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# Playing for Their Nation: The American Military and Baseball During World War II

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During America's involvement in the Second World War, the American armed forces witnessed a rapid mobilization rivaled by no other in this nation's history. Millions of American men and women enlisted or were drafted into military service to fight fascism in Europe and in Asia. While the exploits of these soldiers and sailors on the battlefields, in the air and on the seas have been explored thoroughly, other aspects of military culture have been relatively ignored by historians. Military culture during World War II was a culture dominated not only by war, but also by sport. Military officials depended heavily upon athletics to instill a "common sense that the American athlete, like the American warrior, was superior above all others," thus resulting in a more efficient fighting force.<sup>1</sup> Because baseball was the most popular sport in American society at the time, it is not surprising that the national pastime was an integral part of military athletics. Throughout World War II, military leaders utilized baseball to improve morale, prepare for the rigors of combat, and raise funds for the war effort.

Further, with the induction of over 90% of Major League Baseball's players, the American military also witnessed a dramatic increase in the exceptional teams and talented athletes in its employ—a situation which military officials often exploited to their benefit. For military leaders, having the most recognizable athletes in the country at their disposal was an engaging, and ultimately profitable and ego-building, prospect. For players who devoted up to five years to the cause of fighting the Axis Power, however, the impact on their careers was often devastating and irreversible. Nonetheless, military baseball during

the second World War experienced astonishing growth and support while providing a showcase for some of the game's brightest stars away from the big league spotlight.

### Morale

Little is known about military baseball before World War II, except that it was relatively disorganized and not as ingrained within military culture as it would become in later years. Civil War records contain scattered accounts of Union soldiers engaging in pick-up games—contests that eventually proved instrumental in the rapid expansion of the game during the Reconstruction period.<sup>2</sup> During the Spanish-American War, the United States Army initiated a few organized athletic programs in Cuba, and baseball subsequently became an “important part” of soldiers’ lives there.<sup>3</sup> In 1910 an all-star U.S. Marine baseball team toured Japan in an effort to promote cordial relations between the two nations with the diamond ambassadors, even celebrating Christmas in Nagasaki that year. During America’s struggle with Japan three decades later, one former member of that all-star squad, Marine Lieutenant Colonel Roscoe Arnett, remarked that he hoped to return to Nagasaki “with other Marines on Christmas Day, 1944,” presumably not for a quick double-header.<sup>4</sup>

More significantly, World War I records reveal the first substantial wartime organization of the game in the military—and the first notable participation of major league players in armed services baseball. Legendary figures such as Grover Cleveland Alexander, Rabbit Maranville, and Christy Mathewson joined the war effort, and each added to the prestige and visibility of baseball in the military.<sup>5</sup> During the first World War, several major league teams, including the Cincinnati Reds, New York Giants, and New York Yankees, competed against service teams in exhibition games designed to test the skill of military squads and boost morale among soldiers and civilians.<sup>6</sup>

America’s entry into World War II—and the subsequent mobilization that it necessitated—provided the impetus for a colossal explosion previously unseen in military baseball.<sup>7</sup> Set amid the latter stages of baseball’s “Golden Age” in America when the national pastime was exactly that, baseball in the military between 1942 and 1945 reached unprecedented heights. During the early months of the war, the War Department identified baseball as the favorite recreation of soldiers and sailors and attempted to ensure whenever possible that the nation’s troops had an adequate supply of baseball gear and updates on major league standings and statistics.<sup>8</sup> According to studies conducted by the War Department, about 75% percent of American fighting men enjoyed participating in or attending baseball or softball games while in the military, far outdistancing the second-place sport (football).<sup>9</sup>

Most importantly, military baseball during World War II provided enjoyment and a source of unification for soldiers far away from home searching for a semblance of order. “American GI’s played baseball everywhere they fought” during the war, and the game lifted spirits, entertained, and enthralled soldiers around the globe.<sup>10</sup> To Captain H.A. McClure, commander of the Norfolk Naval Training Station, “nothing typifie[d] the American spirit more than a baseball game” and the continuation of military baseball was “pointblank proof to our enemies that they cannot succeed in overhauling our way of life.”<sup>11</sup> One of the outstanding proponents of armed services baseball during the war,

Captain Robert Emmet of the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, remarked of the soldiers under his command:

They're facing the job of adjusting themselves to military life, in addition to undergoing intensive routine. A game of baseball is a genuine incentive for wholesome thinking. They'll discuss the plays and the players of the exciting game for days after the last out. When a man's mind is alive with interest and enthusiasm, there's no room in it for homesickness or depressive thoughts.<sup>12</sup>

With this information in hand, military leaders began to capitalize on American servicemen's fascination with baseball by utilizing it as a tool to elevate morale. Morale among servicemen had long been recognized by the American military as decisive in the efficiency of its soldiers and sailors. Military leaders relied on "detailed studies of previous armies and past wars" that revealed the "deep-rooted importance of morale" in the success of an extended military campaign.<sup>13</sup> Military and civilian leaders subsequently determined that organized sports, particularly baseball because of its popularity, could help maintain a high level of morale within the armed forces.

For participants and spectators alike, baseball often "provided an important morale booster" during the precarious time.<sup>14</sup> Even if just conversing with fellow fans of the game, soldiers and sailors could brighten up an otherwise ominous situation by discussing the possibilities of a Yankees-Dodgers World Series or debating the merits of Joe DiMaggio or Ted Williams. Baseball aided in refocusing the thoughts of many Americans at this time, particularly those servicemen at home and abroad facing the unpleasantness of war. According to Phil Rizzuto, the Hall of Fame Yankee shortstop and Navy enlistee, while in the service he "never met anyone who didn't like baseball." Rizzuto insisted that among the uncertainties and unfamiliar surroundings associated with the military lifestyle, the game served to "bring [servicemen] together."<sup>15</sup>

During the 1944 invasion of Tulagi in the Solomon Islands, Marine Sgt. Dana Babcock witnessed a fascinating scenario involving a few of his fellow, battle-weary Marines. Surrounded by the enemy on three sides and the Pacific on the other, Sergeant Babcock stumbled upon what he first believed to be a pick-up baseball game amid the chaos. One Marine had "torn a dead branch from a jungle tree to take the part of a bat," and the players ran the bases, hit home runs, got caught in rundowns, and argued with the umpire, "calling him every name in the book," as Sgt. Babcock observed from a distance. Upon closer inspection, however, Babcock noticed something slightly peculiar: the Marines were indeed playing baseball—minus the ball! Apparently, the Marines could not locate anything resembling a baseball; instead of finding another way to pass the time, they proceeded to use a "ghost" ball, with the umpire calling balls and strikes as the "pitcher delivered his phantom pitch." Sgt. Babcock felt that the exhibition he witnessed illustrated that baseball was "deep in the hearts" of American servicemen as the game provided a bit of sanity in an atmosphere rife with insanity.<sup>16</sup>

Commenting in 1945, Marine Major Roscoe Torrance wondered "if the folks at home realize the hold baseball has on the men." Torrance explained that participating in military baseball and following the game at home assisted in relieving tension and displacing the trauma experienced by the men in battle.<sup>17</sup> To many soldiers, only one thing was better than baseball "as relaxation and a morale builder"—a letter from home.<sup>18</sup>

