Baseball
and the American Civil War



A memoir of the 23rd NJ Vol. Inf. Reg.
The Jersey Yahoos

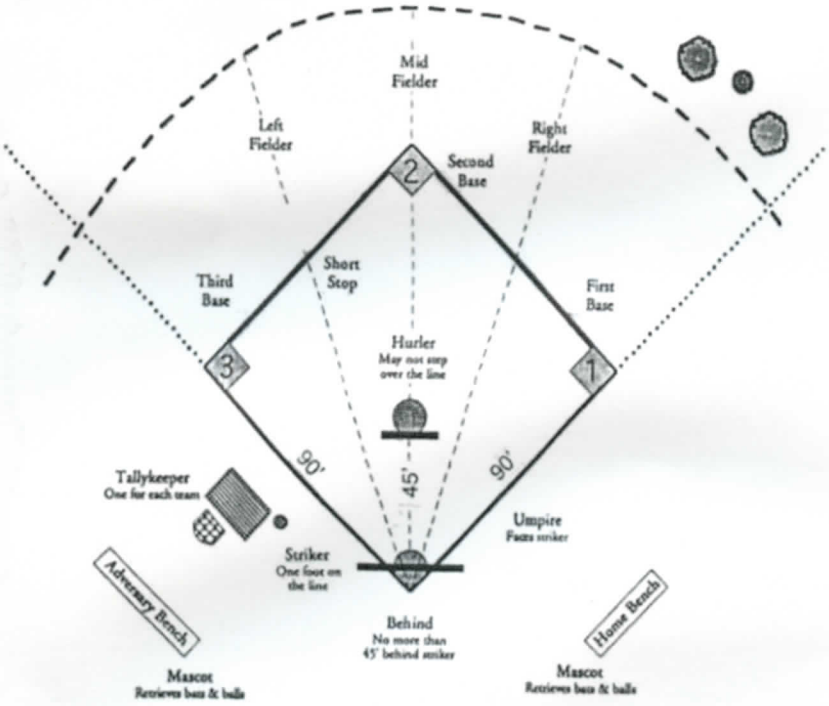
Excerpts from the Civil War Diary of Josiah Crispin
Featured in Journey to Honor (2008)
by James G. Buck

Baseball and the 23rd NJ Vol. Infantry Regiment

The Jersey Yahoos

By Ron Naylor

The 23rd NJ Infantry Regiment of the American Civil War was mustered in mid-September 1862 at Camp Cadwalader, Beverly, New Jersey. They were mostly farm boys from Burlington towns. A Moorestown native, Josiah Crispin, kept a diary for the entire length of his Army service. The following are passages from that book, dealing with a sport unfamiliar to them. Illustrations from other sources.





1860's Base Ball Field
Players Positions



October 24, 1862 – Mercerville MD

"They walked over to a corner of the parade field. There were a lot of people standing around what looked like a square that was bordered by four white sacks. Each sack was about eighteen square [inches] and two inches thick. A man was standing next to one with a long stick in his hand. Another, standing in the center of the square, threw a ball toward him. The man with a stick hit the ball and it sailed out into a field where somebody caught it. The boys in the 23rd Regiment was introduced to baseball."

November 2, 1862 – Lovettsville VA

"The same mail call that brought the devastating news to Crispin brought an anxiously awaited letter for George Howard. [George] returned to his tent and pulled out his treasure. It was a little yellow Beadle's dime book, Baseball Player: A Compendium of the Game, Comprising Elementary Instructions of this American Game of Ball. Howard had enjoyed the game at Hexamer's Battery so much that he had gotten the address of the Beadle Company from Henry Myers and sent for the rules. He studied the book in the fading light. As a great harvest moon rose big in the east, he, Conover and Goodenough were plotting how to get a bat and ball and enough canvas to sew together the bases."

November 12, 1862 – New Baltimore VA

"The boys had some free time after the parade. A group of men from most of the companies in the regiment gathered to watch Howard, Conover, Goodenough and four or five other men learn to play baseball. They found a ball and someone had carried a bat the right size.

They didn't have canvas bases yet, but they did find a way to lay out a field with the right dimensions. They scratched squares in the dirt where the bases were supposed to be. Conover was pitching, Goodenough was catching, and since Howard knew the rules best, he was the umpire.

It didn't take long for the word to get around camp. Soon officers, NCOs and men from all the companies wanted to borrow the book, and learn to play.

