

= Abyssinia , Henry =

" Abyssinia , Henry " is the 72nd episode of the M * A * S * H television series , and the final episode of the series ' third season . First aired on March 18 , 1975 , and written by Everett Greenbaum and Jim Fritzell , the highly rated episode was most notable for its shocking and unexpected ending . The plot of the episode centers on the honorable discharge and subsequent departure of the 4077th MASH 's commanding officer , Lieutenant Colonel Henry Blake (played by McLean Stevenson) .

The title of the episode refers to the slang use of " Abyssinia " for " goodbye " . (" Abyssinia " , pronounced " ab @-@ ee @-@ SIN @-@ ee @-@ ah " can be understood as " I 'll be seeing you " . In the 1920s and 1930s Abyssinia was the name for the country now called Ethiopia .) It is mistakenly said that this slang was frequently used by the Henry Blake character throughout his years on the show . In fact , whenever Blake would bid farewell , it was usually by saying " goom @-@ bye " , though Blake did use this term at least once .

The highly controversial ending to the episode , which has since been referenced and parodied many times , prompted more than 1 @,@ 000 letters to series producers Gene Reynolds and Larry Gelbart , and drew fire from both CBS and 20th Century Fox .

After the production of this episode , both Stevenson and Wayne Rogers , who played the character of Trapper John McIntyre , left the series to pursue other interests . While Stevenson 's departure was announced prior to and written into " Abyssinia , Henry " , Rogers unexpectedly left the series during the break between Seasons Three and Four , and so his character 's departure takes place off @-@ screen in the following episode , " Welcome to Korea " , the first of the show 's fourth season . These combined departures and their subsequent replacements also signaled the beginning of a major shift in focus of the M * A * S * H series as a whole with story and script focus emphasizing the character of Hawkeye Pierce , played by Alan Alda .

= = Plot = =

The episode opens in the operating room , as the surgeons and medical staff (with the exception of Frank Burns) participate in a game of " Name That Tune " . Tension between Frank , who requests silence , and the other surgeons reaches a peak , and shortly afterwards , Radar O 'Reilly (Gary Burghoff) enters the O.R. and informs Blake of his discharge : he has received all of the needed Army service points to be rotated home . Upon the completion of the surgical session , Henry begins planning his upcoming trip home and places a telephone call to Bloomington , Illinois , to inform his wife and family of the good news .

Meanwhile , Major Margaret Houlihan (Loretta Swit) and Major Frank Burns (Larry Linville) are eagerly awaiting the upcoming transfer of command of the 4077th MASH : upon Blake 's departure , Burns will become the unit commander . Henry and Radar begin to clean out the main office , sharing a sentimental moment in which Radar tells Blake of his meaning to him . As a token of appreciation and admiration , Radar gives him an inscribed Winchester cartridge ; a surprised Henry returns the favor by spontaneously giving Radar a rectal thermometer that once belonged to his father .

On the night before Henry 's departure , Hawkeye Pierce (Alan Alda) , Trapper McIntyre (Wayne Rogers) , and Radar throw a going @-@ away party for him at Rosie 's Bar and Grill . All four inebriated , they share some pleasant memories and reminisce before Blake leaves to go to the bathroom . While Henry is gone , the others prepare a comedic ceremony to " drum [Henry] out of the Army " . As a part of the ceremony , the three present Henry with a brand new suit as a parting gift .

The next morning is the first with Frank Burns in charge , and he immediately starts using his " gung @-@ ho " , militarily strict , and whistle @-@ happy attitude to assemble the company . A lack of respect from his subordinates is already evident , as an out of uniform and unshaven Hawkeye and Trapper and an outrageously dressed (even for him) Corporal Klinger (Jamie Farr) show up for the assembly . As Blake leaves his tent for the last time , dressed in his new suit , he is greeted with

a round of applause from the unit . Frank and Margaret give Blake a formal " ten @-@ hut " salute . Henry , in his typical laid @-@ back fashion , tells Frank to " take it easy " and to " stuff that whistle someplace " .

After saying his individual goodbyes to many of the members of the 4077th , Hawkeye whispers to Henry and convinces him to give a long kiss to Margaret , generating another rousing round of applause from the onlookers . Blake then leaves the camp , walking towards the chopper pad with Hawkeye , Trapper , Margaret , Frank , Klinger , Father Mulcahy (William Christopher) , and Radar , with the rest of the camp saying farewells and singing " For He 's a Jolly Good Fellow " .

When the helicopter arrives , it contains a wounded soldier , which occupies Hawkeye and Trapper ; they say their short goodbyes before going to care for the soldier . Beginning to board the helicopter , Henry spots an emotional Radar saluting him and pauses for a moment . He runs back to him to return the salute , hug him , and leave him with the words : " You behave yourself , or I 'm gonna come back and kick your butt . " Blake then boards the helicopter and leaves the 4077th .

The next scene takes place in the O.R. and became a defining moment in the series . As surgeons are working on wounded soldiers , Radar enters , visibly shaken and not wearing the required surgical mask . Trapper chides him for this , but Radar , too dazed to react (or care) , delivers a shocking announcement (and quite possibly his most famous line) : " I have a message . Lieutenant Colonel ... Henry Blake 's plane ... was shot down ... over the Sea of Japan . It spun in ... there were no survivors . " Radar leaves the O.R. as the camera pans the stunned and silent hospital staff , including Trapper and a teary @-@ eyed Hawkeye , who continue to operate on the wounded , and even Majors Burns and Houlihan , who are crying .

