

Università degli Studi di Trieste
Dipartimento di Scienze Giuridiche, del Linguaggio,
dell'Interpretazione e della Traduzione

The Interpreters' Newsletter

Special Issue
No. 27 bis
2022

*Looking back
at Interpreting
in Nuremberg*

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Dipartimento di Scienze Giuridiche, del Linguaggio, dell'Interpretazione
e della Traduzione

Sezione di Studi in Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori (SSLMIT)
Università degli Studi di Trieste

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Editorial

Earlier this year, the Department of Legal, Language, Interpreting and Translation Studies of the University of Trieste hosted AIIC's travelling exhibition "One Trial – Four Languages", after the initiative had been postponed in 2020 owing to the pandemic.

The exhibition provides historical insights into the fascinating and often dramatic lives of the pioneers of simultaneous interpreting: the interpreters who in 1945-1946 worked for the International Military Tribunal in the first of the several Nuremberg Trials during which the leaders of the Nazi regime were tried.

The trial started on 20th November 1945: for 11 months, three teams of 12 interpreters each translated in this new mode of interpretation. Thanks to them, listeners were able to understand what was being said in real time. Without simultaneous interpretation, a trial of such magnitude and duration, with four languages (English, French, Russian and German) spoken by judges, witnesses, defendants, prosecution and defence representatives, would have been unthinkable. The hearings of the main trial alone, with the testimony of 360 witnesses, lasted 218 days.

The first exhibition was organised in Nuremberg in 2013 as part of a series of events conceived by AIIC and *Memorium Nürnberger Prozesse*, the Nuremberg Trials Museum. Over the ensuing years, the travelling exhibition visited numerous European and non-European cities.¹ In Trieste, the exhibition also featured six panel discussions, not only to recall the work of the interpreters at Nuremberg,

¹ For further information about the exhibition see <https://www.profession-of-interpreting.org/en/one-trial-four-languages/>.

but also to examine the various aspects of the trials, as well as their historical significance from a legal perspective.²

One panel examined the experience of the Nuremberg Trials and their impact on current international criminal law. Another panel examined not only the spoken, i.e. the narrative of the trials in terms of languages and cultures, but also the unspoken, i.e. the silence of the defendants, who perpetrated and witnessed unspeakable atrocities. Another panel examined the complex phenomena underlying various practices, such as defendants following orders and the role of the media in presenting memory-based or revisionist narratives. The themes of guilt, moral conscience and ethics in relation to Nuremberg were the subject of another panel discussion, with the voices of writers and philosophers from the German cultural scene; the role of translation as a tool with many ethical implications was also discussed.

Two panel discussions were held on 25th February 2022: they focused on the legacy of the Nuremberg Trials and featured professional interpreters and scholars in the field of Interpreting Studies. The first panel discussion, “Interpreters in Conflict Areas: Ethics and Professional Risk”, focused on the crucial role played, today and in the past, by interpreters in conflict areas and examined important issues such as professional risks, ethics and codes of conduct. The second panel discussion was titled “Simultaneous Interpreting at Nuremberg: a groundbreaking event” and featured an in-depth examination of the role of interpreters during the trials. The experts presented the results of their research on the role and history of some of the interpreters involved at Nuremberg.³

Three of the contributions from this second panel discussion form the basis of the articles selected for this special issue of *The Interpreters' Newsletter*. Much has been written on simultaneous interpreting at Nuremberg, also by the three contributors to this issue. For the panel discussion – and for this Special Issue of *The Interpreters' Newsletter* – they were able to draw on sources not used before, thus adding new features to their reflections and analyses.

The first article is by Jesús Baigorri-Jalón, the author of seminal works in the field of conference interpreting history. The article examines the various aspects that make the Nuremberg Trials a milestone – and a turning point – in interpreting history in general and conference interpreting in particular. The second article is by Francesca Gaiba, author of the first volume devoted to interpreting at the Nuremberg Trials. The article traces the author’s research work, contacts and correspondence with various interpreters and other language experts involved in Nuremberg. The third article is by Ingrid Kurz, who has often done research work on the history of interpretation. Her article examines four of the Nuremberg interpreters and compares their experiences and life stories, also beyond the trials. These are very interesting articles on a subject and event that nearly 80 years on remain extremely relevant and provide fascinating insights into simultaneous and court interpreting.

Alessandra Riccardi and Maurizio Viezzi

2 See <https://interpretiprocessonormberga.it/incontri/>.

3 Special thanks to AIIC Italia for providing the simultaneous interpreting of the two panel discussions.

The Nuremberg Trial as a turning point in the history of interpreting: Notes on historical transitions

JESÚS BAIGORRI-JALÓN

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Abstract

Francesca Gaiba's 1998 book continues to be the primary work on the application of simultaneous interpreting (SI) at the Nuremberg Trial (see my 1999 review). The pioneering and inspirational value of that comprehensive volume makes any attempt to reopen the topic a daunting challenge. After having done some research myself on the Trial's interpreters, some of whom I met in person and even in the booths when I was a staff interpreter at the United Nations, my intention in this paper is to add the perspective of transition in the history of interpreting, underpinned with a few primary and secondary sources that in most cases I had not used before now, because they either were not published or were inaccessible to me. Besides, I intend to expand on my reflections on the impact the Nuremberg Trial had on the profession of conference interpreting (Baigorri-Jalón 2017). I will approach interpreting at the Nuremberg International Military Tribunal (IMT) as part of a transition process symbolizing historical change, and as a testing ground for a variety of linguistic, ethical, sociological and technical challenges. Finally, I will venture a few remarks on the past and the present and on how unpredictability and uncertainty about the future may trigger historical change.

* I am very grateful to Professor Holly Mikkelsen for editing this text and to Professor Lucía Ruiz Rosendo for her suggestions on the preliminary draft. I also thank the two anonymous reviewers of this contribution.

Keywords

history of interpreting, Nuremberg Trial, simultaneous interpreting, conference interpreting, historical transition

Introduction

The main Nuremberg Trial (1945-1946) has been considered a landmark in many aspects, including that of a mythical *Big Bang* of *in situ* simultaneous interpreting.¹ The IMT thus inaugurated an SI era – for *conference* rather than for *court* interpreting – which no other episode has significantly altered, perhaps until the onset of another event with huge reverberations, the COVID-19 pandemic. If onsite SI enabled instantaneous communication in different languages while the speakers were uttering their words, remote SI has made possible instant interlingual communication irrespective of the place where speakers and/or interpreters are located.

Behr (2015: 288), in her entry on interpreting in the Nuremberg Trial, has used the same expression that appears on the title of this paper: “a turning point in the history of interpreting.” In these pages I wish to elaborate on the idea that the interpreting experience at the main Nuremberg Trial was part of a transition process from the prevailing consecutive to the simultaneous mode in international gatherings, which had started two decades before the IMT met in Nuremberg and would continue elsewhere after the Trial.² That transition involved not only technological developments but also an evolution in the interpreters’ training, selection and working environment, in the users’ education on what to expect from interpreting services, and in the relationship between interpreters and the recipients of their services.

The main Nuremberg Trial triggered in a very short period of time the use of the simultaneous system. That happened at an event in which the WWII victors intended to attribute, after a fair trial, a series of heinous crimes to some of the surviving leaders of the Nazi regime. In so doing, they wished to avoid the farce of

- 1 Before the full-scale experiment at Nuremberg, conference interpreting was carried out mostly in the consecutive mode. In that celebratory context, there have been several exhibitions or conferences commemorating the event from the interpreting and interpreters’ perspective. See for instance the series of exhibitions coordinated by Elke Limberger-Katsumi under the patronage of AIIC: <https://www.profession-of-interpreting.org/en/one-trial-four-languages/>, and the catalogue produced for the exhibition at the EU Court of Justice: Cour de Justice de l’Union Européenne (2016) *Il y a 70 ans. Le Procès de Nuremberg. L’interprétation simultanée, des pionniers à nos jours*. Luxembourg: Direction de la communication / Unité publications et médias électroniques.
- 2 The first entry of the definition of “transition” given by the Webster’s dictionary offers two meanings: “a) a change or shift from one state, subject, place, etc. to another,” and “b) a period or phase in which such a change or shift is happening,” Both are applicable throughout this paper. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/transition?utm_campaign=sde&utm_medium=serp&utm_source=jsonld (Accessed 21 August 2022)

the 1921 Leipzig proceeding, which was supposed to settle the issue of WWI guilt, as Justice Jackson made clear from the beginning at the Nuremberg Trial: “Either the victors must judge the vanquished or we must leave the defeated to judge themselves. After the first World War, we learned the futility of the latter course.”³

The IMT not only faced the issue of language barriers; it was also called upon to deal for the first time ever with a series of crimes whose scope was being defined while the trial was ongoing. Certain concepts, such as Holocaust, genocide, etc., were present in the minds of the participants even if they were not expressly used.⁴ Notions such as “crimes against peace” or “crimes against humanity” did not exist before WWII, and defense lawyers, as well as French and Soviet jurists, argued at different stages in the trial that applying laws *ex post facto* contradicted the principle of non-retroactivity (*nullum crimen, nulla poena sine lege*) (Traverso 2009: 116). The international nature of the tribunal required a combination of different legal and procedural systems, not to mention legal traditions and cultures and the mixture of military and civil legal experts. That was the maelstrom the interpreters had to face.

The sources I am using here are made up of a variety of materials (mostly published), which may be characterized as a combination of memoirs and other historical records: autobiographical (Priacel 1974; Frank 1998), biographical (Richmond Mouillot 2015), or a result of an exercise in oral history (Roditi 1986), and also a very small sample of unpublished records from Mark Priceman’s private archive as well as from institutional archives: National United States (US) Archives, International Labour Organization (ILO) and League of Nations (LON) archives. I also incorporate a few images that complement the written records.

Stefan Priacel compiled a series of thoughts about the interpreting profession based on his own long experience, including at Nuremberg. Wolfe Frank’s posthumous book can be seen as an example of an ego-document – as Jacques Presser would call it – that fits into the historiographical personal turn (Baggerman/Dekker 2018). It was edited by Paul Hooley from unpublished notes, written by Frank in a rather informal style, which encompass most of his lifetime, including his experience at the Nuremberg Trial. In the biographical tradition, Miranda Richmond Mouillot’s story about her grandparents – her grandfather, Armand Jacoubovitch, was one of the Nuremberg interpreters – is a high-quality

3 Judge R. Jackson, Opening Statement of the Trial, 21 November, 1945. *Trial of the Major War Criminals before the International Military Tribunal*. Volume II. Proceedings: 11/14/1945-11/30/1945. [Official text in the English language.] Nuremberg 1947: 98-102. <https://www.roberthjackson.org/speech-and-writing/opening-statement-before-the-international-military-tribunal/> (Accessed 29 July 2022)

4 They emanated from two Jewish activists who graduated from the law school at Jan Kazimierz University in Lemberg/Lwów/Lvov/Lviv, Hersch Lauterpacht (crimes against humanity) and Raphael Lemkin (genocide). See Sands (2016), where the author introduces, for completely different reasons, a third Nuremberg-related character who lived in that city around the same period, Hans Frank. Hitler’s lawyer and the Nazi governor responsible for the extermination of Jews and Poles in concentration camps in Poland, Frank would be sentenced to death at the Trial. Lauterpacht was present at the IMT during Hans Frank’s testimony.

ity literary work based on mixed memories, as defined by the author herself: “I realized that when my grandparents passed away, I would carry within me not only the memory of them but the memory of their memories” (2015, chapter six, unpagged electronic edition). It is indeed an inspiring invitation to preserve the recollections of those who are no longer with us, which Richmond Mouillot has strengthened with complementary archival and secondary sources. The long interviews of Édouard Roditi – a rare exception of a Nuremberg interpreter with previous SI practice – by Richard C. Smith are a very good example of how to create meaningful sources through an oral history method. The text contains interesting references to Roditi’s experience at Nuremberg. Mark Priceman’s archive, kept by his family after his death in 2014 at the age of 100, is an impressively rich collection of materials he kept throughout his amazing life. So far it is in a preliminary stage of archival indexing and classification and will, no doubt, be an excellent source for biographical historical research.⁵

1. The technological transition

The main Nuremberg Trial is associated with a *revolution* that brought about simultaneous interpreting. However, from a historiographical perspective it should be remarked that SI did not begin at the Nuremberg Trial. Experimental methods and devices that had been tested successfully for the previous two decades or so were implemented for the first time on a large scale, in the double sense of the continuity of the use of SI for over ten months and of its worldwide repercussions thanks to the unheard-of media display. It is in that context that we can speak of *transition*. Those tests began, if not earlier, with the first proposals made by Edward Filene to Sir Eric Drummond around 1924, which were technically formulated and tested in the following years at the League of Nations (LON) and the International Labor Organization (ILO). Training in SI started at the ILO in Geneva with the course sponsored by Filene in 1927, and successful candidates worked at the 1928 ILO Conference in Geneva, but most of the skills acquisition came via on-the-job practice. That would also be the case at the Nuremberg Trial, where the spontaneous abilities briefly shown by interpreters in quick interviews and tests were the only methodological basis for their recruitment as SI interpreters. In parallel, the Communist International made its own successful SI tests with totally different simultaneous interpreting equipment (Chernov 2016). The improvements in both technologies required time, so the development of the simultaneous modality should be seen as a process rather than as a sudden occurrence.

The IBM company had acquired the patent for the International Filene-Finlay Translator, submitted by Edward Filene in 1930 to the US Patent Office,⁶ and that is how Colonel Dostert knew about that system, used not only at the ILO conferences but also at conferences in the United States (Washington DC and

5 I have reflected on the importance of preserving interpreters’ private archives elsewhere in this journal (Baigorri-Jalón 2016).

6 For more detailed information about the development of the Filene-Finlay system at the ILO, see Baigorri-Jalón 2021.

New York) in 1931. The SI device was also taken on loan by the Permanent Court of International Justice, part of the LON institutions (Baigorri-Jalón 2014: 160), perhaps the first time in which that modality was used in an international court setting. A 1931 ILO file (ILO O304/1/13) contains correspondence between representatives from the Court and from the ILO with requests made by the Court to borrow the simultaneous equipment from the LON.⁷ Stefan Priacel (1974, 19), one of the Nuremberg interpreters, considers that sequence of innovative events as minor experiments (*comme marginales*).

Colonel Dostert, an interpreter himself and coordinator of the Western SI interpreting services at Nuremberg – the Soviet team had its own organizational chart – had sufficient proof of the viability of the Filene-Finlay Translator apparatus to convince General Eisenhower and Justice Jackson. This is Wolfe Frank's explanation of how Dostert convinced first General Eisenhower:

Dostert was President Eisenhower's English/French interpreter and a good friend. When 'Ike' had first become aware of the plans for bringing the top Nazis to trial he had tried to picture how the language problem could be solved. He had, understandably, had moments of irritation in the face of consecutive interpretations, in his activities as top commander.

'Surely, Leon,' the conversation between Ike and Dostert had run, 'this means if a guy says something in German, some other guy has to translate it into English?'

'Yes, General, and somebody else has to translate it into French, and somebody else into Russian [...] and if a guy says something in Russian that has to be translated into English, and into French, and into German.'

The Supreme Commander of Allied Forces was pacing the floor.

'Holy Mackerel, Leon,' he commanded 'You gotta do something.'

And simultaneous interpretation was born. (Frank 2018: chapter 27, unpaginated electronic edition)

American Prosecutor Jackson would eventually convince the representatives from the other Powers, after recognizing in the preparatory meetings in London on August 12, 1945 that the legal need to render the entire proceeding into four languages was a "dreary business" and "a tedious prospect for me and for representatives of all the governments which will engage" in the Trial.⁸ The implementation of the SI system was not easy, but finally that was the option that prevailed: "The [Nuremberg] judges viewed this innovative technology with a mixture of enthusiasm and skepticism. Would it actually work? (No one talked about the fact that IBM, like the Krupps, had done a lucrative business with Hitler.)" (Hirsch 2020: 114).⁹

7 A former translator-interpreter at the League, Colonel Harry Amyas Leigh Herschel Wade, transferred to the Court as of January 1, 1931, was involved in part of that correspondence between the Permanent Court and the League or the ILO (Wade Personnel file, memorandum from the Personnel Office to the relevant administrative services of the League, dated 14 November 1930).

