

# Gary Bedingfield's Baseball in Wartime

[www.baseballinwartime.com](http://www.baseballinwartime.com)

## Baseball in Wartime Goes Dot Com

It has taken eight years to get there, but the Baseball in Wartime website has finally gone dot com. You can now visit the website using the brand new URL [www.baseballinwartime.com](http://www.baseballinwartime.com).

This has hopefully given the website a more international appeal and made use of a URL that is easier to remember. Of course, the other URLs [www.garybed.co.uk](http://www.garybed.co.uk) and [www.baseballinwartime.co.uk](http://www.baseballinwartime.co.uk) will continue to function for the foreseeable future.

Since returning from Cooperstown in January, I've been pretty busy writing a number of articles for publication, but haven't been neglecting the website. I've added some new biographies including Joe Dobson, Mace Brown, Sid Hudson, Walt Judnich, Spud Chandler, Jack Knott, Tommy Bridges, Ken Keltner, Don Kolloway and Charlie Wagner.

Another feature I've added to Baseball in Wartime, is American and National League lists of players showing the teams they were with when they entered military service. You'll find these lists in the Those Who Served part of the website.

Something else new is the addition of game reports and box scores for significant wartime military games. In the Service Games part of the website you will find reports on the Army-Navy game at the Polo Grounds in June 1942, the Service All-Stars and American League All-Stars of July 1942, the Norfolk Navy World Series of September 1943, the Army-Navy World Series of 1944, and the Navy World Series of 1945. More to come soon.

This issue of the newsletter—and I can't believe it's the seventh issue already—focuses on baseball played by prisoners of war and within internment camps. The main article includes a look at both Allied and Axis participation in the game and I'd

like to think it is the most widespread coverage of POW/internment baseball outside of Tim Wolter's book *POW Baseball in World War II*.

For further reading on the subject, I'd strongly recommend Tim Wolter's book as well as Phil Marchildon's *Ace*, Gary W. Moore's *Playing with the Enemy*, and Robert Skole's fictional work, *Jumpin' Jimminy*, which is reviewed on Page 7 of this newsletter.

### Dario Lodigiani Passes Away at 91

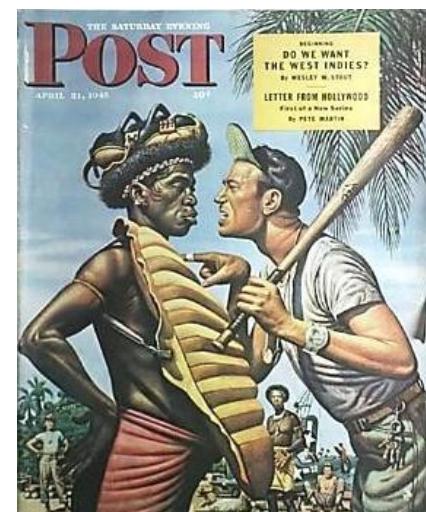


Dario Lodigiani, who played for the Athletics and White Sox before WWII, passed away on February 10, 2008. He served with the Army Air Force from 1943 to 1945 and was stationed at McClellan Field, California, Hickam Field, Hawaii and the Marianas with the 73rd Bomb Wing Bombers. He returned to the White Sox in 1946 but was released the following year and joined Oakland of the Pacific Coast League. He played in the minors until 1952 then managed in the Northwest League and California League. Lodigiani was a coach with the Athletics in 1961 and 1962, and later became a full-time scout.

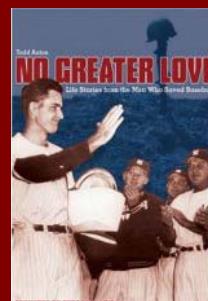
Sign-up a friend to the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter

I'm hoping to expand the Baseball in Wartime newsletter mailing list this month, and I'm looking for your help to achieve this. I'm sure each of you must know at least one person that would enjoy receiving the newsletter in their email Inbox on a monthly basis. Just send me their email address and I'll make sure they are included for the next issue. If, at any time, they decide they no longer want to receive the newsletter they can simply drop me a line and I'll make sure their name is removed immediately. Help me to spread the word and sign-up a friend to the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter mailing list, today!