Subsequently, one of the ways military and government officials utilized baseball to elevate morale consisted of promoting exhibitions and tours to service outposts by major league stars. Although the American military also enlisted Hollywood figures and other entertainers to make appearances overseas to raise morale, for some military leaders sports stars were the preferred form of distraction. Army Colonel M.J. Meyer noted that actors, singers, comedians and the like were often difficult to accommodate and not very cooperative, unlike professional athletes: "we need real troupers here and when we get them the boys appreciate their stuff more than any other kind of entertainment."<sup>19</sup>

Predictably, *The Sporting News* was one of the most outspoken proponents of such involvement by professional baseball players. In early 1943, the editors of the weekly declared that serious consideration should be given to staging major league games overseas during the summer months in order raise morale among fighting men. *The Sporting News* observed that several Hollywood stars had already completed goodwill tours, and reasoned that baseball should undertake a similar venture.<sup>20</sup> Several months later, *The Sporting News* continued its pitch for a major league overseas tour by declaring that such an engagement would be a "tremendous opportunity to assist vitally in the war effort" by entertaining the soldiers and sailors who unflinchingly supported the game as civilians.<sup>21</sup> In North Africa, Lieutenant Harold Kopp echoed the sentiments of *The Sporting News* by insisting that a big league tour would immeasurably improve morale even if actual contests could not be scheduled. If major league stars could simply visit different units and "tell 'em baseball stories," Kopp asserted, troops would be ecstatic and their appetite for baseball would be satisfied, if only for a short time.<sup>22</sup>

Because of scheduling and travel conflicts, however, Major League Baseball was not able to send entire teams for an expedition to overseas military facilities in 1943. A small cadre of major league players, however, did spend several weeks mingling with American troops in Europe, occasionally displaying their diamond skills in exhibitions. *The Sporting News* heaped praise upon Vernon "Lefty" Gomez, Stan Musial, Frankie Frisch, Dan Litwhiler, Fred "Dixie" Walker, and Hank Borowy for "their unselfish answers to the call of our men in the service, who everywhere cry for entertainment . . . from the home sector."<sup>23</sup> The following year, an almost identical cast engaged in a similar morale-building tour and provided entertainment for servicemen stationed in Europe. For spectators of such events, it often meant "the fulfillment of a . . . dream" to witness one of their favorite players in action.<sup>24</sup> In January, 1944, *Stars and Stripes* reported that "alarming news" was arriving from the tour of major leaguers Hank Borowy, Stan Musial, "Dixie" Walker, and Danny Litwhiler. Apparently, most of the GI's "would rather [have] talk[ed] with big leaguers than with Betty Grable or any other dish."<sup>25</sup>

Because most of Major League Baseball's best players were in the armed services during World War II, military contests featuring some of the game's greats pitted against one another or against big league teams drew substantial interest from soldiers and civilians alike. Military officials orchestrated such exhibitions primarily to elevate morale among servicemen, although in that regard they were less successful than they might have been. Most these contests were not played in overseas locales where morale was most likely to be suppressed, but were staged domestically for soldiers and sailors awaiting shipment overseas. Nonetheless, military leaders determined that such events were imperative to main-

tain high morale among its fighting men and scheduled games involving star players in hopes of appeasing their soldiers' and sailors' athletic appetites. In May, 1943, for example, a "capacity crowd" at the Marine Corps Base in San Diego witnessed the Santa Anna Army Air Base team, featuring Joe DiMaggio and future major leaguer Ray Yochim, destroy the home squad 20–2.<sup>26</sup> In an exhibition contest later in the year, a West Coast service all-star team squared off against a combined contingent of players from the Pacific Coast League's Hollywood Stars and Los Angeles Angels. The service squad, led by DiMaggio, Johnny Pesky and Red Ruffing, topped the PCL team 8–2 in the widely attended contest.<sup>27</sup>

The Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois, the largest of its kind in the world at the time, was also the site of many morale-boosting contests involving major league talent. Captain Robert Emmet, the base commander, was known by Naval trainees as the "number 1 man in baseball." Captain Emmet supervised arguably the greatest military baseball teams during World War II and invited "10,000 to 12,000 men in naval training to join him as guests for an afternoon of Big Time ball two or three times a week." Because the Great Lakes facility housed 35% of all incoming Naval recruits, Emmet had access to a continual barrage of major league talent and capitalized on this by scheduling numerous exhibition games for his team with big league clubs and rival bases for the entertainment of the Great Lakes sailors.<sup>28</sup>

Arguably the most important military baseball extravaganza during World War II, however, was a nine-game series between an Army select team and a contingent of Navy all-stars in September of 1944. Army Lieutenant General Robert Richardson, Jr. and Navy Admiral Chester Nimitz collaborated on the concept of a "Serviceman's World Series" in Honolulu. Designed to lift the spirits and raise the morale of the servicemen stationed in Hawaii, the two arranged for the squads to square off in late September, leaving less than a week for both sides to organize their rosters.

Unfortunately for the Army club, the Navy "put together—on three days' notice—one of the great baseball teams of all time." Forty-eight hours before the opener, "a Naval Air Transport plane" carrying "a sorely-needed shipment of plumbing equipment" arrived, "supervised by two sailors, one a chief named Dom DiMaggio, the other a bluejacket by the name of Phil Rizzuto." Shortly thereafter, another Navy plane landed in Hawaii, this time with cargo which included "sailors with names like Rowe, Trucks, Walt Masterson, [and] Johnny Vander Meer." Teamed with other Naval personnel already stationed in Hawaii, such as Johnny Mize, Peewee Reese, and Barney McCoskey, the Navy squad boasted major league talent up and down the lineup.

The Army contingent, however, was not as fortunate in its recruitment of talent. Although not exactly shabby, including players such as Joe Gordon, Johnny Beazly, and half a dozen other big-leaguers, All-Stars Buddy Lewis, Joe DiMaggio, and Hank Greenberg were unavailable due to various reasons.<sup>29</sup> Initially scheduled as a seven-game affair, the "contests proved so popular" the clubs played two more to entertain the area servicemen with the Navy squad, predictably, capturing seven of the nine contests.<sup>30</sup>

### Baseball as a Supplement to Military Training

Along with the substantial role of raising morale within the ranks of servicemen, baseball

also provided the American military with a practical solution to the problems resulting from inevitable periods of inactivity. Awaiting shipment overseas, units occasionally stood fast for weeks after their training had been completed; restlessness and irritability often followed. Even units in combat areas earned furloughs, and had significant periods of idle time when not engaged directly on the front lines. Although extra training was a possibility during down times, officers ran the risk of overtraining their men and therefore explored other opportunities to occupy the periods of inactivity among fighting men.