8 Justice Jackson, Statement on War Trials Agreement, 12 August 1945, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/imt/imt__jacko2.asp#:~:text=It%20would%20not%20be%20a,international%20cooperation%20is%20mutual%20concession (Accessed 29 July 2022)

9 The IBM Hollerith card-sorting system had been exported to the Third Reich for use at Bergen-Belsen and most of the other concentration camps. See Edwin Black (2001).

The technical equipment was rather primitive, and frequent breakdowns caused sound transmission problems that brought the trial to a standstill:

Also, the sound equipment that we had was very defective, so we constantly had breakdowns during the trials when we would interrupt because the interpreters couldn't hear what was being said, or something would fuse. It was very, very difficult. Only in the judges' sessions did everything work smoothly because it was a small room with fewer wires, and there was far too much wiring in that big courtroom. There'd always be someone tripping up on a wire and everything would fuse, and that kind of thing. (Roditi 1986: 183)

However, even in the face of those circumstances, which required adaptation and patience from all participants, it was recognized that the SI system "saved a great amount of time" (Gaiba 1998: 112) and thus became acceptable to educated audiences, paving the way for its growing dissemination in other multilingual fora.

2. The human transition

There is a tendency to overlook the challenge posed by the recruitment, at record speed,¹⁰ of the people capable of making sense of the flood of words, gestures and images that participants in the Trial used in the four official languages on complex and unpredictable topics and legal matters, involving sensitive ethical issues. After all, simultaneous interpreters were not available on the market and had to be found almost instantly by the different participating governments, whose sensitive tasks involved the determination of responsibilities for atrocities committed during WWII and the prevention of future crimes of a similar nature.

Most of those who acted as interpreters at the IMT had no previous interpreting experience, either in consecutive or in simultaneous, although there were some who had gone through the (consecutive only) training program at the School of Translation and Interpreting in Geneva, founded by Antoine Velleman in 1941. That means that, in view of the little time the organizers had for onsite training before the trial began, interpreter candidates discovered what interpreting was about (simultaneous and other modalities too) and acquired or refined their recently-discovered interpreting skills while practicing in the proceedings, as attested by themselves:

[I]t was being done in a very amateurish way in that very few of those who decided that it was going to be done in simultaneous interpreting had any previous experience of it, so that we would be put in our booths without any preparation, and just put to work. (Roditi 1986: 181-182)

The technicians had a spare amplifier, a few microphones and a lot of earphones and they rigged it all up for us to practice in an attic. We had just five days (and

10 The record of the telephone conference of 2 October 1945, when Lt. Col. Griggs and Col. Dostert talked to Ensign Jackson, with the participation of André Kaminker (representing the French delegation), shows the authorities' haste in the interpreter recruitment procedure.

nights) to turn ourselves into ‘Simultaneous Interpreters’ under Dostert’s tutelage. Only one of us could practice at any one time since we had no booths, and these practice sessions covered every aspect of our brand new profession. [...] Back at the Palace of Justice our five days of rehearsals in the attic were soon over and the gadgets were whisked away to be installed in the courtroom. The opening of the Trial was only eleven days away. We kept reading to each other, practicing voice control, delivery, syntax, grammar, vocabulary, reading documents, hearing lectures by attorneys, and helping Dostert set up the teams. (Frank 2018: chapter 29, unpaginated electronic edition)

The principle that interpreting skills could be acquired by practicing and by learning from others is expressed by some of the interpreters, underlining the idea that for most of those who acted as interpreters the Trial was an interpreting school in several respects.¹¹ Priacel was invited to learn by observing interpreters in action at the trial:

Le colonel Dostert m’invita à passer deux semaines à Nuremberg pour m’y exercer à l’interprétation simultanée. J’assisterais à toutes les audiences du Procès et je suivrais les débats tout en m’essayant à me rendre maître de cette forme d’interprétation entièrement neuve pour moi. (Priacel 1974: 22)

And Roditi, who had performed SI before, mentions his tasks as tester and trainer of fellow interpreters during the trial:

[...] as I was one of the very few who’d already done simultaneous interpreting (in Philadelphia). We’d have people who’d just come out of an interpreting school – quite a diploma, but how good were they? So I’d test them and then others who had never been through a school, but who did know languages. I’d test them and train some when I found some who seemed to have linguistic capacities, capabilities, but who were scared of it. I sort of trained them for a few days and showed them that there was no reason to be as scared as they were; so I really had a very heavy schedule. (Roditi 1986: 183)

Thus, one of the transitions experienced by those *de facto* interpreters would consist of a quick evolution from simply knowing the languages for their own use to being able to instantly translate orally between them for the benefit of a variety of end-users (from fellow officials in the court to judges, prosecutors, defense lawyers, defendants and the media) in exchange for remuneration.

11 Stupnikova makes it quite clear in her memoirs: “For a novel simultaneous interpreter there is no better exercise than continuous practice, with the headphones over one’s head and a microphone in one’s hands. There could not be a better way to begin the profession than Nuremberg [...]” (Stupnikova, my translation from the German translation from Russian, Andres/Behr 2014, 194) “Für einen jungen Simultandolmetscher gibt es nichts Besseres als die ständige Praxis, mit den Kopfhörern auf dem Kopf und einem Mikrophon in den Händen. Es konnte keinen besseren Berufseinstieg geben als Nürnberg [...]”

3. The limits of the SI revolution at the IMT

Although SI was in the limelight as far as interpreting is concerned, room 600 of the Nuremberg *Justizpalast* and its adjacent facilities saw the juxtaposition or overlapping of different interpreting modes (whispered, consecutive and sight translation). The transition from consecutive to simultaneous took place at the Trial without completely erasing the previous paradigm, so that consecutive and whispered interpreting, as well as sight translation, coexisted with the SI mode.

Before a decision was made on the use of SI, there had been an enormous amount of oral (multilingual) pretrial communications among all the parties involved, which were solved on the fly in the preparatory meetings in London from June 1945. There, a young Oleg Troyanovsky acted as interpreter for Nikitchenko and Trainin (Hirsch 2020: 59), surely in bidirectional (English <> Russian) consecutive mode (image 1):



Image 1: A.N. Trainin (center with mustache), head of the Soviet delegation to the War Crimes Executive Committee, speaks to his colleagues. To his right sits I.T. Nikitchenko, who later represented the USSR on the International Military Tribunal. This body worked out the Allied agreement to create the International Military Tribunal to prosecute German war criminals at Nuremberg. To his left, a young Oleg Troyanovsky (interpreter). London, August 1945. Photographer Charles Alexander. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, courtesy of Harry S. Truman Library.

Even after deciding in favor of using the IBM system, a great number of pretrial interrogations of the defendants took place at Nuremberg.¹² Those conversations were interpreted either in the whispered or the short consecutive mode, as the following paragraphs show.

I will refer first to Mark Priceman's case as an example of the speedy recruitment of a pretrial interpreter and an up-close view that has validity for a more general historical analysis. In the record of a telephone conference from October 1, 1945, between US Lt. Colonel Griggs and Ensign Jackson (from the Office of the US Chief of Counsel) on the subject "Procurement of Translators and Interpreters", the following excerpt refers to Captain Mark Priceman's assignment to the translation and interpreting services in Nuremberg:

Griggs: [...] We are sending you this week a Captain Priseman [sic], who is a White Russian by birth and an excellent linguist, has been the chief translator for MIS [Military Intelligence Service]. [...]

Jackson: Priseman [sic] is a German or Russian translator?

G.: He is both. He left Russia, went to Germany when he was twelve and lived there and was educated there until 1938 [actually 1933]. You will find him an excellent boy that can be used in either capacity. [...] Colonel Dostert, whom you asked for, is being assigned to our office and is with me now as I talk to you, as is Mr. Suro [Guillermo Suro, Chief of the State Department's Central Translation Office]. He will effectively assume command of this recruitment proceeding as of today, and I'm sure we will get a good deal of progress along those lines. [...]¹³

A few comments may be in order here. Mark Priceman (Prejsman at his arrival in the United States in 1939) was born in Bialystok (then Russia, today Poland) in 1914 and as a child he moved with his family to Germany, where he studied until his *Abitur* in 1933. He was not allowed to apply to a German university on account of his Jewish origin (though he was an assimilated Jew) and his leftist ideology, so he went to study sociology at the Sorbonne in Paris. After fighting briefly against Fascism in the Spanish Civil War (late 1936 – mid-1937) in the ranks of the POUM (the Workers' Party of Marxist Unification) – with the likes of Willy Brandt and George Orwell – he returned to Paris and then left for the US in 1939, before the arrival of the German troops in France. A naturalized American, during WWII he served in military intelligence for the US, mainly in the South Pacific. It was after being demobilized that he was called to Nuremberg in view of his command of the four official languages. It should be noted that

12 "There were hundreds of these pre-trial interrogations and a series of small interrogation rooms had been constructed, most of them wired for sound recording, where the prosecution teams were busy piecing together the story of the Third Reich." (Frank 2018, chapter 28, unpaginated electronic edition). Interesting testimonies of pretrial interrogations can also be found in Sonnenfeldt (2006).

13 "Record of Telephone Conference," ts. Oct. 1, 1945. National Archives, Washington, D.C. Jackson Papers. Record Group 238. Entry 51, box 39, folder "Translators." National Archives Collection of World War Two War Crimes Records, Records of the U.S. Counsel for the Prosecution of Axis Criminality, Main Office Files, 1945-1946. Identification number TC 4382, Secret. [Kindly facilitated by Francesca Gaiba]

Dostert assumed interpreter recruitment responsibilities as of 1 October, just a few weeks before the Nuremberg Trial began. That confirms the idea expressed earlier about the extremely fast process of recruitment of an unknown species of simultaneous interpreters. The result was that most of the people recruited did not have experience in the job.

The following quote is taken from a handwritten private letter sent by Mark Priceman to his parents, dated 8 November 1945. In the letter, which reached its destination uncensored, he refers to the job he had recently been assigned, commenting that he interpreted in whispered mode from Russian and German into English. The two excerpts (image 2 and transcription below) also show how natural it felt for him by then – about three weeks after his assignment – to be in frequent contact with the defendants:

Since last week and for
some time yet I have been and
will be working with the Soviet
delegation. They are now interrogating
the major defendants and witnesses
of the trial, and I go in with
them and with an American court reporter,
and whisper into his ear during the
interrogation what they are talking
about, so he can take it down in
short hand. I am on excellent terms
with Gen. Alexandroff and his staff,
and get a big kick out of my
dealings with them. Gen. A. refers to
me as "kann gpye u npruemera".
Seeing and speaking to people like

3
Rosenberg, Joch, Doemitz, Broder etc
every day, has on me the same
effect by now as having a patient
under his knife on a surgeon
who has performed many operations.
It becomes a routine. - Incidentally,
I did work on Dr Ley shortly before
he decided to join his ancestors,
evil tongues go even as far as to
say that that was the effect my
acquaintance had on him. -

Image 2: Excerpts from Mark Priceman's letter to his parents from Nuremberg, 8 November 1945, pages 2/3. Priceman family private archive, bequeathed to the Centro Documental de la Memoria Histórica (CDMH) [Historical Memory Records Center] in Salamanca.

Since last week and for some time yet I have been and will be working with the Soviet delegation. They are now interrogating the major defendants and witnesses of the trial, and I go with them and with an American court reporter and whisper into his ear during the interrogation what they are talking about, so he can take it

down in short hand. I am in excellent terms with Gen. Alexandroff and his staff, and get a big kick out of my dealings with them. Gen. A. refers to me as “наш друг и приятель” [“our friend and mate”].

Seeing and speaking to people like Rosenberg, Jodl, Doenitz, Raeder, etc. every day, has on me the same effect by now as having a patient under his knife on a surgeon who has performed many operations. It becomes a routine. - Incidentally, I did work on Dr. Ley shortly before he decided to join his ancestors, evil tongues go even as far as to say that that was the effect my acquaintance had on him. – ¹⁴ (Transcription of excerpts from Mark Priceman’s letter to his parents from Nuremberg, dated 8 November 1945, pages 2/3. Family Priceman private archive, bequeathed to the CDMH in Salamanca)

A cross-reference confirms what Priceman says in his letter. The interrogation procedure is spelled out in certain US Government official records, for instance in the summary minutes of Hans Fritzsche’s interrogation of 3 November 1945,¹⁵ conducted by USSR Major General Alexandrov, assisted by members of USSR prosecution staff. Also present: John H. Amen, OUSCC; Captain Mark Priceman, Interpreter; C. J. Gallagher, Court Reporter. Priceman’s job is specified at the footnote of the page:

This interrogation was conducted in Russian. The questions were translated into German, and the answers into Russian, by a member of the USSR delegation. Simultaneously questions and answers were translated into English for information purposes only. (Office of the United States Chief of Counsel for Prosecution of Axis Criminality (1948) Nazi Conspiracy and Aggression. Supplement B. Washington, United States Government Printing Office, 1509)¹⁶

In other US Government documents found in the same secondary record, Mark Priceman appears as interpreter, most likely in consecutive mode, in interrogations of Ernst Kaltenbrunner on 11 and 20 October 1945 (*Ibid.*: 1308, 1309);¹⁷ Hans

14 Wolfe Frank also interpreted for Dr. Ley: “My first customer on that Sunday in Nuremberg jail was Dr Robert Ley, Hitler’s labour leader. He was brought to an interrogation room and I found him to be excessively nervous. In fact, he had difficulty in speaking. I put the list of lawyers before him but he began to talk, disjointedly, of the possibility of handling his own defence – he didn’t however pursue this line for long. He looked at the list, absentmindedly, and then said: ‘I have given much thought to being defended by a Hebrew lawyer, I mean, a Jew,’ and he said something about it being a ‘just turn of fate’ if he were to be defended by such a person. I could not offer such a choice from the list for reasons that hardly require elucidation. He finally selected a name from the list but the services of this counsel were not required; Ley hanged himself in his cell soon afterwards.” (Frank 2018, chapter 28, unpaginated electronic edition). The quote seems to imply that he was in charge of presenting defendant Dr. Ley the list of potential defense lawyers among whom he could choose.

15 Hans Fritzsche was a senior Nazi Party official and attached to the Propaganda Ministry headed by Joseph Goebbels. It is worth mentioning that Fritzsche would develop during the trial a great admiration for the interpreters (Fritzsche 1953: 8).

