

# Rabbi helped Nazi soldier become a football legend

**MORE** than 20,000 people demonstrated outside Manchester City's Maine Road ground in 1949 against the signing of a tall, blue-eyed, blonde goalkeeper called Bernhard Trautmann.

The 25-year-old looked the very picture of Hitler's Aryan master race vision.

It didn't look good though for this ambitious player, not least because he had the enormous shoes of City's much loved England goalie, Frank Swift, who was retiring after 16 distinguished years at the club.

This young man faced a much bigger hurdle if he was to sign for the club of choice of Manchester's powerful Jewish community, for he was a captured Nazi paratrooper and former member of the Hitler Youth.

Just four years after the Second World War ended, with the atrocities of the Holocaust fresh in the minds of the entire nation, it was perceived an unforgivable insult to the fans who had survived German air raids and to the Jewish community of Manchester, in particular, for City to even consider such a move.

So how did the man known as Bert — because the English couldn't pronounce his name — become worshipped as the bravest man in English sport and, even more incredibly, win Manchester's Jewish hearts?

It was a question I put to Trautmann when, alongside fellow broadcaster and City fan, John Stapleton, I had the honour of presenting him with his Manchester City Hall of Fame award in 2004.

"Because of one man" he told me.

Dr Alexander Altmann, the communal rabbi, appealed for Trautmann to be given a chance — reminding everyone that an individual should not be punished for his country's sins.

An amazing act in itself, when you consider that Dr Altmann had arrived in Manchester a refugee from Berlin, where his parents and six other members of his family were murdered by the Nazis.

Without Dr Altmann's intervention, it is unlikely that City would have signed him and we would not still be talking about

**SUSAN BOOKBINDER**, pictured, presented Bert Trautmann with his Manchester City Hall of Fame award in 2004. Having grown up listening to her father's stories about Trautmann playing on in the FA Cup Final in 1956 with a broken neck and knowing that her grandfather, a Jewish immigrant, held him up as a hero, she was honoured to introduce him that night. Trautmann died of a heart attack in his adoptive home in Spain last week, aged 89. Susan looks back on how a former Nazi soldier became a peacemaker, was awarded an OBE and won the respect of all Europeans. But it all started with the Jewish concept of forgiveness — offered by a Jewish leader and Holocaust survivor in Manchester.



the 1956 FA Cup Final, in which Trautmann established himself across the world as a legend.

It is a story known to every City fan of every age and one which I grew up hearing from my father, who regularly described how, as a teenage boy he queued up all night for his Cup Final ticket.

Having "run away from home" and hitchhiked down to Wembley to see City lose to Newcastle the previous year, City simply had to win against Birmingham City.

And win they did, 3-1, with Trautmann playing the final 16 minutes in terrible pain, with a fractured neck.

There are various accounts of how he sustained the injury, but most describe the moment he — bravely as always — dived at the feet of Birmingham's Peter Murphy, then staying on the pitch to

make crucial saves to preserve City's lead.

It was such a privilege and a moment I will never forget when I inducted him into the Hall of Fame.

The 2004 awards were the first. Also inducted at the time were greats such as Colin Bell, Francis Lee, Mike Summerbee, Joe Corrigan, Niall Quinn, Paul Lake and Andy Hinchcliffe — but the admiration was palpable, the atmosphere, electric, when Trautmann came to the stage.

"Your hero, your father's hero, your grandfather's hero — ladies and gentlemen, Bert Trautmann!"

I had hardly got the word 'Bert' out of my mouth before being drowned out with cheers and applause as the entire room — some 500 City-mad guests — were on their feet.



**HEROIC:** Bert Trautmann dives at the feet of Birmingham City's Peter Murphy in the 1956 FA Cup final. Trautmann played the final 16 minutes with broken bones in his neck and helped Manchester City lift the trophy 3-1



**TRIBUTE:** Bert Trautmann with his Manchester City Hall of Fame award

The statuesque, smiling figure, gracefully waving to his worshippers.

The love and respect for him spans generations, playing on with a broken neck is heroic enough, but he'd actually achieved an historic feat already.

So how, as an ex-Nazi Luftwaffe paratrooper did Bert Trautmann win the hearts and minds of Manchester's Jews, many of them still bearing the weeping wounds of the Holocaust?

Bert seemed relieved that I was asking him a different question to the usual broken neck one.

"Rabbi Altmann, that's all," he told me.

Trautmann also seized on the opportunity to make amends. He went out into the Jewish community of Manchester and tried to explain how, as a teenager, he joined the German army.

He told the *Observer* in 2010 "in Hitler's Germany, you had no mind of your own . . . then when you began taking prisoners, you heard them cry for their mother and father.

"When you meet the enemy, you became a real person."

Trautmann was one of only 90 members of his original 1,000 strong regiment still alive in 1945.

He escaped from the Russians and the French Resistance to be finally captured by the British

and taken to a prisoner-of-war camp in Ashton-in-Makerfield, Lancashire.

There he was told of concentration camps and the Holocaust and said he kept nothing from the war — "I don't have my Iron Cross anymore," he said.

2004 was not only the year he was inducted into the Hall of Fame, it was also the year he won an OBE in recognition of his contribution to the improvement of Anglo-German relations.

It was his reconciliation with Manchester's Jewish community that laid the foundations of this crucial diplomatic work.

"We never, ever want another world war," he said. "It absolutely must not happen."

There is a statue inside the Etihad Stadium in honour of Bert, but his death last week has led to tributes from all over the world and calls for a 'Bert Trautmann Stand'.

As a life-long City fan with roots in Manchester's Jewish community, I would love to see that happen.

It would say so much about the humanity and soul of Bert Trautmann, hand-in-hand with that of City's Jewish fans.

**Susan Bookbinder, a journalist and broadcaster, will be writing a monthly guest column for the Jewish Telegraph from August. She has asked that her fee be donated to the Association of Jewish Refugees.**



**INTERVIEW:** Dr Alexander Altmann

## Trautmann's tears for hero Dr Altmann

**WHENEVER** Bert Trautmann recalled what Manchester communal rabbi Dr Alexander Altmann did for him, he became emotional.

"It made him cry every time," *Trautmann's Journey: From Hitler Youth to FA Cup Legend* co-author Catrine Clay told *Sportsworld*.

"Speaking about Dr Altmann genuinely brought tears to his eyes.

**BY SIMON YAFFE**

"He felt amazed at the forgiveness of the Jewish community and the English people.

"Bert admired Dr Altmann enormously. It surprised me that he used to cry about it, because he was a 'tough' guy."

Former BBC documentary-maker Catrine first met Trautmann when

she made a programme about German prisoners of war who had decided to remain in Britain. He was one of them.

"We got on extremely well and he only had to think about it for half a minute when I asked him whether I could write a book about his life," Catrine said.

"There was no question he was affected by what happened during the Second World War.

"He told me that his 'real' education started when he was 22 and arrived in England — it was the first time he saw a different world.

"Bert wanted to show there were good German, not just bad ones.

"He told me a story of three Jewish Manchester City fans, youngsters, who went to watch him train.

"He invited them over to kick the

ball at him."

Former City striker Johnny Williamson, who played with Trautmann in the early 1950s, said he won the Blues' fans over with his performances on the field.

"Bert was a brave and terrific person," he told *Sportsworld*.

"I know there was animosity from City's Jewish fans at first, but I think they took him to their hearts."