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| |  | | --- | | **WASHINGTON, D.C. (March 14, 2019)** – As the Seattle Mariners and the Oakland Athletics prepare to travel to Tokyo to face off in their Major League season opener on March 20 and 21, one can't help but look back and celebrate the 85th anniversary of **Moe Berg** and the All Americans baseball team barnstorming Japan in a series of goodwill exhibition games, while Berg secretly gathered intelligence in Tokyo.  For that historic trip in 1934, Berg joined an incredible roster of American League All-Stars that included Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Jimmie Foxx, Charlie Gehringer, Earl Averill, Lefty Gomez, and manager Connie Mack.  Berg had traveled to Japan in 1932 so it was his second visit to the country under the guise of being a baseball goodwill ambassador.  It all adds to the mystique of Berg and the excitement of Opening Day for the release of ***The Spy Behind Home Plate,*** the newest film about an unknown Jewish hero from award-winning documentary filmmaker **Aviva Kempner**.  *The Spy Behind Home Plate*, set for national release on **Friday, May 24**, is the first feature-length documentary about Berg, the enigmatic and brilliant baseball player who turned spy for the U.S. Office of Strategic Services (OSS) during World War II.  The film will play festivals and theaters across the U.S. and internationally. | |

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Diamond Law Library.*  *Columbia University School of Law and Banzai Babe Ruth author Robert Fitts* |  |  | | --- | | Berg embarked on that 1934 Japan tour armed with his catcher’s gear, a state-of-the art Bell & Howell movie camera and a letter of introduction from Secretary of State Cordell Hull.  Was Berg already spying for the U.S.?  At great personal risk (this was militaristic Japan already at diplomatic odds with the U.S.), dressed in a kimono and a pair of geta sandals, his thick hair slicked back and parted in the middle, the six-foot-one-inch tall Berg made his way to Saint Luke's Hospital with his movie camera hidden under his kimono.  He used the clever excuse of visiting the U.S. Ambassador’s daughter who had just given birth to gain entry into the hospital.  Climbing up the tower on the roof of Saint Luke's (now known as the Old Building), which was then the highest point in Tokyo, Berg filmed the panorama of the Tokyo skyline, including factories, Tokyo Harbor and military installations.  How the footage made it back to the States is anyone's guess.  Years later, it was believed to be viewed by military personnel planning Jimmy Doolittle's daring bombing raid over Tokyo in 1942.  "Eighty-five years ago, Moe Berg’s trip to Japan was not just about showing his catching skills in exhibition games.  In the company of such All-Star players, Berg displayed his unique traits of being the brainiest man in baseball and the most secretive," said Kempner.  “On the cruise over, he charmed Babe Ruth’s daughter Julia (who passed away last week).  She describes how *'I enjoyed dancing with him.  Almost, not quite, almost as much as I did with my father.’*  "More importantly, Berg showed his diplomatic chops by improving on theJapanese he had learned on his 1932 baseball exchange trip.  Berg impressed Babe Ruth by spouting his Japanese vocabulary upon arrival.  And you have to admire his clever plan to visit the hospital on a bogus excuse, while risking being arrested for filming the Tokyo skyline.  For Moe, the 1934 trip was akin to a training mission to becoming a spy for America."  Berg not only played for the last Washington Senators team to play in a World Series (1933), but he also trained years later with the OSS not far from the D.C. team's home, Griffith Stadium.  *The Spy Behind Home Plate*features rare historical footage, as well as revealing interviews with an All-Star roster of celebrities and other individuals from the worlds of sports, spy craft and World War II history.  Interviewees include Berg’s relatives, fellow baseball players, biographer Nicholas Dawidoff, authors David Ignatius and Thomas Powers, MLB historian John Thorn, film professor Dr. Annette Insdorf, playwright Michael Frayn, sports commentator Larry Merchant, sports columnist Ira Berkow, OSS Society president Charles Pinck, Los Angeles Angels manager Brad Ausmus, U.S. Senator Ed Markey and baseball executives Jerry Reinsdorf and Bud Selig.  