

Welcome to the May issue of the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter, in which we take another look at the 1945 San Antonio Service Baseball League season.

As the summer roles around (slowly it seems here in Scotland), it's time to look forward to another season of baseball. Whether it's the big leagues, the minors, or a high school game, baseball still holds that magical element that makes me love this time of year and helps me understand what servicemen overseas missed about baseball while fighting for their country.

But I find myself focused on something else right now as the economic downturn has hit home - I was made redundant from my job last week. It seems ridiculous that someone who specializes in employability skills and personal development training finds himself in the same boat as the clients he has been working with for 15 years. A radical (and foolish) change in UK government funding policies for adult training means that small organizations like the one I work for can longer offer the specialized service we have provided over the years. So it's time for a career change, but after reading some of the biographies on the Baseball in Wartime website, and seeing what many of the returning veterans had to overcome, my task pales into insignificance. I have my health, I have my family . . . and pretty soon I'll have another job!

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The following article appeared in the Lubbock Avalanche-Journal on Sunday, July 11, 1943. I think it gives a perfect insight into the diversity of ballplayers that were playing on service teams during the war years.

Army Baseball Loop Replaces War-Smothered Evangeline

ALEXANDRIA, La., July 10 - The military baseball league of Alexandria is replacing a war-smothered Evangeline league in these parts. The calibre of its play can best be explained by a roundup of the various players' athletic backgrounds. Playing here on the Alexandria Army Air base team, one of the five which comprise the military league, are top keystone combination:

Pro Players on Team

Pvt. Bill Costa, shortstop, formerly with Daytona Beach in the Florida State league and Cpl. Fred Spagnoli, who once played second base for Alexandria's now defunct Evangeline nine, also saw service in the Alabama-Florida league and the Southeastern loop.

The air base's pitching staff includes Pvt. Horace Willey, erstwhile hurler for Milford, Del., in the Eastern Shore league; S/Sgt. Glen Brannon of Hamilton, Texas who played Army baseball in Hawaii and Pvt. Tom Zifarelli, ex-Brooklyn semi-pro.

Behind the plate are S/Sgt. Bob Young of Springfield, Ill., a semipro veteran and Pfc. Phillip Pattavina, former Omaha American Legion player.

In the infield, along with Spagnoli and Costa, are Pfc. George Barrett, first baseman, ex-Toledo American Legion player; Sgt. Tom Braucher, second baseman, Denver Legion league; Pvt. Bob Adams shortstop, of Rochester, N.Y., and Sgt. Carnes, third baseman, a Philadelphian who played Army ball at Fort Logan, Colo., for two years.

Outfielders include Pvt. Walter Roeber, Oakland, Calif.; Pvt. Joe Richards, Salem, Mass.; Cpl. Dan Shook, Basil, Ohio, and S/Sgt. Griffin Carpenter, Shreveport, La. All had sandlot and semi-pro experience.

Other teams in the league are Camp Claiborne, Camp Livingston, Camp Beauregard and Esler Field.

Every club has its assortment of seasoned pros and semi-pros. Sponsors predict that when play gets under way next week the brand of baseball played may be superior to that to which regional fans are accustomed.

[Editor's Note: Bill Costa went on to enjoy a 10-season career in the minors and was the starting shortstop for the Columbus Red Birds of the American Association in the late 1940s. Fred Spagnoli had played seven pre-war seasons in the minors. Horace Willey's only season in professional baseball was with Milford in 1939].

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San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

Welcome to the second month of the San Antonio Service Baseball League schedule for 1945. The league really began to take shape in May with each team playing around 10 games for the month. Randolph Field and San Marcos began to edge their way ahead of the opposition while the powerhouse SAACC

team found things surprisingly tough going following the suspension of four players involved in the "roughing up" of an umpire.

Randolph Field's Walt Nothe continued his stranglehold over opposing batters

and Mel Deutsch proves to be an effective hurler for Fort Sam Houston.

The Kelly Field Fliers, with a line-up dominated with former high schoolers, proves tough competition.

Play Ball!

Dave Ferriss

Dave "Boo" Ferriss, a former star pitcher at Mississippi State University, who signed with the Boston Red Sox in 1942, spent 22 months with Eighth Air Force Command at Randolph Field, Texas, an athletic instructor and played with the Randolph Field Ramblers in the San Antonio Service Baseball League. During that time he fine-tuned his pitching technique under the guidance of former major leaguer Bibb Falk. Because of a severe asthma condition that caused him to be hospitalized for four months, Ferriss was medically discharged on February 24, 1945. He joined Louisville of the American Association for spring training in 1945, but found himself on the Red Sox roster at the start of the season. He made his major league debut on April 29, and his first two wins were shutouts. He won his first eight starts, finishing the year with an incredible 21 victories and 2.96 ERA.

