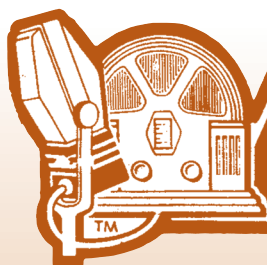


ABBOTT & COSTELLO MEET BILL STERN • ARF, OINK, NEIGH & ZOONEY-OOPS WITH FRANK MILANO



sperdvac

RADIOGRAM

Volume 47 • Number 10

March/April 2024



OPERATION S.O.S. PAGE 6



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- LEE SMITH to my dad, Ray Newton, a big fan
- MICKEY SMITH in memory of my beloved wife, Mary
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from the president

GREETINGS ESTEEMED SPERDVAC MEMBERS,

AS WE FIND OURSELVES well on our way into 2024, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to all who have reached out to us through info@spervac.com. Your voices resonate deeply within our organization, shaping our decisions and directing our focus. It's truly heartening to hear the tales you share and reminisce on the journey we've undertaken thus far.

Speaking of journeys, our SPERDVAC archives have embarked on a transition of their own, bidding farewell to their former abode in Whittier, CA, and finding a new home in the Irvine area. The time had come to bestow upon our archives the upgrade they rightfully deserve. The meticulous care and precision exercised during the preparation and relocation process were paramount; safeguarding our collection for posterity stands as one of the pillars of our organization. My sincerest thanks extend to all board members and volunteers whose unwavering dedication made this transition possible. It is only through your tireless efforts that we have achieved our goal.

However, as the dust settles on this monumental relocation, we must acknowledge that this is merely the commencement of a new chapter. Whereas our archives were once confined unilateral access now beckons with newfound accessibility. With stacks upon stacks and shelves brimming with materials, the daunting question arises: how long will this endeavor take? Indeed, it may span decades! Yet, in the face of such a monumental task, I am reminded of a poignant quote from President John F. Kennedy's inaugural address on January 20th, 1961:

"All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin."

Moreover, President Kennedy highlighted another crucial aspect that resonates deeply with our ongoing efforts: volunteerism. As avid readers of this

column are aware, "Many hands make a light load." If you find yourself in the southern California vicinity and harbor a desire to contribute to our preservation endeavors, I implore you to reach out to us at info@spervac.com or via mail at the address 2625 Middlefield Rd. #171, Palo Alto, CA 94306-2516. Additionally, if you possess expertise in audio restoration or are acquainted with someone who does, please do not hesitate to make your talents known.

Lastly, it's imperative to acknowledge that the relocation was not without its fiscal burdens. Rest assured, your board of directors meticulously planned and executed the move with utmost prudence. Should you wish to offer your support and alleviate some of the financial strain incurred, contributions can be sent to our mailing address. Please designate your support "Archives Preservation." Further updates regarding our progress in tackling the monumental task ahead shall be forthcoming.

Until we next time stay safe and stay tuned.📻

Timothy Knofler



ADVERTISER: COLGATE-PAULMOLIVE-PEET CO.
 PRODUCT: COLGATE SHAVE CREAM
 PROGRAM: COLGATE SPORTS NEWSREEL
 DATE OF BROADCAST: JANUARY 4, 1946
 DAY: FRIDAY TIME: 10:30-10:45 PM EST
 DATE OF RECORDING:

NBC
 322



Two Wits Heard On Bill Stern Show On WFBC. NBC, 10:30

The sounds of hunting, punctuated by noises of barking dogs and cries of "Tally Ho!" will be heard on WFBC-NBC's Colgate Sports Newsreel when Abbott and Costello visit the program as guest of Bill Stern on his program to be heard tonight at 10:30 p. m. over WFBC-NBC.

Bitten by the "social" bug since their appearance in the film "In Society," the ludicrous pair decided to adopt the sport of fox-hunting in confluence with their newly acquired cultural ambitions.

They will discuss with Stern such problems of fox-hunting etiquette as how to sit on a horse, how to recognize a fox and the proper attire to be worn.

Fox-hunting is not found in the script, nor do Bud and Lou return for a second segment as noted in the script. Greenville (SC) News - January 4, 1946.

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STERN: Reel Three! Colgates Camera Close-Up - of Hollywood! We're broadcasting from Hollywood tonight -- and here in Hollywood -- Two of the brightest stars are Abbott and Costello! You've all laughed at their radio show on Thursday nights. You've all seen Abbott and Costello in their pictures -- now meet 'em in person 3- Bud Abbott and Lou Costello!

BOTH: Hello, everybody.

STERN: Good evening Bud -- good evening Lou. How about you two boys telling the audience that sport story you told me. You start Lou.

LOU: O.K. Bill. It's the story of a couple of basketball players. One of them was named Francis Critell - he played for a basketball team from Patterson, New Jersey.

BUD: And the other was named Buddy Taboa - he played for a team from Camden, New Jersey.

STERN: Yes .. I remember the teams -- and I remember, too, that Francis Critell and Buddy Taboa were both great basketball players playing for great teams. But go on with your story, boys.

LOU: Well in 1922 both of these teams were undefeated, and finally they met in the last game of the year.

