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Jumpin' Jimminy

A World War II Baseball Saga: American Flyboys and Japanese Submariners

Battle it Out in a Swedish World Series©

By Robert Skole

Jumpin' Jimminy – Facts, fiction and the first film of Americans and Japanese playing ball in World War II

Jumpin' Jimminy is based on fact: There were 119 American bombers that landed in neutral Sweden in World War II, unable to make it back to England after getting shot up on runs over Germany. Crews were interned, but not in prison camps; rather in inns and hotels and even private homes. They were free to travel in Sweden, sightsee, visit folks, enjoy restaurants and night-life, discuss philosophy with the always-friendly blondes, enjoy peace and civilian life in a nation not torn by war. It was a cushy life – until they got sent back to England to get back into the war.

That much is fact. The rest is fiction: The Jumpin' Jimminy and its 10-man crew, the Japanese submarine and its crew who invented ju-jitsu baseball, the baseball-crazy Swedish Major, the “essential” jobs dreamed up to keep the crew in Sweden, the crew's exciting OSS adventures, and finally, the Swedish World Series, played on neutral ground as the war in Europe ends and while Japan still fights on.

Despite the story's comedy, it does make a clear point that will be widely appreciated by Americans and Japanese. The Swedish World Series opens with the opposing teams the deadly enemies that the war has made them. The Series ends – or continues without ending – with the Yanks and the Japanese having gained each others' respect, trust, admiration and friendship, all thanks to baseball.

This would be the first film of American and Japanese warriors playing baseball – young men in World War II who know that facing off on the ball field makes far more sense than killing on the battlefield.

And now to the story.....

Story Overview

The Jumpin' Jimminy's number three engine has just conked out, and the number one is smoking worse than has been since the Messerschmidts that weren't supposed to be there were there.

Captain Jeff Cabot, the pilot, is sweating, and Boston Brahmins don't sweat. His co-pilot, **Lieutenant Ed Kowalski**, is making like an organ player to keep the remaining two engines of the B-17 working their hearts out. The rest of the crew are praying, in Southern Baptist, Latin, Hebrew, Atheist and in anything else they can think of. They're praying that navigator **Lieutenant Pete Fielding**, the intellectual with the eyeglasses, has aimed the ship to neutral

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Sweden, where every Yank airman in the European theater knows friendly blondes, who all look like Ingrid Bergman, are waiting with open arms.

A puff of an anti-aircraft shell just ahead of the plane makes **Lieutenant Carl Jacobson**, the bombardier, wonder aloud if they're really over neutral Sweden. It wouldn't be too healthy for a nice Jewish boy from Brooklyn to end up in the hands of folks he's just been bombing, even though he looks more Aryan than anyone in Hitler's gang of thugs.

It's autumn of 1944, and up until the moment they got hammered, the Jumpin' Jimminy crew was busy arguing over the upcoming World Series, between the St. Louis teams, the Browns and the Cardinals. Maybe if they'd been paying attention to the skies around them, they wouldn't have been jumped.

But their General Manager, the General, had insisted it was a milk run. The General's assigning his entire team, the best ball team in the Eighth Air Force, as the ten-man crew of the Jumpin' Jimminy would be considered by some, as putting all his eggs into one basket. But the General is a gambling man, and he wants the entire team readily available to beat any damn team any unit can put up against his boys.

And now the Jumpin' Jimminy crew is heading for the biggest game ever, even though they don't know it yet. Not in their wildest dreams would the guys imagine playing a World Series in neutral Sweden. And against a Japanese team, no less.

The radio comes to life and a heavily accented voice welcomes the plane to Sweden. The anti-aircraft shell, sorry, is just a formality. Big Swedish joke, **Corporal Napoleon Anderson** responds from his tail gunner position, in fluent colloquial Swedish, which he picked up working at Swanson's market in Andersonville, the Swede section of Chicago. Napoleon Anderson was a big attraction at Swanson's, since he's a black and blacks are not Swedes, and he's a big attraction in a bomber crew, since blacks are not in bomber crews either in the segregated US Army in World War II.