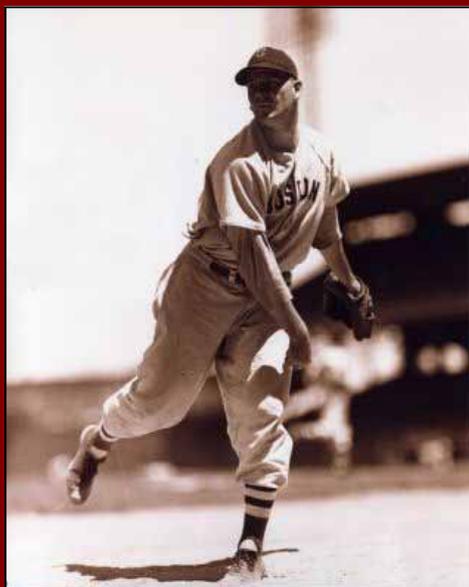
The following article, written by sports editor Harold Scherwitz, appeared in the *San Antonio Light* on May 31, 1945.

Hey, you San Antonio baseball fans, don't be too critical of the class of ball played in the Service league. Up in Boston, Mass, they speak of it in awed whispers and regard it as a sort of third major league — and a super major league at that. For, didn't the Service leaguers bat Dave Ferriss out of the box a few times, and didn't the other Service league pitchers hold him down to a mere .400 at bat?

Ferriss, who is a solemn-faced ribber of the most artful type when he gets in the mood, when things are breaking right and when he feels he knows you well enough, evidently has tried out his "line" on his new Boston friends, judging from hints he drops in a communication to this column received today.

The rookie sensation of the big leagues, with six straight victories for the Boston Red Sox, four of them shutouts, and a batting average that has him tabbed as the club's No. 1 pinch-hitter, remarks, dryly: "The writers here think the Service league is quite a league - and so t is. My experience down there certainly helped me greatly up here. I keep up with the Service league games, get a kick out of reading about them, and wish you would give my regards to my many San Antonio friends and wish the best of luck to the Service league players."

So the Boston writers think the Service league is quite a league! You can picture Dave, if you know him, solemn as an owl, sitting on the Red Sox bench when he isn't pitching or signing his autograph or smiling that slow Mississippi smile for appreciative fans. You can imagine easily the Boston scribes looking for a "story" from this most remarkable of all recruits in baseball history - and Dave supplying him with tales of baseball feats accomplished in the Service league. Wouldn't surprise us if a Boston paper sent a reporter down here to look things over and write a first-hand account of what he saw.



Seriously, Dave says, the answer to his success "so far" (the modest rascal!) is control.

"You can't get away with ANY bad pitches," he says. "Up here you have to keep your noodle on your business all the time.

"Of course, there's another very important item. That's support. The boys pull you out of holes all the time. Even if I do think that the Service league is faster than the American, I'll have to admit that maybe these fellows do the right thing at the right time a little oftener maybe."

The former Randolph field pitcher-slugger summed it up with this: "The papers say I'm getting by on control and headwork. Headwork! Haw! It seems I'm fooling more people than just the opposition batters."

San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

May 1945

Tuesday 1st

Brooks Field win their first game with a 6-4 win over first place Fort Sam Houston. It proves to be there only win of the month.

Thursday 3rd

Walt Nothe, pitching ace of the Randolph Field Ramblers, runs his strike out tally to 35 for two games by whiffing 17 at Hondo in a 9-2 win.

Sunday 6th

Randolph Field defeat San Marcos 14-1. 3,500 fans saw the SAACC/Kelly Field game at Kelly Field's Tech Field ballpark. 1,389 were paid admissions, and in seven games gate receipts at Tech Field have amounted to \$2,265.76.

Tuesday 8th

On VE Day, Hondo beat SAACC, 2-1, in a game that results in SAACC's Del Weber and other players being accused of "roughing up" umpire Nemo Herrera.

Wednesday 9th

In a surprise move following Tuesday's "roughing up" incident, Del Weber suspends himself for four days. However, umpire Herrera is still unhappy with the player's gesture and demands that Weber and three other players be officially penalized.

Thursday 10th

The local Army Athletic Council today suspends Del Weber for 12 games, and also suspends Fred Scheske, John Arrambodie, and Grover Resinger for 10 games for their part in the umpire "roughing up" incident of Tuesday. Despite the loss of these key players, SAACC defeats Brooks Field, 8-4, in a night game at Tech Field.

Tuesday 15th

Today is "Bib Falk Day" at Randolph Field as the Ramblers blast the Brooks Field Ganders, 20-2, to take first place in the league standings. Corporal Falk, manager of the Ramblers for three seasons and expected to be discharged from service any day, receives a wrist-

watch from his players.