BUD: And it was some game, Bill -- it wasn't just a battle between two teams -- it turned into a personal battle between Francis Critell of Patterson and Buddy Taboa of Camden.

LOU: Everybody thought the game was going to end in a fist fight --

Bud & Lou... Who?



Script courtesy Conlie Archives

C-O-L-G-A-T-E
Colgate presents
BILL STERN
with the Colgate Shave Cream
Sports Newsreel

THE COLGATE SPORTS NEWSREEL, known by many other names including *Bill Stern's Colgate Sports Newsreel*, *The Bill Stern Sports Review*, and *The Colgate Sports Newsreel of the Air*, was a 15-minute commentary/interview show featuring sports figures and those associated with sports. The interlocutor was radio's pre-eminent sports broadcaster Bill Stern, whose objective seemed to be "never let the truth interfere with a good story." As OTR historian John Dunning noted in *On the Air: The Encyclopedia of Old-time Radio*, "Bill Stern never let the facts get in the way of a good story" with Stern himself admitting that his stories were "some true, some hearsay, but all so interesting we'd like to pass them along to you."

"So interesting" seems to be the judgment of radio historians with regard to Stern. Frank Buxton and Bill Owen (*The Big Broadcast* 2nd ed. 1997) summarized such by noting that, "Those who criticized his lack of concern for veracity admitted to his great talent as an entertainer," adding that, "few questioned his knowledge of sports, his energy, sense of timing, and announcing skill."

Among the guests of this long running series were sports figures Babe Ruth, Joe DiMaggio, Leo Durocher and Rocky Graziano. Non-sports figures who appeared included Pat O'Brien and Ronald Reagan, known by entertainment fans as Knute Rockne and George Gipp, respectively, from the film,

Knute Rockne, All American (1940), the film from which we get the memorable line, "Win this one for the Gipper."

Also in the *Colgate Sports Newsreel* lineup were Bud Abbott and Lou Costello, as seen here in these script pages from the January 4, 1946, show. The comedy team's association with sports would be, presumably, baseball, and their routine with Stern would most likely be a variation of, what else, "who's on first."

But amazingly there is no mention of baseball. Rather, Bud and Lou go into a fabricated account of their first meeting during a *basketball* game! To make matters even more confusing they identify themselves by their supposed real names, Buddy Taboa and Francis Critell.

Well, the program had to have been very interesting nonetheless.♣

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BUD: And they were right! Because just before the game ended, Francis Critell and Buddy Taboa did start to trade punches.

LOU: But ... they were finally pulled apart. (PAUSE)

STERN: Well? Well, go on with your story. What happened to Francis Critell and Buddy Taboa after they fought during a basketball game?

BUD: Oh, they became friends. In fact, they decided to become partners.

LOU: And as partners they became a couple of comedians. You see today people know them --- as "Abbott and Costello."

STERN: Wait a minute! -- those two basketball players were really you two fellows?

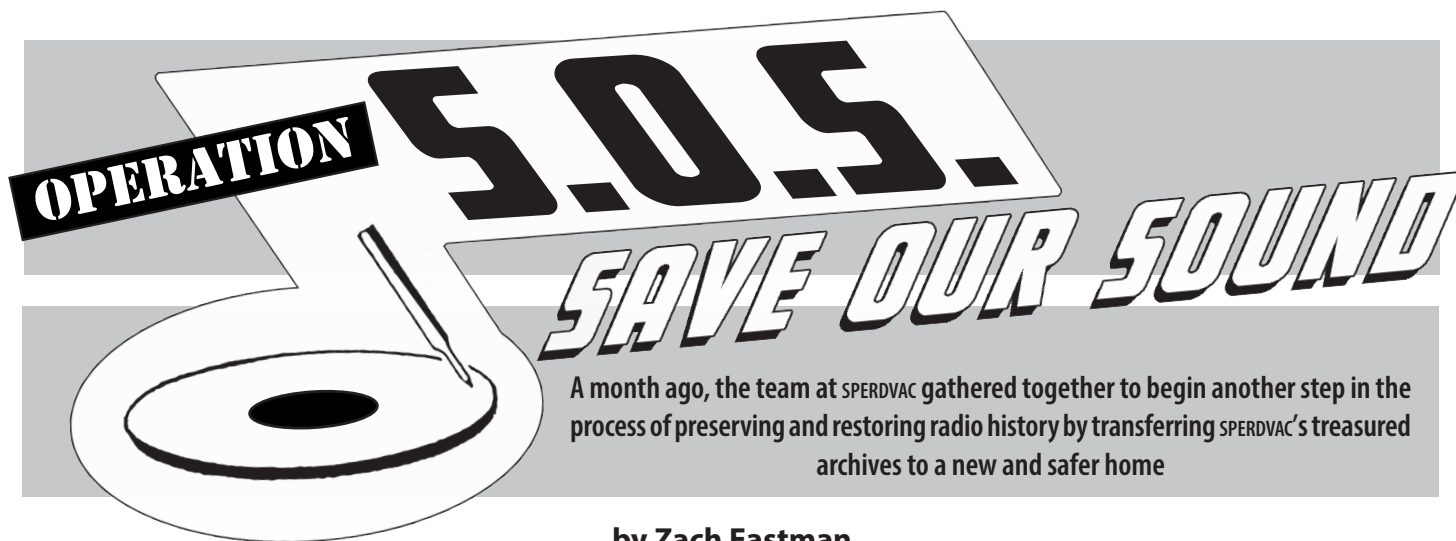
BUD: That's right, Bill.

