



The Jungle League

Greg Singley

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The year was 1938. The small town of La Batterie Mississippi had a baseball team called the Warriors. They played in an after-college (town) team league called the Delta League. Most of the Warriors were scouted by the majors, and they were about to leave the family farm for big city pro careers when war was declared. They were sent to the Island of New Guinea to fight the Japanese and maybe get to play baseball in the Overseas Leagues against some big leaguers. They didn't find out until after they deployed that they might ever get to play baseball again. They thought their pro baseball dreams were shot. But because of the style and tactics of warfare, and the intensity of the fighting on New Guinea, it was logistically impossible for Overseas Leagues to organize for morale on that island for most of the war. Being denied the morale and opportunity to participate in the Overseas Leagues, compounded by the hunger to play and the awareness that baseball was being played all around them in the South Pacific, in the end, made them bitter and thereby made them better than they already were.

So they had to gut it out. They played pick-up games when they could in pouring rain using homemade equipment, while getting shot at by snipers.

But finally, near war's end, on leave and visiting the wounded, they forced a little match on the hospital diamond with a top Navy team on the Island of Manila. Word of the embarrassing ass-kicking of a top Navy team by a bunch of Army nobodies got all the way back to Ted Williams, stationed in Hawaii, and soon after, he and his Navy All-Stars Touring Team accompanied by a crew of Seabees arrived on New Guinea and carved a diamond out of that jungle, and a game it was...

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