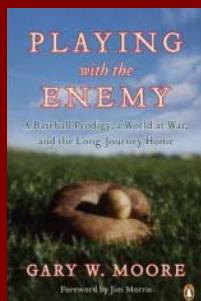
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### In this Edition of the Baseball in Wartime Newsletter

When the Boys Came Home to Atchison

Behind the Wire

Jumpin' Jimminy review

Professional Baseball Statistical Database

## When the Boys Came Home to Atchison

Atchison, Kansas, doesn't have a reputation as a hotbed for baseball. It has never been home to a minor league team, and the town has only ever produced one major leaguer – Carter Elliott - who played 12 games at shortstop for the Cubs in 1921. Nevertheless, in July 1945, two games were played in Atchison that epitomised the return of World War II servicemen.

Atchison, lies along the Missouri River, fifty miles northwest of Kansas City in the northeast corner of Kansas. During the 1940s, it had a population of about 12,000 and is best known as the birthplace of aviator Amelia Earhart, who was born there in 1897 and lost her life while attempting an around-the-world flight 40 years later.

Atchison may have been without a professional ball team but baseball still thrived with the Atchison Merchants and Atchison American Legion teams attracting good crowds at the Amelia Earhart Stadium.



Atchison, Kansas in the 1940s

warfare.

In July 1945, with Germany defeated and all attention being laid upon the Japanese, a number of Atchison servicemen were home on furlough, and 17 of them were organized into a ball team as part of the town's "welcome home" program. The incredible thing is eight of them had spent time as prisoners of war of the Germans and Japanese.

The servicemen team was scheduled to play at 1pm at Amelia Earhart Stadium on Sunday, July 15, 1945, as a preliminary game to the contest between the Atchison Merchants and Ruppert Diecasters of Kansas City. Playing against the Touslee Motors-sponsored American Legion team, the servicemen's starting line-up featured pitcher Frank Davis, who had been a POW in Germany; second baseman Bill Biffinger, who had served with the 101<sup>st</sup> Airborne Division at Normandy and was taken prisoner during the Battle of the Bulge; shortstop Willie Thomas, who as a B-24 tail gunner with the 19<sup>th</sup> Bomb Group was shot down in 1943 and spent 17 months as Japanese POW in Burma; and Bob Vogt, who served with the 79<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division and was captured in France in

January 1945 and held as a POW in Germany. Also in the starting line-up were catcher Brownie McDonald, who had served with both the Canadian and American air forces; first baseman Frank Kelly; leftfielder Louie Akers; and rightfielder Clayton Wolfe, who had all served in the Pacific. On the bench were ex-POWs Bob Besinger and Al Bracke, along with European theater combat veterans Bill Heiser and Mel Lott.

"Some of the boys have not played ball in some time but they have not forgotten how and will give the Legion club plenty of competition," declared the *Atchison Daily Globe* before the game.

### Baseball Sunday

(Double-Header)

#### Amelia Earhart Stadium

1 P.M.—SERVICE MEN HOME  
ON FURROUGH VS. AMERICAN  
LEGION.

2:30 P.M.—TOPEKA AMERICAN  
LEGION VS. ATCHISON AM-  
ERICAN LEGION.

Admission: 25¢

Atchison Daily Globe July 20, 1945

With America's entry into the Second World War in December 1941, many of Atchison's young men entered service depriving the teams of talent for the next four seasons. Atchison's servicemen saw combat as far afield as Europe and the Pacific - some never returned while others made it home with harrowing stories of

## 17 Atchison Servicemen To Play Ball

Atchison Daily Globe July 12, 1945



Bill Biffinger  
POW in  
Germany



Al Bracke  
POW in  
Germany



Willie Thomas  
POW in  
Burma



Louis Akers  
US Army



Francis Kelly  
Pacific



Bob Besinger  
POW in Germany



Brownie  
McDonald  
USAAF



Clayton Wolfe  
US Army



Jim Blagg  
US Army



Bob Vogt  
POW in  
Germany

## When the Boys Came Home to Atchison (continued)

Despite their years away from the game, the servicemen put on a fine performance and held the American Legion team to a 5-5 tie in the four inning contest. "I never expected to see some of these boys ever play baseball again and their presence on the diamond gave me a big thrill," announced Atchison Baseball Association vice-president John Laurie after the game.