The American military long before the outset of World War II had realized that the "idle soldier was the most likely to get into mischief, become homesick, or brood about the dangers he faced."<sup>31</sup> The War Department surmised that inactivity was directly associated with a rise in AWOL cases, decreased levels of efficiency, and increased incidences of venereal disease.<sup>32</sup> Regarding venereal disease, in particular, military leaders hoped "sexuality could be sublimated through athletics" and sports such as baseball could reduce the numbers of infections, consequently improving the health and efficiency of Americas armed forces.<sup>33</sup>

Military officials recognized that baseball could "break down [the] monotony" which inevitably arose with the military routine and prune the "weeds [that] choke good morale."<sup>34</sup> Competing on baseball teams or supporting their favorite squads provided soldiers and sailors with an "outlet for the[ir] abundance of surplus energy and emotion."<sup>35</sup> Baseball proved invaluable in keeping soldiers and sailors focused more on hits, errors, and runs rather than on the horrors of war.<sup>36</sup> Special Services officer Major Leon David held team sports, such as baseball, in high regard, for their ability to discourage idleness and negative thoughts and direct service men's attention from solitary, often destructive activities, to more productive group activities.<sup>37</sup>

The American military stressed particularly the promotion of organized team sports within its ranks because of their ability to provide "validation" to servicemen which might not be accomplished in the random pick-up games in which men occasionally competed.<sup>38</sup> Around the United States and in overseas locales, sports became an increasingly important part of military life as the war progressed. At Fort Huachuca in Arizona, one officer in the 92nd Infantry Division recalled that athletics there received a "lot of attention" and participation was extremely high.<sup>39</sup> In the Pacific, Colonel Earl Peak of the 6th Infantry Division acknowledged that a directive required officers in his area to "participate in athletics at least two hours a day, rain or shine," thus ensuring a large number of participants.<sup>40</sup>

By promoting athletics, and specifically baseball, military officials attempted to instill within servicemen the perception that the American athlete was a superior breed. Theoretically, this perception of superiority would then transfer to the combat arena, ensuring success for Americas fighting men.<sup>41</sup> Major David asserted that organized team athletics developed "leadership, aggressiveness, initiative, and the will to win, all qualities essential to the soldier."<sup>42</sup> As early as 1922, no less an authority than General Douglas MacArthur remarked:

Nothing more quickly than competitive athletics brings out the qualities of leadership, quickness of decision, promptness of action, mental and muscle

coordination, aggressiveness, and courage. And nothing so readily and so firmly establishes that indefinable spirit of group interests and pride which we know as morale.<sup>43</sup>

On most military bases on the domestic front and abroad, baseball was the most popular choice of service men, and military leaders determined to utilize athletics to improve the quality of the American fighting man. Colonel Theodore Bank, the Director of the Army's Athletic and Recreational Division during the war, insisted that sports such as baseball were "not a supplement to [the Army's training] program; they are a basic part of it."<sup>44</sup> To some, baseball provided "healthful exercise" to prepare men for the "rigors of combat conditions" without having to drill them to the point of exhaustion.<sup>45</sup> At the Mare Island Marines Barracks in California, officers used baseball as a means to entertain soldiers, but more importantly to keep the players in "tip-top physical condition."<sup>46</sup>

Proponents of military baseball also emphasized other important benefits for soldiers and sailors who engaged in the national pastime. The assumption held by many, for example, that Americans were more skilled than soldiers of other nations in the art of grenade-throwing led to the conclusion that this was a result of "their ball-tossing background."<sup>47</sup> The editors of *The Sporting News* expanded on this connection between baseball and battlefield performance by asserting that the game instilled a "sense of co-ordination that is important in modern warfare." The sports weekly concluded that this "sense of co-ordination" led directly to military success by enabling American fighting men to become more efficient, flexible and innovative during the pressures of combat.<sup>48</sup> Marine Captain O.W. Todd, whose civilian duties included supervising the operations of the Pacific Coast League's San Diego Padres, expressed similar sentiments by observing that the baseball played by most American service men was "paying off in the Pacific by [making Americans] better fighters."<sup>49</sup>

Likewise, Major John L. Griffith expressed his satisfaction with the knowledge that the majority of American service men played baseball at some point in their lives and many continued to participate in the game while in the military. Griffith pointed to instances during the World War I in which Americans displayed superior leadership qualities during difficult situations that he attributed directly to the game of baseball. According to Griffith, German soldiers often became disoriented by unplanned disruptions in their operations, such as when an officer was killed, whereas Americans improvised and persevered under similar circumstances. He attributed this primarily to the fact that the Germans had utilized calisthenics and mass exercises to maintain the fitness of their armies while the American armed forces supported a program of team athletics which Griffith felt instilled camaraderie, leadership qualities, and quick, decisive thinking among all soldiers and sailors.<sup>50</sup>

Despite the apparent physical and psychological benefits of participating in baseball programs, in some cases athletic injuries incurred on the playing field threatened to detract from the positive aspects of diamond competition. At the Special Services Branch School at Fort Meade, Maryland, officers training for duties which included supervising Army sports programs received instruction in minimizing athletic injuries. Care was to be "taken to see that games involving physical strain shall be participated in under close observation" and that men were not "subjected to tests, which are beyond their present

athletic condition.”<sup>51</sup> Although the majority of athletic injuries suffered by soldiers and sailors resulted from contact sports such as football and boxing, baseball presented its own hazards. A hard ball traveling up to 90 miles per hour, 35" bats, and various slides, tags, and throws all were capable of inflicting serious injuries and incapacitating an individual for days or weeks.

Also, in spite of the great importance some proponents placed upon baseball and other team sports as tools for increasing the efficiency of the American military, athletics could not “serve as a total replacement for other types of military training.”<sup>52</sup> Becoming skilled in executing a sacrifice bunt or turning a double play did little to educate the American fighting man in the nuances of warfare or the vagaries of military equipment. Nevertheless, most officers encouraged soldiers’ and sailors’ fascination with baseball and made considerable effort to accommodate their desires to stay connected to the game. Baseball organizers attempted to schedule practices and games after training had been completed for a given day and timed special events so as to interfere minimally, if at all, with necessary duties. At Fort Meade, for example, Army Colonel Francis B. Mallon allowed two major league contests between the Senators and the Athletics to be staged for the men there, despite his reservations about the impact the games might have on training. Initially, Mallon rejected the idea of two contests in one week, but later amended his decision by stipulating that the games could be played, provided any training that was lost was to be “made up.”<sup>53</sup>

### African Americans

The glaring exception to this preoccupation with athletics involved African-American soldiers and sailors, who were often overlooked, ignored, or isolated by the American military. This inequitable treatment manifested itself very clearly in athletics, particularly in the realm of military baseball. At some of the larger military installations, such as the Great Lakes Naval Training Station, African American sailors did have the opportunity to compete on segregated baseball teams, and did so there with great success. In 1944, for example, a squad composed of African American sailors stationed at Great Lakes compiled an impressive 32–10 record and claimed the Midwest Service League title.<sup>54</sup> However, for many smaller military bases, there were not enough African Americans to field segregated teams; thus, black soldiers and sailors often found themselves unable to compete on baseball teams.<sup>55</sup>

Although segregation in the military was officially ended during the war, *de facto* segregation continued throughout the conflict in both traditional military assignments and on athletic fields. Despite the fact that sports such as boxing and football were often integrated on military bases at home and abroad, baseball teams and leagues were usually segregated, especially on the domestic front. Future trailblazer Jackie Robinson, for example, was not allowed to join the all-white Fort Riley, Kansas, baseball team, but was actively recruited to join the integrated football team—an invitation he rejected primarily because of his frustration with the overt racism evident at Fort Riley.<sup>56</sup> Many African Americans, therefore, either had to direct their athletic energies away from baseball or compete informally without adequate equipment and facilities.

