

Gary Bedingfield's BASEBALL IN WARTIME

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Living WWII Ballplayer Veterans at 250

Happy New Year, and welcome to the first Baseball in Wartime Newsletter of 2008.

Over the Christmas period I spent some time looking at numbers in relation to baseball during WWII. Bear with me, all will soon become clear. I have a database that I have used to gather information on major league players who served with the military in WWII. The database currently contains 1,320 names and contains details of each player's playing career, military service, date of birth, date of death etc.

It made me wonder how many players with wartime military service were still living and with a few clicks here and there, I was presented with the answer - 250!

This equates to around 19% of all players with WWII military service still living.

Further analysis revealed that Lonny Frey - who is 97 - is the oldest living player with WWII service. Hot on the heels of Lonny is Tommy Henrich, who turns 94 in February!

The youngest living veteran appears to be Cloyd Boyer, who turned 80 on September 1, 2007, and served with the US Navy.

As a result, I have decided to focus on compiling biographies of living players for next couple of months. That doesn't mean I will ONLY focus on living players, it's just that there are times

when I am not sure what direction to go next with this mammoth task of recording everything to do with WWII baseball. Focusing on living players will always give me something to fall back on when I am not sure where to go next. I intend to interview as many of these living veterans as I can and will make these biographies available as soon as possible.

Furthermore, there are a couple of book proposals in the pipeline, and I will be in Cooperstown, NY, in mid-January. So 2008 looks to be another busy year!



Phil Rizzuto
1917-2007

WWII Major League Veterans We Lost in 2007

Ernie Koy - January 1
Bill LeFebvre - January 19
Max Lanier - January 30
Hank Bauer - February 9
Buddy Hancken - February 17
Bob Malloy - February 20
Clem Labine - March 2
Bobby Sturgeon - March 10
Lou Limmer - April 1
Ed Bahr - April 6
Charles Marshall - April 15
Ralph McLeod - April 27
Milt Bocek - April 29
Dick Kryhoski - May 10
Bill Wight - May 17
Vern Hoscheit (coach) - June 11
Shag Crawford (umpire) - July 11
Carl McNabb - July 16
Scat Davis - July 23
Frank Mancuso - August 4
Phil Rizzuto - August 13
Ox Miller - August 13
Hal Jeffcoat - August 30
John Sullivan - September 20
Bob Marquis - November 28
Tommy Byrne - December 20

Sponsor a Page on Baseball in Wartime for 2008

Maintaining the Baseball in Wartime website is not an easy task and conducting the extensive research that's required can be very expensive. That's why I'm offering you the opportunity to help by sponsoring a player page on the website. For a donation of between \$5 and \$50 (it's up to you), you can sponsor a family member, friend or favorite player's biography and have your own personal message appear at the top of the page.

Payment can be made securely online with PayPal and further information can be obtained at www.baseballinwartime.co.uk/sponsor.htm or email me at garybed@gmail.com

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For further information visit
www.baseball-almanac.com/minor-league



Baseball and the Battle of the Bulge



At 0530 on December 16, 1944, a massive artillery barrage was followed by three powerful German armies plunging into the hilly and heavily forested Ardennes region of eastern Belgium and northern Luxembourg. The result was the bloodiest of battles that US forces fought in Europe in WWII and soon became known as the Battle of the Bulge.

Thinking the Ardennes was the least likely spot for a German offensive, American forces in the area were minimal and almost complete surprise was achieved. Within the first three days of battle, two of the US 106th Infantry Division's three regiments were forced to surrender and the 19,000 American dead were unsurpassed by those of any other engagement. For the US Army, the battle incorporated more troops and engaged more enemy troops than any conflict before that time.

However, in snow and sub-freezing temperatures the Germans failed to meet their objective - that of reaching the sprawling Meuse River on the edge of the Ardennes. All that they accomplished was to create a Bulge in the American line (hence the name "The Battle of the Bulge").

The Germans lost irreplaceable men, tanks and equipment, and on January 25, 1945, after heavy losses on both the American and German sides, the Bulge ceased to exist. Less than four months later Germany unconditionally surrendered.