In fact, the game proved such a big hit with the local crowd that another game was scheduled for the following week. As a curtain-raiser to the Atchison American Legion's game against the Topeka club, the servicemen's nine were defeated, 8 to 4, in five innings by the Legion side on July 22 at Amelia Earhart Stadium.

Many of these players would go on to star for local Atchison teams, but for those two weekends in July, they were part of the most ex-POW-dominated line-up in the nation.



Atchison Merchants in their pre-war days

*(I am extremely grateful to Claudia Bosshammer-Bilimek of the Atchison Public Library for going far beyond the "call of duty" in assisting me with this project).*

### Starting Line-up for Atchison Servicemen Team

July 15, 1945 at Amelia Earhart Stadium, Atchison, Kansas

Final score: Servicemen 5 Atchison American Legion 5 (in four innings)

Frank Davis	P	POW in Germany
Brownie McDonald	C	Served with Canadian and US air forces
Francis Kelly	1B	Saw action in Pacific
Bill Biffinger	2B	POW in Germany
Willie Thomas	SS	POW in Burma
Charles Medlock	3B	
Louie Akers	LF	US Army in Pacific
Bob Vogt	CF	POW in Germany
Clayton Wolfe	RF	US Army

### Starting Line-up for Atchison Servicemen Team

July 22, 1945 at Amelia Earhart Stadium, Atchison, Kansas

Final score: Servicemen 4 Atchison American Legion 8 (in five innings)

Willie Thomas	P	POW in Burma
Brownie McDonald	C	Served with Canadian and US air forces
John Rudolph	1B	US Army
Bob Besinger	2B	POW in Germany
Tootie Eckart	SS	
Bob Vogt	3B	POW in Germany
Louie Akers	LF	US Army in Pacific
Clayton Wolfe	CF	US Army
Mickey Kurtz	RF	

Other servicemen included in these games were: Jiggs Arensberg (US Army), Earl Atlakson (US Army), Jim Blagg (US Army), Al Bracke (POW in Germany), Jim Blagg (US Army), Bud Cummings, Don Daigh, Bill Heiser (US Army), Ed Intfen (US Army), Tim Jochems, Melvin Lott (US Army), Mac McKelvy (USAAF), Bill Taylor, Frankie Wills (US Army), Don Wolfe (US Army) and Bill Wolters (US Navy)

## Behind the Wire – Prisoner of War and Internment Camp Baseball during World War II

### Overview

In time of war, it is inevitable that troops from both sides will be captured, and World War II saw more prisoners than any other conflict. Between 1940 and 1945, the Germans and Japanese interned 130,000 American and 10,000 Canadian soldiers in prison camps where conditions varied greatly.

Their time "behind the wire" was often a struggle to overcome the reality of captivity, boredom and in some cases fear for their lives. For most POWs boredom was their biggest enemy, for with it came apathy and a lowering of morale. As a result, sport was often the tool that helped overcome this problem, and not surprisingly American and Canadian servicemen used baseball as an ideal morale booster and to recreate a little piece of home.

