

Air and Space this Week

Item of the Week

THE REAL ROBERT HOGAN WAS A HERO, TOO!

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450th Bombardment Group

... as were the thousands of B-24 pilots and crews in WWII. The success of the June, 1944, invasion of the European continent at Normandy absolutely required local and regional air superiority for success. A major effort by both the USAAF and the RAF against the German aircraft industry was necessary, first to attrit the production of new aircraft and to force losses of existing planes and pilots involved in the defense of aircraft manufacturing plants.

This Item tells the first of a two-part story of this part of the War effort. The second will be distributed next month about the "Big Week," a "bombing around the clock" effort (February 20-25, 1944). But the bombing was ramping up before that time, with successes and losses.

One bomber in the pre-Big Week effort was a B-24 piloted by Robert Hogan.

That name may sound familiar. Bob Crane played Colonel Robert Hogan in the 1960s sitcom, "Hogan's Heroes." There are some interesting connections between the two, the subject of this particular Item.

INTRODUCTION

Boeing was building B-24 bombers as fast as it could in 1943 and 44, and many new crews were forming to take them into combat (over 18,000 were manufactured, making the B-24 the warbird produced in largest quantities, ever). One crew was assigned to the 723rd Squadron of the 450th Bombardment Group, based in Manduria, Italy, was under command of 2nd Lieutenant Robert S. Hogan of Birmingham, Alabama. Hogan and his crew had already flown 11 successful combat missions in their airplane they named *Daisy Mae* in the run-up to the Big Week, but their twelfth mission, on **January 19**, 1944, seventy-nine years ago, did not go well. Their objective that day was to bomb bridges and other communications infrastructure in and around Brod, in what was then Yugoslavia.

Everything was fine up to the conclusion of their bombing run, when flak blew off the left wing of the B-24. Both Hogan and his flight engineer, S.Sgt. Chester S. Zukowsky, lived because they could reach the *Daisy Mae's* still-open bomb bay doors; the other nine members of the crew perished.

Hogan and Zukowsky were captured immediately. Zukowsky was held in solitary confinement for three weeks in Obereusal camp, outside Frankfurt, then he was marched to Stalag 13C

outside the German town of Hammelburg. Hogan received slightly better treatment, and ended up in Offlag 13B, a prison camp for officers (officers and enlisted men were kept separated during their confinement), also near Hammelburg.

Yes, that's right, Hammelburg and Offlag (Stalag) 13, just like in *Hogan's Heroes*, 25 years later. Imagine the real Robert S. Hogan's surprise when he first saw the show!

HOGAN'S HEROES

Some of you will remember the show, but many of you were born (long) after it was in production. It was quite popular during the late 1960s. The initial thought was to set the show in a prison, with the inmates operating a clandestine enterprise behind the warden's back, but if you recall the turbulent times of the day, cooler (smarter) heads realized the concept was trouble. So someone (other than Mel Brooks) thought that making a show about Nazis would be a good idea. Well, maybe, at least if the Germans were made the fools to the clever inmates of a POW camp...

Hogan's Heroes (*HH*) was in the news back in November, on the occasion of the death of the last living member of its primary cast. **Robert Clarey**, who played Cpl. LeBeau in the show, had actually been held in a real death camp, Buchenwald. Of the 16 members of his immediately family, only he and two of his sisters survived. Robert was young and strong, and his ability to entertain his captors, combined with a strong will to live, allowed him to make it through his 31-month captivity. After *HH*, Clarey had a successful career as a nightclub singer and dancer, and then in several U.S. soap operas. During his career, he worked with Ira Gershwin and Stephen Sondheim, and married the daughter of singer/actor Eddie Cantor. He had kept the Holocaust portion of his life quiet until 1980, when Holocaust denialism caused him to speak out strongly about his personal experiences.

Three other members of the *Hogan's Heroes* cast lost family members to the Holocaust: John Banner (Sgt. Schultz), Werner Klemperer (Colonel Klink), and Leon Askin (General Burkhalter).

Johann (John) Banner was born in what is now Ukraine. He originally planned for a career in law, but opted for acting, instead. When Hitler annexed Austria, Banner fled to the U.S., but he lost a number of his extended family to the Holocaust. He enlisted in the USAAF in 1942, and served for the duration as a supply sergeant. After the War, he returned to acting, appearing on a number of 1950s TV shows, such as the *Lone Ranger*, *Sky King*, and even *Mr. Ed*. His final TV appearance was on an episode of *The Partridge Family*. He died in 1973, in Vienna.

Werner Klemperer, born in Cologne, was the son of famed conductor Otto Klemperer. His mother was a famous singer. His immediate family saw the growing situation in Europe, and immigrated to the U.S. in 1933. Rather than follow his family's musical tradition, Werner opted for acting instead. When WWII came, he enlisted, and later joined the Army's Special Services Unit, entertaining the troops across the Pacific. After the War, he was an operatic baritone and sang in Broadway musicals. He got his break with a role in a Hitchcock movie, and scored major recognition for his role in *Judgement at Nurnberg*. But of course, he's best known for his role on *HH*, Colonel Klink. The show would win 12 Emmy nominations; he got half of them himself,

and won twice. He also won a Tony nomination for his role in *Cabaret*. He reprised the Klink character on an episode of *Batman* ([It's How You Play the Game](#)), and on an episode of *The Simpsons* ([The Last Temptation of Homer](#)). He passed away on December 6, 2000.