LOU: And Bill, if it hadn't been for basketball we might never have met. So you see, sports means a lot to us.

STERN: Thank you, -- Abbott and Costello! But don't go away I want you both back later in the program.

LOU: O.K. Bill - we'll be here.

BILL: Thanks, boys.



by Zach Eastman

IT'S NOT EVERY DAY that you get to carry a soundwave. It's not everyday that you get to feel history at your fingertips. Yet SPERDVAC has the unique position of providing these moments to us as members of the board and as fans. Surely we have all felt that way by engaging with those thrilling days of yesteryear, and enjoying them in the pristine quality that SPERDVAC has provided.

But as we all know, we are engaged in the last round of ensuring these treasures are here for the next generation to enjoy. Even as SPERDVAC has consistently preserved the materials donated to it, there have been recent efforts to create the most up-to-date preservation copies possible.

A month ago, the team here at SPERDVAC gathered together to begin another step in the process as we found a new home for our treasures.

As a witness on the ground, I noticed some amazing things.

First was how our moving team carried out their task. Their professionalism was on display as each box and each disc was carefully handled. It allowed us time throughout to check on each box and get a good glimpse at what has been waiting for our attention. There was an intrinsic awareness to be extra careful as exemplified by how they handled the CBS sound-effects door. Members may know of this lovely treasure, a direct piece of equipment from the era itself. The fact that turning that knob would let you into the door of any favorite radio character was spine-tingling when looking it over. It was handled gently as it made its way to the new home, carrying its memories along with it.

Secondly was the astute knowledge and foresight of our lead preservationist, Corey Harker, and our resident whiz kid, Walden Hughes. Listening to them talk throughout the move, I became aware of the value of our assets, what we must do with them, and how much we have to look forward to under their careful guidance. In fact, their knowledge led them to places they themselves had been wondering before the move. Quite suddenly, as the move began to take place, I heard Corey say, "Wait, set that box down. Don't load it yet." As the mover placed it down, I was personally puzzled. It looked no different than the others. But as soon as it rested gently on the concrete, Corey thrust it open and there they were: *My Date with Judy* glass discs that had been on his mind for weeks. There they were and ready to be set aside with the other glass discs for we SPERDVAC personnel to personally guide during the move.

That second story made the move seem like an act of magic. It also gave me, as digital content manager, a sigh of relief. I don't

need to worry about the past when we have magicians like Corey and Walden at the helm. And slowly but surely, everyone who is seeing the photos from this epic move will someday be able to hear the fruit of those labors.

As the boxes were gathered we started to see names we recognized as a collective. Those among our ranks know of how we have an elaborate collection of discs for the Lone Ranger. Packed in wooden boxes, reading the labels felt as if you were opening a chest the mythic hero himself may have grasped. To my delight, I was brimming to know that it was still there and still safe before we closed the lid and let the movers resume.

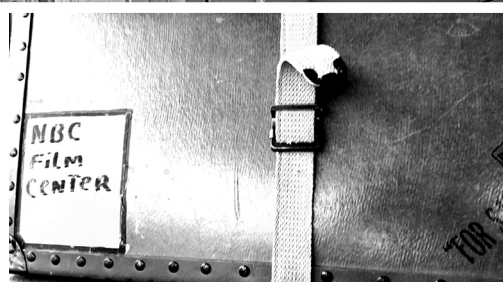
Just before they finished I heard Corey chuckle slightly as he presented forth scotch sound tapes. They were in neat square boxes but they contained something I had never seen before: voice artist reels. Their very auditions and resumes walked around a plastic base. We both carefully grabbed the box and looked. I couldn't begin to imagine how many hands those tapes passed to get to someone who would say yea or nay to folks like Don Messick, whose career began in radio before he became a mystery-solving pup for Hanna-Barbera.

More and more the boxes went until the truck was full and we headed out to their final home.

As the movers went up and down the escalator to the point of monotony, I began taking a look inside the truck that carried the load. I saw a thin piece of what looked like poster board. It certainly was not an antique (the scent of vintage was absent). I flipped it open to reveal a sign for SPERDVAC itself; it was a registration poster for one of the conventions. Now this may not be as glamorous as the treasures previously described (and between you fine reader and me, it's not even the sturdiest material for a sign), but my heart fluttered a little. For that was a reminder not just that we are preserving other people's treasures, but our own heritage as an organization as well. We are approaching our 50th year on this planet as a radio club and just as important as the material we have collected are the memories we have procured over half a century. All that from a little flimsy sign.

Now that the treasures have undergone this first leg of the journey, this begins Corey's journey into our new push for restoration followed by digitization. It's an effort that will bear fruit in the coming months as these will start trickling into SPERDVAC's website for members to enjoy. It will allow you all to listen soon to those very sound waves we all got to hold in our hands.