This rule was sometimes ignored when inter-service and intra-service rivalries over-

whelmed the desire to maintain racial barriers. In an effort to field the best teams available for competition with other military teams, officers occasionally added talented African American players to provide their squads with the best chance of victory. Military officials allowed integration on the baseball field primarily because they determined that men who competed on or supported winning teams exhibited a sharp increase in morale and experienced a heightened sense of cohesive unity—something “no intelligent officer in the Army, Navy, Marine Corps or Coast Guard overlooked.”<sup>57</sup> Consequently, African American baseball players became important in contests determining the superiority of one military group over another. This was especially true overseas, where Jim Crow laws and civilian prejudice did not exist to the extent that they did in the United States. In Hawaii, with its many military installations and diverse civilian population, integrated baseball was common. Two Negro League pitchers, Hal Hairston and Calvin Medley, maintained prominent roles on integrated service teams during the war.<sup>58</sup> More importantly, following the Allied occupation of Europe after the Normandy invasion, integrated teams competed there with regularity. In the hotly contested and highly publicized 1945 G.I. World Series in Nuremberg, Germany, for example, the victorious Army team employed two Negro League stars, Willard Brown and Leon Day, in defeating competing teams fielding many major league players.<sup>59</sup>

### Fund-Raising and Acquiring Baseball Equipment

Along with providing an important boost in morale among servicemen and supplementing conventional military training, American military leaders also used the game as a means to raise funds for both the war effort and also for athletic expenses accrued by servicemen. By staging war bond games and charity drives, many of which included some of the game’s great major league stars, military leaders attempted to exploit the nation’s fascination with the game for economic gain.

Two games specifically characterized this connection between the military and baseball and illustrates clearly the financial role the game filled during the war. In June, 1943, a crowd of 29,221 that witnessed the Norfolk Sailors play the Washington Senators purchased over \$2 million in war bonds. Attended by such luminaries as Bing Crosby, Kate Smith, Al Schacht, and Babe Ruth, the Norfolk squad, paced by Dom DiMaggio, Phil Rizzuto, and Benny McCoy, slipped by the Senators 4–3.<sup>60</sup> A similar contest at the Polo Grounds in New York later that same year pitting an All-Star team composed of players from the three New York major league squads against the formidable Camp Cumberland Army team from Pennsylvania also proved to be a financial success. Boasting a lineup which included Hank Greenberg, Birdie Tebbets, Johnny Beazley, and Enos Slaughter, the Cumberland team nevertheless fell to the New York squad 5–2.<sup>61</sup>

Other games involving military teams abounded throughout the war as organizers attempted to raise funds by every means possible. A “patriotic spectacle” in July, 1942, matched the American League All-Stars, winner of the annual Major League All-Star Game, against a service team comprised mostly of big leaguers. The contest netted \$193,000 for the Army and Navy Funds, and over \$62,000 more in Victory Stamps.<sup>62</sup> Likewise, an historic event occurred during the late summer of 1943 at Wembley Stadium in England.

There, military "baseball encroached on the sanctity of one of England's most famous soccer grounds" where select teams from the "Ground Forces and Air Corps" vied for supremacy. Attended by 21,000 civilians and servicemen, "including high-ranking British and American military leaders," the game raised a modest \$9,000 for the Duke of Gloucester's Red Cross and St. John Fund.<sup>63</sup>

Military leaders also encouraged professional baseball organizations to aid in promoting and sustaining military baseball through financial contributions and equipment donations. Because a large number of servicemen at home and abroad competed in military baseball, the cost of maintaining fields, transporting teams, and purchasing equipment was considerable. With the primary goal of the American military obviously being the defeat of the Axis powers, the funds allocated to military athletics were often insufficient to support the large numbers of soldiers and sailors wishing to compete for military teams. Recognizing the situation, professional organizations made a concerted effort during the war to provide funds to supply soldiers and sailors with the necessary baseball gear. Major league owners bequeathed over \$1 million for this purpose, with nearly every team participating in the donations.<sup>64</sup> In 1943, for example, the Pittsburgh Pirates donated their \$35,844.86 profit from a July 28 game to a government equipment fund established to benefit military athletics.<sup>65</sup>

Major league organizations contributed not only money to the American military for the procurement of equipment, but also donated baseball equipment directly to soldiers and sailors. Beginning in April, 1942, New York Giants officials requested that fans return baseballs hit into the stands for shipment to service teams needing equipment.<sup>66</sup> By June, major league teams had already directly contributed 80,000 pieces of baseball equipment such as balls, bats, and gloves to servicemen at home and abroad.<sup>67</sup>

Despite the vast contributions of Major League Baseball and the funds allocated to military athletics by the American military, soldiers and sailors often experienced shortages of baseball gear due to budgetary restrictions or supply-line disruptions. Some military Athletic Officers, such as Captain Charles Church of the Marine Corps Base in San Diego, responded to the scarcity of equipment due to budget constraints by simply informing soldiers that new equipment would not become available and therefore old gear would have to be recycled.<sup>68</sup> The Fort Rosecrans, California, baseball team took matters into its own hands in April, 1943, by appealing for public assistance in acquiring new uniforms. Although Major League Baseball, private donations, and the Ball and Bat Fund aided greatly in equipping service teams, often "no provision [was] made for uniforms," which were quite costly.<sup>69</sup> In a letter to *The Sporting News*, the team revealed that their ragged flannels were aged to the point that they had begun falling apart and the crisis threatened to disband the team. Minor league team owner Bob Ripley, however, emerged a hero by supplying a complete set of new uniforms for the Fort Rosecrans squad.<sup>70</sup>

Overseas, shortages of baseball equipment were less likely to be a result of inadequate funds than of disrupted supply lines or inadequate organization. Overseas, more than 40% of servicemen felt that they lacked necessary athletic equipment and "not given enough opportunity to participate in sports and athletics."<sup>71</sup> The branch of the Army responsible for the recreational activities of soldiers, the Special Services, often did not have the "flexibility needed to operate under varying conditions, especially in combat areas."<sup>72</sup> Due to

enemy troop movements and air strikes and ordinary military maneuvers, Special Service officers were often unable to supervise delivery of sports equipment to assigned destinations. Even in areas where Special Service officers distributed adequate amounts of athletic equipment, deliveries often were several months late and thus did not coordinate with the “seasonableness of sports” such as baseball.<sup>73</sup> In a study conducted following the war, the War Department decided that in order to better serve soldiers, “supply procedures should be standardized” in combat areas to make delivery of sports equipment more efficient and more reliable.<sup>74</sup>

### Catalysts and Organizers

Even with such difficulties in equipping soldiers and sailors with adequate baseball equipment, the organization of baseball teams and leagues for servicemen became a defining characteristic of World War II military athletics. Because many American leaders viewed baseball as an important supplement to the war effort, in almost every location that American soldiers and sailors congregated on a large scale, baseball established a foothold and prospered. The catalysts for this phenomenal growth rests primarily in the efforts of individuals who, through ingenuity and creativity, managed to organize players and teams and promote the game amid often chaotic conditions. Two individuals, in particular, Zeke Bonura and Roscoe Torrance, emerged as the most prominent organizational figures in military baseball during World War II.

