

= Elmer Gedeon =

Elmer John Gedeon (April 15 , 1917 ? April 20 , 1944) is one of only two Major League Baseball players killed in action during World War II . Gedeon was also a multi @-@ sport star in college at the University of Michigan . He flew several missions in the European Theater of Operations as an officer of the United States Army Air Forces before his final , fatal military operation .

At Michigan , Gedeon became an All @-@ American in track and field , and earned varsity letters in both American football and baseball . He tied a world record in the high hurdles in 1938 . After graduating , Gedeon had a stint in Major League Baseball as an outfielder for the Washington Senators . Gedeon spent most of the 1939 and 1940 baseball seasons in the minor leagues , but he was called up to the Senators in September 1939 .

Gedeon 's baseball career was cut short when he was drafted by the United States Army in early 1941 . He trained as a bomber pilot , and was decorated for bravery after his plane crashed on a training flight in 1942 . He later served in combat , and was shot down and killed while piloting a B @-@ 26 bomber on a mission over France in April 1944 .

= = Growing up in Cleveland = =

Born in Cleveland , Gedeon was a star athlete at Cleveland 's West High School , where he was a member of the class of 1935 . He was a 6 ft 4 in (1 @. @ 93 m) athlete who excelled in American football , baseball , and track and field . While ice skating in Brookside Park in Cleveland as a youth , the ice gave way and Gedeon 's cousin plunged through up to his neck . The cousin later recalled : " Elmer slid across the ice on his belly and pulled me out . " Gedeon 's uncle , Joe Gedeon , was a Major League Baseball player who was implicated in the Chicago Black Sox scandal .

Gedeon 's surname was common in Cleveland , because many people from Sudetenland , where it was common , settled in Cleveland . The phonebook listed numerous Gedeons for biographical research . One finding was that Gedeon 's widow , who was named Laura , later moved to Florida . Another was that his third cousin Charlotte Gedeon said Elmer carried her grandmother 's casket during a funeral .

= = Collegiate athletics = =

Gedeon enrolled at the University of Michigan in 1935 where he earned varsity letters in three sports : baseball , football , and track and field . Gedeon 's best sport was track and field , in which he was a two @-@ time Big Ten Conference champion in the outdoor 120 @-@ yard high hurdles and indoor 70 @-@ yard high hurdles . In March 1938 , Gedeon tied the American indoor record in the 70 @-@ yard (64 m) high hurdles at the Big Ten meet in Chicago . He went on to tie a world record in the Illinois Relays , and then won the Big Ten title despite an injury . He also led Michigan to victory in the March 1939 Big Ten indoor track and field meet in Chicago . Michigan won both the Big Ten outdoor and indoor championships in 1938 ? 1939 . At the 1938 outdoor National Collegiate Athletic Association championships , he placed third in the 120 @-@ yard (110 m) hurdles and became an All @-@ American in track and field .

Gedeon also wore # 51 for the Michigan Wolverines football program from 1936 to 1938 , earning three varsity letters in football . In 1937 , a feature article on the Michigan team noted that , in addition to his abilities as an end , " Gedeon can pass and punt , and can run faster than any one on the squad . " In 1938 , Gedeon played end in Coach Fritz Crisler 's first season as Michigan 's football coach . That was the year that Coach Crisler introduced the " winged football helmet " at Michigan . Team captain Fred Janke recalled Gedeon was " a tall , skinny guy " , at 6 feet 4 inches (1 @. @ 93 m) and 196 pounds (89 kg ; 14 @. @ 0 st) . " A rather serious kid . He could kick quite well . They used to pull him back in serious situations and let him punt the ball , because he could punt it a mile . "

In baseball , Gedeon played both first base and the outfield for the Michigan Wolverines baseball team . He was a two @-@ time letterman in baseball and batted .320 .

= = Professional baseball = =

Gedeon signed with the Washington Senators after graduating in the summer of 1939 . He chose to sign with the Senators over a possible appearance as a member of the USA 's track team in the 1940 Summer Olympics . Gedeon was quite a prospect ; Clark Griffith , president of the Senators , mentioned Gedeon to The Sporting News on June 15 , when talking about exciting new players : " We 've got ... a youngster from the University of Michigan named Gedeon . " Gedeon was initially assigned to a minor league baseball team in Orlando , Florida where he played in 67 games in 1939 . In mid @-@ September , he was called up to the major leagues where he appeared in five games as an outfielder with three hits , one run and one RBI . His three hits came in a 10 ? 9 win against the Cleveland Indians on September 19 as the starting centerfielder . In his five major league games , he played four games in center field and one in right field .

In 1940 , Gedeon attended spring training with the Senators in Orlando , seeking a spot in the outfield or first base . In February 1940 , newspapers ran a wire service photograph of Gedeon hurdling over Senators first baseman Jimmy Wasdell , supposedly " by way of warming up " . returned to the minor leagues where he played for the Charlotte Hornets (in the Piedmont League) and hit .271 in 131 games . He was again recalled in September , but he made no appearances in any games . It appeared 1941 would see Gedeon moving to play more minor league baseball for either Greenville or Springfield . In the interim Gedeon served as an assistant football coach at Michigan .