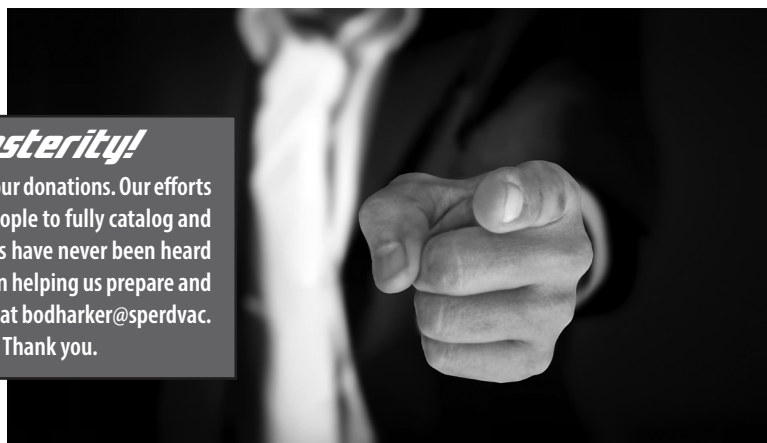
We need your help.🙏



MOVING DAY for SPERDVAC with SPERDVAC's preservationist experts directing movers on the gentle art of transferring irreplaceable materials from a storage unit across town to a safer and more suitable unit for long-term care and storage.

YOU can do your part for posterity!

We appreciate your support of SPERDVAC through your membership and your donations. Our efforts to preserve our radio legacy also need your time and effort. It takes people to fully catalog and transfer our valuable recordings to digital files. Some of our recordings have never been heard since their original broadcasts. Please consider joining our volunteers in helping us prepare and make these recordings available to our membership. Please contact us at bodharker@spervac.com or info@spervac.com for more information on how you can help. Thank you.







ALIAS JOHN FREEDOM

by Gary Coville

IN THE IMMEDIATE AFTERMATH OF PEARL HARBOR, American radio underwent some rapid and fundamental changes. Government censorship and the wholesale loss of talent and personnel to the military services upended programming norms, and this resulted in radio networks scurrying to revamp established series primarily to prove their commitment to the war effort. One of the new entries rushed to the airwaves to back the war effort was *Alias John Freedom*, ballyhooed by gung-ho publicity writers as a cross between Robin Hood and the Scarlet Pimpernel.

The idea was that this figure Freedom would pop up each week in some Axis occupied territory to sabotage the enemy and rescue the vulnerable. The formula was somewhat reminiscent of *Pimpernel Smith*, a 1941 British film, released in 1942 in the US by United Artists with the title *Mister V* (V-for-victory, of course), in which Leslie Howard as the unassuming Professor Horatio Smith performed much the same service.

Initially, the radio series was limited to the West Coast. Premiering on Sunday, January 25, 1942, *Alias John Freedom* originated from San Francisco station KPO, NBC's Red Network Station. However, after just two broadcasts, the show transferred to KGO, NBC's Blue Network station in San Francisco.

The principal players in the early days of the series were Jack Moyles as the ubiquitous and mysterious John Freedom and Lou Tobin, usually in the villain's role. Forrest Barnes prepared the scripts. Indeed, it was Barnes who reportedly conceived the idea for the series and approached NBC in San Francisco. Barnes had more than a credible record as a writer by the time he conceived and pitched the series. He had previously prepared scripts for John Barrymore, Charles Boyer and Alec Templeton, and at the time of *Alias John Freedom* Barnes had been elected national president of the Radio Writer's Guild.

Barnes handed himself one of his more difficult and delicate tasks in formulating scripts for the series. John Freedom was a

Above is a majestic pose to rival that of Doc Savage, the Man of Bronze, of "John Freedom, the heroic figure symbolizing United Nations ideals and—at the same time—the BLUE network program of the same name, has been erected on the grounds of the Minneapolis-Honeywell Co., sponsor of the popular war-effort series, in Minneapolis, MN" (original caption from the Blue network photo department). All illustrations provided by the author.



Creator and principal writer Forrest Barnes of *Alias John Freedom* examines the latest adventure of Mr. Freedom as fellow writer True Boardman looks on.

sobriquet designed to mask the identity of the mysterious figure who traveled in the most dangerous enemy-occupied spots on earth. His assignment was to thwart the enemy's plans and rescue the oppressed and imprisoned. A huge task even for a radio superhero. Barnes needed to drop John Freedom in the middle of actual war locations and snatch his plots from the daily headlines, making them as realistic as possible. John Freedom was to be the ultimate American warrior, engaging in sabotage and espionage against the enemy while reflecting the highest American ideals. If that wasn't enough, Barnes was faced with the Byzantine world of network and industry codes, rules and regulations that normally prohibited precisely the kind of scripts he would be writing.

