pacific

Navy and Marine Corps Medal (highest non-combat decoration awarded for heroism by the United States Department of the Navy to the members of the United States Navy and United States Marine Corps)

Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
CMoMM	Spalding E. "Mike" Michot	Catcher	Minor League	US Coast Guard	Europe (1944)

Minor league outfielder Arnold Traxler, who had been with the Texas League's Dallas Rebels before military service, earned the Navy Cross on March 19, 1945. As the pilot of a Grumman TBF Avenger torpedo bomber, he received the award for "extraordinary heroism in operations" against the Japanese Fleet in the Kure Bay area of the inland sea, Japan. "His outstanding courage and determined skill were at all times inspiring and in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service," declared the citation.

Silver Star (third-highest personal decoration for valor in combat, awarded for gallantry in action against an enemy of the United States)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
T/Sgt.	Nestor L. Chylak Jr.	Umpire	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Sgt.	William L. "Bill" Evans, Jr.	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Germany (1945)
Mjr.	Ralph G. Houk	Catcher	Major League	US Army	Germany (1945)
1/Lt.	Earl D. "Lefty" Johnson	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Battle of the Bulge (1944)
Lt.	James M. "Jake" Jones	First Base	Major League	US Navy	Pacific (1944/1945)
Pfc.	William J. "Bill" Moisan, Jr.	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Germany (April 1945)
Sgt.	Earl W. Rapp	Outfield	Major League	US Army	Germany (1945)
1/Lt.	John S. "Jocko" Thompson	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
Sgt.	Sterling W. Arnold	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe
Cptn.	Michael J. Auer	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe
Major	Robert J. "Bobby" Byrne	3B/OF/2B	Minor League	US Army Air Force	North Africa (1942/1943)
Cpl.	Alexander Danelishen, Jr.	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
Unknown	Alberto R. Esqueda	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Sgt.	William P. "Bill" Fennhahn	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
S/Sgt.	Kenneth A. Kallenberg	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Pacific
Mjr.	George Kenmore		Minor League	US Army	Tunisia (1943)
Mjr.	Charles A. Knoblauch	Second Base	Minor League	US Army	Pacific
2/Lt.	Walter N. Lance	First Base	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Unknown	Phillip G. Mazzeo	<i>Umpire</i>	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Italy
2/Lt.	Loyd F. "Mickey" McGuire	Third Base	Minor League	US Army	Mediterranean (1943/1944)
CMoMM	Spalding E. "Mike" Michot	Catcher	Minor League	US Coast Guard	Europe (1944)
2/Lt.	Louis I. Miller	Third base	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Bismarck Sea (Mar '43)
S1c	Frank L. Nelson	Pitcher	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (October 1944)
S/Sgt.	Peter J. Petropoulos	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	France (June '44)
	Lee A. Porterfield	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe
S/Sgt.	Milton "Rosey" Rosenstein	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Leyte (November 1944)
2/Lt.	William A. Sarver	Outfield	Minor League	US Army	Germany (April 1945)
Captain	Marshall M. Sneed	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	North Africa (1943)
Colonel	Robert W. "Bob" Stephens	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1943/1944)
2/Lt.	Robert W. Teeples	Pitcher/SS	Minor League	US Army	Pacific (1944)
T/5	Webster A. "Buck" Templeton	2B/Shortstop	Minor League	US Army	North Africa (1943)
T/3	Joseph Vecchio	Outfield	Minor League	US Army	France (1944)
T/5	Richard L. "Dick" Williams	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	The Philippines (1945)
2/Lt.	John J. Zulberti	Infield	Minor League	US Army	Italy (1944)

Lt. Robert J. Byrne, the son of former major league third baseman, Bobby Byrne (1907 to 1917 Cardinals, Pirates, Phillies and White Sox), himself a ballplayer with the Ashland Colonels before the war, served with the 57th Fighter Group in North Africa. 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 Bf109 fighter, and went on to earn the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal. The family connection does end there, however. His brother, Bernie, also a minor league ballplayer, was a fighter pilot in Italy and the China-Burma-India Theater. He also received the Distinguished Flying Cross and Air Medal.