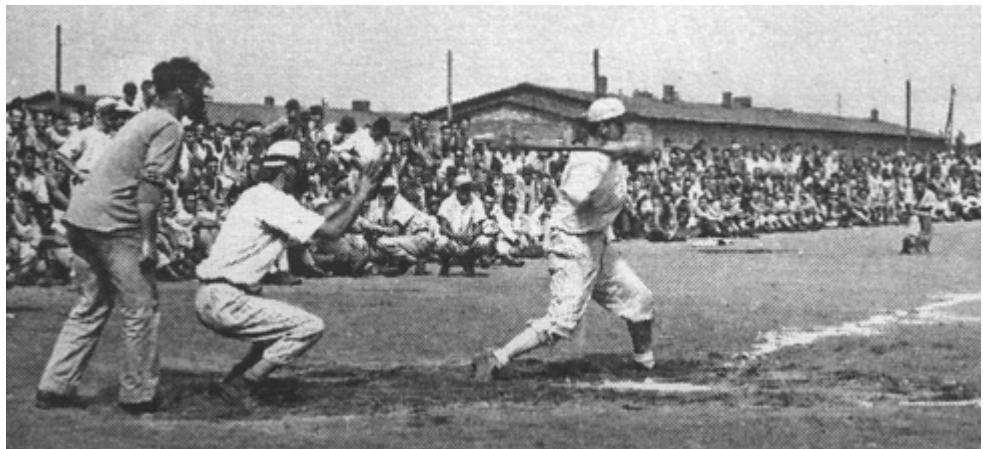
### Prisoners of War

#### Prisoners of the Germans

*Kriegsgefangener* is the German word for prisoner, and this was affectionately abbreviated to Kriegie by Allied prisoners of war. The Canadians were the first baseball-playing Kriegies to be detained by the Germans with airmen being taken prisoner during the Battle of Britain in the late summer of 1940. The first American troops to fall into the hands of the Germans were the ground forces captured in North Africa at the beginning of 1943. Then, in the second half of that year, Army Air Force crewmen – shot down while bombing targets over enemy territory – began to fill the Nazi POW camps.

At many prison camps in Germany, athletic equipment that was actively collected by the YMCA in the United States was distributed by the International Red Cross. It is claimed that 1,754,254 pieces of sports equipment were shipped from the United States to Europe covering a range of sports including basketball, volleyball, handball, ping-pong and, of course, baseball and softball.

Ball games were a regular occurrence during the summer months, with their supply of equipment enhanced with crudely made bats and balls, informal games of catch, pick-up games and even organized league play took place, often encouraged by camp commanders as a means of maintaining morale and discipline. At Stalag Luft VIIA in Moosburg,



Mickey Grasso at the plate at Stalag IIIB

Germany for example, a camp baseball league existed with many games between the Wildcats, Bomber Aces and Luftgangsters. Stalag IIIB in Furstenburg, Germany went a step further and had major and minor leagues divided into National and American divisions.

But baseball – on a much smaller scale – also served another purpose within the camps. The typical noise of a ballgame generated by the spectators and players was sometimes used to disguise the sounds emitting from the excavation of escape tunnels. There are also reports of baseball playing its part in helping prisoners to obtain essential escape equipment as radio transistor parts were smuggled into prison camps inside baseballs and softballs.

Among the first professional ballplayers to fall into the hands of the Germans was Mickey Grasso, who had played one season with Trenton of the Interstate League before entering military service in January 1942. Grasso served with the 34th Infantry Division in North Africa and was taken prisoner by Rommel's Afrika Korps on February 17, 1943. He was among 6,000 Allied prisoners taken by the Germans in counterattacks as they were being chased out of North Africa by Allied forces.

Grasso remained a POW at Stalag IIIB in Germany for two years but baseball was never far from his mind and together with fellow prisoners Harold Martin (a former Appalachian League outfielder who was wounded in combat twice and received the Bronze Star before being captured by the Germans during the Battle of the Kasserine Pass in Tunisia.) and Keith Thomas, they devised a baseball game

using playing cards which kept them entertained during the long periods of boredom in the winter months.

During the summer of 1943, competitive fast-pitch softball leagues were formed and Grasso was a star player with the Zoot Suiters. The following summer, there were major and minor league within the camp, divided into National and American League divisions. Games were well attended; the level of play was high and culminated in a World Series in August.



