

Eyewitnesses at Nuremberg

Hilary Gaskin

*'I keep saying to myself, "This is history. You're living history."
(court-room guard to Priscilla Belcher, Nuremberg, 1946)*



**ARMS AND
ARMOUR**

1990

Alfred Steer, administrative head, language division

I was the administrative head of the language division – I ran the thing. I acted as an interpreter on a few occasions, but I wasn't very good at it. You need a certain amount of absolutely iron nervous control, so that you can absolutely rely on the fact that you're never going to stutter or stop, ever. And I couldn't attain that sort of assurance. So I was fielding the teams, so to speak. We found that the job of interpreting was so nerve-racking that the individual could not do this day after day. The court was only in session from ten in the morning till four in the afternoon, but even so an individual interpreter would only be used for a portion of that time. If he interpreted from German into English, he did *not* do English into German, so he was spared from going back and forth in two languages, but even so we found that he could not do it day after day. So we had three different teams, which we used in succession.

We had repeated instances when an interpreter would simply fail, break down, be unable to continue, and we would have to put in a substitute at as short notice as possible, so that the court wouldn't be delayed any more than need be. Originally I put the stand-by people in a room nearby, and they complained bitterly that they didn't know what was going on when they were brought into the court-room situation cold like this, so then we arranged to have separate sound lines run from the court-room into this neighbouring room. The back-up interpreters were supposed to be sitting there with the headphones on, listening to what was going on in court. Frequently they could tell: before the interpreter in there actually failed they could hear him getting worse, and slowing down, and so forth, and knew that they were going to be called on any minute. I had to make the exchange. We had a system of two lights: a yellow one meaning 'Please slow down,' and a red one meaning 'Please stop the proceedings momentarily.' I'd press the red one, which was in front of Lord Justice Lawrence, he would stop everything and I'd make the shift. So one team would be in court, the second team would be in the room next-door, and then the third team would be completely off,

studying the transcripts or doing whatever they wanted to do, because resting their nerves was the most important thing.

I tested something like 400 interpreters during the year I was there, travelling all over Europe. I found a large number of them in small countries like Belgium and Holland, and in the telephone services too. The Paris international telephone exchange was a superb place to pick people up, because they had to deal with conversations in all languages. But I found that only about five per cent of experienced interpreters could do this Nuremberg job, because of the nervous control that was needed, and because it was simultaneous. Actually, the interpretation was not exactly simultaneous, of course. There should be a lag of about eight to ten seconds between hearing a word in the original language and the appearance of its proper translation in the language interpreted into. If the lag got longer, the interpreter would soon get into trouble, because you can only hold a limited number of words in your memory under those conditions. My Russian was never very good, but I would take a split set of headphones, listening to the Russian in one ear and the original in the other ear, and I would listen for the cognates. For instance, their word for 'tribunal' is 'tribunaliye'. So if I didn't get it within about eight seconds, that interpreter had to be replaced. I was running the thing behind the scenes, most of the time.

We were turning out vast amounts of mimeographed materials in English, French, German and Russian, which was the daily transcript from the court reporters, and the justices asked us to look into the possibility of having this stuff printed. So we set up an international committee, and I worked with Barton, the chairman, who was a very able man. We decided that we would print the transcript, but we would need to clean it up a bit. For instance, people would get up in court, and instead of saying 422 they would say 244, things like that. Constant little errors were being made, and everything needed to be checked. So we set up a special section of reviewers, who would take the transcript as it came out of the court reporters' hands, and check back if necessary with the speaker of that day. Then we would send it off to be printed. Actually it fell far behind, and wasn't completed until after the trial was over. Nevertheless it was a final summation in print, and is a valuable historical record, of course. The woman in charge of the whole reviewing effort, about sixty people, Marguerite Wolf, was a native of Berlin, Jewish, whose family had moved to Britain some time long before Hitler. She was an absolutely charming person, very upper-class-sounding, and she had one of those idiotic little pairs of gold tweezers to hold a cigarette. I'd never seen one before, and I would just stare in fascination and watch her get the last eighth of an inch off that cigarette. We originally had her in as an interpreter, but she, like some others, did not have that iron nervous control that you have to have for simultaneous work under pressure.