At least 25 players from professional baseball were involved in the Battle of the Bulge - five made the ultimate sacrifice.

Those Who Lost Their Lives at the Battle of the Bulge

Bill Hansen

Bill was from Chicago, and signed with Greenville in 1941. He was with the Green Bay Blue Jays of the Wisconsin State League in 1942 where he batted .310 and his contract was purchased by the Milwaukee Brewers of the American Association, but military service beckoned before he had the opportunity to report.

Sergeant Hansen served with the US Army in the Battle of the Bulge. He died from wounds received during that conflict in January 1945.

Erne Holbrook

Erne was from Los Angeles, and a star athlete at the University of Southern California. He signed a professional contract with Charlotte in 1935, and also played for Rocky Mount in 1936.

The following year he returned to California to coach high school baseball teams and joined the coaching staff of USC in 1943.

Private Holbrook served with the 28th Infantry Division in Europe and was reported missing in action in January

1945. It was later confirmed he had died in combat in Belgium on December 16, 1944 – the first day of the Battle of the Bulge.

Ernie Hrovatic



Ernie was from Highlandtown, OH, and signed a contract with the St Louis Cardinals in 1942 and was assigned to the Washington Redbirds in the Penn State League. He was the rightfielder with the Jamestown Falcons of the PONY League in 1943, and led the league in hitting for most of the season (.336 with 96 RBIs).

Hrovatic was expected to join the Sacramento Solons in the Pacific Coast League the following year but entered military service in December 1943.

Private First Class Hrovatic

was with the 3rd Armored Division in Europe. He was killed in action during the final days of the Battle of the Bulge on January 14, 1945.

Hank Nowak



Hank was from Buffalo, NY, and signed a minor league contract with the Albany Travelers of the Georgia-Florida League in 1937.

He had a sensational sophomore year with the team winning 20 games and joined the Houston Buffalos of the Class A1 Texas League the following year. Nowak was a major league prospect for the St Louis Cardinals but military service beckoned in March 1942.

Serving with the US Army in Europe he was killed in

action during the Battle of the Bulge on New Year's Day 1945.

Elmer Wachtler



Elmer was from Omaha, NE, and signed a minor league contract with the St Louis Cardinals in 1942 and played for Decatur and Lynchburg the next two seasons.

He was inducted into the military in March 1944 and served in Europe with the 35th Infantry Division.

On January 5, 1945, during the breakout at Bastogne in snow and freezing temperatures, Staff Sergeant Wachtler was killed in action.

You can read the full biographies at the In Memoriam section of www.baseballinwartime.co.uk

Major Leaguers at the Battle of the Bulge

Andy Anderson

Anderson was captured by the Germans during the Bulge and suffered a debilitating case of frostbite. His weight dropped from 185 pounds to 125 while in a POW camp. He made it to the major leagues with the St Louis Browns in 1948.

Merv Connors

Connors played briefly with the White Sox in 1937 and 1938. He served with the 517th PRCT during the Bulge.

Jim Delsing

Delsing served with the Medical Corps during the Bulge.

Murry Dickson



Dickson had pitched in the 1943 World Series and was with the 35th Infantry Division during the Bulge. He returned to the majors in 1946 and continued to pitch until 1959.

Jake Early

The Senators' all-star catcher was with an artillery unit during the Bulge. "They [the Germans] got the jump and got too close for comfort," he recalled. "Their tanks were less than a mile from the position of my battery. At least one company of their infantry was so close we could see them."

Ralph Houk

Houk was with the 9th Armored Division during the Bulge. He joined the Yankees in 1947 and would later become their manager, also piloting the Tigers and Red Sox.

Earl Johnson

Johnson pitched for the Red Sox before the war. He was commissioned a lieutenant on the field for extraordinary valor during the Bulge.

Jack Knott

Knott won 13 games with the Athletics in 1941. He saw action in the Bulge and was wounded on Jan 10, 1945.