Certainly the most successful of the wartime baseball organizers was former major league first baseman and Army Master Sergeant Zeke Bonura, who became known as the “czar of North African baseball.”<sup>75</sup> In a letter to his parents in the spring of 1943, Bonura mentioned that the situation was “well in hand” in Africa and the men had found time to



The “Judge Landis of North African baseball,” Zeke Bonura (bottom row, center, with bat) poses with an unidentified team in North Africa. *Courtesy* The Sporting News.

get “a league going” and engage in “some spirited games.”<sup>76</sup> By July, North African military baseball mushroomed as Bonura supervised the coordination of over 150 teams in six leagues comprising over 1,000 players—about a quarter of the total number of organized participants in that region. Dubbed the “Judge Landis of North Africa” due to his triumphant endeavors to promote and expand military baseball, Bonura presided over the game in the southern Mediterranean region with wisdom, enthusiasm and a “diplomatic hand.”<sup>77</sup> Bonura was so successful, in fact, that General Dwight Eisenhower personally presented him with a Legion of Merit award for his contribution to military athletics.<sup>78</sup>

Bonura’s promotion of baseball in the armed services, however, was not entirely limited to the American military. A lifetime .307 hitter during a career spent mostly with the Chicago White Sox, he reportedly traded baseball lessons to Arabs and soldiers in exchange for the use of full-blooded Arabian horses.<sup>79</sup> In one notable undertaking during the summer of 1943, Bonura attempted to instruct British soldiers in North Africa on the finer points of striking a round ball with a round bat squarely. Bonura’s instruction proved fruitless despite hours of intensive practice until he advised the pitcher to begin delivering the ball around ankle level at which point the British, with their cricket swings, began to rip the “offerings all over the lot.”<sup>80</sup> By the following spring, British soldiers in the Mediterranean apparently had become so enthralled with the game that one division issued 100 bats and 2,000 balls for use by organized teams.<sup>81</sup>

Another of the great military baseball organizers who thrived during World War II was Major Roscoe “Torchy” Torrance of the United States Marine Corps. In civilian life, Torrance was part-owner and vice president of the Pacific Coast League’s Seattle Rainiers; during the war he became the South Pacific’s equivalent of Zeke Bonura. In April, 1944, on an unidentified Pacific island, 600 Marines under Torrance’s supervision established three leagues with ten teams in each. Enlisting the aid of Navy Seabees armed with bulldozers and tractors, Torrance plowed under the existing jungle to construct twenty-one “first-rate diamonds,” which had to be hand-manicured due to the absence of lawn-mowing equipment. The opening game of the Marines’ baseball season that year had “the éclat of a World Series” contest with all the different “hoots and howls” you could find in Ebbets Field.<sup>82</sup> By the beginning of baseball season the following year, Torrance had expanded his operation to include forty teams as Marines in the South Pacific enjoyed the national pastime while they took “time out from their more arduous task of moving against the land of the setting sun.”<sup>83</sup>

Although the achievements of prominent military baseball organizers were vitally important to the popularity of the game in the service, baseball also flourished in areas where charismatic leadership was absent and in regions where organization was extremely difficult. In Surinam, teams occasionally traversed 100 miles on foot through the jungle to compete with rival units in league contests.<sup>84</sup> On a remote island in the Philippines near the end of the war, former Cleveland Indians southpaw Al Milnar assisted in organizing two baseball leagues and initiated activities that “greatly increased the number of diamonds on the island.” Simultaneously, the number of diamonds on one island of the Marianas chain, precipitated by the operation of ten baseball leagues, reached the astonishing figure of 65—four of them fitted with lights by ambitious soldiers.<sup>85</sup>

One of the most impressive achievements involving military baseball, however, materialized on a New Guinea artillery field during the summer of 1944 where one could find

the “best lighted” diamond in the world. American soldiers “installed floodlights for night games in the jungle league” by employing coconut trees as makeshift poles and surrounded the field with twelve 800 million candlepower lights fastened to their tops. No major league stadium at the time could “boast even one-twelfth of the candlepower” of this highly charged New Guinea outfit.<sup>86</sup>

### Exceptional Teams

In areas where soldiers and sailors had ample means and opportunity, baseball teams and leagues flourished and became an important aspect of military culture, particularly on the domestic front where the military lifestyle was more predictable and routine. Several domestic military baseball teams, strengthened by major league inductees into the armed forces, had an extraordinary amount of talent, sometimes exceeding even contemporary major league competition. Military officers encouraged formation of skilled teams to improve morale among their men—and for the personal satisfaction of commanding successful teams. Throughout the war, a number of military squads fielded All-Stars, future Hall of Famers, and other skilled professionals, which led to a concentration of talent on several teams that was quite impressive.

Arguably the greatest of all World War II military baseball teams were the squads representing the Great Lakes Naval Training Station in Illinois during the years 1942–44. Boasting an ever-changing but always strong lineup, the Bluejackets had access to a continual supply of major and minor league talent because of the massive number of sailors that completed their naval training at Great Lakes—35% of all U.S. Navy trainees.<sup>87</sup> Often competing against and outclassing major league competition, the Bluejackets set the standard for military baseball during World War II despite reassignment of their players to other Naval outposts that obligated the Training Station to annually replace the majority of its roster.

Examining the rosters of the Bluejacket squads from 1942–1944, the preponderance of talented players is striking, particularly the 1944 contingent (see table on page 80).<sup>88</sup> Although superior individual players competed for other military teams during the war, when considered as a group the talent of the Great Lakes’ rosters exceeded that of any other military team. A common joke told by Navy personnel was that “you could throw a baseball anywhere on the station and at least two big leaguers will try to catch it.”<sup>89</sup> No less than 43 major leaguers, 6 All-Stars, and 2 future Hall of Famers represented the Bluejackets during those three years; one of the greatest catchers in the history of the game, former Detroit Tiger Gordon “Mickey” Cochrane, was assigned as their manager.

The 1944 squad was probably the most talented military team ever assembled. Boasting a lineup overflowing with major league ability, the Bluejackets that year won their first 23 games and completed their season with 48 wins against only 2 losses. More impressively, they claimed seven out of eight games against big league opponents, including a “thumping 17–4” victory over the Cleveland Indians.<sup>90</sup> With “better pitching and a tighter defense” than previous seasons’ teams, the 1944 contingent breezed through service competition, with neither of their two losses coming against military teams.<sup>91</sup>

The starting nine of the 1944 Great Lakes squad, which included five All-Stars and one future Hall of Famer, would make any major league manager envious. Amassing

experience in more than 40 World Series games among them, the Bluejacket players had the talent and experience to overwhelm nearly every team they encountered. Led by former or future All-Stars Virgil Trucks, Merrill May, Gene Woodling, Clyde McCullough, Hall of Famer Billy Herman and Tiger great “Schoolboy” Rowe, the Great Lakes squad assembled in 1944 was truly remarkable.<sup>92</sup>

Virgil “Fire” Trucks emerged as the team star that year, posting an ERA of 0.73 with an average of 1.43 strikeouts per inning as the ace of the pitching staff.<sup>93</sup> One of only four pitchers to ever toss two no-hitters in the same year, Trucks was Cochrane’s choice for mound honors in most of the team’s important contests, including exhibition games against major league competition. Trucks’ most impressive outings in 1944 came against the Philadelphia Phillies, Boston Red Sox, and that year’s American League World Series participant, the St. Louis Browns, in which he held the big league squads to zero, one and two runs, respectively. Against the Phillies, the former Tiger hurler held the opposition hitless in his four innings of work before relinquishing the mound to Bill Brandt in the season’s first game versus a major league foe. In an outing a few weeks later, Trucks hurled a gem against the Red Sox, striking out twelve and allowing only two hits en route to a complete-game, 3–1 victory.<sup>94</sup>

