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Hogan's Heroes: Fact or Fiction?

Mark Granicke (Advisor: Dr. Christoph Schiessl, Honors 3030)

Introduction

- The show ran from 1965-1971. Col. Hogan and his men run an underground sabotage unit from within Luft Stalag 13 during World War II (WWII). Germans in the show, including the commandant Col. Klink, are portrayed as idiots whom Hogan and his men repeatedly fool.
- The show received many positive reviews, running for six seasons. Critics praised the show for its creative writing, mocking the Nazis at every opportunity.
- The show also faced two main critiques:
 - The portrayal of Germans as “hopeless oafs” and the conditions/lifestyle of prisoners of war (POWs) were inaccurate.
 - Some saw the show as offensive to survivors and victims of the Holocaust, as many at the time thought the show was making fun of a concentration camp.



LeBeau cooking with fresh meat and spices in the barracks, which would have been impossible for POWs
Source: *Cuisine à la Stalag 13*, CBS, September 20, 1970

Controversy

- Viewers thought the show was mocking concentration camps initially. *MAD* magazine featured a parody comic set in Buchenwald.
- Four of the main Germans were played by Jewish actors, as well as Clary, a Jewish Holocaust survivor, who played LeBeau, and were comfortable with their roles.
- The Jewish creators and writers of the show were conscious of this, and the Germans were constantly portrayed as fools who never win, mocking Nazi ideals.
- The character of Kinch was respectful to African-Americans; he was treated with equal respect to other characters, and further mocked Nazi racial ideals.
- The show aired during the height of the Vietnam War, and many of its episodes were commentary on war, such as draft dodging, peaceful protests, and Soviet relations.



Main stars, from left to right:

Sgt. Schultz, Col. Hogan, Col. Klink

Source: <https://www.meriv.com/lists/12-incredibly-true-facts-about-hogans-heroes>

Accuracy

- The inmate LeBeau often cooked gourmet food, both for other prisoners and German parties, while real POWs rarely had fresh produce and survived on thin soup and hard bread.
- Stalag 13's barracks are spacious and well-kept while real barracks were overcrowded and dirty.
- Real barracks housed many prisoners and allowed little personal space for individual prisoners. Tables and beds were not always guaranteed.
- Cleanliness was also a big concern. Prisoners and clothes were regularly deloused to kill lice, which also infested mattresses. This was not brought up in show, and the delousing station was often the butt of jokes.
- Sgt. Schultz was often bribed with LeBeau's cooking, or candy and cigarettes from Red Cross packages. There were guards who became friendly with American prisoners in hopes of getting American cigarettes and coffee.



Newkirk salutes as Carter impersonates Hitler for a scheme
Source: *Will the Real Adolf Please Stand Up?*, CBS, December 2, 1966

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