But the General couldn't care less what color a man is, as long as he could play ball, and Napoleon Anderson is one hot shortstop, having played for the Negro Leagues, which is as close to the Big Leagues as any of the Jumpin' Jimminy crew ever played, although several played in top farm teams. So the General made him an honorary Mexican. Heck, we have gunner **Private Gus Sanchez**, a Mexican pitcher/utility man already on the team, might as well have two Mexicans, he said, give Gus some company.

The rest of the team is all-American: you name it, you got it: A Mississippi Romeo, a fast-talking New York Irishman, a couple of Bostonians, and a Missouri preacher. Ahh, the greatest generation, all in one bomber, all on one team, all on one mighty crusade.

But right now, the prime goal of their crusade is to land this ship before it falls apart.

Jeff Cabot is the most surprised crewman when the Jumpin' Jimminy somehow lands in one piece, more or less, at a south Swedish airfield. The field is packed with scores of Yank and British bombers that couldn't make it back to England after raids on Germany. Before the war is over a total of 119 American planes, most of them B-17 Flying Fortresses, make it to neutral Sweden. The Eighth Air force has plenty of planes. But not experienced crews. So Yanks who land in Sweden are being returned to England to continue the fight as fast as paperwork and transport can be arranged.

The crew piles out of the plane before it explodes, which they fear is very likely, and then discovers Napoleon isn't out yet. A Three Stooges Swedish rescue team goes in, pulls out Napoleon, totally wrapped in a blanket, hustles him into an ambulance, and off it disappears, siren hee-hawing. The officer in charge tells the crew the man was badly burned, he's all black. The Yanks roar with laughter. The dour Swedes mutter something about crazy American comedians.

The crew goes through the bureaucratic paperwork that's the same in every Army of the world, and is reunited with Napoleon, who has mesmerized a Swedish hospital, especially the wide-eyed nurses, with his perfect Swedish, muscular body and other Anderson attributes. They pile onto a train for a trip through peaceful, Sweden, heading to internment.

They see a nation at peace. No destruction like they've seen close up in England and far down below in Germany. The Swedes are well fed, well dressed, content. Beautiful girls, always beautiful girls.

Aboard the train, Carl Jacobson, has a long conversation with a Swedish escort officer. They speak in German, which is the officer's foreign language and Jacobson's easy minor at CCNY. The officer thinks Jacobson speaks a Swiss German dialect. OK, so it's German with a Yiddish accent, but who cares.

In the car with enlisted men, Napoleon Anderson is definitely identified as a distant kin of their Swedish escort sergeant, whose cousin emigrated to Chicago and would write home of his great adventures, especially with the ladies. How else could a black American speak Swedish (and with a provincial dialect) and be named Anderson, one of the most common names in Sweden? Napoleon lets the sergeant's imagination run wild. Why ruin a man's good story with facts? Napoleon liked being a Swede.

The crew finally arrives at a Yank internment facility -- a country inn, a huge wooden gingerbread building with a number of separate cottages, one of many such places taken over by the Swedish Government for interning Americans, Brits, Germans and any other lucky military who make it to peace and safety in Sweden. It's outside of the town of Falun, in the picturesque mountain province of Dalarna, where girls are known for their blonde beauty, although all Yanks quickly discover that the entire country is packed with blonde beauties.

They meet the Swedish officer in charge, **Major Karlsson**, who quickly loses his Swedish formality when he starts asking about the World Series.

The crew can't believe it. Here's a Swede who is nuts about baseball, to which he was introduced at exhibition games at the 1912 Olympics in Stockholm. Jim Thorpe, the hero of those Olympics, who played in some exhibition ball games, became his hero. The Major worked for hotels in the USA in the 1920s and 1930s, and took in plenty of ball games. He returned home before the war and was managing the Grand Hotel, the finest hotel in Stockholm, when called up for service, and was then put in charge of internees.