Trucks was not the only competent Bluejackets pitcher, however, as the remaining members of the staff all had at least some major league experience. The pitching corps was

| Great Lakes NTS Team Rosters   |   |   |  |
|--|---|---|--|
|  | 1942<br><i>63-14</i>  | 1943<br><i>52-10-1</i>  | 1944<br><i>48-2</i>  |
| 1B   | Chester Hajduk  | <b>Johnny Mize</b>  | Johnny McCarthy  |
| 2B   | Benny McCoy   | Chester Hajduk  | <b>Billy Herman</b>  |
| 3B   | Ernie Andres  | Carl Fiore*   | <i>Merrill May</i>   |
| SS   | John Lucadello  | Eddie Pellagrini  | Al Glossop   |
| LF   | Don Padgett   | Glenn McQuillen   | Mizell Platt   |
| CF   | Earl Bolyard*   | Barney McCosky  | <i>Gene Woodling</i>   |
| RF   | Joe Grace   | Joe Grace   | Dick West  |
|  |   | Leo Nonnenkamp  |  |
| C  | Frankie Pytlak<br>Sam Harshaney   | George Dickey<br>Warren Robinson*<br>Marv Felderman   | Walt Millies<br>Bill Baker<br><i>Clyde McCullough</i>  |
| P  | Russ Meers<br>Johnny Rigney<br>Jim Reninger<br>Frank Marino*<br>Cliff Clay*<br>Don Dunker*<br>Fred Shaffer* | Vern Olsen<br>Bob Harris<br><i>Johnny Schmitz</i><br>Tom Ferrick<br>Jack Hallett<br>Frank Biscan<br>Pete Hader* | <i>Virgil “Fire” Trucks</i><br>Jim Trexler*<br>Bob Klinger<br><i>“Schoolboy” Rowe</i><br>Si Johnson<br>Bill Brandt<br>Ed Weiland |
| <i>All-stars in italics; Hall of Famers in bold; non-major-leaguers denoted by *</i> |   |   |  |

so laden with talent that manager Cochrane felt comfortable inserting former Tiger star and 1943 Great Lakes mound ace “Schoolboy” Rowe as the starting right fielder when the team endured a shortage of capable flychasers.<sup>95</sup> A winner of 158 games and the owner of a very respectable 3.87 ERA during his thirteen-year major league career, Rowe also excelled at the plate. He compiled a .263 average during his big league stint and exhibited exceptional batting skills for the Bluejackets, averaging over .350 during 1944 and winning an exhibition game against the Philadelphia Phillies with a timely round-tripper.<sup>96</sup> Rowe even exceeded the offensive production of major league position players such as Gene Woodling, a .284 career hitter for six big league teams, whose .342 average for the 1944 season was the *lowest* among the Great Lakes starting nine.<sup>97</sup>

Although no other military baseball teams surpassed the Great Lakes squads in overall talent, the squads representing the Norfolk Naval Training Station in Virginia ran a close second. With a stunning 92-8 record in 1942, the Norfolk Sailors employed one of the greatest right-handed pitchers of the modern era. Bob Feller, and former major league infielder Ace Parker, who later starred on the gridiron and earned enshrinement in Pro Football’s Hall of Fame.<sup>98</sup>

By 1943, although Feller was no longer with the team due to reassignment, Norfolk’s squad reached its pinnacle with the addition of major league talent in the form of Don Padgett, Benny McCoy, Jim Carlin, Tom Early, Freddie Hutchinson, Charlie Wagner, Vinnie Smith, All-Stars Dom DiMaggio and Johnny Pesky, and future Hall of Famers Harold “Pee Wee” Reese and Phil Rizzuto. Despite this grand collection of talent, at least one anonymous Norfolk Naval trainee remained unimpressed with the stout lineup offered by the Sailors. The soldier remarked that “Dom DiMaggio [was] far below par,” Don Padgett was “awfully slow,” and he criticized Johnny Pesky for “sleeping” during games. The trainee did concede that Tom Early and Charlie Wagner did “all right” and the “Scooter,” Phil Rizzuto, was “marvelous.”<sup>99</sup>

Despite such observations, the Norfolk team was nevertheless a formidable squad with a solid pitching staff of Hutchinson, Early, and Wagner, plus many talented position players.<sup>100</sup> A solid starter in eleven seasons with the Detroit Tigers, Freddie Hutchinson won nearly 100 games in his career and participated in one World Series. Tom Early and Charlie Wagner, although less successful than Hutchinson in the Major Leagues, won a combined 50 games in respectable stints with the Boston Braves and Boston Red Sox, respectively.

The talent of the Sailors’ position players in 1943, however, was truly exceptional, especially the defensive prowess in the infield. Slick-fielding “Pee Wee” Reese anchored the shortstop post. Phil Rizzuto, also a Hall of Fame shortstop, converted to third base during his stay with the Norfolk squad in 1943 due to Reese’s presence. Second baseman Johnny Pesky, another magician with the glove, secured the keystone corner for a tight defensive infield. Dom DiMaggio, a .298 lifetime hitter, seven-time All-Star, and the youngest brother of the immortal Joe DiMaggio, spearheaded the outfield and added offense to a lineup rife with defensive stars.

The Navy boasted a third exceptional team during in the squad representing the Sampson Naval Training Center in New York. Sporting a nifty 70–7 record from 1943–45, Sampson claimed nearly a dozen major leaguers on its rosters during those three years,

including All-Star catcher Mickey Owen and the talented Johnny Vander Meer, the only pitcher in major league history to hurl back-to-back no hitters.<sup>101</sup>

Other noteworthy service teams during World War II included the Long Beach Army Ferrying Command squad in California and the Bainbridge Naval Training Station Commodores in Maryland. The Long Beach team of 1943 sported a future Hall-of-Famer in Red Ruffing, two All-Stars in Harry Danning and Max West, and another talented major leaguer in Nanny Fernandez.<sup>102</sup> The 1944 Bainbridge squad, which perennially battled the Norfolk Station for Naval supremacy on the East Coast, listed two All-Stars and six other major leaguers on its roster and claimed victories over four big league teams during its remarkable 56–15–1 season.<sup>103</sup>

### Major League Players

Among these dominating teams, and elsewhere in the armed forces, the American military employed some of the greatest baseball players in history during the war. By the conclusion of hostilities, over 90% of all major league players had served in the armed forces, including talented players such as Joe DiMaggio, Ted Williams, and Bob Feller. Many of these individuals fought the war “in cleated shoes” and “were sidetracked into safe berths where they wore a baseball uniform as often as they wore Army or Navy fatigues.”<sup>104</sup> Because of their rare talents, some well-known stars neither “sought [n]or participated in combat,” but rather competed in an endless array of exhibitions, all-star games and service league contests in which they displayed their considerable athletic abilities.<sup>105</sup>

Along with the previously mentioned fund-raising exhibition games, professional players often participated in league games, practices and other sanctioned events rather than traditional military training. Johnny Vander Meer’s commanding officer exempted the pitcher from the majority of his routine military duties to allow him more time to practice and play.<sup>106</sup> Another Navy enlistee, Phil Rizzuto, recalled being ordered on many occasions, along with several other major league players in the armed forces, to drop his normal military duties in favor of special appearances or baseball exhibitions promoting the sale of War Bonds to civilians.<sup>107</sup>