We also compiled a glossary of legal terms in each language for the use of interpreters. This was done by Major Egbert. We had been trying to find a job for him, as he didn't test out as an interpreter, and at his rank he

was useless as a group administrator. One day Sigmund Roth, then head of the interpreters, came into my office saying, 'Al, I've solved it. I've told Egbert that we need a glossary of legal terms. I've got him a room up in the attic, and by golly, he's at work!' I forgot the man for three months, completely, and all of a sudden here comes this apparition out of the past; I vaguely remembered the face, you know? He said, 'Well, it's finished.' I said, 'What's finished?' He turned out later to be quite good as an editor, and he helped to edit the record.

The judges called me in one day, and notified me that it was quite tiring for them to listen to heavily-accented English for six hours a day, and was there anything I could do to take some of these interpreters, who were obviously skilled people, and help them to reduce their accents? I said I'd see what I could do. I chose about six whose accents were particularly bad, and who were interpreting a good deal, and took them down to the sound lab organization, and set up a place where each of them could record himself and then hear himself. I said, 'I want you to hear what you sound like, and then you're going to work with people here, who are going to point out to you certain things that you do which make understanding difficult and which I think can be improved.' One of the Russian-English interpreters was a former Czarist officer, Colonel Schilovsky; he was about six feet seven, enormous. As we were walking away down the hall after the session, Schilovsky said to me, 'You know, Commanderr, that iss the first time I ever hearr I speak with haccent.' I loved it, I just loved it!

Virginia Grey was a German-American from Milwaukee; her parents were German. She adopted the attitude that many second-generation German-Americans do: German is what they speak at home, and when they go to school everyone speaks English. Therefore German is something that they're a little ashamed of – they don't quite admit it. They get into the habit of speaking no German whatever: their parents speak German to them, and they understand every syllable, but they always answer in English. I had a number of friends like that in college, and I'd noticed this. Virginia Grey was a very smart girl, a very nice girl. We got one of those concentration camp guards on the stand, who was an animal. He used the most incredibly filthy, derogatory language you could imagine. I'll use some bad language here – let's say he said, 'You just had to piss on the Jews.' 'Auf die Juden pissen.' *She* would say, 'You just had to ignore the Jews.' I heard that, and during a few moments of recess I grabbed her and pulled her aside, and said, 'Look, young lady, you can't *do* this!' She replied, 'I'm not going to use those words!' She taught Sunday school back home in Milwaukee, and she wasn't going to say those things. 'Look,' I said, 'you are a servant of the court, and the judges are relying on your interpretation to get their opinion of what that man is saying. It's *your* responsibility to give an accurate, complete translation, even if it *isn't* in harmony with your ideas.' I could see she was going to give me an argument; she wasn't about to say 'Yes, sir' at all. So to cut it off I just walked away – the coward's response! When the

court reconvened, I had to do something else, and I didn't get back into the court-room till it had been going for about ten minutes. I slid into a seat, and all of a sudden I heard a gust of laughter sweep the court-room. But this was no laughing matter – it was just impossible. Virginia Grey was sitting in the interpreter's box, beside a British Captain Mackintosh, who was supposed to do French into English. He knew German just as well as he knew French. She would say into her microphone, 'You just had to ...' and then there would be a clipped Scottish accent saying 'Piss', and she would continue, 'on the Jews.' Well the contrast of these two voices, you see, midwestern American female and clipped Scottish male ... so then I took her out and made somebody else do it.

I remember one interpreter I brought to Nuremberg – she was in her thirties, with a Jewish background. I worked with her on our training programme; before we put them in court we'd give them several days of mock court work. After a while I considered that she was ready to go into the court, and I made a point of being there to see how she was doing. And she just froze. She couldn't say a word. It became obvious, and I looked over at her, and she was getting red in the face, and then the tears started. So I punched the red light and told Lord Lawrence that I had to make a substitution, and by the time I got somebody else in she was out in the hallway, and she was crying. I said, 'What happened? I thought you were well prepared to do this job.' 'Well,' she said, 'I looked right over there and I saw those men, and I thought to myself, "Because of those men, twelve of the fourteen men in my family are dead."'

At the end of the trial, the question came up of how the translation of the verdict was to be taken care of. The judges asked me to translate the verdict in advance. I pointed out that this brought up a security question, and they said 'Well, what we can do is give you the verdict and simply leave out the sentence.' So we appropriated a German barracks in Furth, outside Nuremberg – it was easy to seal off – and I took about twenty-five people with various languages and put them there for two weeks to translate the verdicts. They had to be absolutely isolated: there was no telephone; we took food out to them. As part of their payment they wanted to be in the court-room to hear the verdicts, so we reserved seats for them.