The Major explains how a Japanese team has been making meatballs of his own Swedish amateur teams. More amazing stuff the crew can't believe. Oh sure, they know the Japanese love baseball, even made it their national sport. Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig and others Big Leaguers played exhibition games in Japan in the 1930s.

But a Japanese team in Sweden? C'mon! Major Karlsson swears it's true. They're from an interned submarine that the Japanese were sailing home from Germany. It went on the rocks in

Sweden, thanks to compasses installed backward. The crew was ready to commit hara-kiri but was stopped by order of Emperor Hirohito himself. Admiral Tojo wanted that German u-boat, the very latest Kraut job. Tojo planned to use it as a model for a new class Japanese sub. He'd show the Germans how to build the best submarine in the world.

Major Karlsson is overjoyed to learn he now is host to the best ball team in Europe, a ball team he can to put up against the Japanese. The crew is ready and willing. They'd beat the Japanese like the Yanks are beating the Japanese in the Pacific.

But could fighting men of warring nations face each other on a sports field? Major Karlsson says there is nothing in the Geneva Convention prohibiting it, nor in the Official Rules of Baseball.

Formalities are just a minor nuisance for the Major. He has fixed things for just about every big wheel in Sweden when he ran the Grand Hotel. He's owed favors by the truck-load.

Major Karlsson envisions a real Swedish World Series, beginning next spring, in 1945. But first, the Major must find essential jobs for the Americans, so they can spend the winter in Sweden, get in some spring training, and then start the Series. He can't have them rotated back to England, like other crews.

The Major wins full support of the top brass at the American Legation. They love the idea of seeing Americans whipping the Japanese in a Series in Stockholm, in the first and only Swedish World Series.

Using contacts and imagination, Major Karlsson places each member of the crew in a job that is absolutely vital for American and Swedish interests.

Two main characters, Jeff Cabot and Carl Jacobson, get recruited for special undercover missions for the OSS, the American espionage service.

Jeff Cabot is assigned to work in a bank, one that has historic ties to his own family bank in Boston. The Stockholm OSS team of Hank and Joe -- we never know their real names -- assigns him to "liberate" the entire files of top Nazi bank accounts from the bank's closely guarded, underground vaults. With the help of his assistant, Ulla, he pulls off this daring feat by using the old switcheroo and simply walking out with the files. The bank obviously never admits the loss, since they never admit they held the millions stashed away by the German leaders.

Carl Jacobson, with his blond-blue-eyed Aryan looks and knowledge of German, is recruited by Hank and Joe of the OSS to become the SS officer in charge of the internment camp for German officers. The fact that he's American and Jewish, is a minor matter, as long as he keeps his dick out of sight.

His big mission is obtaining a secret list of Swedes and locations available to help fleeing Nazi big-shots. He agrees to the crazy scheme only because he's able to boss around Germans and he also gets a chance scout the Jap team, making a friendly call to sailors of a fellow Axis nation. What he sees is shocking: The Japanese, bored silly, have developed what they call Ju-Jitsu Basebaru -- in which every and any dirty, sneaky, crippling ju-jitsu move is permissible in a ball game.

Carl Jacobson has a wonderful couple days in Stockholm, made interesting by Fraulein Shultz of the German Legation. He scares the pants off every German official in Stockholm, and there are hundreds, as he tracks down the secret list of Swedish friends of the Nazis.

Meanwhile, the rest of the crew finds their own slots for brave, patriotic duty in neutral Sweden, while anxiously waiting for the start of Spring Training.

Napoleon Anderson gets approval to visit his “cousins” on an island in the Stockholm archipelago. Here, he spends the winter, with a charming very distant relative, helping his new-found kin to improve the quality of their moonshine akvavit. His cousins honor him with a special label: Napoleon's Reserve.