Air Medal (awarded for single acts of heroism or meritorious achievement while participating in aerial flight)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
Captain	Gerald F. "Jerry" Coleman	Second Base	Major League	US Marine Corps	(7) Pacific (1945)
Lt.	James M. "Jake" Jones	First Base	Major League	US Navy	(4) Pacific (1944/1945)
Captain	John K. "Buddy" Lewis	3B/Outfield	Major League	US Army Air Force	China-Burma-India (1944)
1/Lt.	Robert E. "Bert" Shepard	Pitcher	Major League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1945)
1/Lt.	Keith F. Bissonnette	Infield/Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	(4) China-Burma-India
Major	Bernard R. "Bernie" Byrne	Second Base	Minor League	US Army Air Force	(4) Italy (1944)
Major	Robert J. "Bobby" Byrne	3B/OF/2B	Minor League	US Army Air Force	North Africa (1942/1943)
Cptn.	James E. Conlan	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	(7) North Africa (1943)
S/Sgt.	John T. DeJohn	Second Base	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (Nov 1942)
1/Lt.	Michael Feduniak	Catcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	(3) China-Burma-India
S/Sgt.	Eugene M. Fellmeth	OF/First Base	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Germany (Dec 1944)
2/Lt.	George E. Gamble, Jr.	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	China-Burma-India (1944)
Unknown	Raymond V. Heitz		Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe
Lt.	Victor F. Hoff	Unknown	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe
1/Lt.	William J. "Joe" Loadholtes	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1944)
1/Lt.	Walter G. Loos, Jr.	Catcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	South America (1943/1944)
1/Lt.	John T. "Jack" Moller	Pitcher/OF	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Pacific ('43)
2/Lt.	Leslie L. Palmer	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	(2) Italy (1944)
T/Sgt.	John J. Regan	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	China-Burma-India ('44)
	Robert L. Rossier	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe
Ensign	Walter J. Schmisser, Jr.	Catcher	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (1944/1945)
2/Lt.	Franklin C. Schulz	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Philippines ('45)
S/Sgt.	John M. "Mason" Smith	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe ('44)
Captain	Marshall M. Sneed	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	North Africa (1943)
Major	William H. "Billy" Southworth	Outfield	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1943)
Colonel	Robert W. "Bob" Stephens	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1943/1944)
Lt Cdr	Arnold C. Traxler	Outfield	Minor League	US Navy	(4) Pacific (1945)
1/Lt.	Verne E. Williamson	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Italy
2/Lt.	Stanford G. Wolfson	OF/Pitcher	Minor League	US Army Air Force	Europe (1944)
Lt(jg)	Thomas J. Woodruff	Shortstop	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (November 1944)
Commendation Medal (presented for sustained acts of heroism or meritorious service)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
Cmdr.	George L. Earnshaw	Pitcher	Major League	US Navy	Pacific (April 1944)

Chief Motor Machinist's Mate Mike Michot, had played minor league baseball with the Louisville Colonels in 1926. He served with the Coast Guard, attached to the United States Navy, and made 56 round trips across the English Channel. he was awarded the Silver Star, Legion of Merit and the Navy and Marine Corps Medal.

Bronze Star (awarded to members of the United States Armed Forces for either heroic achievement, heroic service, meritorious achievement, or meritorious service in a combat zone)

Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
Sgt.	Clifford A. Aberson	Outfield	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
	Rex E. Barney	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Lt.	Frank C. Baumholtz	Outfield	Major League	US Navy	Pacific (1945)
Pfc.	James N. Bivin	Pitcher	Major League	US Marine Corps	Pacific (1945)
Cpl.	Leland V. "Lou" Brissie	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Italy (1944)
Cmdr.	George L. Earnshaw	Pitcher	Major League	US Navy	Pacific (1944/1945)
Sgt.	William L. "Bill" Evans, Jr.	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Germany (1945)
Sgt.	Gilbert R. Hodges	First Base	Major League	US Marine Corps	Okinawa (1945)
Mjr.	Ralph G. Houk	Catcher	Major League	US Army	Germany (1945)
1/Lt.	Earl D. "Lefty" Johnson	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	France (September 1944)
Pfc.	Donald M. Kolloway	Second Base	Major League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
Pfc.	Stanley E. Lopata	Catcher	Major League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
	Robert A. "Maje" McDonnell	Coach	Major League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
Pfc.	William J. "Bill" Moisan, Jr.	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
1/Sgt.	Stephen Souchock	First Base	Major League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
1/Lt.	John S. "Jocko" Thompson	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
Sgt.	Cecil H. Travis	Shortstop	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Unknown	Kenneth W. Trinkle	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Pfc.	Harry W. Walker	Outfield	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
M/Sgt.	Dick C. Whitman	Outfield	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
2/Lt.	Orville G. Barr	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe
	Robert C. Boyce	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe
Unknown	Alberto R. Esqueda	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Sgt.	William P. "Bill" Fennhahn	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
T/Sgt.	Frank D. Janik	Catcher/Outfield	Minor League	US Army	Saipan (1944)
S/Sgt.	Kenneth A. Kallenberg	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Pacific
Mjr.	Charles A. Knoblauch	Second Base	Minor League	US Army	Pacific
2/Lt.	Walter N. Lance	First Base	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Cpl.	Ferrell D. "Dee" Loveless	Third Base	Minor League	US Army	Pacific (1944)
Cpl.	Harold L. Martin	Catcher/Outfield	Minor League	US Army	North Africa (1943)
Cptn.	Malvern C. Morgan Jr.	1B/Shortstop	Minor League	US Army	Europe
Sgt.	Felix J. Penso, Jr.	OF/Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1944)
	Earl M. "Pete" Petersen	Catcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe
S/Sgt.	Peter J. Petropoulos	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	France (June '44)
	Lee A. Porterfield	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe
	Joseph P. Quin, Jr.?	Pitcher	Minor League		
R/1c	Walter L. Rougeux	Third Base	Minor League	US Navy	Pacific (1945)
Pfc.	Minor M. Scott	Second Base	Minor League	US Army	Okinawa (1945)
S/Sgt.	Donald R. Shelton	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Italy (March 25, 1944)
T/5	Webster A. "Buck" Templeton	2B/Shortstop	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1944)
Pvt.	Robert L. "Bob" Vetter	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	France (1944)
Pfc.	Melvin C. "Mel" Wasley	Outfield	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)

