

# End of a Berlin diary, 1947

William Lawrence Shirer

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**NUREMBERG, Tuesday, November 20, 1945**

“This, then, is the climax! This is the moment you have been waiting for all these black, despairing years! To see Justice catch up with Evil. To see it overtake these barbaric little men who almost destroyed our world. This, really, is the end of the long night, of the hideous nightmare.

And how the mighty have fallen! Shorn of the power and the glory and the glittering trappings of Nazidom, how little and mean and mediocre they look - the twenty defendants in the dock this day! How was it possible, you ask yourself in amazement, that these nondescript-looking individuals, fidgeting nervously in their rather shabby clothes, wielded, when last you saw them, only five years ago, such monstrous power? How could they, so measly of countenance as they slump in their seats, have conquered a great nation and almost the World? Their metamorphosis staggers you. Were these the conquerors, the strutting leaders of the Master Race? Why, the sudden loss of power seems to have stripped them clean of the arrogance, the insolence, the truculence that was their very being in all the years I knew them. How quickly they have become broken, miserable little men!

They are already seated in the prisoner's dock when I enter the courtroom at nine forty a.m. The first sight of them is indescribable.



There is **Goring**. He sits in the first seat in the first of the two rows that compose the dock. It is the number-one place and it strikes you that at last he has achieved his long ambition of being Number One in the Nazi hierarchy, though not precisely as he had once dreamed. At first glance I scarcely recognize him. He has lost much weight - eighty pounds, a U.S. Army doctor whispers to me. The fat, pouchy face I knew is much thinner now. He looks younger and healthier, with his excess weight gone and his drug habit cured - an achievement of our army medical corps. His faded air-force uniform, shorn of the insignia and of the medals he loved so childishly, hangs loosely on him. He

## End of a Berlin diary, 1947

William Lawrence Shirer

---

could hardly strut in it now. And gone is his burliness, the old arrogance, the flamboyant air. Indeed, he sits through the five-and-a-half-hour opening session of court quite subdued, though attentive and alert to the proceedings. Often he reaches for his earphones and with a gesture that is almost meek, almost humble, clasps them over his head so that he can listen to the simultaneous German translation of something that is being said in English or French or Russian. At such moments, I cannot help thinking, he looks more like a genial radio operator on a ship at sea than the former tyrant I had heard so often thundering his threats against the world. It is wonderful how a twist of fate can reduce a man to normal size.

Next to Goring sits **Rudolf Hess**, the number-three man of the Third Reich until his ridiculous flight to England. How on earth, you ask again, could that man have been one of the top leaders of a great nation? Here is really a broken man, his face so emaciated it looks like a skeleton, his mouth twitching nervously, his once bright eyes staring vacantly and stupidly around the courtroom. It is the first time I have ever seen Hess out of uniform. In the black coat of the SS he always seemed a strapping fellow. Today in a threadbare civilian suit he looks small and wizened. Unlike the others, he pays little attention to what is going on and sits for most of the time reading a novel balanced on his knees. We know that he claims to have lost his memory, but he seems to me to behave normally enough. He was never very bright and he certainly does not appear bright today. It is his deterioration that startles you. Here is the wreck of a man whom Hitler not so long ago wanted to succeed him as dictator of Germany.

Next in line is the insufferable mountebank **Joachim von Ribbentrop**, Hitler's former Foreign Minister. How often in the grim years have I sat in the Foreign Office in the Wilhelmstrasse and watched this arrogant nincompoop strut in to a press conference to announce in a snarling voice that another innocent, decent land had "provoked" Germany into attacking it! He was an evil, pompous little ignoramus, this former champagne-salesman who had married the boss's (the German champagne king, Henkell's) daughter, and only in the underworld of the Nazi gangsters could such a creature attain prominence. Even among most of them his vanity and arrogance were too much, but Hitler, for some reason, liked him and kept him on as his errand-boy at the Foreign Office until the very end. One glance today shows that the turn of events has shattered this scheming little worm too. Ah, now he is bent and beaten and aged beyond belief. During a recess he shuffles past me as two guards escort him to the toilet. His body is stooped, his face pale, his eyes vacant — a defeated, broken man if I have ever seen one.