Combined all-star squads at Stalag IIIB

With 1944 came an influx of professional ballplayers into German POW camps. Among them was Phil Marchildon, Athletics pitcher, who was at Stalag Luft III, after being shot down on a bombing run over Kiel Bay; Reds pitcher, Dixie Howell, was at Stalag VIIA along with minor league pitcher Dale Hills; Bert Shepard, who would later pitch for the Senators, was shot down and seriously wounded while flying his P-38 Lightning on a strafing attack over Germany. He had a leg amputated but was still determined to pursue a professional career. While at Stalag IX-C, he had an artificial leg made for him and took his first steps towards pro ball. Minor leaguers Frank Aten and Lloyd Taylor were both interned at Oflag 64 in Poland; Andy Anderson, who played for the Browns in



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## Behind the Wire – Prisoner of War and Internment Camp Baseball during World War II

the late 1940s, was captured by German forces on November 21, and held at Stalag IXB; Jim Blackburn, who was pitching for the Syracuse Chiefs in 1943, was the squad leader of a light-machine outfit when he was wounded and captured by German forces on December 23, 1944, and was taken to Stalag IVB; Yankees farmhand, Armand Sergiacomi, was a crew member of a B-24 Liberator that was shot down over Yugoslavia in August 1944 and taken to Stalag Luft IV at Gross-Tychow in Poland; Kitty League catcher, Don Kirby, was shot down over France on a mission to Frankfurt in February 1944 and held at Stalag Luft VI; Ray Milcsik was a shortstop with the Cordele Reds in the Georgia-Florida League and shot down over Kiel, Germany, where he spent the next 17 months as a prisoner at Stalag 17B; Augie Donatelli, who had been a Pennsylvania coal miner before the war, was shot down on a bombing raid and spent 14 months at Stalag Luft IV where he began umpiring softball games and went on to enjoy a 24-year career as a professional umpire. Unfortunately, not all stories of Allied

he was taken prisoner by German troops and transported to the hospital at the Stalag IIA prison camp in Altengrabow, Germany. Sadly, Palatas succumbed to his wounds later that day.

Stanford Wolfson played baseball at the University of Illinois and signed with the Springfield Cardinals of the Western Association in 1940. He played almost every position on the field and was with Cooleemee, Johnson City and Union City before entering military service with the Army Air Force in October 1942. Wolfson trained as a bomber pilot and was attached to the 95th Bomb Group in England. He completed 18 missions flying a B-17 Flying Fortress. On November 5, 1944, as co-pilot on a mission to Ludwigshafen, Germany, the bomber was heavily damaged by flak over the target area and the crew bailed out. Wolfson landed in the Pfalzer Wald Forest about 12 kilometers southwest of Kaiserslautern. He handed himself in at the nearest town and was picked up by members of the Criminal Police from Kaiserslautern. On the journey to Kaiserslautern, Stanford Wolfson was taken to a wooded area and executed. A trial was held by the General Military Government Court at Dachau, in 1947, where Wolfson's executor was given a life sentence.

By the beginning of 1945, conditions in prison camps had changed for the worst. Food rations dwindled, and at the hands of their captors, most endured forced marches in freezing temperatures escaping the advancing Russians from the East, and British and Americans from the West.

During April and May 1945, German prison camps were liberated and American and Canadian servicemen – some in captivity for up to five years – began the long but much welcome journey home.

### Prisoners of the Japanese

In Japanese camps, where conditions and treatment varied drastically, and an estimated 40% of Allied prisoners died in captivity, baseball's role held a much lower ranking as food and survival took priority. Prisoners were used as slave labor, rest days were infrequent, debilitating diseases like malaria, dysentery and typhus were rampant, and many were often worked to death.

But unlike Germany, Japan was a baseball-playing nation with the game being introduced to the nation as long ago as the 1870s. While America and Japan were at war, both countries had professional baseball leagues. It was not until late 1944 that Japanese professional baseball finally shutdown for the duration as the tide of war turned against the

nation.

