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Pistol Pete Reiser, a man for all to admire



Harold Patrick Reiser was born in 1919 in St. Louis, and by 1941 had become the National League's batting champ with the Brooklyn Dodgers. He's not in the Hall of Fame, but at least one of our country's most prominent sportswriters, W.C. Heinz, says Pete is his "all time guy," a man who is "what professionalism is all about." Heinz said, "A professional is someone who makes every play. There's no compromise." For Reiser, there was no compromise. Carried off the field on a stretcher at least 11 times, given his last rites at least once while playing, concussions, dislocated shoulders, torn muscles, bruises, and scars were all a part of the Pistol's game. He ran a 9.8 second 100-yard dash, he sprinted down the first base line no matter what he hit, he flew into second base

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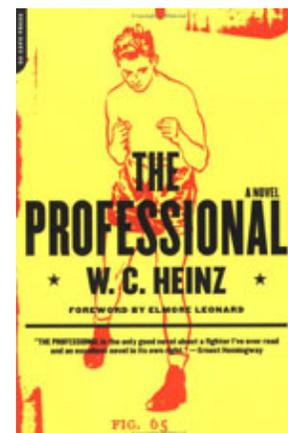
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Opening photo credit: We received this autographed photo of Pistol Pete Reiser from [Martin Carroll](#) of Palestine, Texas. Martin's father knew Reiser in Ft. Riley, Kansas in 1945 and Pete gave him an autographed picture made out to Martin.



[The Professional](#), by W.C. Heniz. Heinz commented that following publication of this book, his editor called him and read him the

blocking out double plays, no matter what big lug was there, he was among the very best in his league in stolen bases, he dove for balls in the outfield, and he crashed into those outfield walls more times than anyone has dared count. As Pete might say, "I'm gonna catch that ball no matter what."

following cable: "The Professional is the only good novel I've read about a fighter and an excellent first novel in its own right. Signed, Hemingway."

July 30, 2004, **updated July 17, 2006 with autographed cover photo.**

There are precious few things better to learn about in the course of a day than a real American professional. They're all over the place in our country, but it's not always that easy to find out about them, the real ones, that is.



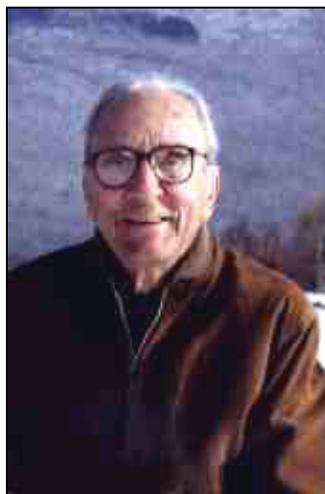
In paging through the September 2004 edition of **American Heritage** magazine, we ran across an article by Nathan Ward entitled, "A life in the loser's dressing room," an interview with W.C. Heinz. Among other things, Heinz is a world-class sports writer and author with a special place in his heart for boxing. In the interview done by Ward, Heinz was asked this question:

"Looking back broadly, are there any athletes or events you covered that remain particularly large in your mind down the years?"

Heinz cited two men, Joe Louis and a baseball player named Pete Reiser. Just about everyone knows about Joe Louis. This editor did not know about Pete Reiser, so that lack of knowledge lit a fire.

What Heinz said about Reiser is most noteworthy, and inspiring. This is what he said:

"My all-time guy was a baseball player named Pete Reiser. When somebody risks his life the way he did, that to me is what professionalism is all about. Who knows how great Pete would have been if he hadn't wrecked himself running



into all those outfield walls. But he was philosophical about it. He said, 'If I hadn't played that way, how good would I have been?' So running into outfield walls was part of playing. He never regretted for a moment that he'd hit those walls. I never found anyone else who had professionalism as strong as Reiser, never saw anyone who had that much promise and then destroyed it. A professional is someone who makes every play. There's no compromise. Lombardi used to lecture on that: 'There are approximately 150 different plays in a game that you have to make, and you have to be professional on every one of them.'"

Harold Patrick Reiser was born in 1919 in St. Louis, Missouri, and he died in 1981 in Palm Springs, California. You might recall that Pete Maravich, a college and pro basketball star, was well known in the 70s and 80s as "Pistol Pete" Maravich. Well, Pete Reiser was the original "Pistol Pete." He was an outfielder (also played third base) for the Brooklyn Dodgers (1940-1942, 1946-1948), and later the Boston Braves (1949-1950), Pittsburgh Pirates (1951) and Cleveland Indians (1952). He played in two World Series, one in 1941, his banner year, and the other in 1947. He batted lefty, threw righty.

In 1941, Pistol Pete was the National League's batting champ with a .343 average, 117 runs (league leader), 39 doubles (league leader), and 17 triples (league leader), and had a .553 slugging percentage (league leader). He played in a career-best 137 games that year, and his Dodgers won their first pennant in 21 seasons.



Reiser was a "little guy" at 5'-10.5" and 185 lbs. But he was a fast son-uva-gun, clocking 9.8 seconds in the 100-yard dash in spikes and full uniform. In the gee-whiz category, John Owens was the first man recorded to run the 100-yard dash below 10 seconds, clocking 9-4/5 seconds on October 11, 1890. In 1930, Frank Wykoff, while a sophomore at USC, set a new world record for the 100-yard dash in 9.2-5 seconds, a record that would stand for 17 years. So the Pistol could run.

Perhaps what stood out most about Reiser was his

commitment to the game at all costs. In his day, he was known as the consummate hustler. As one writer put it, "He simply ignored outfield walls, constantly crashing into them." Reiser was quoted saying:

"I'm going to catch that ball; regardless of the outcome style of play."

He sprinted down the first base line no matter what he hit, broke up double plays sliding hard into opposing fielders, he dove for fly balls, and crashed into fences. He hit a wall in St. Louis, his hometown, suffered a concussion and separated shoulder. Red Smith counted 11 times that Reiser had to be carried off the field on a stretcher. In 1946, he separated his shoulder, broke his ankle, tore muscles and had to quit before season's end. But he came back in 1947, alongside Jackie Robinson, and these two finished 1-2 in steals for the year. Pete crashed into a wall that season as well, and could only play 110 games. He was hurt so badly after hitting the centerfield wall at Ebbets Field that he was actually given his last rites. In the 1947 World Series, he misplayed several balls due to vertigo. He was traded to the Braves after the 1948 season and again to the Pirates and Indians. His bruises, scars, and dizzy spells all forced him to quit the game in 1952.

You'll be interested to know that Pistol Pete went into the Army during WWII, and served from 1943 through 1945. He first met Jackie Robinson at Fort Riley, Kansas.

Pete Reiser played only four full seasons. These are his career stats: .295 BA in 861 games, scored 473 runs, .380 on base pct and stole 87 career bases. He is not a member of the Hall of Fame.

When thinking about guys like Pete Reiser, it is worthwhile to return to one of his lead admirers, W.C. Heinz. In the interview mentioned previously with Nathan Ward, Heinz said this about what makes a professional:

"My philosophy of professionalism is that if there is a leak in the basement and you are a plumber and you are called in the middle of the night, then you go there and handle that leak and weld that joint or whatever you have to do. And if you're soaking wet, then you go home and you clean your clothes, and you can sleep knowing that you did what you had to do. If everybody behaved this way, it would be a far better world."

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