In the dock on Ribbentrop's left sits **Wilhelm Keitel** in an army officer's faded uniform stripped of all markings. He had been something of a jaunty Prussian, this former field marshal and chief of the Supreme Command. I had last seen him at close quarters at Compiegne when he, on Hitler's behalf, dictated armistice terms to France in the sad June days of 1940. I remember how cocky he was then, like all Germans when they are on top, always prancing when he walked and wearing his cap at a rakish angle. There is nothing prancing or jaunty about the old field marshal today. He too is subdued, though he is not a broken man as are most of the others. The massacre of so many souls does not seem to weigh on him unduly. His appetite obviously is still good. He keeps munching crackers - from an American Army K-ration kit.

On his left squats **Alfred Rosenberg**, the phony "philosopher" and once the mentor of Hitler and the Nazi movement. He too has lost weight, the puffiness on the sallow, square face is gone, and he looks younger and healthier than when I saw him last. Dressed in a dark-brown suit, this dull, confused, but dangerous Balt who contributed so

## End of a Berlin diary, 1947

William Lawrence Shirer

---

much to the Nazis' race hatreds, who superintended the loot of art objects from the conquered lands, and who finally helped direct the dreadful extermination of the Slav people in the conquered Russian territories, is nervous in the dock, lurching forward to catch every word, his hands shaking.

Next is a real barbarian in captivity for you! **Hans Frank**, the lawyer, who as Governor General of occupied Poland decimated the Polish people and wiped out millions of Jews. He strikes you immediately as the type of refined murderer who, like Himmler, could kill and kill without getting excited about it or even appearing, personally, as particularly brutal. Today he is easily the most self-assured man in the dock. He keeps his back half-turned on the prosecutors as they read the lengthy indictment of his crimes.

At his side farther down is **Wilhelm Frick**, a cold and ruthless man behind his rather modest exterior. He was one of Hitler's chief henchmen, but toward the end of the regime became somewhat forgotten. Today he seems a forlorn figure in his chequered sport coat. But one could not forget his brutality as Hitler's first Minister of Interior and, in the end, as the "Protector" of Bohemia and Moravia.

It is difficult to recognize the next man in the dock, **Julius Streicher**. The former undisputed master of this town [Nuremberg], who strode through its ancient streets brandishing a whip and waxed fat on pornography and Jew-baiting, has rather wilted away. He sits there, an obscene, bald, decrepit old man, perspiring profusely. Occasionally the old scowl comes back as he glares at the judges. The guards tell me Streicher is convinced they are all Jews. It fortifies your belief in ultimate justice to see this repulsive German at last brought to judgment.

**Walther Funk**, who shouldered Schacht out of the presidency of the Reichsbank and of the ministership of Economics, comes next. He merely looks like a more aged toad than before, still coarse, greasy, and shift-eyed.

Next to him, and the last one in the first row, is a man who would not speak to him for ten years until today - the inimitable **Dr. Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht**. It is evident from the very start that the wily banker, who did more than any other individual in Germany to bring Hitler to power, is furious at having to stand trial with men he now - conveniently - considers as thugs. Sitting erect, his head separated from the rest of his body by his high choker collar, he folds his arms defiantly across his chest. Knowing English, he follows the reading of the indictment without earphones and with rapt attention. Occasionally he deigns to turn to Funk, whom he despises, to exchange a word. I am told Schacht is sure he will be acquitted.

We can dispose of the second row of accused more quickly. The first two gentlemen are the two Grand Admirals, **Karl Doenitz** and **Erich Raeder**. Doenitz, an able naval officer who worked out the wolf-pack technique for German submarines before he succeeded Raeder as commander-in-chief of the navy, sits erect in a civilian suit and looks for all the world like a grocery clerk. Hard to imagine him as the successor of Hitler, which he was - for a brief moment. Raeder, still in uniform, still clinging to his high upturned collar, has aged beyond his already considerable years. The spark that enabled him to build up the German Navy after World War I has gone out of him completely. He is a bewildered old man today.

