

“ON THE HORNS OF A DILEMMA”: THE POSTWAR CORRESPONDENCE BETWEEN JOSEF MANGER AND JOHN TERPAK

JOHN FAIR, EDITOR

Editor’s Note: Historian John Fair has devoted much of his scholarly life to unpacking the impact of Bob Hoffman and the other men and women of York Barbell. At the fourth annual Physical Cultures of the Body Conference held at the Stark Center in January 2024, sport historian Jason Shurley gave a paper on the important contributions John Fair has made to the field of sport and physical culture history, and especially to the history of Olympic weightlifting. From his important 1999 book, *Muscle-town USA: Bob Hoffman and the Manly Culture of York Barbell* to these two articles on the great German weightlifter Josef Manger, Fair has probed the social and cultural history of strength and weightlifting and brought to life the men and women who form the foundations of the current Iron Game. His new book: *Tommy Kono: The Life of America’s Greatest Weightlifter* (2023, McFarland Press) solidifies even further the major contributions he has made to physical culture history.

Known as a meticulous researcher who has done personal interviews with dozens of twentieth century figures from the world of strength, Fair has also sought out and helped preserve many archival documents from our collective history. In this article, he relies heavily on letters between Josef Manger and York Barbell executive and former Olympian John Terpak. The letters, as Fair explains in the article, reveal the

privations and challenges that Manger faced after World War II because of his association with the Nazi party. After reading the original letters, I agreed with John’s suggestion that we publish the letters in full, so that others could

also have access to their correspondence. Letters such as these reveal more than just what the words on the page convey. The clear friendship between Terpak and Manger, and the intelligence and exceptional grace of Manger’s English prose suggest a man of unusual intelligence. These observations are revealed by reading the original letters in full; and it’s one of the reasons historians so highly prize letters as a primary source.

Manger’s situation was not unusual in post WWII Europe, of course. The surviving Saxon Brothers—Kurt and Hermann (Arthur died in 1921) ended up on opposite sides of the new “Iron Curtain” and also faced severe privations. Hermann Goerner similarly came out of the war years in sad condition. Even George Hackenschmidt, who spent the war years in France, lost about 25 pounds during the war from lack of food, and

had no funds with which to buy food, even if it could be found for sale. What made Manger’s situation more complicated, and Terpak’s involvement in trying to help him so surprising, was Manger’s status as a member (although not fully official) of the Nazi party. As John Fair notes at the end of his article, however, what happened to help resolve his situation was tru-



In 1936, Manger was included as a star athlete in several different sets of postcards and tobacco cards related to the Olympic Games. He is shown here in an official Olympic uniform that was worn by the German team when they marched into the stadium.

ly an act of sport diplomacy and demonstrated that "weightlifting could be employed as an instrument to promote good will." It's a story that needs to be remembered, and let's hope that weightlifting and the larger Iron Game can always continue to do so.

—Jan Todd



February 1, 1946

My dear John:

I received your welcome letter of Jan. 10, 1946, with much enthusiasm and deep gratitude through Sgt. Jackson Schaaf. Those lines confirmed to me that it is sport which reconciles nations with each other and that a fine sport comradeship has not ceased to exist in spite of six years of terrible war. This fact has really made me proud and happy. As you perceive, I am still living and was not killed in battle as rumor had it. I was a soldier from May 9, 1942, to Dec. 15, 1944. I was in the administrative service at home and not at the front. Since Sept. 1939 I am married and have a strapping son of five years who affords me much happiness, and, God willing, will perhaps some day also be a weight-lifter.

Since the occupation of Starnberg by your compatriots I am without bread and occupation, because the American military government in Starnberg indefinitely dismissed me from my position on the ground that I belong to the Nazi party, an action based on apparent paper evidence. Against this indefinite dismissal from my position with the finance board in accordance with the order of the military government, Detachment H 289 Starnberg, Cp F. 3 D Mil Govt Regt of August 25, 1945, I have lodged a protest, and here give you the following explanation.