Leon Askin was involved with cabaret theater in Vienna in the 1930s, but he had to flee Austria in 1940 because he was Jewish. His parents didn't make it out, and died at Treblinka; he served during WWII as a USAAF staff sergeant. He was in a number of movies and guest roles on TV through the 1980s. He died in Vienna in 2005.

Howard Kaine (Maj. Wolfgang Hochstetter) was also Jewish, but was an American. He served in the Navy during WWII, then graduated summa cum laude from Columbia with a degree in acting. He was in a number of movies and episodes of various shows, both before and after *HH*.

Larry Hovis (Sgt. Carter) was an American, but his presence on *HH* was affected by the Jewish/Nazi issue. Leonid Kinskey played Carter's character in the pilot, but he could not countenance acting with characters dressed as Nazis. Hovis got the role. After *HH*, he was behind the scenes in a number of productions, most notably *Rowan and Martin's Laugh In*.

Neither **Ivan Dixon** (Sgt. Kinchloe) nor **Colin Lionel Emm** (aka Richard Dawson, Sgt. Newkirk) had a personal WWII or Jewish/Nazi connection.

But There Was a Link Via Music!

Robert Clary was a multi-talented entertainer, as mentioned above.

Bob Crane was an LA drive-time DJ in Los Angeles before *HH*. He had an early interest in music, especially the drums, and played in his school's marching and jazz bands. He frequently incorporated drumming on his radio show, and managed to trigger an avalanche by playing them on an episode of *HH*.

Werner Klemperer was the son of a famous conductor and a noted singer. His violin playing had to be better than the few times it was seen on *HH*, but he sang professionally on Broadway. Howard Caine, in addition to his many film/TV roles, was an expert on the five-string bluegrass banjo. Go figure! Major Hochstetter playing bluegrass! He won many contests and awards for playing the banjo and fiddle.

Clary, Dawson, Dixon, and Hovis were signers, and the [cut a record](#) together after *HH* showcasing songs from the 1940s, entitled *Hogan's Heroes Sing the Best of World War II*. TV show themes from that era usually were instrumental, or at least used that way; some, such as *Star Trek* and *HH*, had lyrics written with them but were never used. The four singers [recorded them](#), too.

And a Sharky Legal Problem

Donald Bevan and Edmund Trzcinski had written a play in 1951 entitled "Stalag 17." It was turned into a box-office success in 1953 as a feature film with the same title. They sued Bing Crosby Productions, makers of *HH*, for infringement, and won in a jury trial, although the verdict was later overturned. The judge involved wryly commented that there was a "striking difference in the dramatic mood of the two works." Duh! The issue went to arbitration. *HH* creators Albert S. Ruddy and (the estate of) Bernard Fein were awarded derivative rights from

BCP in 2013. Mark Cuban owned BCP rights at that time. The follow-up *HH* feature film being fought over never materialized.

Colonel Robert Hogan

HH co-creator Bernard Fein chose the name of a [character actor](#) friend of his for the lead character for the show. This real Robert Hogan actually had a guest part in two of the *HH* episodes. But there was yet another Robert Hogan in our story ...

ROBERT STEADHAM HOGAN

Robert S. Hogan was born into a family of physicians in Birmingham, Alabama. His father had five sons, four of which became doctors, and his uncle was the local hospital superintendent for many years. However, young Bob's initial interest was in engineering, and he enrolled in Auburn's engineering program after high school. Hogan felt duty's call after Pearl Harbor, left his studies, and enlisted in the Army Air Force. His two years of college helped make him an officer, training to fly bombers. By November, 1943, he was in Manduria, Italy with the 723rd Squadron, 450th Bombardment Group, flying missions against transportation, troop, oil refineries, and other targets in Austria, northern Italy, and what was then Yugoslavia. This crew completed 11 missions successfully, but they had several close calls with defending guns and fighters. Their luck ran out on mission number twelve. Flak over their target bridges outside Brod, Yugoslavia, blew the left wing of their B-24, *Daisy Mae*, as their bombs hit, and only Hogan and his flight engineer survived, as recounted in the Introduction. He lost a few teeth when he hit the instrument panel in his escape from the crippled aircraft. He was quickly captured and held in a camp near Nuremburg, before moving over to Offlag-13.

Hogan's wife got the MIA telegram on February 3. Her anguish was tempered a bit six weeks later when she got word that her husband was a POW.

We have a POW pilot named Robert Hogan in Offlag-13, outside Hammelburg. What's missing? An eccentric camp commandant with a monocle? They had one. A jolly overweight sergeant? They had one. A clandestine radio? They had one, but Offlag-13's commandant looked the other way. He, and the prisoners, got more reliable news from the BBC than they did from the German High Command!

