

# THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



## # 865 The .243 Hitter Who Didn't Get Ready. He Was Ready.

There's a baseball card on display at CIA headquarters, in Langley, Virginia. I'm Jerry Roberts, and today, I'll tell you how that came to be. It's coming next, on The Extra Point.

When baseball greats Babe Ruth and Lou Gehrig went on tour in baseball-crazy Japan in 1934, some fans wondered why a third-string catcher named Moe Berg was included on the team. He certainly wasn't a big name player, so why was he there?

Berg was put on the team for one simple reason. He was a United States spy, working undercover with the Office of Strategic Services (the predecessor of today's CIA).

Before we explore that side of his story, I can tell you he set out to be a pro baseball player. Over the course of his 13-year Major League career, playing for five teams, Berg hit a grand total of 6 home runs and his batting average was .243. He wasn't exactly Hall of Fame caliber.

Berg he had two loves, baseball and spying. In high school, he learned Latin, Greek and French. He graduated magna cum laude from Princeton University, having added Spanish, Italian, German and Sanskrit to his linguistic repertoire. He would describe baseball plays in Latin or Sanskrit when playing for his college team.

During further studies at the Sorbonne, in Paris, and Columbia Law School, he picked up Japanese, Chinese, Korean, Indian, Arabic, Portuguese and Hungarian. He could speak 15 languages in all, plus some regional dialects. He read at least 10 newspapers every day. His talents didn't go unnoticed.

A month after Pearl Harbor was attacked, Berg entered into the war effort. Among his assignments was to parachute into Yugoslavia to assess the value to the war effort of the two

groups of partisans there. Berg also penetrated German-held Norway, met with members of the underground and located a secret heavy-water plant — evidence of the Nazis' effort to build an atomic bomb.

His information guided Britain's Royal Air Force in a bombing raid to destroy that plant. However, no one really knew how close the Nazis were to building their first atomic bomb. If they were successful, they would win the war.

Berg was of the Jewish faith, and no doubt understood the plight of Jews under the reach of Adolf Hitler's Third Reich. He accepted an assignment to go to Switzerland to hear a lecture given by leading German physicist Werner Heisenberg, to determine if the Nazis were close to building an A-bomb.

Posing as a Swiss graduate student, he slipped by Nazi guards and took a seat in the front row. In his pocket, he carried a pistol and a cyanide pill. If Heisenberg indicated the Nazis were close to building a weapon, Berg was to shoot the German and then swallow the cyanide pill. In essence, he was on a likely suicide mission.

Just feet away from the podium, Berg listened carefully as Heisenberg spoke. When he ended his speech, Berg determined the Germans were nowhere near their goal of producing the bomb. He then complimented the man on his speech and walked him back to his hotel.

After the war and several years of valuable service, including difficult and dangerous assignments, Berg was awarded the Medal of Freedom, America's highest honor for a civilian in wartime. Berg refused to accept it, without explanation. After his death, his sister accepted the Medal.

It now hangs in the Baseball Hall of Fame, in Cooperstown, New York.  
(Con't.)

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His life didn't end well, as he went through a couple of tough decades following his resignation from the OSS after the war.

My takeaway is Berg's story is one of incredible preparation. It's about constantly adding to your skill set, even though you don't know when — or if — that preparation will ever result in a career move that will take advantage of what you've learned.

Berg didn't get ready when the opportunity came. He prepared, then waited on the opportunity. He WAS ready. There's a difference.

Let's add belief and commitment. Berg saw the larger picture. He saw the very real prospect of a world dominated by the Nazis. He didn't hesitate to accept a mission that had a high probability of ending in his death. That's commitment. Commitment borne of belief.

It's unlikely that you or I will ever be called upon to make such an incredible commitment. Yet, in order to fulfill our destiny, to reach our goals and desires, we also need to commit, and that needs to come from our belief that such a goal, desire, or destiny is worth the price.

What do you want? Establish the goal. Set the commitment, Pay the price.

Moe Berg's sports career was unremarkable. Moe Berg's contribution to America is undeniable. If you ever visit the CIA headquarters and its museum, make sure you look for the baseball card of a .243 hitter who made an all-star difference for America and the world.

That's The Extra Point. Be responsible and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.  
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