Battlefield Commission (awarded to enlisted soldiers who are promoted to the rank of commissioned officer for outstanding leadership on the field of battle)					
Rank	Name	Position	Level of Baseball Played	Service	Location/Date of Award
2/Lt.	Raymond A. Flanigan	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe (1944/1945)
1/Lt.	Earl D. "Lefty" Johnson	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe
1/Lt.	John "Jack" Knott	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe
2/Lt.	Harold H. Rice	Outfield	Major League	US Army	Pacific (1944/1945)
1/Lt.	Warren E. Spahn	Pitcher	Major League	US Army	Europe (1945)
Cptn.	Michael J. Auer	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	
2/Lt.	Robert W. Teeple	Pitcher/SS	Minor League	US Army	Pacific (1944)
2/Lt.	Thomas E. Tucker	Pitcher	Minor League	US Army	Europe (1945)

In the spring of 1943, Zeke Bonura, former first baseman with the White Sox, Giants, Senators and Cubs, was in military service and sent to Oran in Algeria, North Africa, where he organized baseball leagues as well as softball leagues for male and female service personnel. By the end of the summer, Bonura had set-up 20 baseball diamonds with salvaged materials and supervised 150 teams in six leagues, involving nearly 1,000 players. The culmination of the season was the World Series of North Africa between the Casablanca Yankees and the Algiers Streetwalkers. The Yankees were crowned North African champions.

For his contributions to the morale of the armed forces in North Africa, General Dwight D. Eisenhower presented Bonura with the Legion of Merit Award on October 26, 1943. His citation read, in part:

"By his resourcefulness, enthusiasm and leadership he was able to overcome many shortages in needed assistance and construction materials and he established 30 baseball fields in the area through the use of volunteer assistants and salvaged materials. Corporal Bonura has made a substantial contribution to the morale and efficiency of troops in this theater."

Joe Pinder

Medal of Honor (posthumously)
Normandy – D-Day June 6, 1944



On the morning of June 6, 1944, T/5 Joe Pinder, a minor league pitcher for seven years before the war, was with the 16th Infantry Regiment in the first wave of troops to assault the beaches at Colleville-Sur-Mer, more commonly known as Omaha Beach. For Pinder it was a special day—his birthday. He was 32.

As the landing crafts approached the beach the Germans opened fire with artillery, mortars and machine-gun fire. 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 accurate machine-gun and small arms fire, killing 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 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 as a burst of machine-gun fire tore through his upper body. 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.



Jack Lummus

Medal of Honor (posthumously)

Iwo Jima – March 8, 1945



On February 19, 1945, 1/Lt. Jack Lummus, an outfielder with the Wichita Falls Spudders and an end with football's New York Giants, was in the first wave that hit the beaches at the Pacific island of Iwo Jima. His initial duty was as liaison officer for the Second Battalion of the 27th Marine Regiment, spotting targets on and around Mount Suribachi.

On March 6, he was given command of the third rifle platoon in Second Battalion's E Company. Two days later they were spearheading a final assault on an objective east of Kitano Point in the north of the island. Lummus led an assault on three concealed Japanese strongholds and despite minor wounds received from grenade shrapnel, he single-handedly knocked out all three positions. The following day, there was a huge explosion and Lummus was mortally wounded. "We had been under artillery fire for 36 hours," related Captain Donald H. O'Rourke, "and we were just about to move out when Lummus stepped on a landmine. Both his legs were blown off. They got him on a stretcher and as they started back with him he smiled at me and said: 'The Giants sure are losing a mighty good football player.'"

Lummus was transferred to the 5th Division Field hospital where he underwent surgery and blood transfusions but died on the operating table the following day.

Jake Jones

Distinguished Flying Cross

Pacific Theater – February 17, 1945



Jakes Jones, a first baseman, had played for the Chicago White Sox in 1941 and 1942. By August 1943, he was serving in the Pacific Theater flying the Grumman F6F Hellcats as a member of VF-3, the third air group on the carrier USS Yorktown (CV-10). Lieutenant Jones shot down seven Japanese planes, the highest total in his group.