O'Neil was up to bat. Howard carefully took the time to explain the rules and show him how to swing the bat. Conover threw the ball for him several times. Soon he was hitting it regularly. Howard grinned to himself. When the game was over, O'Neill carefully took the bat back to the supply wagon, and in violation of Army regulations, put it safely away. The baseball equipment was secure. No officer ever questioned the wagoner about why it was there."

November 17, 1862 – New Baltimore VA
[The 23rd on the march toward Fredericksburg VA]

"[Ryerson] looked over his troops. It took an hour and a half, and when all was said and done, the Yahoos had measured up. They got the rest of the day off. The baseball game started quickly."

November 27, 1862 – Stafford's Courthouse VA
"George Howard's crowning baseball achievement was teaching O'Neill how to play. The carefully lobbed pitches over the previous weeks had made the man a fanatic. The wagoner made sure the ball, bat and newly sewn bases were kept in the wagon with the company supplies. The game had caught on so well, the officers and the NCOs were starting to play. The weather was nice enough for the men to lay out a diamond and play a few innings. Those who weren't playing enjoyed playing catch off to the side. General Doubleday rode past and was obviously pleased to see the boys were having a good time."

December 25, 1862 – Camp White Oak Church VA
[Following the Union defeat at Fredericksburg VA]

"The weather was warmer than usual, so the boys got out their baseball equipment and played ball, cards or football or pitched pennies."

January 30, 1863 – Camp White Oak Church VA
"Most of the squad was sitting around a big fire after dinner. George Howard was telling them the news about on Christmas Day. The 165th New York played a team of all-stars from the other regiments in front of 40,000 troops."

February 2, 1863 – Camp White Oak Church VA
[At winter quarters north of Fredericksburg VA]

"It was too cold to play baseball. It was difficult to pitch or bat or run with heavy clothing on. On the other hand, the heavy clothing provided protection while playing another game like rugby – More commonly known as football."

February 20, 1863 - Camp White Oak Church VA
[Heavy rain]

"Howard's precious baseball bases were waterlogged. He had to cut the carefully sewn stitches to dry out the already questionable canvas."

March 14, 1863 – Left wing of the AOP [Army of the Potomac]
"Picket duty on the Rappahannock River in Virginia. In the evening the men washed out their guns and put their equipment back in order. The little bit of extra time was spent working on their baseball game."

March 23, 1863 - Camp White Oak Church VA
"The sun finally broke through about noon and it became quite pleasant for a while. The men did the best they could to get the snow off their roofs and air out the huts. It was still too wet for the evening parade. Howard and the boys did manage to play catch with their baseball."

March 28. 1863 - Camp White Oak Church VA
"After supper, Howard got out his bases and O'Neil showed up with the bat and the boys played ball."

April 5, 1863 – Falmouth VA
[Abraham Lincoln arrives to see General Hooker and review a Grand Parade of all units]

"By evening the snow was gone and the baseball equipment was brought out."

April 20, 1863 - Camp White Oak Church VA
"H and G companies came back from picket about 1 PM. The Army was lucky it was not on the march. It had rained as hard as it did during the Mud March, and the roads were still delicate. They knew they had the next day off, so they were enjoying a baseball game and a quiet evening until the mail came."

April 27, 1863 - Camp White Oak Church VA

"Crispin walked down to the riverbank with Rue and Lloyd when they were off-duty. The Rebel pickets were visible on the other side. A kind of unspoken agreement had been reached that they wouldn't shoot at Yankees if the Yankees didn't shoot at them.

The Rebels looked like they were in good spirits. "Look, they are playing baseball, too," pointed Lloyd. Some were playing while others watched or just relaxed in the open."

May 15, 1863 - Camp White Oak Church VA

[Back to the same camp after the Union defeat at Chancellorsville. Josiah Crispin dead.]

"Howard was getting up a baseball game. George quietly suggested that Terhune go join it.

The 23rd NJ Infantry Regiment left Virginia on June 10, 1863 to return to Camp Cadwalader, Beverly New Jersey. The "Yahoos" were proud of their service to the AOP to save the Union. One June 27, 1863 all remaining soldiers of the regiment were mustered out. The soldiers of the unit returned home, knowing the rigor of war and personal combat, but in between the battles and the constant drilling, the unit relished this new sport... Baseball.