16 Available at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.b41558036-view=1up&seq=5> (Accessed 29 July 2022)

17 Ernst Kaltenbrunner was Chief of the Reich Security Main Office, SS Obergruppenführer and General of the Waffen-SS.

Fritzsche on 3 and 16 November (*Ibid.*: 1509, 1512); Gottlieb Berger on 19 October 1945 (*Ibid.*: 1533);¹⁸ Siegfried Westphal on 23 October 1945 (*Ibid.*: p. 1647);¹⁹ and Karl Wolff on 26 and 27 October 1945 (*Ibid.*: 1652, 1663).²⁰

Among Priceman's records, I have also found handwritten notes, a quite valuable and unusual archival piece, from which it can be inferred that he also interpreted among the judges in pretrial conversations in consecutive mode without equipment. The following images, a sample from that record, show two sequential pages from notes scribbled by Priceman with abbreviations of the names of the judges or lawyers (Vosh – Volschov; Storey – Robert G. Storey; Bid – Biddle, Nik – Nikitchenko; Vab - Donnedieu de Vabres; Bir – Birkett; Par – Parker), presumably each one in their language (Priceman understood and spoke all of them), in what seems to be an informal discussion on procedure (how to announce the tribunal's entrance into the courtroom):

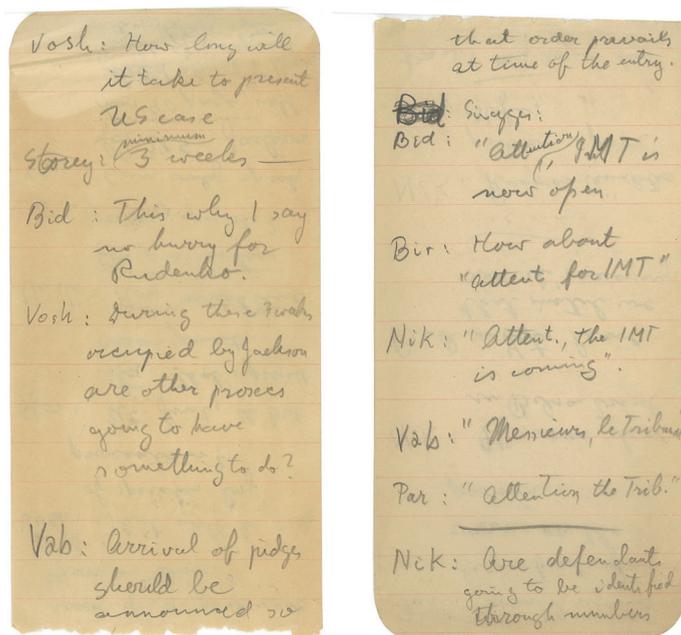


Image 3: Two loose sheets from Mark Priceman's notebook, ca. November 1945. Priceman family private archive, bequeathed to the CDMH in Salamanca.

- 18 Gottlieb Berger was Chief of Central Office of SS, SS Obergruppenführer and General of Waffen-SS, Inspector-General of Prisoners of War, Head of the Police Division of Policy Division of Reich Ministry for Eastern Territories.
- 19 Siegfried Westphal was Brigadier General and after serving with Rommel in Africa, became Chief of Staff to Field Marshal Kesselring in Italy. After the Army purge which followed the 20 July 1944 attempt on Hitler's life, he was appointed Chief of Staff to Field Marshal von Rundstedt.
- 20 Karl Wolff held the following positions: Supreme SS and Police Führer in Italy; Commander of the Italian SS Legion; General of Waffen-SS; at the Führer's Headquarters; Chief of the personal staff of the Reichsführer SS (Himmler); SS-Obergruppenführer.

It seems clear that, apart from this pretrial example, consecutive interpreting was also used during the Trial (for instance during conversations with the defendants or among legal professionals), but, as Priacel remarks, the note-taking techniques were not very well developed among those who acted as interpreters:

[...] à l'exception, sans doute des deux interprètes qui avaient étudié à Genève, la plupart de l'équipe de Nuremberg notaient des mots plutôt que des idées, se servant si possible de signes sténographiques, jetant sur le papier des chiffres, mais de façon toute aléatoire, sans souci encore d'une méthode personnelle. Je précise toutefois qu'à Nuremberg, ce genre d'inconvénients ne tirait pas à conséquence. Les interrogatoires, interprétés en consécutive, étaient faits de questions et de réponses généralement brèves, la mémoire pouvant alors se passer d'un support graphique. (Priacel 1974: 29)

Whispered interpreting was used by the judges during the Trial to communicate among them on the bench. The following photo shows that behind the judges two interpreters are sitting at the ready to assist them in their private communication by whispering, in exchanges where no equipment was used. On the left in image 4 is Oleg Troyanovsky (see Gaiba 1998: 149-150), only partially visible behind the members of the Soviet team (he would liaise between them and the British judges). Sitting on the right end, behind the French jurists, is the other interpreter, Armand Jacoubovitch (see Gaiba 1998: 140), who would enable direct contact between the Americans and the French.



Image 4: From left to right: Alexander F. Volchkov and Iola T. Nikitchenko (USSR), Norman Birkett and the president of the IMT, Geoffrey Lawrence (Great Britain), Francis Biddle and John J. Parker (USA), and Henri Donnedieu de Vabres and Robert Falco (France). Behind Norman Birkett, partial view of bench interpreter (in all likelihood Oleg Troyanovsky). Behind Robert Falco, acting as bench interpreter, Armand Jacoubovitch. National Archives, College Park, MD, USA.

Interpreters performed a lot of sight translation, at times simply to expedite the (written) translation process and on other occasions to use the scripts of speeches prepared by lawyers, prosecutors or judges as support in the booth; and they also revised the transcripts of the verbatim records taken by court reporters in shorthand or stenography. In fact, according to Wieviorka (2006: 63), the Nuremberg Trial meant the triumph of the written over the oral mode: the prosecution and counsel usually read their speeches.

I will insert here a brief digression on the implementation of SI at the UN, as part of the immediate impact that the Nuremberg Trial had on the historical evolution of interpreting. The IMT was a court, so strictly speaking, those who interpreted in Nuremberg were court interpreters and not conference interpreters. However, the simultaneous mode was tested by the UN while the Nuremberg trial was still ongoing and then adopted by that organization, and also by other international institutions and conference settings. Thus, SI became the mode associated with any international and multilingual gathering using an interpreting service and the necessary equipment.

In April 1946 Colonel Dostert took his assistant Mark Priceman and, later on, several Nuremberg simultaneous interpreters (Yuri Khlebnikov, Evgenia Rossof, and Georges Vassiltchikov, followed by others, like Elisabeth Heyward and Ina Telberg) to New York to test the SI system at the United Nations headquarters (images 5 and 6):



Image 5: Interpreters with Control Board Broadcasting: First test of simultaneous interpreting at the UN. Official UN photo 7659853. Lake Success, New York 13 September 1946. The monitor who appears on the bottom right is Mark Priceman. The second interpreter from the left in the booth is Evgenia Rosoff, one of the interpreters transferred from Nuremberg to the United Nations in September 1946.



Image 6: Simultaneous interpretation at United Nations. Official UN Photo 3254. Lake Success, New York, 18 November 1946. United Nations in conference room equipped with simultaneous interpretation system which permits any one of the five official languages to be translated instantaneously and concurrently into the other four at meetings of commissions and committees at United Nations headquarters. Interpreters' teams are shown in full. Booths from left to right: Chinese, Spanish, Russian, French (Khlebnikov and Rossof are third and fourth from the left) and English (Vassiltchikov is third from the left). Outside the booths, Léon Dostert and Mark Priceman (first and third from the left).

After the successful tests at different commissions, the UN General Assembly adopted in its resolution 152 (II) of 15 November 1947 that simultaneous interpretation would become “a permanent service to be used alternatively or in conjunction with consecutive interpretation as the nature of debates may require” (A/RES/152 (II)) (<https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/209980?ln=es#record-files-collapse-header>). That was a significant transition toward the SI mode at the United Nations, which would have a trickle-down effect in other international fora and in conference interpreting in general.

4. The transition process towards building an interpreter's professional profile

I will refer here to some of the linguistic, ethical, emotional and technical challenges interpreters faced as part of their development through the Trial, a stage that was neither the beginning nor the finish line in the building process of the profession.

At Nuremberg it was generally agreed that each interpreter in the booth would interpret only from one language into that of the booth. For instance, in the German booth one interpreter would work from English, another one from French and the third one from Russian, all of them into German. But other combinations were also used, depending on the abilities shown by certain interpreters and on the needs of specific meetings. Wolfe Frank interpreted at times in the German booth, but also in the English one. Since they also had to interpret for the judges in their private meetings (where German was not necessary) there could be changes in the language directionality. Roditi says: “[o]fficially, I interpreted from French into English in the courtroom and from English into French for the closed sessions of the judges, which were top secret” (Roditi 1986: 181).

As Francesca Gaiba (1998) made clear, the interpreters’ teams that worked at the IMT had different pay, status and degrees of professional independence, depending on the government that had recruited them. For instance, in the case of the Soviet team, the loyalty to the prevailing ideology demanded of them by their authorities suggests that they undertook a serious risk assessment both inside and outside the booth. Their determination to carry out their interpreting tasks to the best of their linguistic abilities had an additional component, their fear of making an error that might result in a reprimand by the authorities in Nuremberg or a more severe penalty by those in Moscow, whose secret agents at the Trial “spent much of their time monitoring and reporting on the other members of the Soviet delegation” (Hirsch 2020: 13). That had a significant impact on the interpreters’ performance and on their social life outside the courtroom.

By way of example, a convenient summarizing strategy used by Soviet interpreters when the NSDAP [*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei*], the Nazi party, was mentioned in full was to use just the acronym, thus avoiding the embarrassment derived from linking “Socialism” with “Nazism”. If the unwritten norm was that they should avoid identifying Socialism (the supposedly real one) with Hitler’s party, it was clear that violating the norm entailed a sanction (as expressed by Toury 1998: 17). And that “was not simply paranoia on the part of the Soviets. American policymakers, journalists, and academics were by now characterizing the political systems of both countries as “totalitarian.” (Hirsch 2020: 351). That parallelism between the two regimes, in an atmosphere of anxiety, posed additional linguistic/ideological problems for the Soviet team:

Stupnikova and the other Soviet interpreters struggled to translate the witness testimony for the Leadership Corps, uncertain how “to render the names of the different ranks – Gauleiter, Kreisleiter, Ortsgruppenleiter, Zellenleiter, and Blockleiter. There were simply no equivalents in Russian. Yet in other respects the Leadership Corps reminded them uncomfortably of the Communist Party of the USSR. (Hirsch 2010: 350)

There are other examples of language issues that emerge from some of the interpreters’ testimonies. Roditi, who was highly educated in literary German, mentions an instance in which the wrong interpretation of a term might have legal consequences:

When I arrived [at the end of January 1946], the trials had already been going on for a while, and I think I was the first to point out that the German word **Typhus**

does not mean typhus, but typhoid, so that the prosecutors who didn't understand German were getting terribly mixed up between the experiments on the concentration camp victims with what was typhus, which is **Fleckfieber** in German. But the interpreter into German, who hadn't been properly prepared, was translating typhus as **Typhus**, meaning typhoid, and there'd been no such experiments. (Roditi 1986: 182, original bold fonts)

And Wolfe Frank describes in a mixture of serious comparative linguistics and casual impudence an episode he went through, involving Goering:

Goering's German was intricate and with full sentences so intertwined that many verbs failed to appear.

It is necessary to anticipate the verbs, which come at the end of the German sentence, when working into English. Most of the time, one gets away with it, particularly when one has tuned into a speaker, has got to know his mentality and can foresee what he wants to say. In the case of these 'entwined sentences' (*Schachtelsatz* is the German word) the interpreter has to supply the verb, as I did, many times during Goering's sojourn in the witness box. One day, I passed close to him on my way out of the courtroom. Nobody, I fancied, could hear me. 'You owe me 248 verbs,' I whispered to him, and was overheard, unfortunately, by a member of the Press.

'Goering owes interpreter 248 verbs,' was the headline I had to discover in an English daily on the following morning and there followed a conjectured but accurate account of the interpreter's trials and tribulations.

For this I was given a formal reprimand by an officer of the Tribunal and another one by Dostert, delivered with a broad grin; and I was still clutching the English microphone when defendant Goering left the witness stand! (Frank 2018: chapter 33, unpaginated electronic edition)

It has been said that the voices of the Jews were absent from the Nuremberg courtroom and to a certain extent that is true, as far as witnesses are concerned. However, a number of participants at the Trial had Jewish roots, including interpreters who belonged to Jewish families whose lives, or those of their relatives, had been turned upside down by various political cataclysms, including those involving the defendants sitting close to them in the courtroom. They lent their voices, in languages sometimes acquired in different diasporas, to all the parties involved, and they were supposed to remain unmoved while conveying in a different language the atrocities described by prosecutors or the statements made by defendants denying the charges against them. The challenge for those interpreters, not unlike the Soviet team's experience just mentioned, often consisted of finding a balance between *logos* (words or reason) *ethos* (duty of faithfulness) and *pathos* (emotions, with *tense pasts* having an impact on how to handle *past tenses*). Some testimonies show how difficult it was at times to keep their composure when confronted with certain speeches they had to interpret. Armand Jacoubovitch's granddaughter refers to an indirect source when mentioning her grandfather's supposed breakdown:

Certainly, interpreters' breakdowns were common during the trial, so common that they kept a team of substitutes waiting at all times. Armand and the other

Jewish interpreter had been furloughed to the translators' section when what they were hearing got to be too much for them. (Richmond Mouillot 2015, chapter 19, unpaginated electronic version)

Further on she says that “[i]f indeed my grandfather had a breakdown, he never mentioned it to anyone, and he went back to interpreting quite rapidly.” However, “the content of the trial altered the rest of his life” (*ibid.*).²¹ In fact, his emotional state seems logical when reading Jacobovitch's letter dated 2 January 1946, addressed from his interpreter post at Nuremberg to the Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police. He requested an extension of his wife's refugee permit due to his inability to bring her and their baby to France because “my parents were deported in 1942, our property was pillaged in 1940 when the Germans entered Strasbourg, and, finally, our house was destroyed by bombing” (Richmond Mouillot, 2015, chapter 19, unpaginated electronic version).

When asked about his feelings regarding the crimes against his fellow Jews, Édouard Roditi's reply seems more in keeping with the kind of reasoning that would be expressed by Hannah Arendt on Eichmann's trial in her 1963 expanded reports for *The New Yorker*, which would become the well-known 1964 book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press). This was Roditi's answer on his first reaction regarding his Nuremberg experience:

See, I'm basically a more religious than political character. We were beginning to have more detailed views of the Holocaust, and being basically by temperament more religious than political, I was more in a mood of saying a kaddish for six million people than of trying to avenge them, because I realized that you can't revenge six million people. (Roditi 1986: 189)

Interpreters would resort to a kind of depersonalization or “split personality” technique in order to calm down their feelings and to preserve their emotional balance:

Nous étions au lendemain de l'époque la plus cruelle et la plus douloureuse de la vie des hommes de mon âge. Pourtant, c'est une absolue loyauté que les interprètes, dont la plupart avaient été durement atteints du fait de l'hitlérisme, dans leurs affections voire dans leur chair, surent s'identifier aux Goering, aux Streicher, aux Franck, aux Ribbentrop, c'est-à-dire aux principaux responsables de l'hécatombe qui marqua notre jeunesse. (Priacel 1974: 167)

Nevertheless, none of them emerged from the IMT unscathed, as Stupnikova attests:

Toward the end of the trial, for us “simultaneous interpreters,” our job's insurmountable professional, technical and even psychological obstacles decreased. But one perennial obstacle always demanded the concentration of all my physical and spiritual forces. It was closely linked to the events and memories of my life. It was an open

21 According to Gaiba (1998: 140), who quotes Jacobovitch's fellow interpreter Marie-France Skuncke, he worked as simultaneous interpreter for about two months and then gave up and returned to the translation section.

wound within me. It was enough to touch it with reckless words and it would begin to bleed, causing me an acute spiritual pain. At Nuremberg this was hardly ever alleviated. (Stupnikova, my translation from the Italian translation from Russian)²²

Stage fright had a significant impact on interpreters' performance. These two quotations from Wolfe Frank's memoirs belong, respectively, to the first and the last day of the main Trial:

The degree of accuracy required from us, the total concentration on the proceedings, even when one was not actually interpreting, and the tension emanating from the courtroom during the ten-month mental battle fought over the lives of the twenty-one defendants, put a tremendous strain on the nervous and mental stamina of the interpreters. (...)