After Hitler's coup (usurpation of power) I in April 1933 was stigmatized by the Bamberg daily press as an enemy of the state and as politically unreliable, because I was a Nazi opponent and had publicly voiced my opposition in the inn, the Blue Bell, in Bamberg even after the usurpation of the Nazis, (refusal to give the Nazi salute). Because of my objection to the national socialistic party, I together with my trainer, Fritz Mueller, in Bamberg, Jew Street 9, was expelled from my sport association, the Hercules Athletic Club, in Bamberg in April 1933, a club in which, since my eleventh year, I had been trained with

much labor for the 1936 Olympic Games. In addition, my expulsion from the Sports Association of Germany was demanded. At the last moment, action on my expulsion was stopped by leaders of the sports association Roland Bamberg because then already I was classed as an international star in wrestling and weight-lifting and as an athlete of the first rank for the Berlin Olympiad. In August 1934 I moved to Freising, in order to be trained for the Olympiad by Rudi Ismayr.

On the day of my Olympic victory, I was promoted by the staff chief of the former SA to be SA squad leader, even though I was no member of the SA. On November 9 of the same year, I was again promoted without any effort on my part, and this time to be chief squad leader. The promotions were purely recognition of my great international achievements in weightlifting. In this capacity I never performed any service in the SA.

The Freisinger circuit leader repeatedly requested me to join the Nazi party. I continued to refuse until finally the circuit leader forced me to join by giving me the choice of either joining or giving up my training work in the foreign field. The idea was to send me into foreign countries not only as a representative of German sportdom, but also as a representative of Nazi Germany. Thus, I became a party member, retroactive to January 5, 1937. I may add that I received no membership book, nor was I obligated to the party by oath. I received merely a so-called party candidate's card.

My dear John, I did not assume that the representatives of your country are removing me from the service of the state as an active Nazi, because it may be known that I never agreed with the ideas of the former Nazi party.

The CIC of the 3rd US Army Headquarters in Bad Toetz, where I have been engaged for some time as weight-lifting coach, support my protest, and have forwarded it to Frankfurt, Main, for decision.

My dear Friend John, I shall be very grateful to you, if you, as my American sport friend, would write a letter of confirmation to the effect that while living in foreign lands I have always borne myself as a truly democratic sportsman and never as a friend of Nazism, that, on the contrary, I with heart and hand worthily represented my beloved weight-lifting sport. (Along these lines, just as you know me).

I would be grateful to you also, if you would send this confirmation to the military government in Starnberg/See and to the CIC

of the 3rd US Army Headquarters in Bad Toelz. I would thank you for a copy of the same.

From the sport angle, naturally I am not in very good shape. For fully three years I have not had a dumb-bell in my hands, and the present food situation in Germany will not allow me to very quickly attain top form. Nevertheless, I am still able to do the following:

Druecken (press)	285	English pounds
Reissen (snatch)	275	" "
Stossen (clean & jerk)	340	" "

German athletic sport is dead, and it will take some years before a German athlete will be able to participate in international games.

Rudi Ismayr was never over England as a flier and was not shot down. He was an Obergefreiter (*Editor's note: translated as lance corporal or private first class*) of the Funkers (*Editor's note: translated as a radio operator*). From 1940 to the end of the war a buck private and is at present a prisoner of war in English hands. I hope that he may be released any day. Naturally, Rudi, too, is not in shape. He might be able to do the following:

Druecken	200	English pounds
Reissen	210	" "
Stossen	270	" "

Rudi will probably not be able to make much of a showing in future international games. He is also married and has two daughters.

Of the other German weight-lifters I cannot say much. They are all in bad shape and within a measurable space of time will play no role internationally. Of recruits we today cannot report a thing. As I see it, Germany may in 8 or 10 years again produce weight-lifters fit for world competition.