After a final commercial break , the episode closes with an " affectionate and reluctant farewell " to Blake by means of a light @-@ hearted montage of clips from past episodes .

= = Production = =

The final scene , in which Radar informs everyone of the death of Henry Blake was unprecedented : it was the first time in American television history that a main character departing a series was killed off in a tragic way . When Stevenson decided to leave the series part way through the third season , Gene Reynolds and Larry Gelbart , the show 's producers , decided to make a statement regarding the unexpectedness and horror of war , especially with the Vietnam War fresh in people 's minds .

To evoke genuine emotions of shock and sadness , the final O.R. scene was kept a secret from the cast , with the exception of Alan Alda , until immediately before filming ; only then did Gelbart hand out the last page of the script . As a result , Stevenson was still on the set to see the final scene being filmed . After shooting was completed , a season @-@ ending cast party was planned . Stevenson left the set almost immediately after the end of filming , and the party was canceled due to the poor mood of the cast . Stevenson later said in an interview that he was deeply hurt that his character 's death was revealed in that fashion and the party was " ruined . " Gelbart later said of the event , " I wish we could say to him , ' We didn 't mean it , Mac . ' "

= = Reaction and impact = =

Shortly after the episode originally aired , the reactions and feedback of viewers were intense , both in support and condemnation of the events of the episode . It is estimated that over 1 @,@ 000 letters were received by the producers regarding the episode ; " some ... were from people who understood . Many were from people that didn 't . " Many of those who objected also cited the fact that M * A * S * H was a situation comedy , and that Blake 's " cheap " killing did not belong in the show ; one caller to Reynolds stated after the episode aired that they " don 't know why [they] did it ; it 's not necessary , it 's just a little comedy show " and that " you 've upset everybody [in the family] , " before vowing never to watch the show again . Another , more lighthearted response to the episode came from an unhappy viewer in Lubbock , Texas , who sent a telegram stating that " Henry Blake has been found in a raft in Lake Lubbock . " Initially , Gelbart and Reynolds handwrote

letters in response to the feedback , but eventually , due to the overwhelming number of letters , a form response was created explaining the rationale of their decisions . Negative reactions were not exclusive to the home viewers of the program : both CBS , the network that aired M * A * S * H , and 20th Century Fox , the company that produced M * A * S * H , expressed their unhappiness at the killing of Henry Blake . In fact , CBS ' distaste with the episode was so great that during a later rerun of the episode , the final O.R. scene was cut from the episode . The final scenes have always been shown in syndication , and were uncut on the DVD release of the series ' third season in 2003 .

Not all reaction to the airing was negative : On an episode of the variety series Cher that aired shortly afterward and featured Stevenson as a guest , the situation was parodied when the episode opened to a studio shot of Stevenson as Blake floating on a smoking raft and shouting , " I 'm OK ! I 'm OK ! " .

In Bobbie Ann Mason 's 1985 novel In Country , the teenage protagonist recalls having watched the episode as a child and being " so shocked she went around stunned for days , " and confesses that Blake 's death on the show had seemed more real to her than the death of her own father in Vietnam .

The final scene was spoofed on the Family Guy episode " Fifteen Minutes of Shame " when a cutaway shows Brian Griffin saying to the rest of the family , " I have an announcement . Meg Griffin 's plane was shot down over the Sea of Japan . It spun in . There were no survivors . " .

In 1997 , TV Guide included this episode in their list of the " 100 Greatest Episodes of All Time , " ranking it # 20 .

In 2005 , TV Land included this episode as part of its " Top 100 Most Unexpected Moments in TV History " , ranking it # 15 .

= = Aftermath = =

While " Abyssinia , Henry " is well known for the departure of McLean Stevenson from the series , it was also the final episode in which Wayne Rogers appeared . During the summer 1975 break between seasons three and four , he quit the series . 20th Century Fox sued him for breach of contract , but the lawsuit collapsed . The character of Trapper John McIntyre was subsequently written off the series in " Welcome to Korea , " the first episode of the next season , though Rogers had a small voice role in that episode as a PA announcer at Kimpo Air Base .

As a result , when the cast returned to begin filming the series ' fourth season in September 1975 , there were major changes in both the makeup and the direction of the show : The more earnest and faithful family man Captain B.J. Hunnicutt (Mike Farrell) had replaced Trapper John , and the regular Army Colonel Sherman Potter (Harry Morgan) had replaced Henry Blake as commander of the 4077th . Another change to the composition of the show occurred in the elevation of longtime recurring guest cast member Jamie Farr , who played Corporal Maxwell Q. Klinger , to the regular cast , with his name being featured on the opening credits . Episodes following this represented a major change in focus for the show : The individual effects and psychological damages of war were explored more , often in parallel to the ending of the Vietnam War , and the Korean culture was portrayed in greater depth than had been done before , instead of focusing on a " boorish , military mindset " as before .

In general , the show began to take on a more serious tone as a seriocomic (or dramedy) series , in which the focus was on the character rather than the character type , and moved away from its status as a situation comedy .