

IMPRISONED BY THEIR OWN COUNTRIES

George Takei And Robert Clary Look Back At Youth Tainted By War

BY DOMINICK CANCILLA

There is no greater betrayal than a betrayal of trust. It is far worse to be abused by a parent than beaten by a stranger. It is a greater evil to cheat a lover than a chance acquaintance. That is why, in times of war, the most deeply betrayed are those who are betrayed by their own country.

In this section we offer two examples of such betrayal. Each of these men was taken prisoner by the government of the country he had grown up with. One was delivered to the Nazis, one was imprisoned in America. Each went on to a prosperous career, and devoted part of his life to educating the world so that such horrible wrongs would never happen again.

ROBERT CLARY: FROM THE HOLOCAUST TO HOGAN'S HEROES

There are few Americans who are not familiar with *Hogan's* Heroes. The show is a sitcom set in a German prisoner of war camp during World War II, revolving around Colonel Hogan and his fellow prisoners matching of wits with their bumbling captors. Although the show's premise is somewhat questionable, its executing was excellent. Hogan's Heroes ran for six seasons in the 1960s and remains popular to this day.

What many people don't know is that two of the show's actors were deeply affected by real events in Germany during World War II. Werner Klemperer — *Hogan's* Colonel Klink — was a German Jew whose family was forced to flee Germany as Hitler rose to power. Robert Clary — Hogan's Corporal LeBeau — was a French Jew whose family didn't see the Nazis coming until it was too late.

Clary was born in Paris in the early 1920s. He endured antisemitism while trying to build for himself a career as an entertainer.

When Clary was 16, the government of occupied France arrested

him and turned him over to the Nazis. On his way to the concentration camp in the back of an open truck crowded with other prisoners, children on the street laughed, threw stones, and yelled, "Dirty Jew bastards."

Of the 1,004 people in Clary's convoy, 698 were sent directly to the gas chambers. Of those who were not immediately selected, 15 men and no women survived. Of the twelve members of his family who were taken, only he returned.

In his book From the Holocaust to Hogan's Heroes, Clary details his early life, his 31 months spent in German concentration camps, and his career afterwards. He makes clear not only the horror of the Holocaust, but also the fact that luck and chance occurrence had as much to do with survival in the camps as did strength of will.

The book is interesting, both because it tells the story of the Holocaust from the perspective of someone who lived through it, and because it details Clary's life after the war. His unwillingness to discuss the Holocaust until long after it was over, and the events which led to his change in feelings about speaking of it are quite telling.

Those who know Clary only because of Hogan's Heroes will be surprised to learn that he had an extensive singing career before that show, and that until recently he was putting out an album every year. Clary is also an accomplished artist, and continues to express himself through his paintings.

Until recently, he also was a frequent speaker for the Simon Wiesenthal Center, helping school children and other groups learn about the Holocaust so that such a thing can never happen again.

Clary was quite willing to speak with us about the current state of Holocaust education. But even so, there was something in his manner which gave the impression that he was doing something he had to do rather than something he wanted to do. Even after



Survivors, but still scarred: George Takei as Mr. Sulu in Star Trek and Robert Clary as LeBeau in Hogan's Heroes

sixty years, the wounds refused to heal.

METROPOLE: What do you feel is the current state of education on the Holocaust? **ROBERT CLARY:** I educated from 1980 for at least 15 years. There's really not much more I can tell you about it. It was very tough, but the Simon Wiesenthal center sent me all over the U.S. and Canada to functions, and I would talk about the subject. If it wasn't successful I would have stopped a long time ago because you can not fool the kids. I do not do it any more. All I do now is paint, and I used to put out a CD every year but I think I've stopped now. I've also joined the Shoah foundation established by Spielberg, which was a great thing. Many survivors wanted a movie made about it, and the foundation has recorded the stories of many survivors.

I know one or two survivors who are still talking about it and who belong to the Wiesenthal center. The center sends school children by bus to see the Museum of Tolerance and hear from a survivor.

METROPOLE: Do you think that people confusing the setting of Hogan's Heroes with a concentration camp is a sign of bad education?