Passages taken from the book, Journey to Honor, by James G. Buck, who took the actual diary of Josiah Crispin as the basis of his historical account of the 23rd New Jersey Infantry Regiment during the nine-month enlistment."

Huzzah! Huzzah! Huzzah!

Source: Journey to Honor (2008) by James G. Buck

Reported by Ron Naylor, Jr.
23rd NJ Regiment Re-enactor

19th Century Rules of the Game

Base Ball rules changed frequently in the 19th Century. The following are some examples:

They did not play nine innings until 1857. Before that, the winner was the first to 21 runs.

Gloves were not used until the late 1870s and were not common until the 1880's. 19th Century Base Ball teams almost always play barehanded.

Before 1865 an out could be made if the ball was caught before it touched the ground OR on the first bounce (called the Bound Game). A foul Ball was still an out if caught on one bounce until 1883.

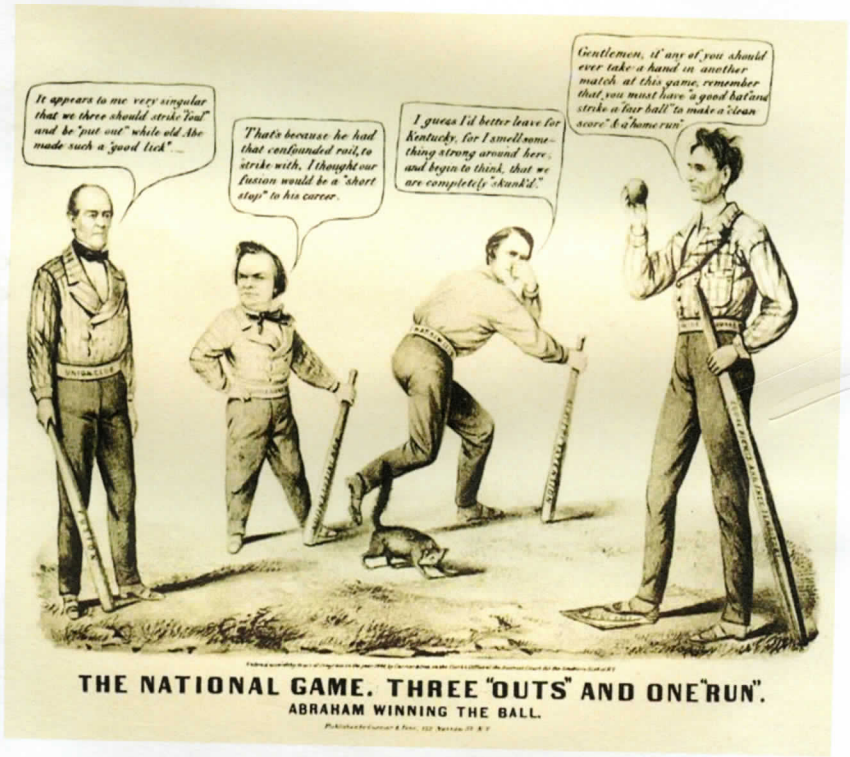
Until 1876, a batted ball was fair or foul depending on where it hit the ground first. It did not have to stay fair past the bases.

Balls and strikes were not called before the early 1860's and then only at the discretion of the umpire. The early 1870s saw limits of three balls and three strikes and the batter could request where he wanted the ball to be pitched. In 1879, nine balls constituted a walk, in 1880 eight, in 1884 six, in 1887 five (and four strikes), and finally today's three strikes and four balls in 1889.

Pitchers could only deliver the ball below the waist until 1883. They pitched from a 3 x 6 pitching box, 45 feet away in the early 1860s. The pitching rubber was introduced in 1893. The pitching mound was probably used in the late 19th century, but was not formally in the rules until 1904.

19th Century Base Ball Terminology

Striker = Batter	Muffin = Unskilled Player
Mascot = Batboy	Hand Down = Out
The Garden = The Outfield	Timber = Bat
Muff = *Error*	Jimjam = Wild Pitch
Muckle = Power	Sockdolager = A Long Hit
Kicking = Complaining to the Umpire	Ace = A Run
Inshoot = Screwball	Outshoot = Curveball
Baseballist = Player	Cake = Player of Little Skill



THE NATIONAL GAME. THREE "OUTS" AND ONE "RUN".
ABRAHAM WINNING THE BALL.