On that first morning, seated in the German booth, my mouth was painfully dry and my hands were shaking. Never before, or since, have I known such nervous pressure or such a fear of the unexpected. (Frank 2018, chapter 30, unpaginated electronic edition)

No amount of practice seems to have been enough to combat his stage fright. Most noteworthy is the mistake he made at the beginning of the announcement of the sentences by the Tribunal, probably the most critical moment in the Trial, when Frank was "the voice of doom":

'Defendant Hermann Wilhelm Goering, on the counts of the indictment on which you have been convicted the International Military Tribunal sentences you to death by hanging.'

This, then, was the formula of the sentence. And, as my eyes were riveted on Goering's face, totally expressionless but growing deadly white, I spoke as if hypnotised, into the microphone before me. '*Tod durch erhaengen* (death by hanging),' instead of saying, '*Tod durch den Strang* (death by the rope) - which is the accepted formula in German. When I realised my error Goering had already dropped his earphones, turned and was stepping back into the lift. Almost, but not quite noiselessly, the door slid shut. The first man to learn his punishment through me had gone from sight. (Frank 2018: chapter 35, unpaginated electronic edition)

5. Concluding remarks on transitions at the IMT

I have tried to show that interpreting in the Trial underwent several transition processes. Even if that historically short event had large and lasting effects, it should be seen as part of a "work in progress", whose narrative should be better

²² "Verso la fine del processo, per noi 'interpreti simultanei' gli insormontabili ostacoli professionali, tecnici e persino psicologici del nostro lavoro diminuivano sempre di più. Ma un ostacolo perenne esigeva ogni volta la concentrazione di tutte le mie forze fisiche e spirituali. Era strettamente legata agli avvenimenti e ai ricordi della mia vita. Era una ferita aperta dentro di me. Bastava sfiorarla con parole imprudenti e cominciava a sanguinare, facendomi provare un acuto dolore spirituale. A Norimberga questo dolore non si placò quasi mai." (Stupnikova 2014: 317)

approached as a chronicle or as an extended diachronic account, rather than as a sudden synchronous occurrence turned into a legend.

The IMT experience modified the idea of multilingualism, in the sense of extending potential interpreting services beyond the LON bilingual (French-English) regime (with the exceptions of the Comintern as well as the ILO, which had used SI in some of its annual conferences, and even with more than four languages at a time in its 1928 session).

The Trial also modified the concept of temporality, since instantaneous oral translation took place at great speed – without having to wait for the rendition in the other languages, as happened in consecutive – and was also disseminated via vertiginous – for those days – media, resulting to a certain degree in an acceleration of historical time. That was a necessary requisite for the success of the IMT, if it was to be a fair trial compatible with the Anglo-Saxon legal maxim of “justice delayed, justice denied”. Rather than looking towards the past – though noting the mistakes, such as the post-WWI Leipzig trial – participants in the IMT paid attention to their immediate present.

Piles of freshly confiscated German records were key pieces of evidence at the Trial, and some of the exhibits in the courtroom, including moving and still images – an innovation at a criminal court – had been obtained from extermination camps while they were being liberated. It could be said, then, that the modern regime of historicity was relaunched at Nuremberg (Hartog 2020: 265) and projected into the future, with the long-term intention of preventing history from repeating itself, that is, as a “never again” deterrent. However, a persistent type of temporality also emerged from Nuremberg, *une temporalité jusque-là inédite, celle d'un temps qui ne passe pas: au nom même du caractère imprescriptible du crime commis*, so that it would reappear in Eichmann's (1961) or Papon's (1997) trials (Hartog: *Ibid.*).

SI would be used at the Human Rights Court in Strasbourg and at the International Court of Justice in The Hague (Priacel 1974: 40), but as far as international criminal court interpreting is concerned, its use would have to wait until the end of the Cold War. It was then that the big Powers permitted the establishment of tribunals for the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda and Sierra Leone, and eventually the International Criminal Court, where generally speaking those powers are not held accountable. The need to establish those tribunals would defy the expectations of the Nuremberg judges: crimes against humanity, war crimes and the crime of genocide would emerge again many years later.

The interpreting profession was also in transition towards its maturity. Most of those who interpreted at the Trial should be considered “occasional interpreters who did not continue” the interpreting profession after the Trial (Gaiba 1998: 133). In fact, the profession was not fully-fledged yet: “à Nuremberg les caractéristiques principales de notre profession, telle qu'elle s'enseigne et se pratique aujourd'hui, préexistaient en germe” (Priacel 1974: 29). The Nuremberg Trial was not the last leg of the process towards the definition of professional identity and professionalization – for many interpreters it was just a parenthesis in their lives – but it further shaped the contours of the profession, thus laying the foundations for new stages that would begin while the Trial was ongoing or immediately after its end.

Conference interpreters' working conditions began to be outlined in the 1920s at the League of Nations, in consecutive mode, and the Nuremberg experience

contributed to adapting them to the SI situation. For instance, the yellow and red lightbulbs that were lit when the speakers' speed was considered too fast or the interpreters' monitors were not only a safety net against fatigue, but also a signal of the limit of the interpreters' capacity and a recognition of their skills' finiteness. And the high esteem the interpreters generally enjoyed among the users of their services both inside and outside the courtroom – in certain social events where they rubbed shoulders with judges and other participants in the trial – was an additional bonus. Interpreters' visibility came not only through the thin glass panes of the booths but also through their audibility. The fact that interpreters were highly noticeable in those rudimentary cubicles, within earshot of some users even without the microphone, made them known to the main participants in the Trial, including the defendants. So they became – yet another transition – a species halfway between the consecutive *prima donna*-style predecessors in the LON and the anonymous *cog-in-the-machine* type that, according to many a staunch consecutive colleague, they would become when interpreters were located outside the users' view. Working conditions would be more firmly upheld with the establishment of professional associations like AIIC (1953), which fought not only for their ability to negotiate professional fees, working hours, etc., but also for the defense of quality and ethical standards as criteria for membership.

The inclusion of SI at the School of Translation and Interpreting in Geneva and the creation of new schools, which adopted that interpreting modality in their curricula, can be seen as a consequence of the success of SI at the IMT. In fact, interpreting training programs since then have had to lengthen the course of study for the candidates they select – those with a native command of their A language and a near-native knowledge of their B or C languages – so as to cover the other requisites to becoming interpreters: interpreting techniques, ethical issues, stage fright, etc. Since many of those responsible for the curricula, candidate selection and teaching in those schools were originally consecutive interpreters, the curricula always included consecutive as a *sine qua non* to initiate simultaneous, ignoring what had happened at Nuremberg. Inertia and the resistance to change have kept an apparently inescapable order of “first consecutive, then simultaneous” in the curricula to this day.

An important effect of the Nuremberg Trial on public opinion and on the development of SI in other contexts was the user education that it brought about. High-level military personnel, judges, legal experts and journalists had to adapt to the speed that was considered feasible for SI. Annette Wieviorka (2006 : 65) refers to Edgar Faure (French counsel for the prosecution at Nuremberg) saying that “il lui fallait multiplier par deux le temps qu'il mettait d'ordinaire pour débiter un texte déterminé”. That was one of the impacts of SI, as Gaiba (1998, 101) also remarks. All the participants had to get used to listening through headphones to interpreters with a variety of accents and voices, including soprano females translating baritone male speakers.²³

23 Justice Birkett was at times harsh on the interpreters, for instance when “gruff German generals were interpreted by young women with chirpy little voices, diminishing the power of the witnesses' testimony” (Persico 1994, 263-264).

As opposed to other careers (for instance, the legal professions, perhaps excluding secretarial or clerical jobs), the numbers of female interpreters at Nuremberg had been unknown in previous decades, except in the Comintern or in the Spanish Civil War. That symbolized a transition towards a growing feminization of the conference interpreting profession. It also paved the way for a turn towards a new historiographical canon, in which women are no longer absent from the narratives of the history of interpreting.

We may wonder nowadays if the “desperate times require drastic measures” motto, which pushed IMT organizers to resort to the almost dormant Filene-Finlay system, can be applied to the COVID-19 crisis as a potential catalyst for a dramatic increase in the use of remote simultaneous interpreting (RSI). I signaled years before the COVID-19 pandemic several important differences between the onsite SI success after the IMT and the prospects for RSI (Baigorri-Jalón 2015: 23-24). They are related, *inter alia*, to the existence now of a well-established professional (conference) interpreter corps with a strong negotiating capacity to preserve working conditions and to make socio-professional demands, and to today’s vast array of technologies and initiatives (as opposed to the single IBM model at the time of the Nuremberg Trial and the early stages of the UN). Those and other reasons may prevent an extensive adoption of RSI.

We cannot predict how the amount of “digital fluid” that is already running in our veins will evolve or how deep neural networks will eventually help interpreters in their work. History is not about predicting the future, but knowing the past may teach us to interpret the present. In the context of what I have said in the previous pages, I argue that, even if the main task of the interpreter – facilitating the crossing of the language communication threshold – will remain the same as it was several decades ago at Nuremberg, current would-be interpreters will practice the profession in ways unrecognizable to us, their predecessors. Only time will tell.

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“I have done some digging in my memory files and some old folders”: An intimate look through my correspondence with Nuremberg interpreters from 1995 to 1998

FRANCESCA GAIBA

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Abstract

*This article offers a look behind the scenes of the research for my book *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*, which was published by the University of Ottawa Press in 1998 (Gaiba 1998). I share anecdotes and information from my personal correspondence from 1995 to 1998 with some of the simultaneous interpreters and language personnel of the Nuremberg Trial of 1945-1946. My correspondence with them reveals their personalities and their eagerness and interest in participating in this research about their phenomenal contribution to one of the most important events of the twentieth century – a contribution which, incredibly, had been ignored up until the publication of this book. Featured in this article are E. Peter Uiberall and Alfred Steer, who worked at the trial mostly as monitor and language administrator, respectively, and were the most important sources of original material for my research on Nuremberg interpretation. Also featured are Edith Coliver, Sigfried Ramler, and Elisabeth Heyward. Almost 75 years after the end of the trial, the interpreters' contribution to that historical event, as well as their correspondence with me during my research from 1995 to 1998, are significant historical contributions that need to be acknowledged and celebrated.*

Keywords

Nuremberg Trial, history of interpretation, twentieth-century history, simultaneous interpretation, court interpreting, Nazi history, International Military Tribunal, Second World War, translation history.

This article offers a look behind the scenes of the research for my book *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*, which was published by the University of Ottawa Press in 1998 (Gaiba 1998), and subsequently translated into Japanese in 2013 and published in Japan by Misuku Shobo Ltd. This book was the first book-length publication on the topic of the history of simultaneous interpretation and is still today the only book on interpretation at the Nuremberg Trial. The Nuremberg Trial of 1945-1946 was the first, main trial carried out by France, the United Kingdom, the United States, and the Soviet Union against representatives of the defeated Nazi regime following World War II.

The topic of simultaneous interpretation at the Nuremberg Trial is important to all who are passionate about the history and profession of interpretation, and the history of the Nuremberg Trial and of the 20th century. In the 1990s, however, there were few published articles about the system of simultaneous interpretation at the Nuremberg Trial and the interpreters who not only pioneered that system but also de facto enabled an expeditious trial. The book offers a complete overview of the early history of simultaneous interpretation by presenting a description of its workings at the 1945-1946 War Crimes Trial (henceforth, the Nuremberg Trial).

Simultaneous interpretation as we know it today at conferences and international meetings was nascent in 1945 and had never been witnessed on a world scale until the Nuremberg Trial. Astonishing as it may seem, the miracle of simultaneous interpretation did not receive any attention from historians. Thousands of volumes have been written about the trial, about its legal, political, historical aspects – but if we were to add all the mentions dealing with its interpreting system up to 1998, they would have amounted to about a dozen pages. Interpreters received as much attention as court stenographers, police officers, or press correspondents. And yet, one thing is clear: The Nuremberg Trial would not have been possible without simultaneous interpretation.

The impetus for this research was finding the answer to these questions: how had the idea developed that it was possible to connect microphones and earphones in such a way that a speech could be translated *instantaneously* and *extempore* in a different language? Who thought it was possible for an interpreter to hear and speak at the same time, and why then? What effect did this have on the trial?

I conducted the research for this book as a student at the Scuola Superiore di Lingue Moderne per Interpreti e Traduttori (School of Modern Languages for Interpreters and Translators) of the University of Bologna, based in Forlì, where I studied for my bachelor's degree in conference interpreting from 1990 to 1996. This research on the Nuremberg interpretation was conducted at the University of Heidelberg Institut für Übersetzen und Dolmetschen (School for Translation and Interpretation) in Germany in 1994-1995, and in 1995-1996 at the University of California Berkeley in the United States. Figure 1 shows the notes from the very first presentation I gave on the subject in a University of Heidelberg class in late 1994. The small but specialized library of the University of Heidelberg Institute for Translation and Interpretation had few but crucial articles about the history of interpreting such as Skuncke (1989) and Kaminker (1955a, 1955b). The

University of California Berkeley Bancroft Library was my main research source for documents about the Nuremberg Trial. The 42 volumes of the original transcripts of the proceedings are available there in triplicate copy, plus microfiches of 1945-46 *The Times*, *The New York Times*, *The New York Times Magazine*, and *Newsweek*, important sources of original coverage of the trial, with some articles even containing names and anecdotes about interpreters (such as Schmidt 1946). Eventually, based on significant archival research and personal and professional network contacts, I was able to find and connect with more than a dozen Nuremberg interpreters who were still alive at the time of my research, 50 years after the trial. Their testimony to me formed the core of *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial* (Gaiba 1998).

Francesca Gaiba
 Deutsch 40
 October 25, 1994

Referat "über das Thema "Dolmetschen und Übersetzen in den
 "Nürnberger Prozessen"

I. Beschreibung der Prozesse *Oktober 1945 - Oktober 1946*

A. die Beteiligten *Wah. Persönlichkeiten*

1. die Angeklagten
2. die Verteidigung *Deutsche Anwälte*
3. die Ankläger *aus 4 Ländern*
4. die Richter *aus 4 Ländern, die den Krieg gewonnen haben*
5. die Mitarbeiter *Sekretärinnen, Kopisten, notwendig für * / Londoner Pakt*

II. Übersetzung und Dolmetschen *besser als konsekutiv - lang*

A. die Dolmetscher *keine Profis - bilingual zweisprachig zum ersten Mal - nur 100 - oft aus der Armee - aus den Konz. Lagern - emotional*

B. die Übersetzer *zu wenig - unklar zu schnell machen viele Fehler*

1. Vorteile der Simultanübersetzung *schweiller - "fair trial" funktioniert insgesamt*
2. Nachteile der Simultanübersetzung *viele Fehler - Geschwindigkeit - Bedeutung der Stimme*
 - a. die Technik *10M Rotes/Selbes Licht - die Glaskabine*
 - b. Probleme Deutsch ins Englische *das Verb - "ja"*

III. das Effekt der Übersetzung auf das Prozeß *→ siehe Angeklagten werden düffelt für ihre Worte - wichtig daß sie sie erkennen behaupten die Worte haben andere Bedeutungen aus "Sonderbehandlung" ungarisch nicht wertig*

A. Vorteile für die Angeklagten

B. Vorteile für die Ankläger *→ können Dok. lesen - Übersetz.*

IV. Das Kreuzverhör Görings *18 März 1946 vs. Jackson*

A. Übersetzungsfehler *liberation/clearup für Freimachung*

B. wie Goring den Ankläger ausmanovriert *wiedermolung um Zeit zuge winnen - Impakt des Kreuzverhörs ist verloren. G hat Vorteil: Kennt 2 Sprachen*

Figure 1 Source: Author's archive

Two notes about the time I undertook my research: One made the research at all possible and timely, and the other made it much more difficult compared to how research is carried out today. In the mid-1990s, many Nuremberg interpreters were still alive and able and willing to be interviewed, to share their memories and materials with me. Since that was about 25 years ago, as one can imagine, the interpreters have since passed away. Thus the timing of this research was very fortunate.