CLARY: I think that most of the time that's

what they did. It's what's on their mind. There are German soldiers and Nazis so they think concentration camp. But it was very different. It had nothing to do with genocide, nothing to do with arresting Jews just because they are Jews. Maybe it's a sign of bad education, but it's not just students who said that. Grownups at the time said that. Even people who didn't watch it were horrified by what they thought was a concentration camp. You could not do a comedy series about a camp, but it is true that in concentration camps, most of us did not lose our sense of humor, and that was part of how we got through it.

METROPOLE: In your book you mention someone asking about your sex life in the camp. Does this kind of question seem innocent or ignorant to you?

CLARY: It depends who asked that question. I don't really remember. I think it was kind of a curiosity. At that age people are greatly obsessed with sex so they want to find out "what did they do." It didn't shock me. From a young student, it was sheer curiosity. They're at the age where they are talking to you so they want to know what is hanging between your legs.

METROPOLE: What other kinds of questions were you often asked?

CLARY: There were all kinds of things and they were all very gratifying. Every time I was through talking they would give me a standing ovation. They loved to see me, to see the number on my arm. And the letters I received are very gratifying and keep me going.

METROPOLE: Do you think that the Holocaust is being adequately taught about in schools?

CLARY: I hope so. I don't know what we Jews did that we are on this earth to be so despised constantly by other human beings. We were the complete opposite - we brought people who cured diseases and wrote great symphonies. For centuries we have always been — they have wanted to get rid of us. If you teach people from a very early age to not to despise, to not to hate, it might help a little bit to show us why we are on this earth.

METROPOLE: At what age should children be introduced to the subject?

CLARY: I think I always resented to talk to five, six, seven years old kid, even eight or nine. My thinking is they are much too young to comprehend. I think you have to be in high school. At that age, you have to be responsible for what you do with your life, and they may understand better and be

more impressed.

METROPOLE: When I was in high school, one of my classmates brought in a note from her mother excusing her from any classroom discussions about World War II. What do you think of that?

CLARY: Well that's ignorance on their parents' part.

METROPOLE: Education is needed to help counter the arguments of Holocaust revisionists. How do you think revisionists should be handled?

CLARY: I think they have been handled quite well. They were put on the map, and people said, "listen to those idiots, those anti-Semites." A small minority group was made to look responsible for all that was bad in this world. It is frightening. That was one of the major reasons I started to talk. People would say that I should not mention the revisionists, but these are the people putting poison in your mind and we have to beware of them

METROPOLE: Some countries have made revisionist Web sites illegal, do you think this is effective?

CLARY: If you do something illegal, then I have no reason to talk to you the way I do now. It is a very thin line. It is like when the neo-Nazis walked outside Chicago when so many Jewish survivors were living there. When is the first amendment not the 1st amendment? I suppose never.

METROPOLE: On Amazon.com there is a comment on your book by someone who is obviously a revisionist and who has not read the book. Do you find it possible not to take this kind of thing personally?

CLARY: I'm not surprised, because I know what human beings are. I take it that the person is a complete moron and should learn to live with other people. I should tell you that my nephew, Brian Gary, who discovered my book and found me a publisher, takes care of my Web site. I don't have a computer. I don't want to be involved with it. For me, it is a waste of time. I paint, I do things that I could not just sit at a computer and read a lot of bad e-mail. A lot of people write just because they think they can talk to a famous person. I don't want to waste my time with that, so I d not have a computer at home.

METROPOLE: In addition to being a survivor, you have an extensive singing and acting career. Do you ever feel that you are defined more by what has happened to you than by what you have accomplished?

CLARY: It makes no difference to me. If that's what people want to think about it,

fine. I am contented to have been very lucky to have lived as long as I have and to have had a great marriage and parents. I have wonderful grandchildren. If people want to think "Hogan's Heroes made a star out of him," fine. I have always sung and danced and worked in all aspects of show business.

METROPOLE: Is there any thought you'd like to leave our readers with?

CLARY: No that's about it. Just tell them to buy the book!

GEORGE TAKEI FROM INTERNMENT TO STAR TREK

Just after the bombing of Pearl Harbor, the United States government declared all people of Japanese ancestry security risks. Japanese Americans in great numbers were rounded up and shipped to internment camps because of their race. Japanese people who had immigrated to the United States in the hope of finding a better life and, perhaps, greater freedom, instead had their freedom stripped away.