After the verdicts were given out, one of the press boys came running into my office, saying, 'Have you heard the latest? Schacht is going to hold a press conference!' Hjalmar Horace Greeley Schacht, by his full name, was one of the three who were acquitted. So we went downstairs to see it. Finally the guards brought him out, and took off his handcuffs – from now on, you know, he's a free man. There was a big table there, with four or five microphones. He sat down and they started throwing questions at him. Then he said, 'Wait a minute!' Of course he spoke perfect English, having been brought up in Brooklyn. He wouldn't speak a word of anything but German in the court. He said, 'You want me to co-operate with you reporters, and I'll be happy to, but I'd like to ask you first if you'll co-operate with me. When I walk out of here today I have nothing

but the clothes on my back. I own nothing. It has all been confiscated. I don't have a penny, or a mark, or a house. What I am going to be forced to do is go to my daughter's home in Heidelberg, and I think she'll take me in. But she has children, and I've never been to her house and visited my grandchildren without taking them a gift of some sort. So if you gentlemen could spare a candy bar or a packet of cigarettes, I would be very glad to co-operate with you.' The next thing you know there's a heap of stuff on this table, and I thought to myself, 'That old son of a bitch! He isn't out of prison and he's in business!' The last time I heard of him, he was called in by King Farouk to reform the Egyptian economy, which he probably did at a fantastic fee.

Peter Uiberall, interpreter

I got to Nuremberg before my boss did, and I was immediately put to work on translation, as most of us were. My first job was to translate the interrogation of the former Austrian Chancellor, Kurt Schuschnigg, who had been in confinement under Hitler – 'honourable confinement', they called it, but it was still confinement – and who was freed with many others when the Allied armies came into northern Italy. He had been brought to Nuremberg and was being interrogated, and in the interrogation he described what went on at the Anschluss, and the scenes in Berchtesgaden, including the very famous one where Hitler opened the door and showed him the generals all lined up and ready to march. So it was very interesting working with some 140 pages of interrogation and translating them from German into English. The interrogation had been done with an interpreter. And I did the best job I knew how to do. I knew the circumstances; I was quite familiar with them. I certainly didn't miss any names or places or anything like that. Eventually I turned it in, and my boss, a woman army officer, said, 'You know, I'm terribly embarrassed, because that so-and-so denied the whole thing and said his interrogation was mistranslated.' In my experience it was fully in character for Schuschnigg. He refused to testify, and nobody wanted to force him. He went to the United States and became a college professor. But I was hurt. This was my first job in Nuremberg, and I was told by no less a person than the former Chancellor of Austria that I'd mistranslated his interrogation. A few days later, thank goodness, my colonel arrived, and we started work on the preparation for the trial.

The court-room was being worked on busily and there was no chance to do any practice trials in it. They had to fly in a rug from Belgium, the nearest place where such a big rug could be found. Germany was desolate – there were no rugs left that could fill a court-room in Nuremberg. The machinery wasn't there, the benches weren't there, there was nothing to sit on. We were given a space in the attic of the court-house, and in there we set up a mock court-room. There were hills of evacuated German law books standing everywhere. Colonel Dostert and Major Vincent worked out and tested the system, assisted by a whole group of officers, including myself. We played various roles, which we had to guess at because

nobody had seen a war crimes trial before. Some of us played the prosecutors, defence counsel, witnesses, and so on, making up the text, while others among us were doing the interpreting into the microphones. And we discovered a number of things that we had not thought of before. In the first place, there is a certain speed beyond which you cannot possibly hear and talk, so there had to be a system to keep people from getting too fast. Then someone came up with the idea of light signals: a yellow light coming on for 'slow down', and a red one for 'stop'. The latter was for situations where the interpreter could not carry on because he had a coughing spell or something – it happened once or twice – and then you pushed the red button, and everything stopped until you were ready to go on. You had to have somebody who observed this, and the need to stop, and that was the monitor. He had two channels on his earphones, one for each ear, and sometimes he held one earphone away from his ear and listened to the actual room sound. It wasn't so much a matter of having to understand whether the interpreter was doing a good job or not, as of listening to the way he was speaking. Was his breathing showing trouble? Sometimes you could see this. On a number of occasions I did that monitoring job, and sometimes it was possible to step in and help. The monitor sat very close to the German-English interpreter; on one or two occasions he had some problem, he handed me the microphone and I was able to help. That was the monitor's job, invented in these mock trials. Eventually, when we had some of these problems ironed out, we set up mock trials in the court-room once it was ready.