Hondo's Clint Hartung strikes out 15 and allows Kelly Field just two hits in a 2-1 win.

Thursday 17th

McLee Baker of San Marcos defeats SAACC, 1-0, in 11 innings. Lloyd Dietz throws a 2-0 one-hitter for Fort Sam Houston over Brooks Field.

Friday 18th

San Marcos strengthen their hold on second place with a 24-9 victory over Brooks Field.

Sunday 20th

Despite losing, 1-0, to SAACC, Fort Sam Houston's new pitcher, Mel Deutsch, pitches well in his first outing of the year, allowing just two hits in six innings. Woody Johnson hurls the 5-hit victory for SAACC.

Walt Nothe pitches his second shutout of the season for Randolph Field with a 14-0 win over Hondo.

Wednesday 23rd

Randolph Field strengthen their hold on first place by turning back the challenging San Marcos Navigators, 14-6. It is Randolph Field's eighth straight league win.

Thursday 24th

Randolph Field defeat Fort Sam Houston, 6-1, for their ninth straight triumph.

Sunday 27th

McLee Baker of San Marcos beats Hondo's Clint Hartung, 10-1, with Baker giving up only two hits.

Walt Nothe hurls Randolph Field to their 10th straight victory blanking Kelly Field, 8-0. It is Nothe's third straight shutout.

Tuesday 29th

Catcher Hank Blair blasts two home runs as San Marcos upset SAACC, 14-7.

Hondo Comets trounce the hapless Brooks Field Ganders, 8-1.

Kelly Field Fliers beat Fort Sam Houston, 13-12. Kelly Field's manager, Jerry Witt, who at times this season has had a squad of only 10 men because of transfers, got first-class service out of a group of former high schoolers against Fort Sam. Witte has Fenton Mole, outfielder, and Harvey Christiansen, second-baseman, both 19 and recent

San Francisco high school graduates; Dick Barton, 20, from a Detroit high school; Don Lopes, kid outfielder from San Jose, California, and a high school teammate there, 19-year-old pitcher Frank Prowse. Mole, Christiansen and Lopes among them got most of Kelly Field's 17 hits.

Thursday 31st

Mel Deutsch outpitches Mike Dick to give Fort Sam Houston a 4-3 win over San Marcos.

San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

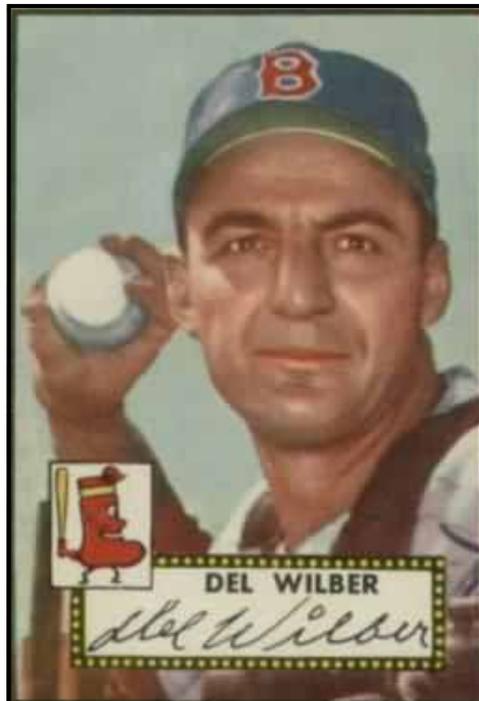
Standings at Tuesday May 29th

	W	L	Pct	GB
Randolph Field Ramblers	11	2	.845	-
San Marcos Navigators	10	4	.714	1.5
SAACC Warhawks	9	5	.643	2.5
Hondo Comets	6	8	.429	5.5
Fort Sam Houston Rangers	5	7	.417	5.5
Kelly Field Fliers	5	8	.385	6.0
Brooks Field Ganders	1	13	.071	11.5

San Antonio Service Baseball League 1945

Player Profile

Del Wilber



Delbert Q. "Del" Wilber, a scrappy catcher, was born on February 24, 1919 in Lincoln Park, Michigan. His professional career began with the Findlay Oilers of the Ohio State League in 1938, where he hit .304 in 97 games. In 1939, still with the Oilers, he batted .332 and led the league with 157 RBIs, prompting a sale to the St. Louis Cardinals' organization.

The 21-year-old spent the 1940 season with the Springfield Cardinals of the Western Association, where he hit .308 in 113 games, and moved up to Columbus of the South Atlantic League in 1941, batting .262 with 10 home runs.

