

On This Date

February 10, 1939

A career .308 hitter in four minor league seasons, [Gordon Enloe Houston](#) is the first professional baseball player to be killed in World War II.

On the afternoon of February 10, 1942, at McChord Field, just south Tacoma, Washington, Second Lieutenant Houston, the flight leader of the 55th Pursuit Group, is killed when his bulky and outdated [P-43 Lancer](#) hits a ditch at the end of the field that had been dug during the afternoon while landing and his plane flips over, pinning the [Clarksville, Arkansas](#), native underneath.

Part of the [Western Defense Command](#), Houston was leading his flight up and down the coast, searching for Japanese submarines that had been sighted in the area.

In 1935, Gordon and his brother C.L. enroll at the [College of the Ozarks](#), where they play on the school's football team. A year later, they both enroll at [Henderson State Teacher's College in Arkadelphia, Arkansas](#), where Gordon is a back-up on the Reddies' football team. The following summer Houston is playing for the semipro [Bierne \(Ark.\) Lumber company](#) team before signing with the [Monroe \(La.\) Twins](#) the Class C Cotton States League where he hits .320 in 46 games.

In 1938, Houston hits a league-leading .384 with 32 doubles and 18 home runs for the [Texarkana Liners](#) and is named to the East Texas (C) League all-star team. The following season Houston injures his foot in July and has the worst year of his career with his batting average slipping 165 points to .219. In 1940, back for his third-straight year with [Texarkana](#), and his last in professional baseball, Houston returns to form, leading the Liners in hits (158), doubles (30) and batting average (.304) while playing in a career-high games (129).

First Player Killed



Lieut. Gordon E. Houston

MACCHORD, a routine morning flight at McChord Field, near Tacoma, Wash., February 10, Lieut. Gordon E. Houston, formerly college football coach, resulted in his death in a single-engine Army plane, the first player of his profession both killed in World War II. He enrolled in the Air Corps at San Jacinto and later graduated at Ontario, Calif., for postgraduate flight training. Campaigning this country, he was assigned to a pursuit fighter squadron at McChord Field. Houston was signed by Monroe of the Cotton States League in 1931 and went to Texarkana in 1938, where he played until leaving the service, except for a brief stint with Oklahoma City in 1939. That season, Houston hit .361 for Texarkana. He also was hitting the ball in the Air Service until the accident caused his untimely death.