At the same time, I performed the research for this book in the 1990s before internet and email were established research tools. This may be difficult to imagine for current junior scholars and possibly difficult to remember for the rest of us, but there was a time when research was conducted only on paper, through books, letters, archives, and in physical libraries. Libraries and archives did not have their documents, materials, and photographs available online in searchable databases. They often did not even have a website. Documents, photos, and photocopies had to be requested via letters, and paid for with checks or wire transfers, or the archives had to be visited in person. In fact, apart from one in-person visit, a few phone calls, and sporadic rudimentary early emails, all my contacts with the Nuremberg interpreters and staff at archives took place via faxes or via the postal service, with letters I would type and print, mail in an envelope with a stamp, and wait for a few days or weeks or months for a reply. I saved and subsequently scanned all my postal correspondence with the Nuremberg interpreters. Since the interpreters are no longer alive today, 25 years after my research and 77 years after the beginning of the trial, their correspondence to me about their experience at the trial, their handwritten testimonies, the photocopies they made for me of original Nuremberg materials they held in their basements, become that much more valuable as a personal, human, and historical record.

For detailed information about the workings of the interpreting system, its effect on the trial, the history of interpretation before and after the Nuremberg Trial, and biographies of the interpreters, I refer the readers to my book, in which I put all the information and the data I collected (Gaiba 1998), and to other excellent publications that have been added to the canon since (Baigorri-Jalón 2014; Kurz and Bowen 1999). In this article I present something that few people have seen, that is, a glimpse at the Nuremberg interpreters' correspondence with me in 1995-1998, a few insights into their lives at the time and their personalities as gleaned from that correspondence. This article is an expanded version of the presentation by the same title I gave on February 24, 2022, at the University of Trieste, Italy, at the series of lectures accompanying the exhibit *One Trial – Four Languages*.

1. The most iconic picture of Nuremberg interpreters

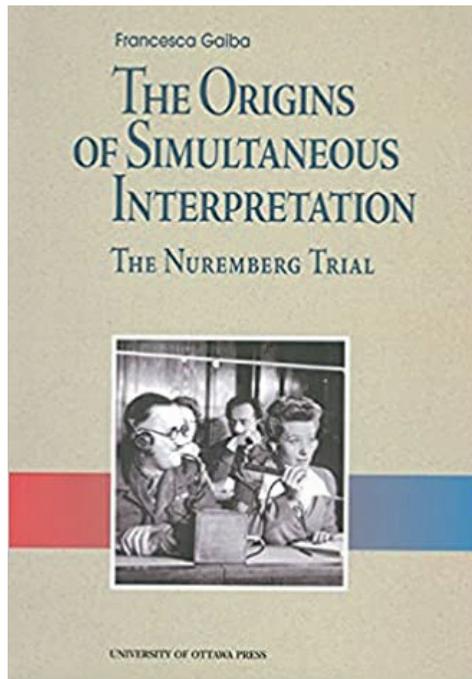


Figure 2 Source: University of Ottawa Press

Arguably the most iconic picture of Nuremberg interpreters is the picture on the cover of my book *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial* (Figure 2). Before the book went to print in 1997, I visited the US National Archives, located in College Park, Maryland. I went to their photography collection in the hope of finding high quality pictures of the trial and of the interpreters to be published with my book. As I boarded the train for Maryland that morning, I did not know that I would find a treasure trove of photographs that would impact our shared visual culture of Nuremberg interpretation and interpretation history.

At the archives, I was given white cotton gloves to wear to avoid damaging the original photographs, and boxes after boxes were wheeled to my desk marked “238.4 Photographs and lantern slides taken [...] at the U.S. Military Tribunals at Nürnberg, Germany.” It is hard to describe the emotion I experienced when I pulled out original picture after picture of the Nuremberg Trial and its participants. After years of research and having seen very few published images of the Nuremberg interpreters, seeing original images of the Trial was both a validation and a homecoming. When I pulled out the picture seen here on the book cover (Figure 2), I realized that I already *knew* the woman pictured in it, though I had never *seen* her. I had read about her, I had heard her mentioned in some of the documents, the videos, and the interviews, I had seen references to her with the nickname “the Passionate Haystack.” Her name was Margot Bortlin-Brant, an excellent Nuremberg interpreter who translated German into English. She

acquired that nickname for her expressive mode of interpretation as well as her blond updo, a hairstyle in which she was able to accommodate her headphones (Uiberall: April 27, 1995). Seeing her for the first time and recognizing her was an emotional moment akin to finding a long-lost relative. Seated next to Ms. Bortlin-Brant is Capt. Macintosh of the British Army, translating from French into English. To my knowledge this picture had not been used before in publication. Once the picture appeared on the cover of my book, it was the first time it was used on a wide scale, but not the last time.

This picture has now become iconic. Among many other reproductions, it is on the cover of the exhibit *One Trial – Four Languages*, a traveling exhibit about the Nuremberg Interpreters organized by Elke Limberger-Katsumi and the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC). It was on the cover of the brochure for the University of Trieste series of lectures, coinciding with the exhibit *One Trial – Four Languages*, organized by Alessandra Riccardi and Gianluca Pontrandolfo. The original picture, however, differed from its reproduction in different publications, including the cover of my book.



Figure 3 Source: National Archives, College Park, MD.

As seen in Figure 3, there is a person on the right who has been frequently cropped out of the published versions of this iconic photograph, possibly because of formatting or because his role was not as glamorous as that of the interpreters. I would like to give due credit to the person, because I can confidently state that this person, Mr. Peter Uiberall, is responsible for so much of the information we have today about Nuremberg interpretation. Mr. Uiberall was the unofficial Nuremberg interpretation historian, who preserved original material, kept in contact with many Nuremberg interpreters and generously helped me with the bulk of the research materials and recollections that form the core of my book.

In the picture, Mr. Uiberall is performing the role of the monitor. The monitors performed a crucial role at Nuremberg: They were responsible for checking

the accuracy of the interpretation and the functioning of the equipment, and for the communication between interpreters and the court. The monitor reminded the tribunal to speak at a pace that interpreters could understand and translate. They would be responsible for making sure a complete team of interpreters was ready for each day's sessions, listening to the verbatim channel and various interpreted channels to ensure that the voices were coming across at a comfortable volume and that the interpretation was accurate, and checking whether interpreters needed a pause or a break before being able to continue.

Other historical pictures of Nuremberg interpreters, such as Figure 4, show that the monitor was a constant presence in the courtroom during interpreting, while today this role no longer exists in settings using simultaneous interpreting. In Figure 4, for example, four men in uniform stand in the back on the right-hand side of the picture. The first one on the right is the marshal of the court. The other three men performed the role of monitor. Of the three, the one in front is Léon Dostert, who is credited as the person who brought simultaneous interpretation to the Nuremberg Trial. Behind Léon Dostert are E. Peter Uiberall and Capt. Joachim von Zastrow (left to right). Next to Léon Dostert, towards the center of the picture, is the above-mentioned interpreter Margot Bortlin-Brant, who is standing behind the glass partition, looking down at her desk.



Figure 4 Source: National Archives, College Park, MD

2. Peter Uiberall

Ernest Peter Uiberall, known as Peter Uiberall, was one of the interpreters who stayed longest at the trials. He worked there as monitor and interpreter from the beginning in 1945 and became Chief Interpreter during the Subsequent Proceedings, for which he remained in Nuremberg until 1948. He was born in Vienna in 1911 to a Jewish family. As the trial started, he worked as monitor, and became court interpreter in February 1946 for German into English.

I wrote to Mr. Uiberall in January 1995 from my dormitory room at the University of California Berkeley, and he immediately called me in response to my first letter.

1/26/95 Please conversation
Peter Uiberall
Beechwood Rd.
Tel (703)765-0596

1) Perovic
2) AHC
Assemblée Aug 92
Brussels

Rosy Mesa Steel Chief Interpr. World Bank

copy of interview
Gaskin book - mock
-light

→ UN 2 Yuri Klebnikoff
Ms Elizabeth Hayward f from Paris
still active

Chevalier friend of his
Troianowsky
beuchst
interpreters
Ben Wald
son of Ambassador to US
1934
for Kinshev in US
→ Amb to UN

Figure 5 Source: Author's archive

★

February 25, 1995

Dear Miss Gaiba,

(6824)

Your letter of Feb. 14 (date-stamped Feb. 21!) arrived today, and I was glad to hear from you. Meanwhile I have done some digging in my memory files and old folders. In fact, I am working on a list of all the Nuremberg interpreters I can remember and what I can remember about them. The result should be of some use for your work. I had been asked, some time ago, to do this for a U.N. Anniversary project. I may have it done in about a week or so.

Before going into your letter of today I ought to respond to the listing you sent me: "Members of the Language Division and Interpreters of the Nuremberg trials."

First of all: The term "Language Division" was used during the Subsequent Proceedings. Professor Taylor's structural description is accurate; his remarks about the 'direction' of interpreting are not. At least one-half of the interpreters were translating from their native tongue -- for reasons I have explained in the videotape interview and elsewhere. This applied, f. i. to Colonel Dostert (F-E), Wolfe Frank (G-E, occasionally E-G), Uiberall and Siegfried Rammler, the last Chief of the Interpreting Branch.

The Language Division (beginning in the Fall of 1946) was headed by a civilian, Mr. Homer B. Millard who undertook the awesome task of transforming the division from a one-trial, quadrilingual service to a 5-6-trial, bilingual system. In theory we were alerted to serve six courtrooms, if necessary. In fact only five courts were ever briefly active at the same time, placing an enormous burden on the Translation Branch and requiring a large increase in the number of qualified G-E and E-G interpreters. To authenticate: I was assigned as special assistant to Director Millard -- until February 1947, when I started in the 'Justice Case' -- and was involved in the restructuring of the division and the testing of applicants in Nuremberg, London and several West-German cities where we hired German nationals.

You can see what memory-teasing does: You press the button and the computer begins to spout. So, back to your list: Translation Division members and Interpreters

Colonel Dostert: I am sending you copies of two obituaries, with a slight correction. I saw him last in 1949, at the Georgetown Institute for Languages and Linguistics, the first simultaneous interpreting school in this country, created by Father Edmund J. Walsh (Georgetown School of Foreign Service) after his return from the IMT Trial in Nuremberg where he served both as advisor on Church matters and Vatican observer, as I was told. Dostert was then assisted by Dr. Stefan Horn, a former colleague of mine (E-G) in the Justice case, and a graduate of the Geneva Interpreting School. I believe he succeeded Dostert as Director of the Institute -- now the School of Interpreting headed, Dr. Margareta Bowen.

Commander Alfred G. Steer (now: Professor Alfred G. Steer, 215 Bishop Drive, Athens Georgia 30606), distinguished U.S. Naval Officer who had commanded a ship in the Pacific that was engaged by Japanese kamikaze aircraft. He had studied in Germany before the war, but already during the Nazi regime, and had produced a German-language course for the U.S. Navy. He served as Deputy Chief and Executive Officer of the Translation Division and became Chief of the division (abt April, 1946) when Colonel Dostert left for the U.N. assignment.

1

Figure 6 Source: Author's archive

He was such a wealth of information that I could barely keep up with writing down notes while talking to him (Figure 5). Fortunately for the historical record, most of our subsequent interactions took place via mailed letters, which I preserved. In my letters of 1995 and 1996, I peppered Mr. Uiberall with a wealth

of questions, which formed the basis of the questionnaire I would ask all other Nuremberg interpreters I eventually contacted. The list included such questions as: How he found out about the trial, who had the idea of using simultaneous interpreting, how were interpreters trained, how were relations with the Russian teams, how did it feel to live in post-war bombed-out Nuremberg, and most importantly, whether he had the names and contact information of other Nuremberg interpreters, which, fortunately, he did and shared with me. He was generous with his time, and shared with me recollections, historical materials, and a videotape with interpreters' interviews, among others. While I wrote to him in the Berkeley computer lab and printed the letters on a university printer, he wrote his letters to me on a typewriter, adding corrections and page numbers by hand and a handwritten signature, making his letters so much more personal and touching. Providing all this information to me was not an easy task. "Your questions cover a lot of ground, and it will take me some time to answer them, after getting some old papers together and revising my recollections," he wrote in an early letter dated February 11, 1995. And also "I have done some digging in my memory files and some old folders," he says in a letter from February 25, 1995.

In 1995, he even created two documents detailing the workings of the interpreting system at Nuremberg specifically to answer my questions (Uiberall: April 11, 1995, and July 25, 1995). It was only years later that I realized the importance and the honor of having a first-hand participant in world history create a unique historical record in response to my questions as a 24-year-old junior researcher.

Mr. Uiberall comes across in his letters as both authoritative and humble. He is authoritative when he knows his facts and is glad to dispel confusion about the technical aspects of the interpreting system ("Your information is not really contradictory. It just needs to be sorted out a little." And "So all the bits of information you mention in Question (b) are quite compatible and merely need to be put into the right time sequence." February 11, 1995), or when he discusses seemingly contradictory historical sources. Here is how he frames the issue, in his letter to me of April 27, 1995.

The problem with "sources," especially 50 years after the facts, is that so many are not only secondary but also merely repeating hearsay or material from other secondary sources. And even with primary sources the key is whether the person had direct access to the information or merely heard about it later from others.

In his letters, Mr. Uiberall is humble when he reaches the limits of his memory, as in the letter he wrote when I sent him pictures of interpreters for him to identify: "Concerning the two other photographs [...], I am still quite at a loss. I recognize nearly all the faces of the interpreters shown but cannot yet recall some of the names. I would like to keep the copies for a while and see if I can do better" (Uiberall: February 11, 1995).

My correspondence with him also contains unique comments that show some of his personality. In the opening sentence of his February 25, 1995 letter (Figure 6): "Dear Miss Gaiba, Your letter of Feb. 14 (date-stamped Feb. 21!) arrived today [*handwritten: Feb. 24*], and I was glad to hear from you," Mr. Uiberall was not shy in gently scolding me for my tardiness in mailing my letter, while at the same

time expressing his continued interest in participating in our shared endeavor of collecting historical material and information about Nuremberg interpretation and honoring those who participated. It is worth noting that at that point in time, neither Mr. Uiberall nor I knew that this college senior thesis would ever be published as a book by a university press, or that it would continue to sell hundreds of copies each year for 23 years. He only knew that I was an Italian student at UC Berkeley interested in an event he had first-hand knowledge of, and he was willing to help me, even though, as far as he and I knew, this undergraduate thesis, this *tesi di laurea*, could have ended up in a dusty drawer from the moment of my graduation and never seen the light of publication.

I triangulated information I received from other Nuremberg interpreting personnel such as Mr. Steer and Mr. Ramler (both mentioned below) and from published and unpublished sources with Mr. Uiberall, so that he could confirm, clarify, or dispel misinformation for me. In a smart distribution of labor, Mr. Uiberall referred me to Mr. Steer about the organizational setup of the Interpreting Division, and Mr. Steer referred me to Mr. Uiberall for the identification of pictures of Nuremberg interpreters. "I marked the xeroxed photos of the interpreters that you sent me," Mr. Steer said. "However, you should send them to Peter Uiberall, if you have not already done so. His memory here would doubtless be better than mine" (Steer: February 14, 1995).

In May 1996 I sent Mr. Uiberall a copy of my final thesis as it was submitted for graduation to the University of Bologna, and he sent me a congratulatory handwritten note (Figure 7), together with – of course – a long list of corrections!

7204 BEECHWOOD ROAD
HOLLIN HILLS
ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA 22307

May 21, 1996

Dear Min Jaiha,
Many thanks for sending me a
copy of your outstanding work.
The enclosed notes may perhaps be
useful when the book gets ready
to be printed.