In the past, the network had ruled against scripts built around themes of espionage and sabotage. Such topics clashed with network sensibilities and were sure to be axed by continuity ac-

ceptance. When it was decided that the series was worth risking with a broader network audience, NBC decided to relax or rescind the regulations that had previously prohibited similar storylines. *Broadcasting* (May 11, 1942) reported that Blue Network officials had revised their earlier policy regarding espionage and sabotage themes. Such subjects would now be acceptable if programs adhered to specific guiding principles formulated by NBC-Blue's continuity acceptance department and its head, Dorothy Ann Kemble. No script would be acceptable that undercut public confidence in the government, the war effort or the military. Storylines could not employ sabotage ideas that might inspire fifth columnists. The "horrors" of combat were not to be the focus of dramatization. Cliff-hangers would not

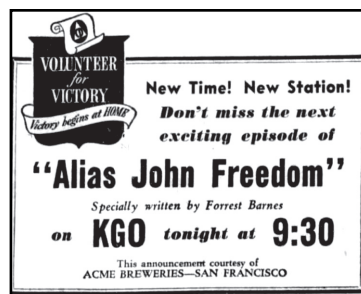
be allowed. Various other prohibitions and admonitions were also attached but it was clear that NBC's amended guidelines had been written specifically to justify the production of *Alias John Freedom*. The long-standing injunction against wartime themes had effectively been repealed by war itself. Just a week later—May 18, 1942—NBC-Blue would unleash its next entry in the same genre, *Counterspy*.

Alias John Freedom, the progenitor of NBC's change of heart, had been pulled together quickly in response to Pearl Harbor. The headlines all but wrote the scripts for Forrest Barnes once changes in network policy officially gave the go ahead. When the series transferred to the full network, effective with the April 19, 1942, broadcast, the show continued to originate from KGO and continued to air as a sustainer.

Just as the war was now a global war, *Alias John Freedom* fictionally travelled to the hotspots of that conflict. Wherever the enemy had conquered territory and subjugated human beings, John Freedom would appear as a symbol of hope and resistance. His network debut (April 19, 1942) found the ubiquitous John Freedom in Occupied France. The itinerary continued with Czechoslovakia (April 26), Norway (May 3), Holland (May 10), Yugoslavia (May 17), China (May 24) and onward wherever the headlines led the series.

The stories were fictional but grounded in the grim reality of actual war. Too grim, as it turned out, for the reviewer in *Variety* (April 29, 1942). "The barbaric cruelty that he [Barnes] depicted

so graphically in this particular episode could easily be credited to the Gestapo but it isn't the sort of thing that the more sensitive stripe of listener, particularly women, are going to fancy," the reviewer pronounced. "Telling about a broken arm is one thing, but having the act dramatized in all its sadistic details is something that doesn't settle well within the family circle, especially when it includes young children." The reviewer furthered that, "In addition to the arm breaking incident there were such shocker tidbits as a man



The long-standing injunction against wartime themes had effectively been repealed by war itself.



'Alias John Freedom' operated on two levels. First, it functioned as stark, sobering drama. Secondly, it served as useful wartime messaging.

going gradually insane by the process of auto-suggestion and giving a horror-by-horror account as he sinks to his death in a patch of quicksand."

Clearly, radio was attempting to come to terms with the contemporary nature of war. It was a struggle for both the medium and its listeners. Nonetheless, *Alias John Freedom* found approval in some quarters. Radio critic Ben Gross (April 20, 1942) called the program "a swell attraction." Bruce Adams, in his newspaper column (September 17, 1942), signed on to the idea that "while John Freedom is a fictional character, to his millions of followers he is a counterpart of all that is brave and true in the American tradition...." Matt Barr, commenting in his *On the Air* column in the *Los Angeles Times* (December 28, 1942), suggested that "The real heroes of *Alias John Freedom* are the unconquered people of Europe, whose countless acts of sabotage are adding up to a big headache for Hitler and his gang." Barr concluded that *Alias John Freedom* is "a thrilling program, and an encouraging one, showing as it does how strongly the anti-Nazi war continues under the surface even where Hitler's troops are strongest."

Just how closely Barnes was drawing inspiration from legitimate headlines can be discerned from examples of two summaries released to newspapers shortly before broadcast:

Poughkeepsie Journal (May 2, 1942) – "Norway, where last week the Nazis, preaching Nordic brotherhood, shot 10 Norwegian patriots, will be the scene of the adventure drama 'Vikings Never Die.' Another in the current *Alias John Freedom* programs to be heard tomorrow at 7:30 p.m. The drama will disclose how John Freedom with the aid of the French girl, Marie Marcian, and Richy Wessling, war correspondent, joined a commando raid on the Norwegian coast in order to free an innocent patriot from a detention camp. While in Norway, John Freedom will masquerade as a Nazi general and uncover the treacherous plot of a Quisling who poses as a member of the

underground organization of patriots."

Sacramento Bee (November 2, 1942) – "The fearful price Germany is paying for the conquest of the Russian Ukraine as a result of the Russian scorched earth policy will be highlighted in tonight's broadcast as John Freedom visits the Stalingrad area in the episode of *Alias John Freedom* heard over KFBK at 7:15 o'clock. In the action author Forrest Barnes paints a vivid word picture of the

desperation with which the Nazis seek to capture food, clothing, ammunition and other vital war supplies. Yet, this spy story relates as they capture village after village town after town, paying a terrible cost in dead and wounded, von Bock's Nazi hordes find only destruction and ashes."

