BASEBALL DURING WORLD WAR II

By Preston Phillips
RESEARCH QUESTION:

• What effect did WWII have on baseball?
• How did baseball effect WWII?
  • Baseball stars sent overseas
  • Military baseball overseas
  • Prisoner of War baseball
GREEN LIGHT LETTER

• Baseball was in “golden years”, attendance and popularity at an all-time high
• WWII threatened to destroy baseball in America
• President Roosevelt wrote a letter to the baseball commissioner
• The American morale needed baseball
BASEBALL STARS TURNED SOLDIERS

• 500 Major League players including:
• Minor Leagues went from 40 leagues to 12
• I gained the utmost respect for the “greatest generation”
MILITARY BASEBALL

- Over 100 official military games and countless pick-up games
- Morale booster
- Kept soldiers out of trouble
- Training
POW BASEBALL

• 130,000 soldiers and 19,000 civilians held prisoner during WWII
• Baseball prevented learned helplessness, gave hope
• YMCA and Red Cross collected and distributed commercial-quality gear to prisoners
• Softball-style game
• Make-shift fields
• Stalag Luft I
• Stalag Luft III—Pinnacle of POW Baseball
UNDERCOVER BASEBALL

- MIS-X division provided escape and evade equipment disguised as baseball equipment
  - Baseball cards with maps
  - Baseballs with radios
  - Buttons with compasses
- Baseball was diversion for digging
- Provided a different form of hope
CONCLUSION

- Germans targeted baseball diamonds with bombs
- Japanese mocked the heroes of baseball
- Private John E. Stevens: “Baseball is a part of the American way of life. Remove it and you remove something from the lives of American citizens, soldiers, and sailors
- Just as Superman embodies the sacrifice, strength and hope that Americans value, baseball did the same during the 1940’s