In Bad Toelz I was reading the American magazine *Life* and there saw you in a weight-lifting demonstration. I was moved almost to tears. It showed me that you and your friends have not been asleep but have raised the weight-lifting game in the land of sport-America-to the top. I am proud of you and your friends. You will go down in the history of weight-lifting as the American Ismayr. Bob Hoffman too, and the rest of the fellows deserve the highest commendation.

I feel very sorry for my friend, Steve Stan-ko. In my estimation he was the ideal heavy weight-lifter, the lifter who could equal my achievements. The feats of Davis I regard as im-

possible; his other achievements are credible.

I agree with you as regards the achievements of the Russian lifters. I regard them as superlatively colored. The Russians must first prove at international games that these feats are authentic. What nice work! That they have good lifters we, of course, cannot doubt.

My dear John, the achievements of the American second-string men (aftergrowth) are phenomenal. Keep it up! For me America is the land of weight-lifters and without doubt possesses the finest man power in the world. Undoubtedly you will win Olympic honors in London in 1948. Maybe I shall be able to admire your feats as a spectator.

I cannot yet send you any pictures, but I hope to send you some very nice ones of German lifters in my next letter.

I trust that for today I have given you enough news. I greet you and all my American sporting friends, especially also Bob Hoffman.

Your friend and faithful comrade,
Sepp Manger

My sister, Marie, is married, has a daughter of five years, and sends you hearty greetings.



May 14, 1946

Dear Sepp:

I hope you will forgive me for taking so much time in replying to your letter of 1 February. The entire industrial set-up in the United States is right in the middle of the reconversion period and with so many labor strikes and other difficulties arising all of which hinder the progress of reconversion, we are finding it rather difficult to get any material work accomplished. However, we are looking forward to rapid peaceful settlement between labor and industries, then we can get back to a normal life.

During all the hustle and bustle of this reconversion, I did manage to write the letter which you requested and addressed same to the Commanding Officer, CIC of 3rd U.S. Army Hqs., Bad Toelz, Germany, and a copy to Commanding Officer, Detachment, H 289 Starnberg, Co. F., 3 D. Mil. Govt. Reg't., Starnberg/See, Germany. I also mailed copies to you similar to the copy attached hereto. Nothing would please me more than to see you reinstated to civilian status. Personally, I have always admired you and respected you for the person you were and

as I knew you. To me, you were a true Sportsman . . . a fair and square competitor and a person who used his own better judgment to guide his destiny.

I shall make inquiry at our local Post Office regarding shipments of food and whether it is permissible to send parcels to Germany. If permission is granted, you will receive several parcels within the near future. My good friend, Jack Elder from Texas, has inquired about Tony Gietl's address. Is there any possibility that you can furnish his address? Jack Elder would be pleased to correspond with Gietl and also wishes to send him some articles.

Our National Championships are only 2½ weeks hence. At the present time I am in the best condition of my lifting career. In training on May 11, I made, in very good form, the following lifts at a bodyweight of 74 Kg.:

Press – 114 Kg.
Snatch – 114 Kg.
Clean & Jerk – 150 Kg.

At the National Championships in Detroit, Mich., if all is well, I should make 250, 255 and 335 pounds or approximately 114 Kg. Press, 116 Kg. Snatch and 152 Kg. Clean and Jerk.

We have several other excellent middleweights in this country. There is Stanley Stanczyk, 22 years of age, weighing 160 pounds (73 Kg.), who has done 240, 245 and 315 (109 Kg., 111½ Kg., and 143 Kg.) We also have a 17-year-old lad, Peter George, weighing 155, who presses 220, snatches 240 and clean and jerks 330 (100 Kg., 109 Kg., and 150 Kg.). A third middleweight is Frank Spellman, 24 years of age, who has recently returned from the war. He presses 250, snatches 240 and cleans and jerks 310 (114 Kg., 109 Kg., 140½ Kg.). I'm more than 10 years older than the up-and-coming middleweights but that does not seem to be any handicap. It is my contention that a man, providing he does not dissipate to excess, can remain in his prime insofar as lifting is concerned, until he is 40 years of age. I have no intention of remaining in com-



Josef Manger has no problem demonstrating perfect technique with this short exercise bar. This was one of many publicity shots taken of him in 1936.

petition until I reach 40 . . . if I can represent my country in the Olympic Games in 1948, I shall be happy to retire immediately [when] the Games come to an end in London.