Jack Lohrke

Minor league infielder, Lohrke, survived two battle experiences during the Bulge in which comrades on either side of him were killed. He made it to the major with the Giants in 1947.

Clarence Maddern

Maddern served with the military police of the 76th Infantry Division in Europe. He suffered frost bite in his toes during the Bulge and had the traumatic experience of having a comrade die in his arms. He made it to the majors with the Chicago Cubs in 1946.

Morrie Martin



Martin was with the 49th Engineer Combat Battalion during the Bulge. "The Battle of the Bulge was the worst," Martin recently told baseball historian Bill Swank. "It was the coldest I'd ever been in my life. I didn't have my shoes off for three weeks and I've had trouble with my feet ever since."

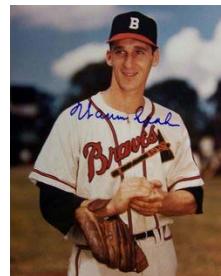
Martin made it to the majors with the Dodgers in 1949.



Steve Souchock

Souchock was as tank commander with the 691st Tank Destroyer Battalion. He was awarded the Bronze Star for his heroics during the Bulge. Souchock joined the Yankees in 1946.

Warren Spahn



Hall of Famer, Spahn, had pitched briefly for the Boston Braves in 1942. He served with the 276th Engineer Combat Battalion and they soon found themselves in the Bulge. "We were surrounded in the Hertgen Forest and had to fight our way out of there," recalled Spahn. "Our feet were frozen when we went to sleep and they were frozen when we woke up. We didn't have a bath or change of clothes for weeks."

Hank Thompson

Thompson played for the Negro League Kansas City Monarchs in 1943. The following year he was with the 1695th Combat Engineers in Europe. Thompson manned a machine gun during the Bulge.

Jocko Thompson

Thompson, who would play for the Phillies after the war, earned a battlefield commission during the Bulge.

Cecil Travis

Travis was the pre-war Senators' shortstop. He served with the 76th Infantry Division in WWII. During the Bulge, much of his time was spent in a frozen foxhole and he suffered severe frostbite. Military doctors worked hard to save his feet.

Ken Trinkle



Giants' pitcher, Trinkle, was with the 9th Armored Division during their involvement in the Bulge, and was awarded the Bronze Star.

Ernie White

White pitched for the Cardinals before the war. He was pinned down in icy water for a day during the Bulge.

Dick Whitman

Whitman's baseball career almost ended before it began during the Battle of the Bulge when he suffered severe frostbite and a shrapnel fragment pierced his back. He joined the Dodgers in 1946.

Hoyt Wilhelm

Hall of Famer, Wilhelm, received the Purple Heart during the Battle of the Bulge.

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Nick Macone - 1945 ETO World Series Hero



On December 3, 2007, we lost Nick Macone, one of the last surviving players from the 1945 ETO World Series.

Nick Macone played centerfield for the underdog OISE All-Stars in their memorable clash with the mighty Third Army team. His clutch-hitting and solid defense helped cause one of the biggest upsets in wartime service baseball.

Nicholas J "Nick" Macone was born in Concord, Massachusetts on February 3, 1918. An outstanding athlete at Concord High School, he co-captained the 1937 team that won the Middlesex County Baseball League and was a member of the 1937 Massachusetts state semi-pro nine that competed at Wichita, Kansas.

Following high school graduation, he signed a professional contract with the Sydney Mines Ramblers of the Cape Breton Colliery League, a four-team circuit at the heart of the hard-nosed coal mining community

of Nova Scotia in Eastern Canada. It was a pretty rough league and the local miners were diehard fans who didn't like their team losing - the Royal Canadian Mounted Police had to rescue umpires on a number of occasions at Brown Street Park.

Macone batted .271 in his 1938 rookie season with the Ramblers and his .321 average in 1939 was third best in the league. But after 1939, the league disbanded with Canada's entry into the war and the 22-year-old returned home to Concord to play with the semi-pro Lincoln Mohawks in the Boston Suburban League.