= = Military service and death in World War II = =

Gedeon was drafted into the military in January 1941 , and reported to the Army instead of spring training . He was inducted at Fort Thomas , Kentucky and reported to the Cavalry Replacement Center at Fort Riley on March 18 . He immediately became an acting corporal of Troop B of the First Squadron for the thirteen @-@ week training program . The Bentley Historical Library at the University of Michigan owns a copy of an April 1941 fraternity newsletter with a note from Gedeon . " As you probably know by this time " , he wrote to his Phi Gamma Delta brothers , " Old Ged has been drafted . " On being assigned to the cavalry , Gedeon joked in the letter to his fraternity that " the only horse I ever saw in my life was the one the milkman used . "

On October 22 , 1941 , Gedeon was accepted into pilot training despite his size and transferred to the United States Army Air Forces , earning his pilot 's wings and a commission as a second lieutenant at Williams Field , Arizona in May 1942 . He undertook twin @-@ engined bomber training with the 21st Bomb Group at MacDill Field in Tampa , Florida . Gedeon 's usual duties were to aid in European mission planning from a desk . On August 9 , 1942 , Gedeon was flying as the navigator in a B @-@ 25 that crashed in the middle of a swamp on take off from the municipal airport at Raleigh , North Carolina . Gedeon crawled from the burning bomber , and despite burns and three broken ribs , he went back into the wreckage , rescuing a crewmate , Corporal John R. Rarrat , who had suffered a broken back and two broken legs . Two crew members died in the crash , and Gedeon spent 12 weeks in the hospital recovering from his broken ribs and burns to his back , hands , face and legs , some requiring skin grafts . He lost 50 pounds (22 @.@ 7 kg) in recovery . First Lt. Gedeon was awarded the Soldier 's Medal for heroism and bravery by Major General St. Clair Streett in what was described as " one of the most colorful ceremonies ever held at MacDill Field .

" I 'll be back in baseball after the war " , he had said on his last leave before going overseas . Gedeon 's cousin recalled : " The last time I saw him , he told me , ' I had my accident . It 's going to be good flying from now on . ' He said he had used up his bad luck . " In February 1943 , the Associated Press ran a feature story about Gedeon 's war service under the headline : " Gedeon Will Return to Baseball If War Doesn 't Last Too Long . " Gedeon was quoted in the article as saying " he hopes to pick up after the war where he left off . " He added that " it 's a matter of time . " " If the war ends before I 'm past the playing age I 'll return to the game . If I 'm too old , I 'll do

something else . "

In July 1943 , Gedeon was among personnel from the 21st BG that became the cadre of the 586th Bomb Squadron , 394th Bombardment Group United States Army Air Forces , formed to train with Martin B @-@ 26 Marauders . At Ardmore Army Air Field , Oklahoma , he participated in group operational training in preparation for combat . In February 1944 , the group was sent to RAF Boreham , England , to become part of the Ninth Air Force . Gedeon was assigned as Squadron Operations Officer and began flying combat missions in Europe . His first mission was to attack an airfield at Beaumont @-@ le @-@ Roger , France , on March 23 , 1944 .

On April 20 , 1944 , Gedeon piloted one of 36 B @-@ 26 's that left Boreham in the late afternoon to attack a V @-@ 1 " buzz bomb " site being constructed at Esquerdes , a village in the Pas @-@ de @-@ Calais near Saint @-@ Omer . Led by Capt. Darrell Lindsey , it was the group 's thirteenth mission . Attacking after dusk from 12 @,@ 000 feet , the group encountered intense and accurate anti @-@ aircraft fire , and Gedeon 's plane was hit by flak below the cockpit just after bombing . Gedeon 's co @-@ pilot , his clothes on fire , was able to parachute from the bomber as it plunged towards the ground , but Gedeon and five other crew members were killed . Gedeon was initially reported as missing in action and it was not until May 1945 that his family received word that his grave had been located in a small British army cemetery at Saint @-@ Pol , France . Gedeon 's body was later returned to the United States , and he was buried at Arlington National Cemetery .

Of the 500 @-@ plus major league players who served in the military in WW II , Gedeon and Harry Mink O 'Neill of the Philadelphia Athletics , killed at Iwo Jima , were the only Major League Baseball players killed in World War II . , both at age 27 . The two have become symbols of " baseball 's sacrifice " in the war effort . As the National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum proclaims : " Ballplayers , like every other American citizen , understand the importance of giving one 's self for their country . " After the war , a scholarship in Gedeon 's name was established at the University of Michigan . Gedeon was inducted into the University of Michigan Athletic Hall of Honor for track and baseball in 1983 . He was the sixth Michigan athlete inducted for his contributions in multiple sports .