Alias John Freedom operated on two levels. First, it functioned as stark, sobering drama. Secondly, it served as useful wartime messaging. Shortly after going national, *Alias John Freedom* began short-wave transmissions to Europe and the Far East. The expectation being that the conquered peoples under Axis control would

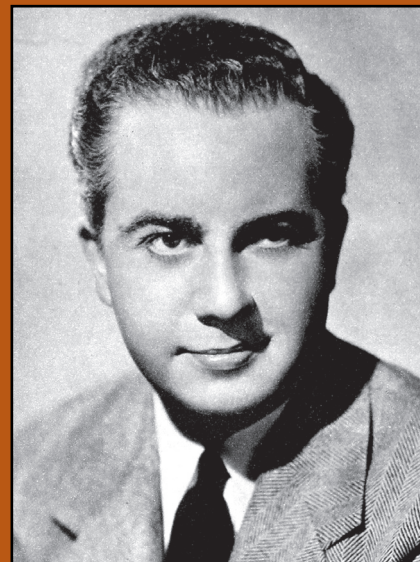
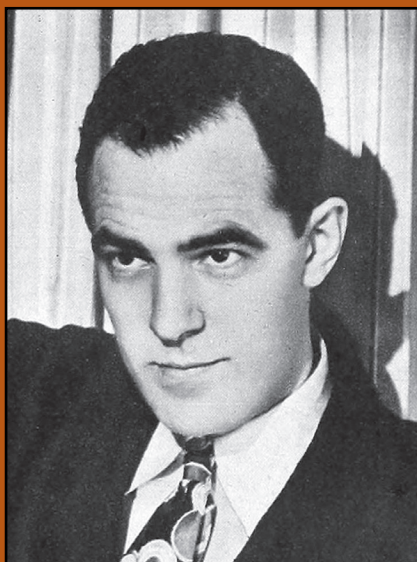


Original September 21, 1942, network caption: "Presenting the only good Nazi in captivity—Lou Tobin, who plays the Nazi roles in the BLUE Network's 'Alias John Freedom.' Above, the villain [sic] is Jack Moyles, who, as John Freedom, vanquishes Tobin every Monday night."

find reassurance in the program's messaging. Boris Eliachef, counsel general of the Free French in America, even set up a photo opportunity with Jack Moyles to publicly thank John Freedom for his role in helping fight the war.

Among the numerous difficulties radio faced during WWII was the loss of advertisers. Much of American manufacturing had been diverted to the war effort. Without civilian consumer goods to offer listeners there seemed little purpose in advertising on radio. *Alias John Freedom* limped along as a sustainer until August 3, 1942, when Minneapolis-Honeywell signed on to the Blue Network's Teamed Sponsorship Plan. The idea was to give advertisers who had been diverted from the consumer market the opportunity to fully sponsor a series one week out of every four. The other three weeks the sponsor would receive a mention during the program. This provided such sponsors with the ability to keep their names before the public during the war. Minneapolis-Honeywell, well-known for heating and air-conditioning, was then producing sophisticated military instruments.

As it turned out, Minneapolis-Honeywell was the only sponsor to sign up for *Alias John Freedom*. Nonetheless, the company took the series and its sponsorship seriously. First, it published a "Freedom Booklet" on heating and fuel conservation for listeners and Honeywell even erected on the grounds of its Minneapolis headquarters a life-size statue of John Freedom in tribute to the ideals Freedom represented.



The final two aliases to portray John Freedom, Karl Weber and Ed Prentiss, whose distinctive voices would be heard in later years as TV announcers and narrators.

IN 1943, several changes were in store for the program. Effective with the January 6 broadcast, *Alias John Freedom* moved from Monday to Wednesday night and the series underwent a name change. Now it was just plain *John Freedom*.

The explanation given to the press was that the change was made to forestall the impression that the program was a crime or mystery show rather than a wartime drama.

A bigger move took effect with the February 17, 1943, broadcast. For reasons apparently known only to network executives, it was decided to move the program from San Francisco to Chicago. The change necessitated a wholesale change in cast and personnel. A 27-year-old Chicago radio actor named Karl Weber

beat out a score of actors to win the role of John Freedom. According to the program's new director, Ted MacMurray, Weber looked the part "and that, combined with his tonal qualities and range of expression prompted my selecting him to play 'John Freedom.' The part is one that requires great sincerity and the ability to project disciplined emotion." In addition to MacMurray as director and Weber as John Freedom, other changes included Hobart Donovan taking over script duties from Forrest Barnes and Rex Maupin leading a new orchestra.

After three months in the title role, Weber departed Chicago for New York. The explanation given to the press was that Weber had decided to seek fame on radio row in the Big Apple. With time in short supply, director Ted MacMurray turned to established Chicago actor Ed Prentiss to fill the role of John Freedom, starting with the May 19 episode. Prentiss, who was playing Captain Midnight at the time, seemed a logical replacement for the departing Karl Weber.