Wilber was just shy of his 23rd birthday when he entered military service with the Army at Fort Custer, Michigan, on February 4, 1942. That summer he was the catcher and manager of the Jefferson Barracks Army Air Force baseball team in Missouri. In a game against Parks Air College on May 17, he hit a three-run home run and two singles in three at-

bats to help Jefferson Barracks to a 5-0 victory.

In October 1942, Wilber transferred to Miami Beach, Florida, to attend Officers' Candidate School. He graduated as a lieutenant and was sent to San Antonio Aviation Cadet Center (SAACC) in Texas as a physical instructor in 1943, where he managed the baseball team.

In 1944, playing in the San Antonio Service Baseball League, SAACC featured former Cardinals' Enos Slaughter and Howie Pollet. Wilber hit 13 home runs during the regular season to tie for first with Slaughter and guided the SAACC team to the league playoffs where they defeated Randolph Field in three games for the league title.

Still with SAACC in 1945, Wilber was involved in a controversial incident in which he was accused of roughing up umpire Nemo Herrera. Wilber. As a result of this, he was suspended for 12 games.

Wilber, who attained the rank of captain while with the Army Air Force, was discharged from San Antonio in February 1946. He joined the St. Louis Cardinals during spring training and made his major league debut on April 21. Wilber played just four games that season and was hitless in five plate appearances.

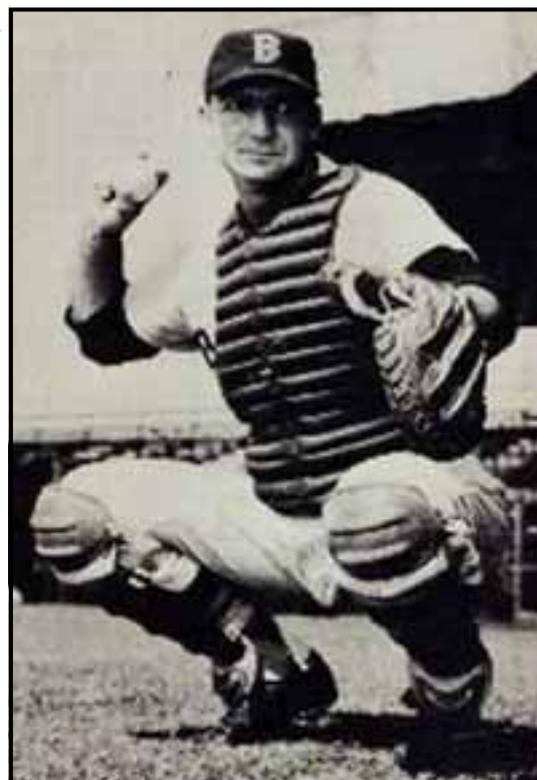
In 1947 he played 51 games with the Cardinals and batted .232. He remained a backup catcher with St. Louis through the 1950 season, when he was drafted by the Philadelphia Phillies. His best season came in 1951 with Philadelphia when he hit .278 with eight home runs and 34 RBIs. His career game also occurred that year on August 27. On the night his daughter, Cynthia, was brought home from the hospital, Wilber hit three home runs in three at-bats in a 3-0 win over the Reds.

Wilber spent eight seasons in the majors and hit .242 with 19 home runs, 115 RBIs and one stolen base in 720 at-bats. During his career, he developed a habit of decorating baseballs for winning pitchers with such things as line scores and cartoons.

Wilber managed in the minors after he retired as a player. When Marty Marion was managing the Chicago White Sox in the mid-1950s, Wilber served as a coach. He scouted for the Twins from 1960 to 1969. In 1970, he served as a coach for the Washington Senators managed by former Red Sox teammate Ted Williams. For two years, he served as the manager of the Senators' AAA team in Denver and moved on to manage Spokane of the Pacific Coast League in 1973.

In 1973, he managed Texas for one game and finished with a perfect 1-0 record as a major league manager.

Del Wilber, who throughout his career enjoyed decorating baseballs for winning pitchers, passed away on July 18, 2002 at St. Petersburg, Florida. He was 83 years old.



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Luman Harris, the Philadelphia Athletics' righthander, turned in a 4-3 victory over the White Sox in this War Relief contest. It was his last major league game before donning a navy uniform. He left for his home in Birmingham, Alabama, the following day and reported for duty with the navy on July 14.

New Book Coming Soon

Baseball's Dead of World War II: A Roster of Professional Players Who Died in Service

by Gary Bedingfield

It's a well-known fact among baseball fans that two major league players made the supreme sacrifice during World War II. What is far less commonly known is that at least 125 minor league players also lost their lives while serving their country. In addition to providing an extensive overview of baseball and the home front during the war years, *Baseball's Dead of World War II* draws on extensive research, and interviews with surviving family members to give the first published insight into the personal lives, baseball careers and tragic sacrifices made by these men.

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