Therefore, with a country so fond of baseball there inevitably are accounts of the game being played in some form, and in camps where discipline was a little more relaxed pick-up games were even played by American prisoners and their Japanese captors.

One of the first professional ballplayers captured by the Japanese was Ray Makepeace, who signed with the St Louis Cardinals' farm team at Union City in the Kitty League in 1937. A sore arm brought an early end to his career but he attempted a comeback with Sioux Falls of the Nebraska State League before entering military service in February 1941. Makepeace was captured by the Japanese at the fall of the Philippines in May 1942. He was given temporary duty repairing boats in Manila harbor before being assigned to Manila Port Detail as part of 400 men responsible for unloading and loading Japanese ships. There was little time to rest but Makepeace was involved in occasional softball games using mainly improvised equipment.

He was later assigned to galley duty and was watching Japanese soldiers playing baseball one day. A ball rolled to his feet and he bent down to pick it up and return it to the players. In broken English, a soldier asked Makepeace if he knew Ted Williams. "Yes," he replied. He was then asked if he knew Babe Ruth, and Makepeace said he knew him too. The soldier smiled and said, "F@%K Babe Ruth!"

Another minor leaguer who became a captive of the Japanese was Walt Lentz, who was 13-8 as a North Carolina State League pitcher in 1942. He entered military service with the Army Air Force in September of that year and served as a waist gunner in a B-29 Superfortress based at Chakulia in India. On December 14, 1944, his plane was severely damaged while bombing the rail yards in Rangoon, Burma. Lentz and the rest of the crew bailed out and were handed over to Japanese troops by Burmese villagers. They travelled to Rangoon by boat, train, truck and on foot, and were continuously interrogated throughout the journey. On one occasion, Lentz refused to answer questions and was beaten to his knees by a Japanese officer using a sword, Lentz thought he was going to be beheaded but instead the officer thrust the sword point in the young airman's back and yelled at him that he would thereafter answer the questions he was asked.

Lentz and the rest of the crew arrived at Rangoon Central Prison on Christmas Day 1944. Conditions were poor, four men



Winner's certificate for a softball tournament at Stalag 357

servicemen captured by the Nazis are filled with stories of playing baseball to while away the hours. Joe Palatas played one season as an outfielder with the Springfield Red Birds of the Mid-Atlantic League in 1942. Shortly after the season ended, he entered military service with the Air Force and was stationed in England with the 92<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group. Flying as the bombardier on a B-17 Flying Fortress, Palatas' plane was shot down by antiaircraft fire over Stettin, Germany on April 11, 1944. Severely wounded, he managed to bail out of the stricken craft. Immediately upon landing,

## Behind the Wire – Prisoner of War and Internment Camp Baseball during World War II

shared a cramped cell where they slept on pieces of burlap. They were frequently beaten by the guards and everyone suffered from malaria and severe weight loss due to the poor diet.

More than four months passed before Lentz and other prisoners were marched to another camp. Along the way they were frequently attacked by British fighter planes and, upon arriving at the village of Pegu, they were abandoned by the Japanese guards.

### Chinese POWs of the Second Sino-Japanese War



Chinese POWs playing baseball at Shanghai in 1940

The Second Sino-Japanese war was the result of a decades-long Japanese imperialist policy aiming to dominate China politically and militarily to secure its vast raw material reserves and other resources. During the war, which began in 1937 and ended with the Japanese surrender in August 1945, Chinese prisoners at the Woosung POW camp, near Shanghai, were "encouraged" to play baseball by their Japanese captives. Baseball in China had a fragmented history at that point and was later banned as an "evil western influence." Its resurgence in China began in the mid-1970s.

### Internment Camps

#### Japanese-American Internment Camps in the United States, Canada and Australia



Japanese Americans played baseball at an internment camp in the United States

Following the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941, and out of fears of espionage and sabotage along the Pacific, the US government removed Japanese American men, women, and children from their homes on the West Coast of the United States and interned them in hastily constructed camps called "War Relocation Centers" in remote parts of the country. Baseball was a way for those interned to have some normality in their uprooted lives. Teams for all age groups were formed in the camps and some featured highly competitive league structures.