On October 15, 1941, Macone entered military service with the Army and was stationed at Aberdeen Proving Ground in Aberdeen, Maryland.

Macone was later sent overseas with the 70th Ordnance Company and spent two years in North Africa and Europe. With the war over in May 1945, Macone was finally able to get back to playing baseball, albeit with service teams in mainland Europe. In September 1945, Macone was playing for the OISE All-Stars, a team led by former Phillies' pitcher, Sam Nahem. The unconventional All-Stars' line-up included Negro League players Leon Day and Willard Brown, along with an assortment of semi-pro and college players and they stumbled along, somehow defeating all the teams that came their way. A late-season clash saw Macone hit a towering home run against Chuck

Eisenmann's Seine Base Clowns that won the game.

Pretty soon, the All-Stars found themselves in the ETO World Series where they would face the mighty Third Army team. The Third Army was a star-studded outfit led by Cardinals' outfielder Harry "The Hat" Walker and driven by a pitching staff that featured Ewell "The Whip" Blackwell of the Cincinnati Reds.

The OISE All-Stars seemed to have little hope of getting a runner on base let alone winning a game in the best-of-five World Series against the Third Army - Ewell Blackwell had been unbeaten all summer!

True to form, the Third Army easily overcame the All-Stars, 9 to 2, before 50,000 cheering servicemen at Soldier Field in Nuremberg, Germany in Game One. One of the few highlights in the game for the All-Stars was Macone's double to deep left center in the seventh. However, Game Two was a different story as Leon Day handcuffed the Army men, allowing just four hits to win, 2 to 1, and tie the series. In Game Three - at their home ground in Rheim, France - the All-Stars handed Blackwell his first defeat of the season, and it was Macone's two-run double in the fourth that made the difference as the All-Stars came out on top, 2 to 1.

The Third Army came back with a vengeance in Game Four. Harry

Walker hit a two-run home run and Bill Ayers blanked the All-Stars, 5 to 0. The deciding game saw the series return to Germany and despite the support of 50,000 fans, the Third Army were unable to stop the underdog All-Stars from creating a huge upset as they defeated Blackwell for the second time. Macone had two hits in the 2 to 1 victory, including his third double of the series.

Equipped with pro offers, Master Sergeant Macone returned home and signed with the St Louis Browns in February 1946, joining the team for spring training in Florida. Unfortunately, Macone's professional career didn't work out. He returned home to Concord and continued to play baseball with the Lincoln Mohawks.

Macone, who married Gertrude Peters in 1947, was a volunteer fireman and was employed at Polaroid Corporation in Waltham, Massachusetts, as a mechanical supervisor, retiring in 1982 after 20 years of service.

He continued to tend his 40-acre farm in Concord well into his eighties and this "hobby" provided produce and his notable tomatoes for family and friends.

Nick Macone passed away at Emerson Hospital in Concord on December 3, 2007. He was 89 years old.

Read the complete Nick Macone biography at www.baseballinwartime.co.uk

An Introduction to Valle Baseball

From the sandlot baseball fields of Corona, NY, just 2 blocks from where Shea Stadium now stands, John Valle Sr's love for the game of baseball was born and nurtured. Back when the game was learned without professional instructors, or indoor winter facilities. But through playing all day with your friends to hone the skills needed to compete at higher levels. John Valle Sr worked his way to a catching position for the Fordham University Rams in Bronx, NY. He married a beautiful girl from Woodside, NY, Marilyn Walsh and they raised 8 children, of which 2 played professional baseball. And one (Dave Valle) inherited the catching skills of his dad and became a major league ballplayer for 13yrs, as a catcher with both the Seattle Mariners and Texas Rangers.

From this heritage, the J&M Valle Pro Baseball glove line was started in memory of, and in dedication to John Valle Sr and his wife Marilyn (J&M). The Valle Pro Baseball gloves are made of the highest quality craftsmanship with designs by owner John Valle Jr, and being used by the youth to the professional level players.

Read more about the company history & products they provide at www.vallebaseball.com or call 1-866-388-8049.