Kempner, who produced, wrote and directed the film, added, “Moe Berg is finally achieving the recognition he so deserves as a World War II hero.  This full-length feature documentary explores the broader landscape of his immigrant Jewish upbringing, why he was called the brainiest man in baseball, and his many courageous OSS missions geared towards preventing the Nazis from developing the atomic bomb.  Berg is the American hero we all need to know more about!”  Born in New York, Berg grew up in Newark, New Jersey.  The erudite Major League catcher played on five different baseball teams in the '20s and '30s, spoke a multitude of languages, earned degrees from Princeton University and Columbia University Law School, and attended the Sorbonne.  In 2018, Berg and the 13,000 heroic men and women of the OSS finally received a well-deserved Congressional Gold Medal during a moving ceremony where Berg’s heroism was cited.  Berg played for the Brooklyn Robins (which became the Dodgers), the Chicago White Sox, the Cleveland Indians, the Washington Senators, and the Boston Red Sox during baseball's Golden Age. | | A black and white photo of a person  Description automatically generated |  |  | | --- | | *Courtesy of the National Baseball Hall of Fame* | | Berg may have had only a .243 batting average during his 15-year Major League career, but it was the stats he collected for the OSS that made him a most valuable player to his country during World War II.  He was selected by the OSS for a mission to interview top Italian physicists to assess their knowledge of the Germans’ bomb program.    He worked for the OSS in a prominent role in U.S. efforts to undermine the German atomic bomb program.  In 1944, the OSS assigned him to attend a lecture by German physicist Werner Heisenberg in Zurich.  For the trip to Switzerland, Berg was given a gun and a cyanide pill to take with him and was instructed to shoot Heisenberg if he was constructing an atomic bomb for the Nazis. After WWII, Berg remained elusive and later became reclusive.    Based in Washington, D.C., Kempner, a director-writer-producer dynamo, boasts a resume of critically acclaimed and award-winning documentaries, including *Rosenwald, Yoo-Hoo, Mrs. Goldberg*, and Peabody winner*The Life and Times of Hank Greenberg*. She also produced another WWII documentary, *Partisans of Vilna*.  The child of U.S. Army officer Harold Kempner and Polish Holocaust survivor Helen Ciesla, Kempner was born in post-World War II Berlin, Germany.  Her family history inspired her to make films about under-known Jewish heroes--television pioneer Gertrude Berg, Hall of Fame baseball superstar Hank Greenberg, philanthropist Julius Rosenwald, and the Jewish resistance to the Nazis.  Her films have received top honors from The National Society of Film Critics, the New York Film Critics Circle, the Broadcast Film Critics Association and CINE Golden Eagle and Peabody Awards.    Kempner is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and is an avid voting rights advocate for the District of Columbia.    For more information on*The Spy Behind Home Plate,* including events and speaker programs related to the film, please visit [www.spybehindhomeplate.org](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001f4nSYLK17l3RhKxC86PIrVYUlC92fU3IJ3ArogkVQ-GH_gm2srKgXwaV1_IrQxy_GCEdHJ8b08DJLl0pEneGtpZhouug0Y81znJJ3L1QpJpJNFiyCMHSXNna4wvtBOHeQoFpO-YdO-ZbhoYUuICBwfy8GTyxF0lA&c=zqOQbWFsJFo2TEo6yU7ZVfv8VaahhRMT1DuREwttZTbNG8OPHGUhbQ==&ch=CjhYO5Gzvxk6VV9EZXLrhbD8sT2ze0yySzAGa_3hcgkFCIljLoab7A==).    #          #          #  **For booking:**  Michael Tuckman at [michael@mtuckmanmedia.com](mailto:michael@mtuckmanmedia.com)  ***National / New York***  Adam J. Segal of The 2050 Group – Publicity: 212.642.4317[adam@the2050group.com](mailto:adam@the2050group.com)  **To schedule an interview for a sports publication:**  Fred Sternburg at Sternburg Communications: (303) 548-0707,[toofred@aol.com](mailto:toofred@aol.com)  **To schedule an interview for an entertainment publication:**  Ziggy Kozlowski at Block-Korenbrot Public Relations, (323) 634-7001,  [zkozlowski@bk-pr.com](mailto:zkozlowski@bk-pr.com)  **Outreach:**  The Ciesla Foundation  (202) 362-5760  [cieslafdn@gmail.com](mailto:cieslafdn@gmail.com) | |