Occasionally, internment camp teams got to play against teams from local towns and communities. For example, the Tucson High School baseball team played at the Gila River Internment Camp in Arizona in April 1945. The Butte High School Eagles, as the camp team became known, beat Tucson in 10 innings.

Canada followed America's lead and interned more than 22,000 Japanese Canadians. Legendary baseball champions, the Vancouver Asahi, who overcame inequality in the 1920s and 1930s and instilled a sense of pride in Japanese Canadians, were disbanded when the team's players were relocated to various Canadian internment camps.

Internment camps for people of Japanese origin also existed in Australia during the war and it can be assumed that baseball was part of the activities that helped keep up morale.

#### Santo Tomas University Internment Camp, Philippines

From 1942 until the end of the war, Santo Tomas University in Manila was used by the Japanese to house male and female civilian prisoners from America, Britain, Canada and Australia. "Sports were practically our only form of entertainment at Santo Tomas," recalled Royal Arch Gunnison of the Mutual Broadcasting System. "The Japs let us organize softball leagues and we had 30 teams playing. Sometimes, if they thought we were enjoying ourselves too much, the Japanese guards would come out to a softball game and pick four or five men from each team and cart them off somewhere to dig ditches until the game was over."

Gunnison was later transferred to a POW camp in Shanghai. "The captain of the guard there was nuts about softball, and wanted to play a game between the guards and the prisoners. We stalled and tried to prevent the game, because we knew so many things could go wrong. But he insisted."

After just one inning the POWs led 27 to 0. No matter how hard they tried to mess

plays and swing-and-miss at pitches, they still one 27 to 2. "It got so funny that everybody on the sidelines, except the Japs of course, nearly choked while trying to keep from laughing. That softball game was practically the only contact in sports we had with the Japanese."

#### Bad Nauheim Internment Camp, Germany



Bad Nauheim ball team

In Germany, with the declaration of war against the United States, more than a hundred American journalists and diplomats were gathered at the US Embassy in Berlin and taken to Bad Nauheim, where they were interned at the Jeschke Grand Hotel. To relieve boredom they regularly played baseball with a bat made from a broken tree branch and a ball that consisted of a champagne bottle cork wrapped in socks and tape.

With diplomatic bags for bases and an old orange crate for home plate, they formed two teams, newsmen versus the diplomats. "Playing baseball was good for our morale," recalled Angus MacLean Thuermer, an American reporter working in the Berlin bureau of the Associated Press.

The Bad Nauheim baseball season was short-lived. The internees were exchanged for German journalists and diplomats detained in the United States in May 1942.

#### Interned American Flyers in Sweden

As a result of engine malfunction or damage from enemy anti-aircraft fire, a large number of American bombers landed in neutral Sweden and the crews were interned for a short period. Baseball was not a popular game in Sweden at the time although exhibition games had been played at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm and a few teams were scattered around the country.

Reports indicate that bomber crews played baseball to overcome the boredom of waiting to be shipped back to their unit, and the crew of "Red Dog," a B-24 that crash-landed in Sweden in 1944 following

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a raid near Hamburg, regularly played baseball and provided the seed to the local team's present-day success. On Easter Monday 1944, a ballgame was played between two bomber crew teams at Falun, a city in the province of Dalarna, and proceeds from the game were donated to the Red Cross. Bob Skole's book, *Jumpin' Jimminy*, uses interned American crews in Sweden as a backdrop for his fictional look at baseball between Americans and Japanese [see the *Jumpin' Jimminy* review on this page].

