

BUC BIOS: Bill Pierro

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On April 15, 1951, on his 25th birthday, prized Pittsburgh Pirate farm-hand William Leonard (Wild Bill) Pierro is admitted to Pittsburgh's Presbyterian Hospital in "critical" condition after being stricken with what is later diagnosed as encephalitis, an inflammatory disease which affects the brain.



Bill Pierro
1950 Pittsburgh Pirates

Pirate Hurler Seriously Ill

PITTSBURGH, April 15 (AP) Bill Pierro, Pittsburgh Pirate pitcher, is in critical condition from a brain ailment, Dr. Norman C. Ochsenhirt reported Sunday night.

Pierro entered Presbyterian hospital Saturday on his 25th birthday. He first became ill at Knoxville, Tenn., last Tuesday.

Dr. Ochsenhirt, the Buc team physician, said:

"I've consulted brain specialists and we've diagnosed Pierro's ailment as either encephalitis (inflammation of the brain) or meningitis (inflammation of the brain lining.) His condition is critical and he's been placed in isolation.

Pierro's wife arrived by plane Sunday night from their home in Brooklyn and rushed to his bedside.

The rookie pitcher lost two games for the Pirates last year after coming up from Indianapolis of the American association, where he had an 8-3 record.

Only Saturday Pierro had been assigned to Indianapolis on a 24-hour option.

Considered one of Pittsburgh's top pitching prospects with eight one-hitters in the minors, the 25-year-old Pierro first becomes ill six days earlier in Knoxville, Tennessee ... two days prior to his illness, Pierro is optioned to Indianapolis, the Pirates' top minor league team.

One year later, on April 11, 1952, the Pirates waive Pierro to clear the way for the World War II veteran to make a deal for himself in what ultimately proves to be an unsuccessful comeback attempt.

Lying about his age, the Brooklyn-born Pierro is only 16 years old in 1942 when he joins the Marines for World War II ... after his discharge, the hard-throwing right-hander walks into a Pittsburgh tryout camp in 1947 and asks for a chance to tryout ... impressed with what they see, the Pirates sign Pierro to a minor league contract and assign him to Tallahassee of the Georgia-Florida (D) League.

In 1948, with a standard salary of \$75 a month and \$3 a day for meal money, Pierro goes 17-8 with a 2.15 ERA for the Bartlesville Pirates and leading the Kansas-Missouri-Oklahoma (D) League with 300 strikeouts in 230 innings ... earning a promotion to Waco for the 1949 season, Pierro is 18-11 with a 2.96 ERA and leads the Big State (B) League with 275 strikeouts in 255 innings pitched.

Pierro is 8-3 for the Indianapolis Indians and is leading the American (AAA) Association in strikeouts with 75 when on July 11 1950, Pierro and infielder Danny O'Connell (.351-8-50) are summoned to the major leagues by the Pirates ... in return, Pittsburgh releases third baseman Nanny Fernandez (.258-6-27) and pitcher Frank Papish (0-0, 27.00) outright to Indianapolis.

Pierro makes his major league debut against the Boston Braves on September 17, 1950 ... he works into the ninth inning before weakening and is relieved by Hank Bowery ... Pierro allows five ninth-inning runs and absorbs the loss as the Braves rally for an 8-6 win ... Pierro allows six earned runs in eight innings on six hits and five walks while striking out five.

Bill Pierro Year by Year:

Year	Team	League	Level	W-L	INN	BB	SO	ERA
1947	Tallahassee Pirates	Georgia-Florida	D	--	37	43	35	---
1947	Bartlesville Oilers	KOM	D	8-9	134	159	180	4.30
1948	Bartlesville Pirates	KOM	D	17-8	230	145	300	2.15
1949	Waco Pirates	Big State	B	18-11	255	126	275	2.96
1950	Indianapolis Indians	American Assoc.	AAA	8-3	104	59	75	2.65
1950	Pittsburgh Pirates	NATIONAL	MLB	0-2	29	28	13	10.55
Major League Totals				1 Season	0-2	29	28	10.55
Minor League Totals				3 Seasons	51-31	723	532	790

All-Star Team: 1948-KOM; 1949-Big State

Bold denotes led league

Bill Pierro [2 of 2]:

Pierro appears in 12 games for the last-place Pirates in 1950, striking out 13 batters and walking 28, which results in an 0-2 mark and a 10.55 ERA.