Take care,
yours,
Peter Uiberall

Figure 7 Source: Author's archive

In January of 1997 Mr. Uiberall and I celebrated together the news that the University of Ottawa Press was going to publish the thesis as a book in their series “Perspectives on Translation,” and he agreed to write a compelling foreword for it. In the summer of 1997, I was living in Washington, D.C. as an intern for the National Endowment for the Arts, a government internship that was required by my master’s program in international relations from Syracuse University. It was a lucky coincidence to be there that summer, right before the publication of my book, which allowed me both the great joy to meet Mr. Uiberall and his wife in person at their home in Virginia, as well as visit the National Archives, as I mentioned above. Figure 8 shows what Mr. Uiberall looked like when I met him in 1997.

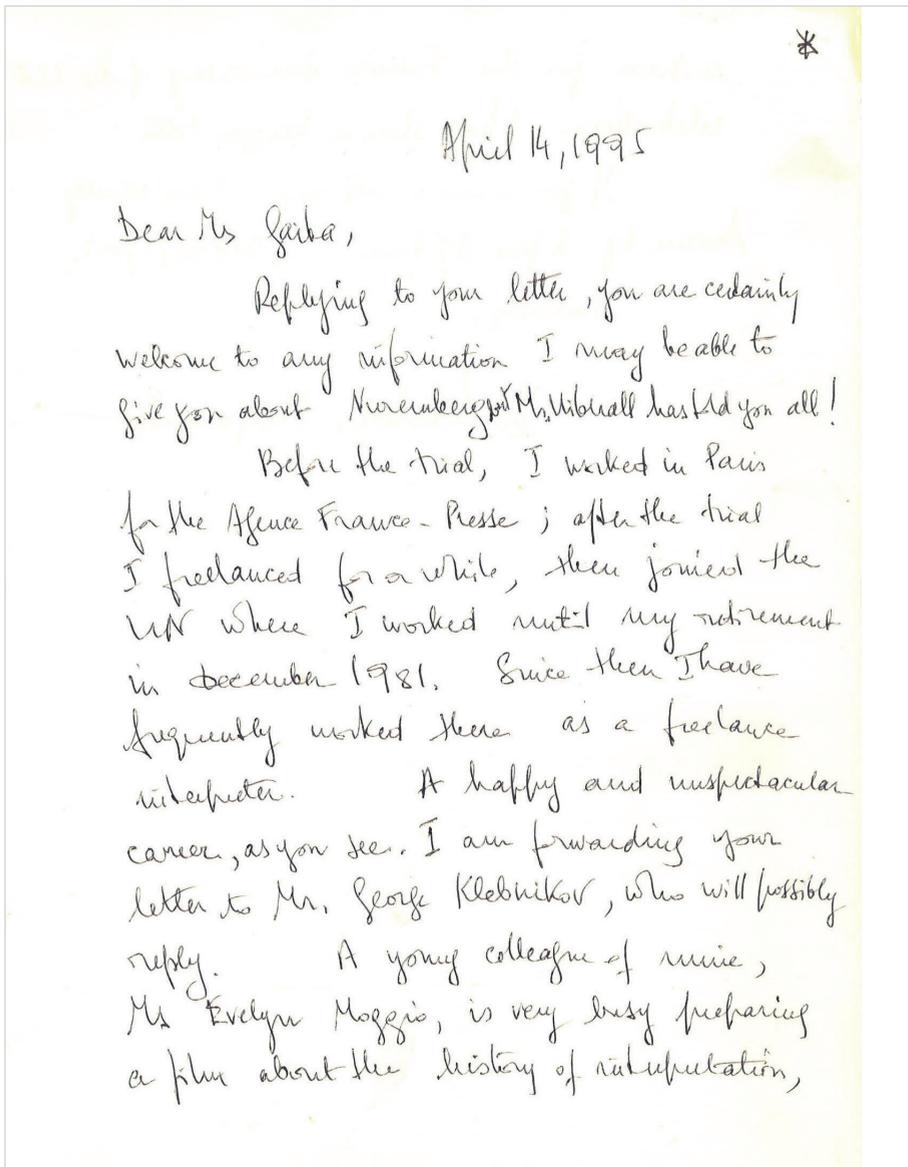


Figure 8 Source: <http://poetryandpoetsinrags.blogspot.com/2007/09/poetic-obituaries-ernest-peter-uiberall.html>

3. Elisabeth Heyward

Elisabeth Heyward was an interpreter who worked at the Nuremberg Trial and was another important source that I was able to contact and correspond with starting in 1995. Figures 9 and 10 show one of the handwritten notes she sent me. She was born in Russia in 1919 and her family then migrated to Germany and then France. She worked as court interpreter at the International Military Tribunal at the English-into-French desk. Incredibly, she told the story of going, on the day she arrived, into the visitors’ gallery of the Nuremberg courtroom, where she

was astonished to see and hear simultaneous interpreting. She thought it was impossible that interpreters could translate simultaneously, a practice she (and most other people in the world) had never witnessed before. Despite this fact, she received no training at all. In the courtroom the following day, she had to launch into simultaneous interpreting and, after overcoming the initial difficulty due to the unfamiliar technique and vocabulary, she found that simultaneous interpreting was feasible after all and that she could do it.



*

April 14, 1995

Dear Ms. Saba,

Replying to your letter, you are certainly welcome to any information I may be able to give you about Nuremberg. ^{Mr. Tibbitt} has had you all!

Before the trial, I worked in Paris for the Agence France-Presse; after the trial I freelanced for a while, then joined the UN where I worked until my retirement in December 1981. Since then I have frequently worked there as a freelance interpreter. A happy and unspicacular career, as you see. I am forwarding your letter to Mr. George Klebnikov, who will possibly reply. A young colleague of mine, Ms. Evelyn Moggio, is very busy preparing a film about the history of rehabilitation,

Figure 9 Source: Author's archive

in time for the Fiftieth Anniversary of the UN
celebrations. I have shown her your letter.

If you want to call me, I am usually
home by 8 pm NY time : (510) 487-7004.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Heyward, —

Figure 10 Source: Author's archive

4. Edith Coliver

Edith Coliver first served as a German-English, English-German consecutive interpreter in the pretrial interrogations and then as a court interpreter at the beginning of the trial. She subsequently worked as a research analyst, conducting interrogations of female members of indicted Nazi organizations.

Incredibly, I met Ms. Coliver by absolute chance. While working with the catering team for an event at the International House in Berkeley, California, I was introduced to Ms. Coliver as a student interested in the Nuremberg Trial, and she told me she had been an interpreter there! We exchanged contact information, followed by many faxes (Figure 11).

Edith S. Coliver
156 Lombard Street #16
San Francisco, Ca. 94111
Phone: (415) 291-9063
FAX: (415) 291-9064

August 2, 1995

Francesca Gaiba
108 Ferrarese
Bologna 40128
ITALY

Dear Ms Gaiba:

Sorry I am so late in replying to your June 16, 1995 inquiry. I have been very busy and am in the process of leaving for a month.

To answer specifically:

* I learned about the trials through newspapers, while working in Washington. I applied to the War (now Defense) Department and was interviewed by them. I was tested by Col. Dostert, the same person who tested me for my position as translator at the 1945 United Nations organizing conference in San Francisco. We received a certain amount of training in Nuremberg, particularly as to the glossary that was going to be used at the trials. We also had actual role-playing.

* The pay was something like \$300/month, which was not bad in 1945 dollars. Our accommodations in Nuremberg were first at the first-class Grand Hotel and later on in billets (houses), with meals and maid service, which we shared with other interpreters. Compared to the Germans we lived like kings.

* My relations with interpreters was good, and I have maintained a life-long friendship with Siegfried Ramler, Chief Interpreter. Another close interpreter-friend was Edouard Roditi, a very gifted linguist, art dealer and art historian. We mingled freely with other staff at all levels and of all nationalities, as well as with a multi-national group of journalists. Next spring the Nuremberg staff will have its 50th reunion, in Washington, D.C. My contacts were probably wider, since I switched to the Prosecution as a research analyst, and because I did research for a book, "Final Judgment" by Victor Bernstein, an American Journalist.

No doubt you will be returning, at which time we can exchange notes, if needed. Best wishes,

Cordially,



Figure 11 Source: Author's archive

Ms. Coliver died in 2001, a mere six years after corresponding with me about her role in the trial. This undated picture (Figure 12) of Ms. Coliver was captured from a 2018 online article on the women of Nuremberg by the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation.



Figure 12 Source: <https://sfi.usc.edu/news/2018/04/21696-women-nuremberg-edith-coliver>

5. Siegfried Ramler

Siegfried Ramler was a court interpreter during the Main Trial and the Subsequent Proceedings; he then served as Chief of the Interpreting Branch in 1948 until 1949. He was born in Vienna in 1924. In Nuremberg, where he arrived before the beginning of the trial, he served as pretrial interrogator, which he considers the most interesting part of his experience in Nuremberg. He worked as a consecutive interpreter during Hermann Göring's pretrial interrogation. In the courtroom, he worked at the German-into-English position for the whole trial, acting sometimes as monitor, too. After the end of the Main Trial in mid-1946, he remained for the Subsequent Proceedings until 1949, and became the last Chief of the Interpreting Branch.



Figure 13 Source: Author's archive

Figure 13 shows him in a picture taken during the trial (Alexander 1946). The poor quality of the picture is due to the fact that, in 1995, when corresponding with Nuremberg interpreters, I would send them photocopies of the few available pictures of Nuremberg interpreters taken from books or historical newspapers, in the hope that they would be able to identify specific interpreters for me. In this case, as can be seen from his handwriting at the bottom of the photocopy, Mr. Ramler identified himself, Tom Brown, and Peter Uiberall.

According to Mr. Uiberall (February 11, 1995), some of the interpreters in this picture are not sitting at their correct desk position, since this picture was staged, or “a photo opportunity” (Uiberall: April 27, 1995), meaning that a newspaper photographer wanted a picture of the interpreters, but it did not matter to them which person sat at which desk. (See chapter 2 in Gaiba 1998 for an explanation of the language desks.) Finally, Mr. Uiberall identified the person sitting in the front row, third from the left, in this picture (Figure 13) as an USSR interpreter called Solovieva, while Mr. Ramler identified this person as himself. Again, this is an example of the problem with sources – even those who were present at the trial – recollecting details 50 years after the event.

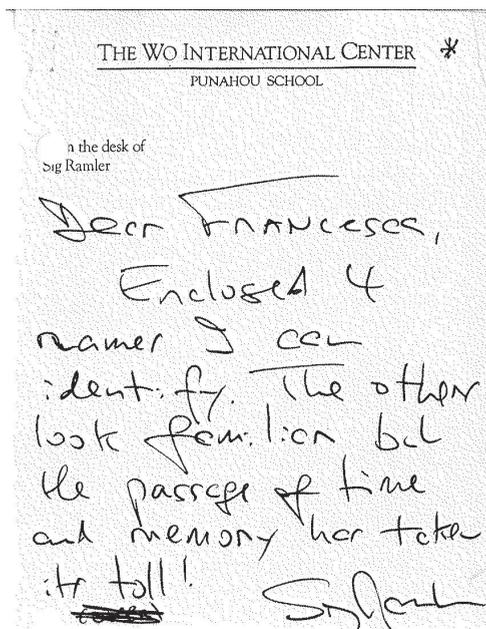


Figure 14 Source: Author's archive

Accompanying the photocopied photograph was one of the many letters Mr. Ramler sent me, a handwritten note (Figure 14) about how the passage of time had taken its toll on his memory of the names of other interpreters in the picture. Figure 15 shows what Mr. Ramler looked like in 2014 in an interview with the International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) called “Siegfried Ramler, interpreter at Nuremberg, in London with AIIC,” and Figure 15 shows one of the letters and faxes he sent me in 1997 from his university office in Hawaii.



Figure 15 Source: <https://youtu.be/nrMVTQyPf5I>

THE WOI INTERNATIONAL CENTER
PUNAHOU SCHOOL

Siegfried Ramler
Director

February 1, 1995

Ms. Francesca Gaiba
Room #632 International House
2299 Piedmont Avenue
Berkeley, CA 94720

Dear Francesca:

Here is as much information as I can give you in response to your fax of January 27, 1995:

- a) I was born in Vienna in 1924 and attended elementary and secondary school in that city until 1938 when I went to England where part of my family was located. I finished secondary school in London and started higher education when the war broke out. During the war in London I worked in a variety of war-related jobs including a stint of translation work for governmental offices. At the end of 1944 I was selected to join the 9th United States Airforce Service Command as language liaison officer in their advance into Germany. I was assigned to a mobile battalion and assisted that unit as a linguist focusing on the disarmament of German installations. In early 1945 our battalion moved to a city in the vicinity of Nurnberg where preparations for the international trials were beginning. When I called on that office I was asked immediately to join the language and interpreting staff, then still in its embryonic stages, under the leadership of Colonel Dostert. (My battalion commander would not release me; I literally went "AWOL," absent without leave, to join the Nurnberg staff, then named the United States Chief of Counsel. Since Nurnberg had considerable clout at that time this "defection" was soon straightened out.) For information about my further studies, my career and activities after the trials I am sending you my Curriculum Vitae which supplies the necessary data.
- b) At the moment the names of other interpreters at the trial, those still living, are not handily available to me. I'll look through my files at home and send you some names later. However, it is difficult or impossible for me to tell you how they all got there and what they did afterwards.
- c) As I remember, Colonel Leon Dostert was the key person behind the simultaneous interpretation system. I have no information about the role played by Justice Jackson or his son.

1601 PUNAHOU STREET • HONOLULU, HAWAII 96822 • PH. (808) 944-5883 • FAX: (808) 944-5712

Figure 16 Source: Author's archive

6. Alfred Steer

Mr. Steer was Deputy Chief and Executive Officer of the Translation Division and became Head of the division in April 1946. Born in 1913 in the U.S, when he arrived in Nuremberg he did not pass the test to become an interpreter but became a valuable administrator. Alfred Steer had several duties when working for the Translation Division. Initially, he oversaw the recruitment of the interpreters, and he was even sent across Europe to find and select them. As Head of the Translation Division, at the end of the trial, he was asked to translate the verdicts in advance, and he organized a special group of translators who agreed, for reasons of security, to remain locked up for the duration of the translation.



Figure 17 Source: National Archives, College Park MD

Ms. Francesca Gaiba
Room 632 International House,
2299 Piedmont Ave.,
Berkeley, CA 94720

Dear Ms. Gaiba:

The acronyms you ask about:

1. CAF (for Clerk Administrative Fiscal). This was the outmoded way of classifying Civil Service employees. In my time it ran from CAF 1 (about \$500 per annum) to about CAF 15 (about \$12,000 per annum).
2. Con. I think this was a mistake.
3. Pvt. = "Private," the lowest U.S. Army grade.
4. CWS = for Chief Warrant, an upper enlisted grade.
5. Ugr. = ungraded.
6. Pfc. should be "Pf.1/c," = "Private, first class." See #3 above.
7. T5. = Technician fifth grade, non-commissioned officer, U.S. Army. Say "Sergeant."
8. P2- I've forgotten.
9. Yeoman (yes, that is correct) 3/c. = Yeoman was the Navy enlisted man who dealt with secretarial and paperwork chores. Useful and respected. "3/c" means third class, the lowest of four classes.
10. Cdr. Navy Commander. My final rank at Nurnberg.

"The dirty, unpleasant experiences" - at Nurnberg (preferred spelling - see below). The suffering in the city (89% destroyed) was intense. The stench of rotting corpses had almost (but not quite entirely) dissipated by the time we arrived (September). People (mostly women and children) were living in underground air raid shelters, or in lean-to's made of tin, propped against some fragmentary wall still standing. Others cooking over open fires, fueled by wood from the ruins, in the streets. German bestiality to fellow Germans was shocking. Daily we saw the stronger Germans getting a standing place on the running boards of moving trolley cars by bodily throwing down onto the street weaker Germans, usually right in front of on-coming traffic. Such scenes were unavoidably played out before our eyes twice daily - once on going to work at the Justizpalast and again on return home. Note: the five officers in my billet "adopted" one air raid shelter group during the winter by supplying food and shelter surreptitiously (we weren't supposed to).