And, of course, there were no tunnels or any of the other espionage/sabotage infrastructure like in *HH*!

In general, Hogan and his compatriots were treated within international standards. They were extremely hungry, and thought about food constantly. But camp personnel were only a little better off. War-time Germany was a place of hunger.

Like many veterans, he kept pretty quiet about his wartime experiences. He did share with his son that there were only three memorable things from his POW experience: the great longing for food, the kind acts of a young local girl who would occasionally pitch a piece of fruit or two over the wire, and the news from the radio. He also traveled to visit each of the nine families of the men lost when *Daisy Mae* went down. Every call was difficult, but one was particularly so.

Eight of the nine men lost were bachelors, but one, [John Rau](#), was married and left a one-year-old child. Hogan had earned a Purple Heart and two Air Medals with Oak Leaf Clusters.

Safely home, Hogan returned to college to complete his undergraduate degree, at the University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, then completed the necessary studies, residencies, etc. to become doctor, culminating with certification by the American Board of Internal Medicine in 1958. He would enjoy a long and successful medical career. He was very dedicated to his profession, and to the local community, but he did develop one outside interest...

He loved *Hogan's Heroes*! His family couldn't help but notice the links between Bob Crane's Hogan and their patriarch. Dr. Hogan noticed the links, too, and he was motivated to point them out to Bob Crane in a fan letter!

HOGAN MEETS HOGAN

Dr. Hogan received a reply to his letter to Crane from the producers of the show. They pointed out that the characters depicted were completely fictional, legalese, legalese... However, the marketing guys had more on the ball than the producers, and quickly wrote back and arranged for the two Hogans to meet (along with publicity cameras). There was a press conference at the Airport Motel with both men and Dr. Hogan's two sons. Afterward, they all had lunch together at the Country Club of Birmingham. Good Press all around.

The website of the 450th Bomb Group Memorial Association [has a page](#) devoted to Robert S. Hogan, and it includes pictures of Dr. Hogan during wartime, a clipping of his MIA notice in the local newspaper, and some of the pictures taken of him with Bob Crane.

Dr. Robert S. Hogan passed away in 1980, at the young age of 58.

CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE 450TH BOMBARDMENT GROUP

The 450th Bombardment Group formed up at Alamogordo in November, 1943, and shipped out to Manduria, Italy. They were known as the "Cottontails," for the distinctively-white paint job on the aft end of their B-24 Liberators. It took the rest of 1943 for the Group to move and get situated in their new base, a relatively routine action except for a barracks fire on New Year's Eve. They got the fire damage straightened out, and conducted their first bombing attack on January 8. Their target was Mostar, Yugoslavia, and bombing results were only "fair." After that, bombing attacks were delivered almost every day. 2Lt. Hogan flew 11 missions between 1/8 and 1/19, the day he was shot down.

The 450th Bombardment Group comprised four Squadrons of B-24s, the 720th, 721st, 722nd, and Hogan's 723rd. They performed well the rest of the month and into February, working up to the "Big Week." Their contribution to that effort won the Group a Presidential Unit Citation for their role in an attack on the aircraft manufacturing facilities near Regensburg, a tough target that would require many other visits. They'd later win a second at Ploesti (a major oil refinery complex).

The only thing that marred their record was a single incident during the Regensburg attack. A Cottontail bomber had been crippled by defensive fighters and was in serious distress, without

escort, and dropped their wheels to indicate their surrender. German fighters wanted to force it to land intact at their base for study rather than shoot it down and kill all aboard. The pilots understood the signals, and followed the fighter's lead. Most of the fighters forged ahead, leaving two to guide the B-24 to the desired spot. The B-24 took advantage of the situation and shot down the two now-unsuspecting fighters, then managed to make it home. But one of the fighter pilots lived to tell the tale. Axis Sally broadcast the story on her propaganda radio show the very next night, vowing revenge. After that, the Cottontails' loss rate soared. Fighters were seen to divert from the squadron of the bombers they had been attacking when they saw a Cottontail aircraft come along. At first, the Cottontails tried to tough it out, but their losses continued to mount, so they painted their aircraft to match others in use. Apparently German intelligence was able to ferret out the offending group aircraft even without the white tails, because Axis Sally broadcast the paint change on her program one day later. Other marking changes by the 450th and their Group mates were similarly reported by Sally.

Most people have heard about the B-17 Flying Fortress bomber. [The "Fortress" part of that name did not reflect the aircraft's self-defense capabilities, but rather its initial planned role as a flying coastal defense platform!] The Fort definitely has the look of a dangerous bomber. But the B-24 Liberator was like its older, hard-working brother, without the attention-getting flair. A lot more Liberators were made than B-17s, and they dropped a much higher aggregate bomb total.

The Big Week's damage to German aircraft production was an important factor in the D-Day invasion and beyond. That success was due to good leadership at all levels, and the bravery of men like Robert S. Hogan and his crew.

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