Despite the fact that many major league players participated in military baseball as a partial or complete substitution for traditional military duties, other professionals did not always have the luxury of serving their country by playing baseball. Over 50 minor leaguers perished as a result of the war, while only two individuals with major league experience—Harry O’Neill and Elmer Gedeon—were killed during the hostilities, though neither were active big leaguers when entering military duty. Countless other minor league players sustained injuries or spent their prime years in the armed forces which curtailed their dreams of reaching the major leagues. Certainly the most publicized story regarding an injury suffered by a professional player involved career minor leaguer Bert Shepard. A pitcher and outfielder for several minor league teams before his induction into the Army Air Corps, Shepard lost the lower half of his right leg due to a wound sustained while fighting in the skies over Germany. Shepard returned to the United States after a brief period in a German POW camp and was determined to continue his baseball career. The Washington Senators allowed Shepard to realize his dream by signing him as a player-coach during the 1945 season. Utilizing an artificial limb, Shepard eventually pitched in

several exhibition games for the Senators and one regular-season contest, during which he pitched a total of five innings and allowed only a single run.<sup>108</sup>

Although many major league players certainly felt relieved that their talents and notoriety often allowed them to escape possible injury or death on the front lines, some prominent players seemed uncomfortable with the apparent preferential treatment that military leaders were lavishing upon them. During his first few months in the Army Air Force, Joe DiMaggio participated in countless baseball-related events, including games, practices and exhibitions, in the place of other military responsibilities. DiMaggio felt that he was extended so much special treatment that he publicly demanded combat duty from his superiors. Possibly concerned with the public perception held by some that he was playing a game while others were dying, DiMaggio insisted that he “didn’t enlist to play baseball.”<sup>109</sup> DiMaggio’s superiors apparently rejected this plea, and most of DiMaggio’s time spent in the military involved either baseball or other athletic pursuits.

Similarly, early in the war Cleveland Indian pitcher Bob Feller was stationed in Hawaii, where he enjoyed a fairly comfortable existence because of his status as an exceptional athlete. While in Hawaii, Feller competed in various military games and exhibitions in lieu of other military duties and spent a great deal of time “drinking beer” and relaxing. Feller eventually concluded that he could not, in good conscience, continue this type of lifestyle while others were risking their lives. Feller soon thereafter requested combat duty but, unlike in DiMaggio’s case, Feller’s superiors granted his request and assigned him to the battleship *Alabama*, which saw significant action in the South Pacific.<sup>110</sup>



Joe DiMaggio displays his majestic swing as a member of the Santa Ana Air Base squad during an exhibition game against Los Angeles of the Pacific Coast League in April, 1943. *Courtesy of The Sporting News.*

Although most major league players rarely, if ever, had to endure combat or other hardships while in the armed services, several active major league players were wounded or otherwise detrimentally affected by the war. Washington Senators shortstop Cecil Travis, who seemed destined for greatness before the war, suffered frostbite in his legs during the Battle of the Bulge and never regained the quickness or range he displayed in previous years. Although he compiled a .314 career average, in the three years he spent in the major leagues after the war his highest average was .252 in 1946. Charlie Wagner and Hugh Mulcahy, fairly successful pitchers for the Boston Red Sox and Philadelphia Phillies respectively, both contracted dysentery while in the South Pacific and endured substantial weight loss, which all but ended their post-war careers.<sup>111</sup> Detroit slugger Hank Greenberg proved prophetic by stating during his military stint that he would not “play a lot of baseball” after the war. Greenberg felt that all of the “work and training” had added too much bulk to his already hefty frame and he had lost the agility necessary for top-level baseball competition. True to his word, Greenberg lasted only two and a half seasons in the Major Leagues after the war and only occasionally flashed his pre-war brilliance.<sup>112</sup>

Other players were affected more mentally and emotionally by the war rather than physically, Ted Williams, for example, struggled with psychological factors while stationed in Pensacola, Florida, where he competed regularly for his company’s baseball team. Williams admitted that often he “didn’t have [his] heart in [the game]” because of his concern with the war and played below his lofty standards.<sup>113</sup> Bob Feller acknowledged that the magnitude of the war itself forced him to readjust his “mental attitude towards” baseball and made the game not “seem so important” during his stint in the military and even upon return to civilian life.<sup>114</sup> The primary impact on the players of the World War II era, however, involved simply the curtailment of their already brief careers, leading to speculation about what might have transpired on the field if not for the war. Each major league player who served in the military had precious years of their careers stripped away and hundreds of minor leaguers had their careers derailed before they even began. The most obvious examples were several of the most dominant players of the era—Joe DiMaggio, Hank Greenberg, Bob Feller, and Ted Williams. Although it is impossible to precisely project career statistics for players who spent substantial time in the armed forces, the years spent away from the game obviously affected their final numbers. Joe DiMaggio and Hank Greenberg, who ended their careers with very similar career batting totals, both probably would have exceeded 500 home runs and 2,000 RBIs if not for their time spent in the military. Cleveland Indians pitcher Bob Feller almost certainly would have exceeded 300 wins if not for the three and a half years he served in the Navy during his athletic prime. Feller, in all likelihood, also would have exceeded Walter Johnson’s career strikeout record of 3,509 by the end of his career (Nolan Ryan has since increased the record to 5,714).

Of the great players of the World War II era, Ted Williams’ career was arguably affected the most by his military service. With nearly five years during the heart of his baseball career spent in the military, three of which he served during World War II, Williams narrowly missed shattering some of baseball’s most hallowed records. Williams almost certainly would have approached, if not exceeded, the Babe Ruth’s career home run record of 714, the record at the time of Williams’ retirement. With less than 500 RBIs

separating Williams from the most prolific run producer in history, Hank Aaron, the Red Sox star also would probably still claim the record for career runs batted in.

For every Ted Williams or Joe DiMaggio, however, there were lesser known players like Benny McCoy, Buddy Hassett and Johnny Rigney who also had their careers interrupted or ended by the outbreak of hostilities. Philadelphia Athletic second baseman Benny McCoy enjoyed a promising three-year career before the war and seemed destined for stardom with his exceptional speed and occasional power. McCoy, however, was one of the first major league players to enter the military and he never again played in the big leagues after the war. First baseman Buddy Hassett, a solid player for three teams, also saw his big league career come to a screeching halt with the outbreak of the second World War. A .292 career hitter, Hassett's career spanned the seven years leading up to the war and ended when he entered the armed forces.

Unlike McCoy and Hassett, White Sox pitcher Johnny Rigney did return to the Major Leagues following a stint in the military. Rigney, however, injured his arm while competing for his service team and pitched sparingly in two seasons after the war. A standout performer on a subpar White Sox squad before the war, Rigney managed to compile a 3.59 ERA and 63 wins during his brief career—but he tallied only seven of those wins after the end of hostilities. Many other professional players continued their baseball careers after the war, although the missing years prevented many players from realizing their full potential on the diamond.

Thus, during the nearly four years encompassing the United States' involvement in the global conflict, military baseball provided the compass for millions of fighting men searching for direction. Baseball in the armed services thrived and expanded in the years spanning World War II, primarily because military leaders considered baseball an important factor in sustaining morale, physical fitness, and cohesion among servicemen. Soldiers and sailors eagerly accepted the promotion of the game as a form of recreation, and also used baseball to maintain a semblance of order and connection with their civilian lives. The infusion of talented professional players sharply improved the level of play, and American leaders capitalized on this by enlisting baseball to supplement the war effort both financially and psychologically. During World War II, armed services baseball claimed superior organization, the most talented players in the world, and unrivaled enthusiasm by its participants. These facts, virtually unexplored half a century later, warrant the inclusion of World War II military baseball as a distinguished and decisive element in the history of America's pastime.