### Playing with the Enemy

#### German Prisoners Playing Baseball

Baseball may well have been of little interest to Germans during World War II, but there is at least one case of Nazi prisoners playing the American pastime. In Gary Moore's book, *Playing with the Enemy*, he tells how his father, Gene, a pre-war prospect of the Brooklyn Dodgers, who served with the Navy and played baseball with a touring all-star service squad, was sent with the team to a remote POW camp in Louisiana, where they were assigned guard duty for the crew of the U-505 German U-boat. The U-boat had been captured in the Atlantic along with top-secret codebooks and the Enigma encryption machine, and the crew of the U-505 were held at the camp in secrecy. Not even the Red Cross knew of their existence. Despite their differences, Moore and the rest of his ball team taught the German submariners to play baseball.

#### Japanese Prisoners Playing Baseball



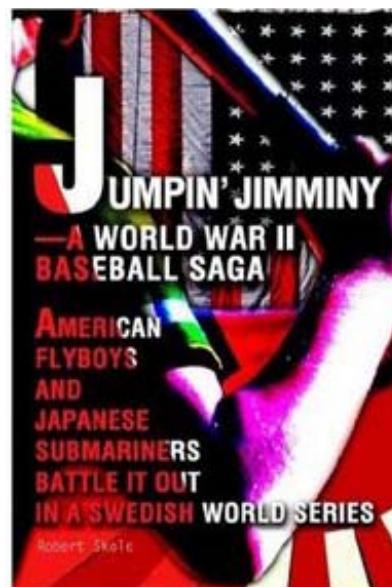
Baseball among Japanese POWs at Cowra in Australia

It was inevitable that Japanese prisoners would play baseball while behind the wire, and there are accounts of them playing ball at camps as far afield as Russia and Australia. At the No 12 Prisoner of War Compound near Cowra in Australia, baseball was a regular pastime among the 1,100 Japanese prisoners held there, although their baseball bats became weapons on August 5, 1944, when nearly 400 prisoners escaped in a mass breakout. All escapees were soon recaptured and a total of 231 Japanese and four Australians were killed.

There is one account of Japanese prisoners playing ball against their American captors, and it took place in Hawaii. "The Japs were offering \$100 to any of our good players who would join [their team] against us," recalled Senators' pitcher Walt Masterson. "They are very small and extremely light, and the temptation is strong to grab a couple of them by the heels and knock their heads together."

During the course of the game, a Japanese pitcher attempted to brush back one of the American batters. "I took care of that bird next time he came up to bat!"

### Jumpin' Jimminy: A World War II Baseball Saga by Robert Skole



I remember seeing Robert Skole's novel on amazon some time ago, and I can't believe it's taken me until now to read it. *Jumpin' Jimminy* is a fun book, a light-hearted story set against a real-world backdrop. During WWII. More than 100 American bomber crews used neutral Sweden to make emergency landings. What followed for these crews was a short term of internment before they were returned to their units. Skole has taken this fact to create a fascinating story of how a bomber crew of ballplayers end up playing the crew of a Japanese submarine in the Swedish World Series. It's an easy read with a lot of laughs along the way. If you haven't read *Jumpin' Jimminy* I suggest you grab a copy now because I'm not going to tell you who wins Swedish World Series!

Published by iUniverse (2004) \$13.95  
[www.jumpinjimminy.com](http://www.jumpinjimminy.com)  
[Available at amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com)

### Professional Baseball Statistical Database



You may recall that in the December issue of the Baseball in Wartime newsletter I reviewed Pat Doyle's Professional Baseball Player Database. Well, Mr Doyle has been extremely busy and he's just released another gem!

The Professional Baseball Statistical Database contains year-by-year records for major and minor league players between 1920 and 1945. Every player who is listed in the Official Baseball Guides for those seasons is included, and many who were omitted from the Guides because of limited playing time have been researched and added to the database. The database contains sortable and printable statistics and is an absolute joy to work with.

If you are serious about researching baseball from the war years then the Professional Baseball Statistical Database is an absolute must. It's easy to install on your computer and is up and running in minutes. For more information go to:

[www.baseball-almanac.com/minor-league/](http://www.baseball-almanac.com/minor-league/)  
 or email Pat Doyle at  
[baseballdata@kc.rr.com](mailto:baseballdata@kc.rr.com)