Beside him is the most personable-looking and the youngest of the defendants, **Baldur von Schirach**, leader of the Hitler Youth and, during the war, the hated Gauleiter of Vienna. He looks more American than German, his parents having been American, I believe, and one of his grandfathers a soldier in the Union Army during the American Civil War. Young Schirach actually believed in the Nazi nonsense, serving Hitler with

## End of a Berlin diary, 1947

William Lawrence Shirer

---

fanatical loyalty and great ruthlessness, particularly in corrupting the youth of Germany with the poison of Nazism. Today he seems a bit dazed at finding himself in this place.

**Fritz Sauckel**, next to him, the boss of slave labor, looks like a pig, with his narrow little slit-eyes. If Germany had been a normal land, he would have found his place in life behind the counter in a butcher shop, for he looks like a small-town butcher. He is nervous today and sways to and fro. The stiff back of the man next to him, **Alfred Jodl**, does not sway. He sits gravely in his faded army uniform, this tight-lipped Bavarian who became the most powerful general in the German Army and the closest to Hitler. Like Keitel, he could never say no to Hitler, which was probably the principal reason for his advancement, as it was of Keitel's.

And next comes old **Franz von Papen**, incredibly aged, the eyes sunk in, the skin taut over the wizened face, the shoulders stooped, but still looking the part of the old fox. He has had many narrow escapes in his life, but here at last justice seems to have nailed him. He does not like it at all, you can see.

**Arthur Seyss-Inquart**, the Austrian traitor and, during the war, the brutal oppressor of the Dutch, and **Albert Speer**, Hitler's Minister of Armament and Munitions, are next in line and show little emotion of any kind.

Next to the last is **Baron-Konstantin von Neurath**, the typical career diplomat, without convictions and without integrity. Hitler had used him for a time as Foreign Minister and then as a front man for his butchery in Prague, where Neurath was the first "Protector." He sits in the dock today, a broken old man, apparently dazed by the discovery that one can come to the end of the road to compromise. He hardly knows how to stand up and be counted, for this forlorn remnant of a conservative old German family has never stood for anything in his life except serving whoever was his master.

Last in the dock is the most unimportant, one **Hans Fritzsche**, whose voice on the radio was so like his master's, Goebbels's, that it was often difficult to tell them apart. He is here, I take it, as a sort of substitute for Goebbels and appears to be taken aback by the importance attached to him.

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Promptly at ten a.m. the bailiff, whose manner and voice make plain he could only have been imported from an English law court, bawls to the occupants of the courtroom to come to attention and rise. The prisoners, quick to respond to any orders, leap to their feet. The judges file in. They are an interesting lot. Lord Justice Lawrence, who will preside, is a fine old chunk of Britain with an ample Gladstonian forehead and the restrained self-assurance of all eminent British judges. He looks like a cross between Gladstone and Stanley Baldwin. Within a moment's passing he has stamped his dominance of the courtroom on all present, including the prisoners, you feel. He will be firm, unemotional, and fair. His alternate is Sir Norman Birkett, probably the keenest legal mind in the room, a thin, gangling fellow whom I had often seen at court in my younger days in London, where he was among the two or three greatest trial lawyers of the time.

Francis Biddle, our former Attorney General, is a bit self-conscious, almost tripping on his robe as he mounts the bench. At his side is Judge John J. Parker, a homespun North Carolinian, whom an irate Senate once kept out of the Supreme Court. Europe and especially the insane Nazi World are a bit strange to him, you feel, but he takes them in his even stride. The French judge, Donnedieu de Vabres, resembles Clemenceau one minute and Pétain the next. His alternate, Robert Falco, looks like any French lawyer one used to see crowding the halls of the Palais de Justice in Paris. He seems to have a tendency to drool.