Maybe we can look at the behavior of France's government toward its Jewish citizens during World War II and excuse it as an act carried out under pressure from an invading army. Maybe we can look at the Nazis and call them simply evil. But how can we excuse the the imprisoning of American citizens by a country which is supposed to be the world's foremost example of freedom and individual rights?

The answer is that we can not excuse it, we can only learn from it.

Long before George Takei became famous for his role as Mr. Sulu on the original *Star Trek*, he was, along with his family, held prisoner in a U.S. internment camp.

We spoke to Takei in the hope of learning about the camps from an insider's point of view, and were surprised to find that as an advocate for education on this issue, Takei is a wealth of information on both the camps' history and their impact on America.

We were also surprised to find that Takei does not appear to bear any resentment for the country that held him prisoner. The tone of his voice said as much as — perhaps more than — his words. This is a man who sees what American can be, what it was intended to be, and who knows how badly it failed when put to the test in 1942.

METROPOLE: I'm interested in talking

about the Japanese relocation camps during World War II -

GEORGE TAKEI: Oh no, no. Let me correct you right off. They were U.S. internment camps for Japanese Americans. Japanese internment camps were put up by the Japanese government for American P.O.W.s. You see the difference.

METROPOLE: Absolutely.

TAKEI: These were U.S. internment camps for Japanese Americans. We were rounded up by our own government and incarcerated in our own country. That's the big difference.

METROPOLE: Along those same lines, is there a preferred word to use for people who were in those camps?

TAKEI: Internees.

METROPOLE: Thank you. I think that this is an important subject, and I'm hoping that having information about the camps come from you will get some people interested who might not be otherwise.

TAKEI: I would like people to read about it. I am chairman of the board of the Japanese American National Museum, and this institution is to tell, not just that story, but the story of the entire Japanese American experience, from the coming of the immigrants to what happened to the next generation with World War II. And then the redress movement and the glory of democracy where today we now have Japanese Americans not only in the halls of Congress, but on the President's cabinet as well. As I'm sure you know, the Secretary of Transportation is Norman Mineta, who was in an internment camp himself.

METROPOLE: The Japanese American National Museum — is that the one in Los Angeles?

TAKEI: That is correct. However, we travel our exhibits throughout the country, and so we are a national museum. As a matter of fact, I think we can be called an international museum because we've sent our exhibits to Brazil, and for the last two years we've had an exhibit traveling to Japan. We've found that the people of Japan are just as ignorant of the Japanese American experience and of the internment as two-thirds of America is.

METROPOLE: I'm guessing that you were too young when your parents were taken to the camp to have any memory of your life before that time, is that right?

TAKEI: I was four years old at the time of Pearl Harbor, and I was in two camps until I was eight years old.

METROPOLE: So do you recall being

taken to the camp?

TAKEI: You know, I was too young to really understand what was happening, but a child senses the parent's tensions. We were all packing up and getting ready to leave, and then when soldiers with guns come to take you away, that was scary. I do remember that. And here's an interesting historic circle. We were taken from our home and assembled in front of the oldest Japanese Buddhist temple in downtown Los Angeles. And it was that building that became the first building of the Japanese American National Museum.

We were assembled there, then put on busses, and then taken to the horse stables at the Santa Anita racetrack because the camps weren't built yet. So we were there for a couple of months. And then from there we were put on a train and taken to the swamps of Arkansas - a camp called Rohwer. There were ten camps all together, all of them in some of the most God-forsaken places in America. Whether in the swamps of the south, or the blistering hot desert of Arizona, or the windy, cold, high plains of Wyoming, or Utah, or Colorado.

Can you imagine how it was for my parents, to have your business, property, home, freedom, taken away from you, and then be housed in a horse stable where the stench of horses was still pungent.

METROPOLE: Do you feel that insult of being taken to horse stables was intentional, or that the government just took you where there was available space?

TAKEI: Well, the government didn't house draftees in horse stables.

METROPOLE: That's true. A very good point. You mentioned your parents' property. Were people expected to just give up everything but what they could carry?

TAKEI: Well, you know, they said they were coming to get us, and what my parents used to call vultures were all hovering about and my father felt it was better to get something than to leave and have it taken away by the vultures. He got \$5 for his car. My mother's brand new refrigerator he sold for a dollar. He was a bibliophile, he collected books, and he didn't want to lose that so he put them into storage. There were some people who were so angered by the vultures hanging about that they took their furniture out into the back yard and burned it rather than leave it to the vultures.