For Prentiss' debut as John Freedom, scriptwriter Hobart Donovan concocted a play drawn from recent headlines. On April 21, 1943, news broke that Japan had recently executed an unspecified number of unnamed American aviators who had been captured after a 1942 raid on Japan. Japan's refusal to treat the captured Americans as prisoners of war under the terms of the Geneva Conven-

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presents ...
The Victory Program
All America Is Cheering ...
Democratic as the Stars and Stripes ... Thrilling as Doolittle's jaunt to Tokio
Alias John Freedom
Excitingly yours MONDAY at 9.15 P.M.
The swash-buckling exploits of a modern Robin Hood fighting for human rights in France, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Holland, China and all the blazing frontiers of the world.
It's a BLUE NETWORK Program

tion and their subsequent execution in Tokyo inflamed the American Public. In the Hobart script, John Freedom learns that the Japanese are about to execute several American aviators in Rangoon. Freedom rushes to the rescue but arrives too late to prevent the executions.

Radio listeners had no difficulty in comprehending the direct parallel between the headline executions in Tokyo and the fictional executions in Rangoon. Indeed, *The Indianapolis Star* (May 18, 1943) headlined the report of the upcoming *John Freedom* broadcast with, "Broadcast to 'Avenge' Murders in Tokyo." The newspaper report went on to detail the plot: "American aviators murdered in Rangoon by the Japanese will be avenged tenfold during the John Freedom dramatization at 8 o'clock tomorrow night over WISH and the Blue Network." When Freedom arrives too late to rescue the flyers, Freedom "resolves to avenge

their wanton slaughter and aided by Chinese guerrillas and Jimmy Scully, a former truck driver on

the Burma road, decimates a Japanese detachment."

Ed Prentiss would remain with the series through the remainder of its run. Unfortunately, that would only amount to a few more months. The series sole sponsor, Minneapolis-Honeywell, announced that it would discontinue its sponsorship effective July 28, 1943.

NBC-Blue renewed efforts to attract commercial interest to the series. In advertisements appearing in various publications that summer, including *Variety* and *Broadcasting*, the network touted a list of its current "hit programs" which had openings for additional sponsors. The list included *John Freedom*, which the ad copy fulsomely described as "a series of tense, exciting melodramas—well



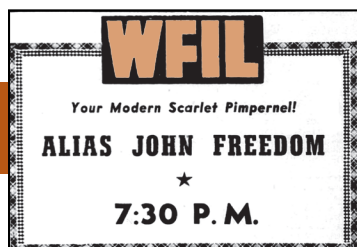
Cartoonist Dooley illustrates another adventure of the Blue network's ace hero John Freedom. From Poughkeepsy *New Yorker*, November 16, 1942.

written and well authenticated."

Unfortunately, no sponsor stepped forward. Without a commercial backer, *John Freedom* was forced to relinquish its primetime Wednesday evening timeslot and was shuffled to Saturday mornings as of September 4, 1943. The series continued until December 4 when Freedom

found himself in Amsterdam on one final mission.

THE GREAT RADIO COMEDIES such as *Fibber McGee and Molly* are often credited, and properly so, with helping to keep up American morale during the dark days of World War II. Programs such as *John Freedom*, and those which followed, did much the same but in a quite different way, by offering a cathartic form of revenge for radio audiences for the atrocities of Pearl Harbor and other evils of war.♣



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‘Arf, oink, neigh, zooney-oops,’ he says

FRANK MILANO had his career path clearly outlined in his mind. The Wilmington, DE native would be a radio actor. Initially, he followed a rather conventional path toward fulfilling his goal. To pay the bills, Frank went to work for Wilmington’s largest employer, the DuPont Chemical Company. He joined the local drama league, performed in summer stock and eked out a few scattered radio appearances including performances on *Armstrong of the Air* and *Salute to the Allies*. Working at DuPont, while making a local name for himself as an actor, Frank landed a few appearances on DuPont’s *Cavalcade of America* radio show. However, the big break that actors typically yearn for eluded the young performer. There seemed to be an infinite number of actors chasing a handful of opportunities.

When America entered the Second World War, Milano was 23-years-old. He was turned down for service by the Army. Instead, he took a position with the War Manpower Commission for a time as a director of morale in a shipyard. Later he joined a USO troupe headed by Raymond Massey and sailed for Europe. Following the war and a brief stay in Hollywood, Milano moved to New York, determined to make his reputation as an actor. Before long, his radio career would turn in an entirely new direction.

Growing up on a farm, Frank had been fascinated with the sounds made by birds and animals. He listened and learned to replicate those sounds to an uncanny degree. During studio rehearsals, Frank would sometimes amuse the room with his extensive repertoire of animal sounds. As the story was told, one day the sound of a meowing cat was required in a script, but the sound effect device had broken down. Milano stepped into the breach. Before long Frank stopped worrying about looking for parts; the parts came looking for Frank.

His acting career had veered from its original plan, but Milano easily made the adjustment. He patiently rehearsed each non-human part until it sounded authentic. In 1952 he would explain to an interviewer, “I think what I do is just as dignified and important as straight acting. Why shouldn’t there be just as much art in portraying an animal or inanimate object convincingly as in portraying a human being?”