Far worse was the degrading and repulsive material we were forced to deal with all day long in the court room and in the back room translation sections. Such cruelty as the Nazis routinely practiced, such sadism, depravity and bestiality was,

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Figure 18 Source: Author's archive

Figure 17 is an undated picture of him at his office in Nuremberg. While Mr. Steer did not work as an interpreter at the trial, he played a very important role as an administrator, and was invaluable for my research. We exchanged many letters, such as figure 18, in which he answered my many questions about the trial and the interpreters. Mr. Steer was generous with his time, recollections, and his willingness to share with me original historical documents he had kept in his house, such as the invaluable Personnel Index Files (Figure 19) of the Language

Division, as well as a document about the interpretation that he wrote in 1945 or 1946 called "Simultaneous Multi-Lingual Interpreting System" (Figure 20). This document was originally written on a typewriter on parchment or onion paper, and not only had the ink spread on the page making it almost impossible to read, but the paper was so thin that the ink on the other side showed through the page. This eight-page document is an original source: It was written at the time of the trial rather than as a recollection 50 years later. It was and is a fundamental document in my research and in my understanding of how the interpreting system worked at the trial.

Name Rosoff Miss (M)(F) Citizenship French
 Military-Rank _____ A.S.R. _____ Years Service ASN
 Civilian-Grade Interpreter AGO No _____ Base Pay 15000 francs
 Title (civ) Professor Room No 354 Phone No 51 568 Ext _____
 Division Transl. Division Section Cour. Interpreter
 Supervisor Dostert
 Residence (Nurnberg) 3 Vestner Strasse Phone No 71-141
Ziendorf
 Residence (U.S.) 17 rue Durat Phone No PA 30.52
 Emergency Addressee Charles Rosoff Schlumberger, Susquehanna Phone No _____
Paris (16.)
Houston (Texas)
 Parent Organization _____ Expiration of Contract _____
 Expiration of Temporary Duty _____
 Expiration of Passport _____ Left 10 Aug.
 (if applicable) for Paris
 Date Reported for duty OCG _____ 4 States
 Date Relieved from duty OCG _____



Name SIGMUND (NMI) ROTH (M)(F) Citizenship USA
 Military-Rank 1st LT INF A.S.R. 107 Years Service 8/ASN 0-1999267
 Civilian-Grade NONE AGO No 258724 Base Pay \$ 175.00 Month _____
 Title (civ) MISTER Room No 184 Phone No 61184 Ext NONE
 Division TRANSLATING Section STAFF
 Supervisor _____
 Residence (Nurnberg) 36 FORSTHAUS STRASSE Phone No 71005-6
 Residence (U.S.) 315 EAST 80TH ST NEW YORK CITY Phone No ?
 Emergency Addressee MRS CELIA ROTH 305 EAST 47th ST NYC Phone No / ?
 Parent Organization ASF, 2d SVC., SEPARATION CENTER Expiration of Contract _____
PORT DIX, NJ.
 Expiration of Temporary Duty 9 FEB 46
 Expiration of Passport NONE
 (if applicable) _____
 Date Reported for duty OCG 9 NOV 45
 Date Relieved from duty OCG _____



Figure 19 Source: Author's archive

SIMULTANEOUS MULTI-LINGUAL INTERPRETING SYSTEM

Description of

I. Courtroom Installation The responsibility of maintaining interpreters as necessary. Experience has shown that interpreters occasionally break down. The present system is conducted with the aid of International Business Machines equipment, the correct term for which is "The Finlay Filene Translators." This system involves microphones and earphones for the interpreters so that the voice of the speaker is carried to the interpreters by wired earphones. The interpreters then interpret into separate microphones and their interpretations are carried through wires to every set in the courtroom. In the present courtroom, there are some 600 sets, each provided with a set of headphones and a dial selecting switch, flash into Russian, and French and German, and also German into Russian. The French and German tables are explained orally.

The spectator takes his seat, puts on his earphones, and adjusts the dial for his choice of language. Through any dial at any time, he may hear each of the four court languages. No. 1 position on the dial is the verbatim, that is, the actual words of the speaker, regardless of language (the interpreters listen to verbatim always). No. 2 is the English channel, No. 3, Russian, No. 4, French, and No. 5, German. There is no physical limit to the number of earphones and selector switches that can be installed. Microphones are located about the courtroom for the convenience of the speakers. These microphones are located in the following places: At No. 41 in the attached sketch, there is a microphone for the prosecutor or defense attorney who is addressing the court. Attached to this table are earphones and selector switches for the speaker's use. In addition, there are four microphones on the Judges' bench. Another microphone is located at position 57 for the use of the witness. There are four microphones at position 58, two in the back row and two in the front row into which the interpreters speak. Lastly, there is a portable microphone in front of position 58 for the use of the marshal of the court. This microphone has been shifted on occasion to a place between positions 16 and 17 for the use of the defendants. There is no physical limit to the number of microphones usable but the number which are "live" at any moment should be kept to a minimum to avoid excessive noise. There is a man at the console at position 45 who controls the volume lever at the individual microphones. This is necessary in order to maintain an even level in view of the fact that some speakers speak loudly, some softly, some close to the microphone, and some at a distance. Behind position 55, as indicated by the inked box, there is a small room containing the amplifiers and the technician. This technician can see into the court through a doorway so that he can regulate his equipment. The half of position 58, closest to the interpreters, is occupied by the monitor, indicated by the inked "M" on the sketch. This is an officer whose task it is to listen continuously to the various channels to monitor the speed and accuracy of the various interpreters. He has beside him two buttons which when pushed, flash a yellow or a red light in front of the speaker. The yellow light requests the speaker to speak more slowly, and the red light requests him to stop as long as the red light is on.

technician >

Monitor >

lights >

Figure 20 Source: Author's archive

Mr. Steer was a scholar of German literature and a lover of Italian culture. We became friends and stayed in touch for a few years after my research. He teased/complimented me on my graduation by calling me "senorina [sic] dottoressa" as can be seen in two letters from him (Figures 21 and 22). He also joked in Figure 22 that he was inflicting his handwriting on me when he could not access his typewriter.

THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
DEPARTMENT OF GERMANIC AND SLAVIC LANGUAGES
ATHENS, GEORGIA 30602

A.G. STEER, JR.
EMERITUS

15 April, 1996

215 BISHOP DRIVE
ATHENS, GA 30606

Francesca Gaiba
108 Ferrarese
40128 Bologna
Italy

*ok) entered
biblio*

Congratulations! I have just finished reading your excellent tesi di laurea. This careful and accurate piece of work should become a standard source. I also note with pleasure and amusement that you have mentioned my doubtless hopelessly Quixotic crusade to change the English spelling of Nurnberg. Despite the fact that my proposal is more logical and more accurate, you recognize that the damned British with their Frenchified "Nuremberg" have carried the day.

It is most encouraging to see this important historical material handled skillfully by a person as diligent, objective and scholarly as yourself. Again and again your neat touches pleased me. I should have been much sharper in dealing with that annoying purist, Mr. Justice Norman Burkitt. But you, with smooth skill, have him condemn himself out of his own mouth by quoting from his memoirs!

There a few minor errors you might want to change if there is to be a printed version: on p. 39 you state that German was my native tongue - no, it is English, although you have the sense of the anecdote just right. Your English is all but perfect. On p. 89 you write "it left no room to error." Best usage would prefer either "it left no room to err" or "it left no room for error." And on p. 98 I think you meant "they are more critical about interpretation..."

Again, heartiest congratulations!

AG Steer

P.S. Are you now a "senorina dottoressa"?

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Figure 21 Source: Author's archive

Dear Saurima Dattorosa! (OK)

I have your letter of 28 February, which unfortunately finds me unable to write a neat and adequate reply. We are in the midst of a move to 335 Beechwood Drive, Athens, Ga. An addition is being made to the new house for my office, so my desk, files, papers, computer, etc. are in storage until the new room is completed - at least another month! So rather than wait I'll inflict my very bad handwriting on you now, with a proper letter to follow in due course.

Congratulations on getting your book published - I am anxious to see a copy.

I approve of most ~~of~~ you have written about me, but would like to make one suggestion - You know I have

a high opinion of Perrotto's
book on Nuremberg. Somewhere
there (my copy of his work is in
storage, so I cannot quote the
page #) he refers to me as
"an amalgam of scholar and man
of action." I am proud of that,
and if you want to add it to
Perrotto's quote (top p 2), I'd be
flattered.

When I finally get my
papers and records back in order
I'll send you a copy of my
memoir "Interesting Times."

Again, congratulations and
best wishes!

RSBer

Figure 22 Source: Author's archive

7. Conclusion

This article offers a glimpse behind the scenes of the research I conducted in the late 1990s for my book *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*, the first book-length monograph to investigate the use of simultaneous interpretation at the Nuremberg Trial of 1945-46. In this article, I offer anecdotes from my interactions and correspondence with a few of the Nuremberg inter-

preters I contacted and interviewed for the research. Their handwritten notes, their comments about their waning memory of the trial, and their humorous asides offer a picture of their personalities 50 years after their momentous contribution to one of the most crucial events of the twentieth century.

It was a pleasure and an honor for me as a young student of history and of interpretation to correspond with the interpreters who had worked at the Nuremberg Trial. Over time, their letters have become more meaningful as the interpreters have passed away and as more young scholars, more professional interpreters, and people in general have become interested in the history of interpretation at Nuremberg. Over the years dozens of people have contacted me to access the materials listed in the bibliography of *The Origins of Simultaneous Interpretation: The Nuremberg Trial*, especially the unpublished, harder-to-find archival material. To increase access, I have scanned all my original unpublished sources and am giving free access to all the digitized material from the bibliography of my book, including all the letters of the interpreters, and all the unpublished and archival materials that I collected from numerous archives around the world for the book research, to anyone who is interested in accessing them. Anyone who is interested should email me at my address at Northwestern University (gaiba@northwestern.edu), and I will give them access to the online folder containing all the scanned materials.

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Interpreting for the Nuremberg Trials – Four Eyewitness Accounts

INGRID KURZ
University of Vienna

Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of first-hand accounts of four interpreters who worked for the Nuremberg Trials.

Keywords

Pretrial interrogations, work in the courtroom, psychological strain, linguistic problems, life outside the courtroom, life after Nuremberg

Introduction

The Nuremberg Trials, where 22 leaders of the Nazi regime had to answer for their war crimes and crimes against humanity before an International Military Tribunal between November 20, 1945 and October 1, 1946, have filled history books. They laid the foundations of international criminal justice as we know it today. It is not an exaggeration to say that world history was written in the courtroom of the Nuremberg Palace of Justice. The Allies' mission was to provide fair and expeditious trials of the Nazi leaders. Therefore, it was decided that they were to be carried out in four languages (English, French, German, Russian)¹.

1 See Article 25 of the Charter of the International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg Charter): All official documents shall be produced, and all court proceedings conducted in English, French, Russian, and in the language of the Defendant.

It was the interpreters who made the four-language proceedings possible. Nevertheless, their contribution remained largely ignored in the historical record for quite some time. Bowen/Bowen (1985: 74) point out that although “the legal, historical and political aspects of the trials have been studied extensively, translation has not been given much attention in these studies”.

Even more than a decade later, Gaiba (1998: 21) mentions the difficulties of finding relevant material and states that “published material about Nuremberg interpretation is extremely scarce”.

Since then, the situation has drastically changed. Numerous studies (Gaiba 1998; Gaiba 1999; Baigorri-Jalón 2002; Behr/Corpataux 2006; Kalverkämper/Schippel 2008; Rumprecht 2008; Andres/Behr 2014; Salevsky/Müller 2015) have provided detailed descriptions of translatorial activities during the Nuremberg Trials and covered virtually all aspects – technical equipment, recruitment, testing, preparation, working conditions, etc.

The International Association of Conference Interpreters (AIIC) has also taken an active interest in the history of the profession. At the Extraordinary Assembly in Brussels in 1992, there was a panel discussion with Marie-France Skuncke and Frédéric Treidell, two of the interpreters who had worked for the Nuremberg Trials, plus the production of a videotape (Kurz/Bowen 1999: 1-2). The AIIC exhibition “One Trial – Four Languages” was started in 2013 and has since traveled to many different places, most recently to Trieste.

One might ask, therefore, whether the topic “Interpreting for the Nuremberg Trial” has not been exhausted by now and whether there is anything to be added.

I think it is still worthwhile to take a closer look at the first-hand accounts of interpreters who worked there and to compare their memories. I have selected four eyewitnesses – Richard W. Sonnenfeldt, Siegfried Ramler, Peter Less, and Marie-France Skuncke – all of whom have left us valuable records by writing about their experiences and talking about them in interviews and public appearances. This paper will focus on the following questions: How did they get to work at the Nuremberg trials? How do they remember their work and life there? How did they handle the psychological strain? What linguistic problems were they confronted with? And finally, what impact did their work for the International Military Tribunal have on their lives? Although they came from different backgrounds, they had a number of things in common. They were all bilingual (or even trilingual) individuals in their early twenties who were unexperienced but courageous enough to take on a most responsible, difficult job and mastered it.

1. Four different roads to Nuremberg

1.1. Richard W. Sonnenfeldt (1923 – 2009)

Richard W. Sonnenfeldt, the son of Jewish parents, was born and grew up in Gargelen, a small town in Germany. After the *Anschluss*², he and his younger

2 Annexation of Austria by Nazi Germany on 13 March, 1938.

brother were sent to England by their parents where they attended a boarding school. In 1940, Sonnenfeldt was deported because his German passport lacked the big red J stamp that identified him as a Jew. After an adventurous journey to Australia and India he managed to join his parents in the United States. He became a U.S. citizen and joined the American army.

Shortly after the end of World War II he was stationed in Salzburg, Austria, with the Second Corps, Seventh U.S. Army where he worked as a mechanic and driver, when his life changed overnight. He was lubricating an armored car when a sergeant yelled, "Sonnenfeldt! Private Sonnenfeldt! [...] The general needs an interpreter! [...] We are in a hurry, get going" (Sonnenfeldt 2011: 1). He was taken to General William Donovan, the Chief of the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), which was based in Paris. They were trying to find interpreters for interviewing witnesses to prepare for the upcoming war crimes trials. He passed a brief language test and was flown to Paris with hardly time to change into a clean uniform and wash his hands and face (*Ibid.*: 2-3).

In Paris he started translating German documents, but soon began to accompany officers to Germany and Austria, Warsaw and Prague to interview prospective witnesses and defendants. In late July 1945, he flew to Nuremberg with the American prosecution to interpret in the pre-trial interrogations of the Nazi leaders and was put in charge of recruiting and testing additional interpreters.

Now just twenty-two, by a combination of natural gifts, hard work to acquire an American accent, and a series of chance events, I had been spotted as a bilingual soldier in the exact right place and moment. I was being plucked from utter anonymity as a motor pool private to be thrust onto the main stage of postwar history: the trials of the Nazis. (Sonnenfeldt 2011: 2-3)

1.2. Siegfried Ramler (1924 – 2020)

Siegfried Ramler was born as the son of Jewish parents in Vienna, Austria, where he spent his early childhood. After the *kristallnacht*³ in November 1938 he escaped to England on the *kindertransport*⁴ to live with relatives. There he completed his education and became bilingual. When World War II broke out, he was in London.

Following the invasion of Normandy and their march towards Germany, the Allied troops needed people with a good knowledge of German. Ramler took a test, was immediately accepted and assigned to the 9th US Airforce Service Command where he worked as a translator. About a month after the end of the war Ramler's battalion was stationed in the vicinity of Nuremberg. When he learned about the upcoming trial of the Nazi leaders, he hitchhiked to Nuremberg, even though he had been ordered to fly back to London. "I had reached a turning point

3 German for crystal night, also called Night of Broken Glass or November Pogrom, the night of November 9-10, 1938, when German Nazis attacked Jewish persons and property.