Here in America.

You know, the importance of this story today is that we hear faint echoes — it wasn't as blatant as sixty years ago - but the

echoes are still audible today when Arab Americans are being beat up or their businesses have rocks thrown into them or when male Arab immigrants are taken away without charges. It was just like with the Japanese Americans — no charges, no trial, they are just taken away and incarcerated for a period of time, and their families have no idea of where they are, why they were taken away. They call it detention now, instead of internment.

METROPOLE: Were your parents U.S. citizens at that time?

TAKEI: My mother was a U.S. citizen. This is another little-known fact of American history. Every immigrant coming to this country can aspire to become a naturalized citizen, except one group of immigrants — immigrants from Asia. At that time it was mainly Chinese and Japanese, and they could not become naturalized citizens. So from the very outset they had this discrimination put upon them. My father came to this country when he was 10 years old. He was educated in San Francisco, he grew up in San Francisco, and he was an American in spirit if not in legalistic terms. But because he was born in Japan, he could not become a naturalized

METROPOLE: Was that a new law or something already on the books?

TAKEI: It was from the 1800s. To give you a little bit of history, the Japanese particularly when they came to the west coast went into farming and they were quite successful. The Caucasian community wanted to prevent the Japanese immigrants who were so successful in farming from owning land, so in California in 1912 they passed what was called the alien land law. It said nothing about Asians. The phrase that they used was "aliens ineligible for citizenship." And who were they? The only aliens ineligible for citizenship were Asians - the Chinese and Japanese. They were excluded from owning the land they developed. They took wasteland and turned it into bountiful agricultural land, yet they could not own it. And then a couple of years later, Oregon passed the same law, as did the state of Washington. All up and down the West coast they passed a law that didn't say Asians but was directed specifically at

METROPOLE: Talking again about your experience in the camps, how were you

TAKEI: It varied from camp to camp, but you had barb wire fences around you. You

had high guard towers with machine guns pointed at you. It was no different from a concentration camp. Well, I shouldn't compare it with the Nazi concentration camps because they were death camps. There was no systematic elimination of the Japanese American internees. However, it wasn't systematic, but many were in essence killed by the internment experience.

Every Japanese American had to go, whether they were citizen or immigrant, a baby or elderly person, and medical care was very poor, so if you got sick that was almost a death sentence. Many people went crazy, and they would walk up to the barb wire fences. Even when the guards said stop they wouldn't stop walking and were shot down.

The military even raided orphanages, to gather Japanese-American babies. Now what threat are they to the government? Babies? And some were half Japanese at that. That's why they were orphans. A woman had an affair, got pregnant, and in those days to have a half-Caucasian baby would have had her ostracized from the Japanese American community, so she gave the baby up for adoption. And the military went and gathered all the Japanese American babies and set up an orphanage at the Manzanar camp. It was irrational. Hysterical.

METROPOLE: Do you recall anyone trying to escape?

TAKEI: No I do not. I'm sure you can find instances of that if you do some research. **METROPOLE:** Among the people who were taken to the camps, what was the feeling toward the government at that point?

TAKEI: There was a whole range. Before internment, but right after Pearl Harbor, young Japanese American men and women like all American men and women rushed to the draft board to volunteer to serve in the military. They were responded to with a slap in the face. They were labeled 4C which translates in normal English as enemy non-aliens. Now, what is a nonalien?

Well, that's a citizen. But we had to be defined in the negative. Enemy non-alien. And for those Japanese Americans that were already in the military at that time, they had the greatest insult inflicted on a soldier. Their weapons were taken away, and if you protested you were thrown into the stockade. Just for being Japanese American. You're already wearing the uniform and serving your country, but overnight you become a potential traitor and saboteur or

fifth columnist.

However, a year into internment, the government realized there was a manpower shortage and here are all these young men and women in camps that they could utilize, but they've incarcerated us as potential traitors, so they had to find some way of ascertaining the quote "loyalty" of the people who had their property taken away, their freedom taken away, and they were imprisoned behind barb-wire fences.