We have no promising lifters as yet in any of the other classes. Last Saturday, John Davis competed in the Metropolitan Championships (New York and vicinity) and made 257 press . . . failing with 272, snatch 262 and 347 clean and jerk. His bodyweight was 202 pounds. He does not possess the same interest as prior to the war so it is not predictable whether he will remain in competition or choose to withdraw. It was rumored that

he retired from amateur competition but evidently that was false.

I hear from Terlazzo quite regularly. His building is still under construction (materials are difficult to obtain) but he hopes for its completion before the 1st of July. He will conduct a Health Club, specializing primarily in reconditioning exercises for the business and professional men and women. Very little interest will be devoted to Weightlifting. Tony hopes to develop a lucrative business for himself, and I sincerely believe that he will succeed. Los Angeles is a rapidly growing city (over 2,000,000 population at present) and from all indications it will continue to increase.

I shall write again, immediately upon hearing from you. Hereafter, there will be no more long delays between letters. Our work here is pretty well under control now and instead of having 10 working hours per day, 6 days each week, we're going on an 8-hour schedule, 5 days each week.

Convey my best wishes to any of my German Weightlifting Friends. You may contact [me] personally or by letter and let me hear from you at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely your Friend,
JB Terpak



April 30, 1946

Commanding Officers,
CIC of 3rd U.S. Army Headquarters,
Bad Toelz, Germany

Dear Sirs,

It was with regret that we recently learned of the plight of our fellow weightlifter, (Joseph) Sepp Manger. From our understanding of his unfortunate situation, it appears that his success as a champion athlete has resulted in penalizing his present civilian status. It can be readily conceived how a person of such prominence could, under a totalitarian form of government, be a victim of the fame resulting from his outstanding accomplishments as an athlete. Believing that Sepp Manger is a victim of peculiar circumstances evolving from his athletic success, we feel morally obligated to express our evaluation of his character, particularly in regards to the former Nazi movement.

Our personal association with this athlete commenced just prior to the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin and continued throughout the duration of this huge tournament. This associ-



During the month of August 1936, Manger appeared on the cover of *Athletik*, the specialist journal for heavy athletics in Germany and abroad, for three consecutive weeks. Almost no athlete in Germany was as famous as he was and also so closely identified as being the ideal type favored by the Nazi party. Here, Manger receives the gold medal for his performance at the 1936 Olympic Games in Berlin.

ation was resumed the following year in Paris when the world's weightlifting championships were held in the capital of France. We spent considerable time with Manger while traveling together in Europe. In 1938 Manger, as a member of the German lifting team, visited the United States and spent several weeks in this country while taking part in weightlifting contests. During his stay in this country, we again had considerable personal association with him. Later that year our association was resumed when we made a trip to Vienna, Austria, to participate in the world's weightlifting championships.

Sepp Manger, being an amiable person, made it possible for us to become intimately acquainted with him from the very outset of our association. This fraternization rapidly developed into a friendship. Our esteem of his friendship has been high because of his admirable character. In athletic competition, he exemplified the principles of good sportsmanship.

Through the medium of our friendship with (Joseph) Sepp Manger, we learned of his predicament under the Nazi regime. Being a democratic and humane person, he was opposed to the Nazi doctrines. Despite his opposition he, like innumerable other persons, was enslaved [sic] to the ruthless government dominated by Adolph Hitler. The fact that Manger was a distinguished person, being a champion athlete, exposed him to special pressure. Under the threat of persecution, he was compelled to become a member of the Nazi party. His affiliation with this organization was a sham in view of the fact that he was not obligated to the party by oath and did not receive a membership book.