The other crewmen get equally screwball assignments – from a Bible thumping revival tour to teaching Swedes to make Polish kielbasa, from introducing the Welcome Wagon for Allied fliers to cooking chili for the Mexican Ambassador.

Then, spring, and Spring Training. The war is coming to an end, when the Series starts in a special ball park built in Stockholm. The Major finds neutral diplomats and businessmen who know baseball to serve as umpires. Stockholmers flock to the field to enjoy the excitement.

The Series begins, and the teams play their hearts out. Real ball, and none of the Japanese “ju-jitsu.” It turns into an extended see-saw battle, with the teams gaining respect for each other as the Series continues.

The war in Europe ends, and the games continue. And continue and continue, even after the Japanese surrender.

According to Major Karlsson, the Series never ended.

The characters: the Yanks

Captain Jeff Cabot, pilot and pitcher, is Boston Brahmin, with all the advantages that class, Harvard, and inherited wealth provide: good looks, charm, and a disdain for drudgery in his family's bank. He loves flying, and loves baseball even more. Jeff spends his time in Sweden making life exciting for a special young lady he gets to help him to carry out a secret Allied espionage robbery at a Stockholm bank.

Second Lieutenant Carl Jacobson, bombardier and first baseman, is tall, rugged, blonde, blue-eyed and the call-central-casting type for a Nordic Aryan, except he's a New York Jewish kid with a CCNY degree. His knowledge of Yiddish-tinged German gets him an assignment by the OSS, the American spy organization, to pose as an SS officer in charge of the Swedes' internment camp for German military. From there, he is able to scout the baseball team of the Japanese submarine crew as they train for the World Series.

Napoleon Anderson, Corporal, tail-gunner and shortstop, is the only black in a bomber air crew in the Eighth Air Force. His talents, playing in the Negro League, earned him the assignment. Napoleon is small, wiry -- an advantage for a tail gunner – and, amazingly, speaks fluent Swedish, which he learned working at Swanson's market in Chicago's Andersonville, the heart of the Swede neighborhood. Napoleon gets permission to spend the winter looking up his long-lost “relatives” on an island in the Swedish archipelago. There, he teaches his “kin” how to improve their famous local product, bootleg moonshine.

Sergeant Joe Bacciagalupo, gunner and catcher, is a burly, bright, boisterous Bostonian, from the polyglot West End, on the other side of Beacon Hill from where Jeff Cabot was raised. They

actually played ball together as kids on Boston Common. Joe was working his way through night law school, and playing semi-pro ball, when drafted. He gets a job teaching English at Falun High School in the town where the Americans are interned. A generation of Swedes grow up being able to perfectly pronounce Havahd Yahd, Baaston and other Beantown peculiarities.

Lieutenant Ed Kowalski, co-pilot and second baseman, the first of his Polish-American Pittsburg family to go to college, is assigned as liaison to the Polish army and navy men who found refuge in Sweden. An officer and gentleman, has not forgotten his roots, nor his mother's kitchen. He puts his Polish cooking talents to use by introducing Sweden to the delights of kielbasa. The traditional Swedish sausage made in the town, Falukorv, is famous because it's tasteless. All foreigners, especially the Poles, living in Sweden say a silent thank-you to the Pittsburgh chef, airman and second baseman, for his culinary achievements worthy of a Nobel Prize.

Lieutenant Pete Fielding, navigator and right fielder, is a studious type who managed to get a flying assignment despite his eyeglasses. A brilliant navigator, Pete is famous for getting lost on the ground. He's assigned to prepare up-to-date maps of airfields and roads that the Allies can use for emergencies or if Sweden gets drawn into the war.