## End of a Berlin diary, 1947

William Lawrence Shirer

---

All these judges wear black, judicial robes, but the Russian judge, Major General Iona Timofeevich Nikitchenko, vice-president of the Supreme Court of the U.S.S.R., and his alternate, Lieutenant Colonel Alexander Fedorovich Volchkov, are in military uniform, resplendent with decorations.

Without ado, Justice Lawrence raps for order and proceeds to read an opening statement. *"The trial,"* he says, *"which is now about to begin is unique in the history of jurisprudence of the world, and it is of supreme importance to millions of people all over the globe. For these reasons, there is laid upon everybody who takes part in this trial a solemn responsibility to discharge their duties without fear or favor in accordance with the sacred principles of law and justice. . . . It is the duty of all concerned to see that the trial in no way departs from those principles and traditions which alone give justice its authority and the place it ought to occupy in the affairs of all civilized states."*

He warns that the Tribunal *"will insist upon the complete maintenance of order and decorum, and will take the strictest measures to enforce it."*

Whereupon, getting down to business with dispatch, he directs the reading of the indictment. Everyone in the courtroom knows it almost by heart, but this is a trial by due process and it must be read. Justice Jackson picks his first assistant, Sidney S. Alderman, to begin the tedious task of reading, and later the British, French, and Russian attorneys pitch in to carry on with it. *"The United States of America,"* Alderman intones, *"the French Republic, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics against Hermann Wilhelm Goring, Rudolf Hess, etc., defendants. . . ."*

One by one the four counts are read: count one, the charge of conspiracy to commit crimes against peace, war crimes, and crimes against humanity ; count two, the detailed charge of crimes against peace; count three, war crimes; count four, crimes against humanity. All the obscene atrocities, to which we seem to have become hardened, are described and enumerated. The prisoners are bored. So is everyone else. One's eyes wander over this strange, unprecedented scene. On the right, as I look from the press box, the raised bench of the tribunal. Directly across the room, facing the judges, is the prisoners' dock. Back of the defendants, who sit on hard, bare, wooden benches, are eight American M.P.'s, in neat GI uniforms, white belts, and helmets, carrying night-sticks and side arms. They are on the alert to see that no materials for suicide pass between the prisoners and their lawyers, who are crowded at small tables immediately in front of them. Directly before us sit the prosecutors of the four nations. And at the opposite end are the interpreters, behind glass partitions, jabbering away into microphones in English, French, German, and Russian. You can adjust your earphone to whichever language you please. This setup, installed by the U.S. Navy, should save years of time, since it does away with the tedious business of waiting for every word spoken here to be translated into three other languages. Now the translation is simultaneous. Judge Lawrence, for example, poses a question in English to a German lawyer who understands only his own tongue. The question comes over his earphones in German. He answers in German and simultaneously the judge gets the answer in English. Thus international trials in our day, with the awful barriers of language practically wiped out.

Over the main entrance to the courtroom, one notices there is some rather bad German art work representing, I take it, eternal justice with the sword. The miserable little men in the dock and the system they built up had denied justice to all who stood in their Way. Perhaps, in a rough sense, it was eternal, a durable thing you could not forever do

## End of a Berlin diary, 1947

William Lawrence Shirer

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away with despite your strength and your tyranny. Had it not, quietly and decently, returned to this little room today, as sure as death itself?