After participating in carrier-based raids on Tokyo, on February 17, 1945, he was awarded his second Distinguished Flying Cross. The citation read:

"For heroism while participating in aerial flight against the enemy during the first carrier-based strikes against the Japanese homeland on February 17, 1945. While flying a carrier-based fighter plane as section leader in his Air Group Commander's division, he countered the attacks of aggressive, determined and numerically superior enemy fighters. In this action he shot down two of these attacking planes. His skill and courage were at all times in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service."

Jocko Thompson

Silver Star

Holland – September 17, 1944



On September 17, 1944, 1/Lt. Jocko Thompson, who would go on to pitch for the Phillies for four seasons, played a vital role in Operation Market Garden - the largest airborne operation in history. As a platoon leader with the 504th Parachute Infantry Regiment, he and his men landed only 600 hundred yards from the southwestern edge of the bridge at Grave that spanned the Maas River. 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. They soon retreated towards the town.

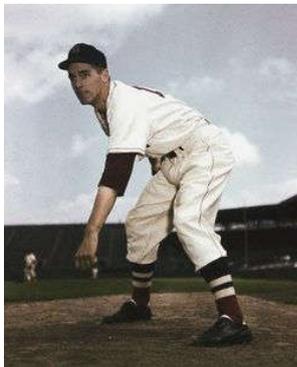
Thompson's bazooka man then dealt with the machine-gun fire coming from the tower on the bridge, and the platoon set up a road block, securing the bridge until the arrival of further elements of the 82nd Airborne.

On September 17, 2004 – 60 years after Thompson's platoon captured the bridge at Grave in Holland - it was renamed Lieutenant John S. Thompson Bridge.

Lefty Johnson

Bronze Star

France – September 30, 1944



Earl "Lefty" Johnson, who had spent two seasons with the Boston Red Sox before the war, served with the 30th Infantry Division in Europe. The division landed at Omaha Beach, Normandy, on June 11, 1944, and spearheaded the St. Lo breakthrough. "We were a replacement unit," he explained. "We had to go through Omaha Beach to get there [St. Lo]. The wreckage was still there, the burned-out tanks and half-sunken ships and assault boats that were just so much twisted steel."

On September 30, 1944, Johnson, a rifle platoon sergeant earned his first combat honor – a bronze star. His citation read: "During heavy concentration of hostile fire, a friendly truck was struck by an enemy shell and had to be abandoned. The fact that the vehicle contained vital radio equipment made it imperative that it be recovered before falling into enemy hands. Sergeant Earl Johnson and several other members of his unit were assigned to this hazardous mission. They courageously braved a severe hostile fire and were completely successful in dragging the vehicle over an area in plain view of the enemy."

In addition to the Bronze Star, Johnson also received a battlefield commission promoting him to second lieutenant.

Earl Rapp, an outfielder who would go on to play for the Tigers, White Sox, Giants, Browns and Senators, earned the Silver Star for his part in the battle of the Colmar Pocket - a three-week battle where Allied forces overwhelmed the German Nineteenth Army in bitter winter conditions.

Mike Auer

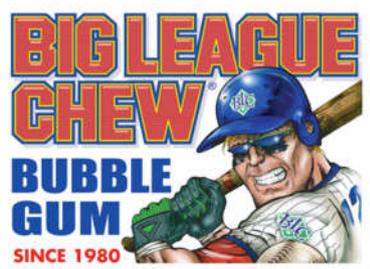
Distinguished Service Cross

France – January 1945



Mike Auer, who would play for the Janesville Cubs in 1947, earned the Distinguished Service Cross, the second highest military award of the US Army during World War II, making him the highest decorated professional baseball player of the war not to receive his award posthumously. His citation reads:

“...for extraordinary heroism in connection with military operations against an armed enemy while serving with Company A, 19th Armored Infantry Battalion, 14th Armored Division, in action against enemy forces from 13 to 20 January 1945 near Hatten, France. When his battalion was forced to withdraw and covering unit was cut off by the enemy, Captain Auer moved about from group to group under intense enemy artillery, mortar, and small-arms fire and, organizing and encouraging the troops with him, did much by his aggressive and fearless leadership to save the covering force. With the battalion again on the offensive, Captain Auer manned a machine gun, and, in addition, hurled grenades into the enemy position and broke up a German attack single-handed. Then, fighting a rear-guard action, he enabled a surrounded and outnumbered company to withdraw from threatened enemy encirclement. Captain Auer's heroic leadership, personal bravery and zealous devotion to duty exemplify the highest traditions of the military forces of the United States and reflect great credit upon himself, the 14th Armored Division, and the United States Army.”



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