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  2. Benjamin G. Rader, *Baseball: A History of America's Game* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 12-13.
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  4. "Guam Baseball Yarn Stirrs Memories of Lieutenant Colonel," *Marine Corps Chevron*, 26 Aug. 1944, 20.
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56. Jules Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 62.
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68. "Athletic Gear May Be Harder to Get," *Marine Corps Chevron*, 15 May 1943, 14. Although it is not clear if every armed forces base employed an Athletic Officer, many with sizable numbers of military personnel, such as Marine Corps bases, did maintain individuals with that title.
69. According to *The Sporting News*, the Ball and Bat Fund was a government-organized creation designed to utilize public and private finances to purchase baseball equipment for soldiers.
70. "How Clubs Can Aid Service Teams," *The Sporting News*, 8 Apr. 1943, 4.
71. *What the Soldier Thinks*, Aug., 1943, 71.
72. United States Army, *Special Services Companies*, 5.
73. *Ibid.*, 6.
74. *Ibid.*, 9.
75. "The Commissioners Say," *Stars and Stripes* (African Ed.), 10 Jul. 1943, 7.
76. "In the Service," *The Sporting News*, 2 Apr. 1943, 13.
77. "In the Service," *The Sporting News*, 13 Jul. 1944, 13. "The Commissioners Say," *Stars and Stripes* (African Ed.), 24 Jul. 1943. The comparison to "Judge Landis" refers to Kenesaw Mountain Landis, who served as Major League Baseball Commissioner from 1920–1944.
78. "Bonura Gets Award," *Stars and Stripes* (African Ed.), 27 Oct. 1943, 3.
79. "Sports Service Record," *Yank: The Army Weekly*, 15 Aug. 1943, 18.
80. "The Commissioners Say," *Stars and Stripes* (African Ed.), 10 Jul. 1943, 7.
81. "Sports Parade," *Stars and Stripes* (Mediterranean Ed.), 13 May 1944, 14.
82. Sgt. Francis H. Barr, "Leathernecks Form 30 Teams in Three South Pacific Leagues," *The Sporting News*, 27 Apr. 1944, 10.
83. "Pacific Marines Plan Baseball Careers," *Marine Corps Chevron*, 10 Feb. 1945, 8. Sgt. Phil H. Storch, "Baseball Teams Again Invade Japan," *Marine Corps Chevron*, 19 May 1945, 8.
84. "Sports Service Record," *Yank*, 3 Oct. 1943, 18.
85. "Al Milnar Conducting Big Sports Program on Island," and "65 Diamonds, 10 Leagues on One Isle in Marianas," *The Sporting News*, Jun. 28, 1945, 11.
86. "In the Service," *The Sporting News*, Jun. 22, 1944, 12.
87. "Baseball Genuine Incentive Says Naval Training Chieftain," *The Sporting News*, 6 Jul. 1944, 17. The Great Lakes facility was the largest of its kind in the world during the war and, although other Naval Training Stations trained large numbers of sailors, the sheer size of Great Lakes is the most obvious reason for the dominance of its baseball team.
88. Rosters obtained in "No Sparring on 1944 Tars! Mickey Says They're Best," *The Sporting News*, 17 Aug. 1944, 12. Final record of 1944 team obtained in "Hoisted Greatest Record for Great Lakes Team," *The Sporting News*, 14 Sep. 1944, 12.  
Due to losses as a result of reassignment, the 1945 team, despite the addition of Bob Feller, was not as strong as in previous years and was therefore not included. Although the cause is unclear, the most logical explanation is that by 1945, most eligible players had already enlisted, been drafted, or been released from duty. Thus, fewer players went through Great Lakes for training or remained there as instructors.
89. Sgt. Dan Polier, "Sports: The Great Lakes Ball Team Has a Major League Line-up," *Yank*, 8 Aug. 1943, 18.
90. Letter from the Athletic Office of the U.S. Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, IL, to *The Sporting*

*News*, 1 Sep. 1944, *The Sporting News* archives, St. Louis, Missouri.

91. "No Sparring on 1944 Tars! Mickey Says They're Best," *The Sporting News*, 17 Aug. 1944, 12. Their two losses came against the Brooklyn Dodgers and, ironically, a Detroit semi-pro team.
92. Although Rowe also played for the Dodgers and Phillies during his stellar 13 year career, he is most remembered for his tenure in Detroit where, he led the American League with 24 wins in 1934 and winning percentage in 1940 (16—3).
93. "Sports Service Record," *Yank*, 3 Sep. 1944, 21.
94. "Rowe's Broadside for Cochrane Tars Sinks Phillies," *The Sporting News*, 18 May 1944, 12. "Bluejackets Ride Over Bosox, 3-1, on Trucks' Fire Ball," *The Sporting News*, 1 Jun. 1944, 13. "Great Lakes 8, Browns 2," *Stars and Stripes* (Mediterranean Ed.), 17 Jun. 1944, 14.
95. "Rowe May Become Outfielder," *The Sporting News*, 20 Apr. 1944, 15.
96. "Rowe's Broadside for Cochrane Tars Sinks Phillies, 3-1," *The Sporting News*, 18 May 1944, 12.
97. "Sports Service Record," *Yank*, 22 Oct. 1944, 21.
98. "Norfolk Sailors Set Pace for Service Teams," *The Sporting News*, 1 Oct. 1942, 16.
99. "Sports Service Record," *Yank*, 20 Jun. 1943, 18.
100. "Sixteen Guns from Majors Give Power to Norfolk's Two Service-Star Teams," *The Sporting News*, 2 Apr., 1943, 13.
101. "Eight Major Leaguers on 1945 Roster," *The Sporting News* (1945 n.d., available in File #1 of "Armed Services Baseball at *The Sporting News Archives* in St. Louis, MO).
102. "Major Leaguers Win for Beach," *Marine Corps Chevron*, 5 Jun. 1943, 26.
103. Al Cartwright, "Crack Bainbridge, Md., Outfit Stakes Claim to Eastern Toga," *The Sporting News*, 7 Sep. 1944, 12.
104. Dan Polier, "Sports: Critics Put the Blast on Navy Big Leaguers," *Yank*, 6 Feb. 1944, 20. Robert Smith, *Baseball* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 299.
105. G. Edward White, *Creating the National Pastime* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 270.
106. Grandson of Johnny Vander Meer (deceased 1997), completed questionnaire for author, 5 Sep. 1998.
107. Phil Rizzuto, completed questionnaire for author, 28 Aug. 1998.
108. Crissey, "Baseball and World War II," 2.
109. "Sports Service Record," *Yank*, 12 Sept 1943, 18.
110. John Underwood, "War Bond," *The 1992 Information Please Sports Almanac* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 55.
111. Crissey, "Baseball and World War II, 1.
112. "Short Sports Stories: Hank Greenberg Says Good-bye to Baseball and an Ump Confesses," *Yank*, 23 May 1943, 18.
113. Ted Williams with John Underwood, *My Turn at Bat: The Story of My Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 144.
114. Sec Taylor, "Behind the Sports Headlines," *Stars and Stripes* (Paris ed.), 3 Aug. 1945, 7.