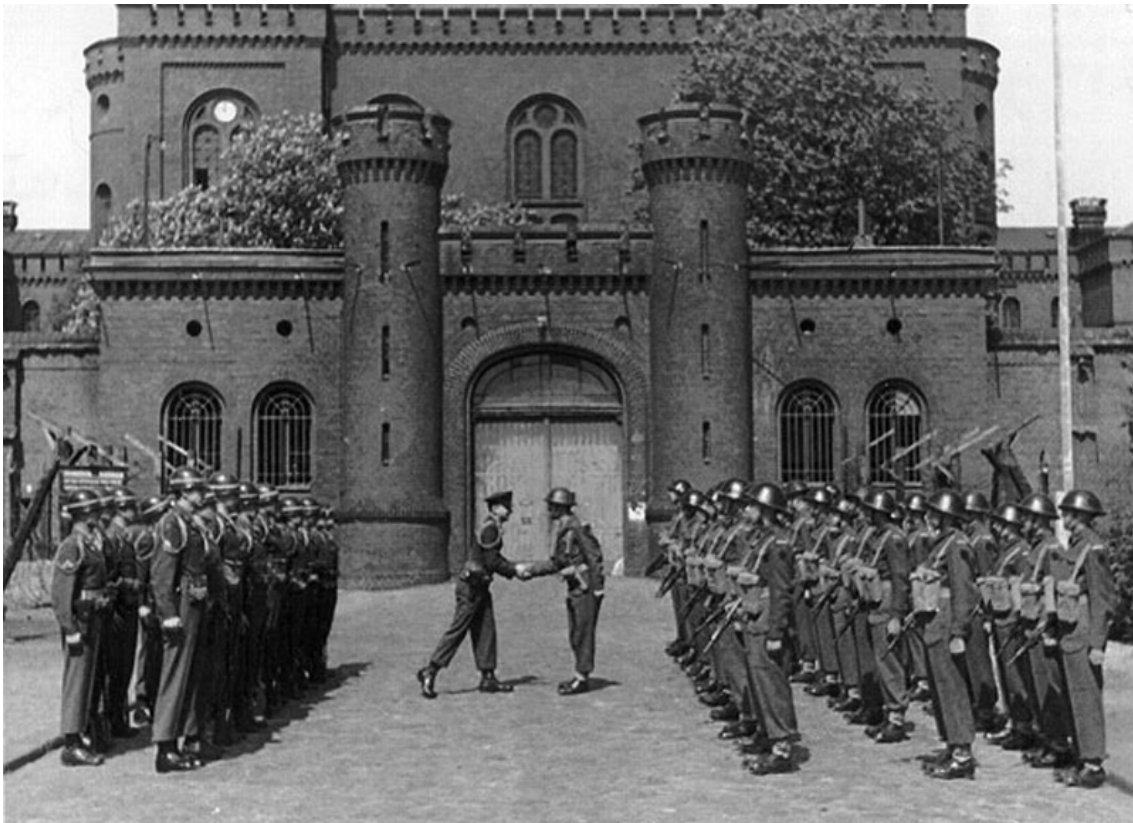
[William L. Shirer: 'End of a Berlin Diary', p. 293 – 301]

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### POSTSCRIPT, Spring 1947

The days and years in Berlin among the Germans were not, on the whole, very pleasant. But they were not dull either, and I have no regrets that my own particular and unimportant fate was spun out for so long in the great and convulsive Teutonic capital beyond the Elbe. The suffering and glory of my time stemmed largely from the evil that came out of Berlin and from the success of the non-Germanic world in finally conquering that evil. For a reporter, Berlin, an ugly city with pleasant lake-studded, wooded environs, was decidedly the capital to have worked in.

It is a relief, though, in glancing through my notes for 1946 and the beginning of 1947 to find the Berlin story fading out of one's life. I did jot down an item now and then from Germany - second-hand, of course. On October 1, 1946 came the news from Nuremberg that Goring, Ribbentrop, Keitel, Kaltenbrunner, Rosenberg, Frank, Frick, Streicher, Seyss-Inquart, Sauckel, Jodl, and Martin Bormann - the last tried in absentia - had been sentenced by the International Military Tribunal to die on the gallows.



Hess, curiously enough, escaped with a life sentence, which was also given to Funk and Raeder. Speer and von Schirach got twenty years in prison, von Neurath fifteen, and Doenitz ten. Surprisingly, Schacht and von Papen, who had served their Nazi masters so well, were acquitted, as was Fritzsche!"

[William S. Shirer: 'End of a Berlin Diary', p. 365]