They came down with this outrageous thing called the loyalty questionnaire. This was a year into the incarceration. It was a series of questions — about fifty questions — but they were interested in two specific questions. And this questionnaire had to be responded to by everyone over seventeen years of age. Everyone. Whether you were an immigrant old lady, or a seventeen-yearold girl. Question 27 asked, "Will you bear arms to defend the United States of America." Could you imagine this being asked of an 88-year-old immigrant lady? Or even an 88-year-old immigrant man? Or a seventeen-year-old girl? And in the case of my mother who was in her mid twenties, she had three young children. My baby sister was just an infant then, and I was five year old. And she was asked to respond to "Would you bear arms to defend the United States of America?"

Question 28 asked — and this was a very sloppily worded question with two ideas in one sentence - "Will you swear your loyalty to the United States of America and forswear your loyalty to the Emperor of Japan." Now the word forswear assumes that there is an existing loyalty to the Emperor of Japan. This is an outrageous question to ask of an American citizen someone born here, educated here, who always thought he was an American — will you forswear your existing loyalty. You can't forswear something which doesn't exist. And so if you answered no to that question, meaning you don't have a loyalty to the Emperor to forswear, you were saying no to the first part as well, "will you swear your loyalty to the United States of America." If you answered yes, meaning that you would swear your loyalty to the United States of America, you were also a ha — fessing up that you were up until that time were loyal to the Emperor of Japan. It was outrageous.

This questionnaire threw all ten camps into turmoil. They didn't know how to answer that. My parents said that they have taken my property, my home, my freedom,

but they're not going to take my dignity away from me. I'm not going to grovel before this kind of outrage. And they answered "no" to those two questions. As extraordinary as it is, there were those who answered yes to those two questions and despite their rejection a year ago as 4C, they volunteered to serve in the military again.

You might have read about the 442nd Regimental Combat Team, and the Japanese Americans who served with the military intelligence board. They served with extraordinary valor. And the 442nd Regimental Combat Team is the most decorated outfit to return from the European theater of World War II. This is another little known fact, it was another Japanese American outfit, the 522nd battalion, that liberated Dachau, the Nazi concentration camp.

METROPOLE: I didn't know that. **TAKEI:** Most people don't know that. METROPOLE: So at what time did your family leave the camp?

TAKEI: The outside world was still pretty scary because anti-Japanese feelings were still strong. So, in our family — there were other families that left together - but in my family my father left first, in 1945, and came back to Los Angeles to find housing and a job. Those were the two most difficult things to get.

My father's first job was as a dishwasher in a China Town restaurant and the housing that he found for us was on skid row in downtown Los Angeles. We left the camp in February of 1946. For us, as children, that was normality, because everybody always lived the same way. We all lived in the tar-paper barracks, we lined up three times a day for our meals, we all showered in the communal shower, and so that was normality for us as children. So when we came out it was a terrifying experience. The stench of urine and the human feces in the alleyways in skid row, and the scary, ugly people that staggered around and then they fell down and just lay there in their barf. We'd never seen anything like that. My little sister said, "Mama, let's go back home," meaning back behind those barbed wire

METROPOLE: How long do you think after you were released your family started feeling like part of society again?

TAKEI: My father spoke both Japanese and English fluently, and in camp — we were in two different camps, the one in Arkansas and then we were taken to another one in northern California, Tule Lake —

and my father was block manager in both camps, sort of like the representative of each block, so he was seen as something of a leader. When we came out, many of those people that had difficulties speaking English came to my father to have him help them get a job or find housing.

So my father after his first job as a dishwasher opened an employment agency in little Tokyo and he helped them. But the kind of jobs he could get for them were jobs like dishwasher, or janitor, and cleaning lady that paid a pittance, and he didn't have the heart to collect his commission. And so my mother said, you know we've got to eat to, you've got to quit doing this, so he started a dry-cleaning business in east L.A., which is the Mexican-American ghetto. He was reasonably successful there, and we got the to point where we could by a house. So in 1950 my father bought a house back in the same old neighborhood, the Wilshire district, that we'd lived in before the war. METROPOLE: You left in 1946, so you were in the camp when the atomic bomb

was dropped on Hiroshima. Do you recall

TAKEI: Well, my mother's parents, grandparents, came from Hiroshima. And before the war they returned to Hiroshima, because they sensed the war coming. For my mother it was an absolutely torturous experience because we didn't get any information other than what little information the camp command would share. She had no idea whether her parents had survived or whether they were gone.