4 German for children's transport, the operation to evacuate Jewish children from Nazi-occupied Europe to the United Kingdom between 1938 and 1940.

in my life [...] That decision, ignoring an order, set the course of my personal and professional life” (Ramler 2008: 46). After a brief interview he was accepted as an interpreter.

1.3. Peter Less (1920 – 2019)

Peter Less was born in Königsberg, Germany, where he grew up in a middle-class Jewish family. In 1938, he tried to persuade his family to leave Germany, but like many other intellectuals they felt that they were not in danger. So he left alone and went to Switzerland where he was an undocumented alien and worked at a number of odd jobs. Because he spoke German, English and French he got a grant that allowed him to enroll in the *École d’Interprètes* of the University of Geneva. He graduated shortly after the end of World War II. This is how he was recruited:

One day, American officers in uniform came to the school. They tested a dozen people and hired three, including me. “Tomorrow morning”, the American officer said, “you must fly to Nuremberg” (Geske 2015).

1.4. Marie-France Skuncke (1924 – 2007)

Marie-France Skuncke (née Rosé) was born in Warsaw, Poland. She grew up bilingually (Polish and French) in Paris, but her English was excellent so that she could be considered to be trilingual. She graduated from the *École d’Interprètes* of the University of Geneva in 1944 and immediately started to work as a freelance interpreter. After having done consecutive interpretation for two conferences, she found herself without another assignment in the winter of 1945 and was wondering what to do next when she got a telephone call from Jean Meyer from the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was setting up a team of French interpreters for Nuremberg and told her that there would be some simultaneous interpreting, something she had never heard about in the Geneva school.

He said, “You will be doing some translation work, and gradually you will be trained in the Court Room so that you can eventually work as an interpreter in the Court”. And that was that. I said, “Yes, I accept it”, and left for Nuremberg. (Kurz 1985: 3)

She was twenty-one years old when, on a cold winter day in 1946, she arrived in Nuremberg “with mixed feelings”.

2. Interpreting during the pre-trial interrogations

For the pre-trial interrogations between August and November 1945 consecutive interpretation between English and German was used. Sonnenfeldt was there from the very beginning. He was selected to interpret the pretrial interrogations

of the most senior Nazis – Goering, Hess, Ribbentrop, and Keitel – for the prosecution. Over a period of four months, he spent hundreds of hours with the accused in the interrogation rooms on the second floor in the Palace of Justice and had the opportunity to talk to them face to face.

Goering was known for interrupting interpreters. His English was good enough to catch the gist of questions, but not good enough to assert himself. When, during their first encounter, Goering tried to correct Sonnenfeldt's translation, Sonnenfeldt refused to be intimidated and said:

Herr Gering.⁵ When I translate the colonel's questions into German and your answers into English, you keep quiet until I am finished. You don't interrupt. When the stenographer has recorded my translation, you may tell me whether you have a problem, and then I will decide whether it is necessary to consider your comments. Or, if you would like to be interrogated without an interpreter, just say so, and I will merely listen and correct you. [...] I am the chief interpreter here, and if you will never interrupt me, I will never again mispronounce your name, Herr Göring. (Sonnenfeldt 2011: 17-18)

This earned him Goering's respect. Goering knew that it was to his advantage to have an interpreter. Sonnenfeldt became Goering's favorite interpreter and was also the official interpreter during the serving of the indictments.

He was given the title of Chief of the Interpretation Section, which was not a military rank, but required that all the other interpreters and the stenographers and typists of the Interrogation Division had to report to him.

I even had an anteroom with a receptionist! How amazing that I, a twenty-two-year-old private, younger even than the young army secretaries, was being treated as a full-fledged member of the staff. (Sonnenfeldt 2011: 11)

As the number of prisoners and witnesses who had to be questioned before the upcoming trials increased, more interpreters were needed for the Interrogation Division. It was Sonnenfeldt's task to interview them and check their German and English.

Like Sonnenfeldt, Ramler had arrived in Nuremberg before the beginning of the Trial and became one of the interpreters who worked during the interrogations of Goering and other Nazi key leaders. In his memoirs he describes this period as the most interesting because the testimonies given at that time were not yet shaped by the defense strategy and the structure of the formal trial to follow. It was "history in the raw".

When I think back to my most memorable experience during the four years I spent in Nuremberg – over a year with the international trial and three additional years with the subsequent proceedings – the interrogations in preparation for the major trial stand out, as Germany's erstwhile leaders presented spontaneous and unfiltered testimony. (Ramler 2008: 47)

5 A deliberate mispronunciation of his name. The word *gering* means "little nothing" in German.

3. Interpreting in the courtroom

As is well known, Colonel Dostert, General Eisenhower's personal interpreter, was put in charge of organizing the simultaneous interpretation system for the International Military Tribunal. He was appointed Head of the Interpreting Division and Chief Interpreter. In this function, he assumed command of the hiring and testing of candidates who would be interpreting at the trials.

Sonnenfeldt was invited by Colonel Dostert to sit in the booth. He worked during the opening session but did not want to do simultaneous because that did not interest him. Besides, he was honest enough to admit that "the speakers' linguistic versatility and knowledge of legal terms were beyond my capabilities" (Sonnenfeldt 2011: 51). Therefore, he declined Dostert's offer. In his memoirs he expresses his admiration for his colleagues who were doing simultaneous.

I was grateful not to be sitting behind the glass wall with the tribunal interpreters, who, now proficient in their demanding role, did magnificent work in four languages – available to all in the courtroom by turning a button on a little box connected to one's headset. (Sonnenfeldt 2011: 199)

He continued to work as Chief Interpreter of the American prosecution. One of his tasks was "to verify that witnesses and defendants made the same statements in court as those they made in pretrial examination" (Sonnenfeldt 2011: 221).

Ramler passed the test for simultaneous and became a member of the team of tribunal interpreters.

Skuncke remembers working in the translation department for several weeks. She was instructed to get as much practice in simultaneous as possible and interpreted the sessions to herself in simultaneous, either in the courtroom or the public gallery. She also mentions that "at the same time we were being trained – not at all systematically, when I think of what we now expect of our students. It was rather haphazard" (Kurz 1985: 3).

3.1 Emotional impact and psychological strain

The first question that comes to mind is how these four young people who themselves had been victims of the Nazi regime in one form or another managed to stand up to the psychological strain of sitting in the same room as those responsible for the mass murders of Jews.

Sonnenfeldt's father had briefly been interned in the Buchenwald concentration camp. His family had to give up their home and managed to escape to New York. Ramler's grandfather had died in Buchenwald. His parents were able to leave Austria at the last moment and to join their two daughters who had moved to Israel earlier. Peter Less had lost all of his family – his father, mother, grandmother and only sister – in Auschwitz. Skuncke was the only one who was not directly affected by the Nazi atrocities as she had lived in Paris.

How could they stay calm and interpret the defendants' words in a clear and dispassionate manner? Didn't subconscious, negative feelings intervene?

They unanimously report that they were preoccupied with doing a good job, with unfamiliar vocabulary and the search for accuracy. Sonnenfeldt (2011: 22) admits that he wanted to see the guilty punished for their crimes, “but my mind was more on doing my job than avenging a personal past in Nazi Germany”. He also points out that he had sworn to translate accurately, completely, and truthfully (*Ibid.*: 22).

As Ramler (2008: 52) points out, “the task required total concentration, staying in tune with the flow of the speaker and keeping him or her in sight to achieve simultaneity”. He goes on to say that “my function as a tribunal interpreter required a professional- attitude that did not allow emotion to affect performance” (*Ibid.*: 63).

They saw films showing bloodcurdling images of the gas chambers and unspeakable cruelties.

How did they manage to cope with the testimony of brutality in concentration camps, of torture, of medical experiments on prisoners?

Again, they emphasize that, even though it was difficult, they had to concentrate on their job and could not let their feelings play a role in the courtroom.

I found myself in a dual situation: My function as a tribunal interpreter required a professional attitude that did not allow emotion to affect performance in the courtroom. Despite the fact that I was a witness to and a target of Nazi persecution, experienced the murder of my grandfather, and saw my family forced to escape from Vienna, I focused on my function as a linguist, responding to the interpretation challenges facing me at the trials. (Ramler 2008: 63)

It wasn't easy. You were sitting in the same room with the people who probably killed your parents, but you could not let your feelings interfere with your job. You swore to interpret as faithfully as possible, to put the speaker's idea into the listener's head. So we did. (Geske 2015)

One can only marvel at how they managed to do such an admirable job. Not all of the interpreters could bear the immense psychological strain and had to be transferred to the translation section. Gaiba (1998: 21) writes that “many reported that they had nightmares, for example, about the horrors of the films that the US Army had taken when they first entered the concentration camps”. Skuncke remembers a colleague who, like Peter Less, had lost his family in the concentration camps. He tried to interpret, but he couldn't, it was just too much for him (Kurz 1985: 4).

3.2 Linguistic challenges and self-assessment

Apart from technical terminology (legal, bureaucratic, military, and medical terms) there were numbers of other linguistic challenges for the interpreters during the proceedings. Rendering long passages of legal documents being read was only one of them.

Peter Less remembers that the differences between Roman law and common law posed difficulties because the German lawyers did not understand what an American attorney meant when he spoke about a writ of *habeas corpus*. On the

other hand, Roman law professionals would use Latin terms that the Americans did not know (Gesse 2015).

Problems also included language structure. For the interpreters working from German one of the difficulties was anticipating the German verb at the end of a subordinate clause.

Then there was Nazi language, unique to the Third Reich, which was euphemistic and intentionally obfuscating. German language ambiguities were deliberately used to camouflage the meaning and impact of an expression. Certain terms were created to hide acts of terror. *Sonderbehandlung* (special treatment) meant execution, *Endlösung* (final solution) referred to the systematic extermination and mass murder of Jews (Michael/Doerr 2002).

On one occasion, Ramler had to defend his translation of the German word *erfassen*, for which there are two possible English translations: One is register, which is harmless, and the other is seize, which has an aggressive connotation. When he chose to say, “the Jewish population was seized”, consistent with the context of the testimony, there was an objection by the defense taking issue with his translation, and he found himself in the strange situation of having to interpret a debate about the accuracy of his interpretation (Ramler 2008: 52).

In an interview with Tanya Gesse, Peter Less admitted to a serious mistake:

Once I made a big mistake and almost caused World War III. It was over a word – a name actually – Rascher. The question was, “What did Rascher do?” and I translated: “What did Russia do?” The Russian officer immediately jumped up, shook his hand in the air, and said: “WHAT?! What are you involving Russia for?” I then had to explain that I meant the German General Rascher, not the country, and apologized. (Gesse 2015)

Retrospectively, Skuncke views her performance critically:

I must say that professionally I shudder at it, because I knew so little about simultaneous interpretation, I knew little about legal matters, and after all it was a terrible responsibility to be doing that. (Kurz 1985: 6)

She goes on to say, however, that there were few interpreters at that time and that they had to learn on the job.

Personally, I didn't feel inadequate at that time because I didn't know what simultaneous interpretation should be! I had never been taught by anybody except when I came to Nuremberg. (Kurz 1985: 6)

Peter Less, too, states that they were all working to the best of their ability. “We did the best we could” (Gesse 2005).

4. Life outside the courtroom

Throughout the day, the interpreters were confronted with the atrocities of Nazi crimes, but “the horror did not stop once they left the courtroom” (Gaiba 1998: 158).

Like many other German cities Nuremberg was destroyed by Allied bombing. It resembled a ghost town. The infrastructure was completely destroyed. Sonnenfeldt (2011: 10) remembers “driving through an endless maze of destruction”. Skuncke recalls that “what you saw and heard in court was absolutely dreadful. And when you came out of the Court, it was all in ruins. The atmosphere was very grim” (Kurz 1985: 3).

But, at the same time, they also found themselves in a very privileged position. Since there were very few buildings left in town, they lived in the suburbs of Nuremberg. They were housed in beautiful villas that had been confiscated from top Nazis. Jeeps would pick them up to go to the courthouse and drive them back after work. They were keenly aware, though, that “there was a surreal aspect to this lifestyle, with the backdrop of the bomb damage and ruins in the old city” (Geske 2015).

Another benefit was access to the PX, the Army stores, where they could buy cigarettes, tea and coffee or clothes and things that were not available elsewhere. For Skuncke, “oddly enough, one memory of Nuremberg is that of tremendous material comfort” (Kurz 1985: 3). The salary that she received from the Tribunal was much more than what the French Foreign Ministry paid. Peter Less was able to send his entire salary to his wife and could afford to take weekend flights to Paris to meet her there, and Ramler was able to visit his family in Israel several times. However, in their recollection “it still was quite dismal, and we were living a very artificial life” (*Ibid.*: 3).

Like the Palace of Justice, the Grand Hotel, although damaged, had not been completely destroyed. It was the only hotel that was still standing and became the operating base for court officers and the world press. It was the place where they all gathered in the evenings to let off steam and relax after their hard work-day and to enjoy music, dancing, eating and drinking. They worked hard and they played hard. As Skuncke puts it:

We had the time of our life. It was a kind of reaction [...] We were reacting against all that horror which we saw and heard. And it was such a relief that it was all over.
(Kurz 1985: 5)

5. Life after Nuremberg – Four different careers

For all of them, their interpreting activities in Nuremberg constituted a brief, but essential part of their lives.

Marie-France Skuncke was the only one who remained in the profession, while the others chose altogether different paths. Like many other interpreters, she did not stay in Nuremberg until the end of the trial. The French Foreign Ministry had offered her an interpreting assignment at a conference in Paris in June 1946. Before returning to Paris, she wrote an article for *L'Interprète*, urging that simultaneous be taught in interpreting schools. As of 1947, she worked for UNESCO for two years. Subsequently, she pursued a successful career as a freelance interpreter and also taught at the interpreting schools in Geneva and Paris. From 1970 - 1972 she served as Executive Secretary of AIIC.

Peter Less got a visa to the US and went there in 1946. He would have liked to work as an interpreter for the newly founded United Nations, but they did not need German. He worked as a translator and teacher for a while and did all kinds of jobs to get through law school. Like his father and uncle, he became an attorney and specialized in family law.

Siegfried Ramler continued to work for the subsequent bilingual trials (English and German) and stayed in Nuremberg until 1949. He got married to a Hawaiian court reporter. After his service in Nuremberg, he got his *diplôme supérieur* from the University of Paris and then moved to Hawaii, where he distinguished himself as an educator. He started a career as a language teacher at the Punahou Academy in Honolulu and became Chairman of the Punahou Foreign Language Department. He was founder and president of numerous associations in Hawaii, such as the Wo International Center and the Alliance française of Hawaii.

Richard W. Sonnenfeldt returned to the United States after the end of the Main Trial in 1946 and studied electrical engineering at Johns Hopkins University. He was one of the engineers and inventors at RCA who developed color television. In the 1960s he worked on computers and equipment for the NASA Man on the Moon program and later on became a business executive and consultant.

6. Conclusion

In line with the intention of AIIC's exhibition "One Trial – Four Languages" to take the Nuremberg interpreters out of their anonymity, I have selected the eyewitness accounts of four individuals for a contrastive analysis.

Even though Nuremberg was only a brief episode in their lives and Skuncke was the only one to pursue a successful career as a conference interpreter while the others chose different professions, their work at the International Military Tribunal had a deep impact on all of them.

According to Ramler (1988: 439) "it was only later, with the time for perspective, that the substance and impact of the trials came into focus". Peter Less sums it up by saying, "We were young and not very experienced, but we were indispensable. We felt like pioneers, but at the same time we didn't think we were anything special" (Gesse 2015).

Their experience in Nuremberg left all of them with an enduring commitment to global cooperation.

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