Frank’s talents were employed across the spectrum on many of radio’s most recognizable series, including *The Shadow*, *Lux Radio Theatre*, *Milton Berle*, *Suspense*, *Yours Truly Johnny Dollar*, *X Minus*

One, Mark Trail and *Bobby Benson*. In fact, Milano was routinely featured on *Bobby Benson* as Bobby’s horse, his dog and pet skunk as well as assorted other creatures. In one script, Frank was required to play a dying horse. The heart-wrenching neighs of the dying animal were so traumatizing to young listeners that angry mothers wrote letters of complaint about the scene.



Press reports reported that Frank’s yearly income was now pegged at \$50,000, just shy of \$1 million a year in today’s terms. With Frank’s emerging prosperity, he purchased a 330-acre farm in upstate New York, a significant portion of which he reputedly set aside as an animal preserve. His stated goal was to reach the point where he could spend five days a week at the farm, leaving two days for working in New York. It is not clear if he ever reached that goal. Between radio and now television, Milano’s services were in continual demand.

Frank copped a title role in one radio series. *The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin* had begun its five-season television run in the fall of 1954. The following January, Mutual brought Rinty to the airwaves using the television cast, with one notable exception. The role of Rin Tin Tin was now played by Frank Milano. Apparently, Mutual trusted Frank to handle himself more professionally at the microphone than the famous canine.

For all his renown as an animal imitator, Frank was equally adept at creating sounds for inanimate and fantastical objects. He played a dysfunctional motorboat for Milton Berle. He was adept at imitating flying saucers, devices in which he fervently believed. He imitated a jet-propelled spoon for *Tom Corbett*, Space Cadet. He provided the snap, crackle and pop for Kellogg’s Rice Krispies. Apparently, Krispies failed to emote convincingly before a microphone.

Milano and his expansive catalog of sounds easily segued into television in the 1950s. He gave voice to cartoon characters like King Leonardo of *King Leonardo and His Short Subjects* as well as providing two of the puppet voices on *Rootie-Kazootie*. He even provided the sound of a siren on *Car 54, Where Are You?*

Ten days before Christmas 1962, Frank pulled into a gas station not far from his home and collapsed of a fatal heart attack. He was 44 years old. His mother succinctly summed up her son’s life: “Frank was always keeping us laughing. He did it as a boy, and just kept it up.”

Original Mutual caption January 21, 1955: Frank Milano is one actor who never speaks a word on his radio programs although he is often heard in featured roles. Known to listeners from coast-to-coast, though not by voice, Milano is heard as the voice of the legendary dog hero, Rin Tin Tin, during the Mutual network program, “The Adventures of Rin Tin Tin.” Ever since he was a youngster, Milano has imitated animal calls, perfecting snarls, roars, grunts or caterwauling. Today he is America’s foremost animal actor.



Courtesy: Olan Schulz

LET'S MAKE IT REAL. In the August 10, 1943, broadcast of *Suspense*, a man was supposed to be killed by holding his head under water. To make the sound of death-gurgles as real as possible, victim Dennis Hoey as Sam Gooch, center, allowed murderer Edmund Gwenn as Archibald Spiller to push his face into a bowl of water, here held by Vicki Marsden. The play was "The Fountain Plays," adapted by Robert L. Richards from the short story by Dorothy L. Sayers. Ted Bliss directed for producer William Spier. Also in the cast were Raymond Lawrence, Robert Harris and Jim Bannon as the Man in Black. The story was re-broadcast November 23, 1944, with Charles Laughton as Spiller and Dennis Hoey reprising his role as Gooch. Joe Kearns portrayed the Man in Black with Truman Bradley announcing. No word if Hoey took the plunge a second time.

KEN MURRAY SAYS:



Now that good old summer is really here, it's going to be pretty tough to get Mr. J. Q. Public interested in politics, Europe, or taxes, with vacation time just around the corner. Yes Sir! This is the season when everybody tries to do a Mussolini and find a place in the sun.

About this time of year, a great many people get the itching sole, which can only mean one of two things . . . the wanderlust or athlete's foot.

Of course, if you're going to some fashionable mountain resort, it's best to spend a little more and hire a guide. Don't rely too much on your conscience.

A further suggestion should be given to those who are victims of the habit of looking under the bed before retiring. Don't sleep in upper berths.

Naturally, it's a relief for the girl who has already made a definite decision where she is going on her vacation, as it takes a lot of weight off her mind. Now, she only has to start talking it off her hips.

June 1936



BEFORE COMPUTERS THERE WAS RADIO!

And the best place to learn all about the golden age of radio is *Radiogram*. Don't miss a single issue of *Radiogram*. Check the back of your *Radiogram* for your membership number and renewal date. You can also give this to your friends who

don't use a computer so they can join. New Members can just write the word *NEW* in the Member Number area. You can always renew your basic membership at www.sperdvac.com using PayPal, but you don't need a computer to be a member of SPERDVAC. Use this form and mail a check to SPERDVAC for \$20.00 to:

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