Pierro Chronology:

June 9, 1948

Pierro strikes out 18 Miami Owls and yields only one hit in a 4-2 KOM (D) League victory ... the Owls' lone hit is by 27-year-old SS Art Priebe ... a lifetime .220 hitter in five minor league seasons, Priebe hits .187 as the player/manager for Miami in his final season of organized baseball.

May 8, 1950

Pierro allows only one hit in an 8-0 shutout of the Kansas City Blues in an American (AAA) Association game ... Kansas City's outfielder Archie Wilson - a lifetime .303 hitter in 15 minor league seasons - ruins Pierro's no-hit bid with a triple off of the left field wall with two outs in the eighth inning.

April 23, 1950

Making the jump from Waco to Indianapolis of the AAA American Association, Pierro makes an "auspicious" debut, pitching 11 innings to beat the Toledo Mud Hens 2-1 ... yields seven hits and strikes out nine in his complete game victory.

July 5, 1950

In the final victory of his career, Pierro out-duels Louisville's Harley Hisner in a 1-0 win over the visiting Colonels ... Pierro allows only five hits en route to his second shutout and eighth victory of the season.

July 12, 1950

Pierro and Indianapolis shortstop Danny O'Connell are recalled by Pittsburgh ... Pierro is 8-3 with a 2.60 ERA while O'Connell is hitting .351 with eight home runs and 50 RBIs.

July 17, 1950

In his major league debut against the Boston Braves, Pierro takes a 6-3 lead into the ninth inning before the Braves rally for five runs and a 8-6 win before 21,450 at Forbes Field ... Pierro pitches eight-plus innings, allowing six earned runs on eight hits with five strikeouts and five walks.

April 13, 1951

Suffering from gastritis, Pierro is optioned to Indianapolis with a 24 hour recall privilege ... General Manager Branch Rickey replaces Pierro on Pittsburgh's major league roster with 27-year-old southpaw Paul LaPalme ... LaPalme will finish his rookie season 1-5 with a 6.29 ERA for the seventh-place (64-90) Bucs.

April 15, 1951

Two days later, on his 25th birthday, Pierro is warming up in the Pirates' bullpen in Florida when he is stricken with encephalitis, an inflammatory disease which affects the brain ... the Brooklyn, N.Y., native may have contracted this crippling disease by his exposure to malaria in the Pacific during World War.

May 22, 1952

In an effort to bolster their portside pitching, the Pittsburgh Pirates again purchase the contract of lefty Paul LaPalme from the Indianapolis Indians ... the Bucs, in turn, send Pierro and outfielder Ted Beard to the Indians.

April 1, 2006

Pierro dies at the age of 79, in his hometown of Brooklyn, New York.

Pierro Loses Booster

Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, March 26, 1951

Pierro loses the support of Pittsburgh Pirate General Manager Branch Rickey. Denied a tryout at Ebbets Field when Rickey was the boss of the Brooklyn Dodgers, Pierro is at spring training when Rickey tells him that has a good chance to become a "fine major league pitcher," but needs to add another pitch to his repertoire.

After Pierro says that no one has ever helped him, Rickey tells him to come to Perris Hill Park the next morning at 8:30 a.m., where Rickey himself will assist Pirate coaches Bill Posedel and Sam Narron in some extra pitching instruction.

When Rickey arrives the following morning, he finds out that no one has seen Pierro. At 9:10 a.m., when Rickey is ready to leave the park, Pierro arrives. Rickey tells Pierro to go into the clubhouse, get his spikes and glove and catch the "earliest" transportation to Deland, Florida.

Rickey says, "Right now I don't care where that boy pitches this season. He doesn't have the attitude to play on this ball club. He is going to have to show me a great deal more desire than that."