In writing on (Joseph) Sepp Manger's behalf, we are aware that he is not seeking any concessions but only desires to be judged on his true merits. We sincerely believe that a thorough review of his case would serve to absolve him and warrant the restoration of his full rights as a civilian. Thus, we feel justified in urging that action be taken to re-examine his case.

Respectfully yours,
Bob Hoffman, Editor and publisher
of *Strength & Health*

John Terpak, 10 times National A.A.U.
Middleweight Lifting Champion

Tony Terlazzo, Olympic, World's and National lightweight lifting titleholder



Josef Manger
Starnberg/See,
Hauptstrasse 6

24 June 1946

My dear Johnny,

I received your welcome letter of 14 May 1946 with much joy and gratitude. The letter was long delayed, but in return my joy was the greater. I am especially grateful to you for your cooperation with CIC in Bad Toelz, and with the military in Starnberg/See. In the meantime, I became pretty well rehabilitated, and I hope because of your kind help to become free to resume my former occupation. The Third U.S. Army has been transferred to Heidelberg, and my friend, Sgt. Jack von Schaaf, has been dismissed to his home. His address is: Sgt. Jack von Schaaf 3402 6th Ave., CRT Chattanooga, Tenn.

Dear Johnny, I shall be more than grateful to you if you could send me several packages of food stuffs. The food situation in Germany is terrible. I shall, however, accept these packages only if I may pay for them. Financially I am so situated that even according to the German rate of exchange I can reimburse you for your expenses. I express my sincere thanks to you now for your efforts in this matter.

Fourteen days ago I met Toni Gietl in Munich, where he is living. In a few days I hope to send you his address.

I am enthused over your latest performances. If you can retain this form until the Olympics in London in 1948, I already know who will be the winner in the middleweight class. With a performance of

115 Kg. Press
115 Kg. Snatch
152 Kg. Clean & Jerk

no one at the present time nor in the near future will be able to beat you.

As far as your age is concerned, I can tell you that [Josef] Strassberger, Germany, [Carlo] Galimberti, Italy, and many others at the age of forty and over enjoyed the form of their life. It is a fact that a weightlifter is strongest between 35 and 45 years.

The reports about Russian weightlifters will first have to be proven in international competition. I do not believe in the correct work of the Russian weightlifters. As for you, I have seen you work, and can only say that you have always worked above criticism and cleanly. Your work has afforded the international judges only pleasure.

In Germany the sport is beginning to live again. But the terrible food situation is keeping the athletes from accomplishing anything worthwhile. Given proper nourishment, the German lifters might quickly play an important part in international competition.

Rudi Ismayr is still held by the British in an internment camp near Hamburg. But I hope that he will soon be set free. I fear that he will hardly attain international form again. The middleweight lifter, Wagner-Essen, is engaged in serious training, and has reached the following marks:

100 Kg. Press
100 Kg. Snatch
135 Kg. Clean & Jerk

I am proud of Terlazzo's initiative and ask you to convey to him my warmest greetings and best wishes for his success. While we are on the subject, may I ask you to extend my greetings to all of my American weightlifting friends. My own marks at present are: 130 Kg. Press, 125 Kg. Snatch, 160 Kg. Clean & Jerk.

If Germany is permitted to take part in the next Olympics, I have no fears with respect to the defense of Olympic title. Only 33 years of age I cannot yet reckon myself to the old iron. If I had the proper diet, I could today threaten to break many a world's record.

Dear Johnny, it is the wish of my heart to personally see you and all my known American sporting friends, and to discuss the joys and worries connected with weightlifting.

Johnny, if you could send me the address of Mr. Wortmann, I should be very grateful to you.

And now, dear friend, I greet you warmly, and sincerely hope that you will be able to retain your present form until the Olympics in London in 1948, in order to represent your country as the number one victor.

Your friend,
Sepp Manger