My mother didn't sleep at all; she was tortured by it. And so my father said to her, why don't you, for your own peace, consider your parents having gone. As it turned out, my grandparents had survived, but one of my mother's younger sisters went back to Japan with my grandparents, and she and her baby were killed in the atomic bombing. She was supposed to have died in one of the rivers in Hiroshima. Apparently their bodies hurt so much that they found some refuge in the rivers, and that's where she died, as did her baby. She was found dead with her baby.

METROPOLE: This is just one of the worst parts of our history.

TAKEI: That's why the unilateral efforts by George Bush to start a war in Iraq is really a chilling thing.

METROPOLE: Do you feel that the existence of the camps made feelings of racism worse, or better -

TAKEI: How could it be better?

METROPOLE: I've heard that in France, for example, after the war, there was less racism because people saw how horrible the camps had been.

TAKEI: What made the difference was the Japanese Americans who served in the military. Because they served with such incredible patriotism — as I said, the 442nd is the single most decorated outfit, and there are many Congressional Medals of Honor awardees. As a matter of fact, the senior senator from the state of Hawaii, Senator Danny Inouye, one of the veterans of the senate, has a loose right sleeve because he left his arm in Italy while fighting with the 442nd.

Because of that, a lot of things started to change. For example, in 1952 the Walter McCarran act was passed, which for the first time granted naturalized citizenship to Asian immigrants. My father was one of the first to become naturalized. Although he came here as a boy, and he felt American, he couldn't officially become an American until the Walter McCarran act was passed in '52.

METROPOLE: You mentioned current events earlier. Do you think that there could be camps of this kind again?

TAKEI: I'd like to think not the camps, but when you have an event like September 11 or Bush's sense that Saddam Hussein is a threat to the United States, there is an air of hysteria. As I said earlier, Arab immigrant men are being detained with no charges, just like with the Japanese Americans. No trials. Just detention, in this case, with their families not knowing anything.

The yahoos in our society, in our nation, have taken pot shots at people and murdered not just Muslims but, you known an Egyptian in Phoenix, Arizona — an Egyptian Sikh, so he's an entirely different religion, but these yahoos shot him and killed him. Just last week, a young, 18 year old Arab-American kid whose brother talks just like us — the kid's so beat up that he can't be interviewed - was ganged up on by about twenty young non-American meaning their behavior is non-American white kids. This kind of behavior is completely contrary to what this nation is, but it's started happening again.

METROPOLE: I remember little more than brief mention of these camps being made in history class in high school. Why do you think so little time is spent teaching about this?

TAKEI: That's why we have the Japanese American National Museum, to make up for this deficiency. We feel that dark chapter in American history is probably the most important chapter in American history. My father used to say both the strength and weakness of American democracy is that it is a true people's democracy. It's as great as the people can be, but it's also as fallible as

That's why political leadership, responsible political leadership, is so important, to try and put these yahoos in their place. And to try and keep the hysteria down. I'm afraid that we have an attorney general, John Ashcroft, who is raising the same kind of issues again, pitting national security against civil liberties. What is national security when our civil liberties are endangered? We don't have an America to protect — if the fundamental principles and ideals of this system are going to be compromised, then what is national security?

METROPOLE: We're essentially destroying ourselves.

TAKEI: Exactly.

METROPOLE: A friend of mine who was born in one of the internment camps tells me that it seems to her that only the descendants of the people that were in the camps have any kind of interest — and that interest is waning with every passing generation. Things like your museum are obviously helping to correct that. What else do you think needs to be done to preserve this history for all Americans, not just Japanese Americans?

TAKEI: Education is the key to democracy. When too many people are ignorant, then democracy is endangered. It's got to be woven into the fabric of our educational system. This was not a Japanese-American experience. It was an outrage to the American constitution. That's everybody's constitution — your constitution, my constitution, Jesse Jackson's constitution, Pat Robertson's constitution. All Americans should know about the failure of American democracy at that point in history so that we don't let that happen again.

METROPOLE: I assume that people who are interested in more information should turn to your museum.

TAKEI: Yes. We're on the Internet, as you know, and we travel our exhibits all over the country. We currently have one in Sacramento. The exhibit titled "American Concentration Camp" was in New York; Atlanta, Georgia; Sacramento; Seattle; and next year it's going to be going to Little Rock, Arkansas. 0