Sergeant Joshua Bennett, radioman-gunner and third-baseman, would have been an itinerant preacher, like his Missouri dad and granddad, if he didn't love baseball, and girls more than spreading the Good Word. But he liked baseball and girls better, so he transferred from the Bible College to the University of Missouri to study physics. Fortunately, he retained his preacher talents, and he agrees to tour Sweden as a holy-roller, with his words of faith and spirituality translated into Swedish by two buxom blondes, whose religion includes generosity and sharing. Preacher Bennett becomes the star attraction of the Swedish revival circuit.

Private Mickey O'Mallery, gunner and center fielder, is a New York Irish entrepreneur and street business tycoon. To make best use of time before spring training, he creates a "Welcome Wagon", sponsored by local merchants. His wagon - with samples of the town's wares - and with two charming blonde assistants, meets every Allied plane that makes a forced landing in Sweden.

Private B.J. Jones, gunner and left fielder, is a handsome southern gentleman from Pascagoula, Mississippi. Girls find him irresistible, which causes some problems with paternity suits since there are so many Yank crewmen named "Jones." Between appearances in family court, B.J. a farm boy who can do anything with his hands, teaches a Swedish carpenter shop owner to make baseball bats and a leather goods factory to make baseball gloves.

Private Gus Sanchez, gunner and relief pitcher/utility, played with Mexican teams before being drafted by a Texas team and then drafted by the US Army. His chili is famous in the Eighth Air Force, which makes it easy for him to get a job as cook for the Mexican ambassador in Stockholm. Gus has a lovely winter waiting for spring training, as he carefully teaches an eager blonde assistant chef the secrets of real chili and real Mexican heat.

The Swedish Major and the Japanese Commander:

Major Karlsson is not your typical Swede. He laughs, he's outgoing, he's an enthusiastic wheeler-dealer -- and loves baseball. In civilian life, a professional hotel manager, he lost his gloomy Swedish reticence by working in America for years before returning home to Sweden. He's in his mid-40s, and, through his many discrete hotel favors, has top connections with Sweden's business, political and diplomatic elite.

“The Commander” studied engineering at Caltech before returning home to Japan and to his Navy career. Because of the highly unusual circumstances of the submarine crew -- the only Japanese sub crew ever interned -- “The Commander” is able to relax, and almost become “one of the boys.” This enables him to manage the crew's baseball team -- when he's not hustling fresh whale meat from Norway for the best sushi outside Japan.

Other

The number of Japanese ball players playing in the USA major leagues adds attraction to this film idea. Japanese players have been on Major League teams since the mid 60s. There are numerous Japanese players today in the Majors, names such as Ichiro, Hideo Nomo, Hideki Matsui and Shingo Takatsu.

About the Author

Robert Skole is a baseball fan. Robert Skole is also a reporter, foreign correspondent and author, having worked for newspapers and magazines in Massachusetts, Florida, Japan, and Europe. He was a reporter for McGraw-Hill business and trade publications for 25 years, serving as bureau chief for *Electronics* magazine in Washington and as chief correspondent in Scandinavia for McGraw-Hill World News. He has reported for a wide range of business and technical publications, including *Business Week*, *Nucleonics Week*, *Chemical Week*, *Engineering News-Record* and *American Machinist*.

Robert Skole was founder and editor of *Sweden Business Report*, a bi-weekly newsletter covering Swedish corporations and the stock market. His freelance articles have appeared in the *Boston Globe*; *Esquire*; *Washington Star*; *The Nation*; *Japan Times*; Germany's *Manager Magazine*; *L'Expansion*, of France; and other publications.

He has written and edited a dozen books, including the English edition of *Hasselblad, the Man and the Camera*; *Sweden in Focus*; *Sweden-USA*; and *The Volvo Guide to Halls of Fame* (co-authored). *Jumpin' Jimminy -- A World War II Baseball Saga* is his first novel. He served in the 8th Cavalry Regiment in the Japan occupation. A native of Massachusetts, he and his wife, Monika, a Swedish journalist, live in Boston and Stockholm. He is working on two mysteries; the first, *Killer Condo*, will be published in the near future.

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