While this was going on in preparation for the interpreting, there were a lot of people doing translation of documents, and I did some of this too. The problem was that we had nothing to sit on. The court-house had been hit by one or two bombs; it was patched up, and there was no furniture. The army had brought in some field folding tables, and most of the translators, in the first week or so, were given these long court benches to sit on, old-fashioned German court benches with a high back. I remember many a night, when we were working through the night, by about five or six o'clock in the morning you would see one or two of the translators stretched out, taking a few winks on the court benches, because we had deadlines to meet, and it was extremely difficult to keep up with the mass of German documentary material that was coming in. It had to be translated into the other languages in order to make it available to the prosecution, so that they could use it to prepare their cases.

Before 1945, simultaneous interpretation had not existed in the form in which we used it at Nuremberg. At the League of Nations there was a form of simultaneous translation, however, that was pre-translated speeches that were read simultaneously in the different languages; there was a selector switch and you could choose the language in which you wished to listen to them. That was called the Filene-Findlay system: Gordon Findlay was the man who devised the system of different channels, and Filene was the Boston businessman and philanthropist who financed the thing. Our work in Nuremberg was based essentially on

the Filene-Findlay system, but something entirely new had come up: we had to do *spontaneous* interpretation, *immediate* interpretation. I don't personally like the word simultaneous, because it *isn't* really simultaneous – first you have to hear, then you can speak. And nothing that I have heard at the United Nations is as difficult as any of the things we had to do with our witnesses, because we had no way of anticipating what they were going to say. To make a comparison, the speeches at the United Nations very often start with, 'It gives me great pleasure to add to the words of my distinguished colleague,' etc. etc. Much of this is code, and all you have to do is know these things by heart. And you can wait as long as you want – you don't lose anything – and you can rattle it in any time you want, and some do. We had incredible problems in the court, because nobody had thought of them before. For instance, in German, where the verb comes at the end of the sentence, you do not know at the beginning of the sentence what he's going to say. A classic example that actually happened in the Nuremberg Trial: a former Nazi official on the witness-stand is asked, 'Did you know Mr Schmidt?' (I'm making up the name.) And let us say Mr Schmidt was a concentration camp Commandant, and having known him would be incriminating. The witness starts, 'Ja, den Schmidt, den habe ich im Jahre Fünfunddreissig oder nein im Jahre Sechsdreissig, da habe ich den Schmidt ...' You still don't know. Has he seen him, has he known him, has he spoken to him, has he heard of him? All this can follow in the verb at the end. So the poor interpreter cannot start, unless he does what they used to call in German 'eine Eselsbrücke bauen', which is a German term, very difficult to translate, meaning something like 'building a donkey's bridge'. It doesn't exist in English. That is to say, 'Yes, er, no, er, Schmidt, well, with regard to Schmidt, was it in thirty-five or thirty-six, was it in Leipzig or was it in Dresden, I'm not quite sure, it was then that ...' You have to turn the sentence around completely, in order to be free to speak when he speaks, or else you lose him and you cannot catch up. That is one of the very characteristic problems of simultaneous interpretation.

Another one, the worst, is when you don't understand the word that you hear – when you have never heard it before. The United Nations has a principle, which I dispute – I'm nobody, so I can dispute it! – that they employ people to translate *from* the foreign language *into* the native tongue. The fact is that our experience in Nuremberg showed that the people who are best at simultaneous interpreting are the ones who understand every word that comes over the phones, and then are somehow capable of putting that into the other language. If you don't understand it in the first place, namely, native tongue understanding, then you can't do anything with it. There's a very important difference here. We preferred people like Wolfe Frank, who had native tongue German but who had lived long enough in an English-speaking country and had enough experience with the English language, in different fields of professions and endeavours. It helped me a lot at Nuremberg that I had worked in agriculture; I had worked in all kinds of fields. The interpreters

need to have the vocabulary of the language they translate *into*, but they must have the full *understanding* of the original. I was once in the court-room when a very, very good interpreter was sitting at the German-English microphone, and a witness on the stand was talking about somebody who had been an alcoholic, and who had been sent to an institution to dry out. This is the way it came out in German: 'Und da wurde er in ein Sanatorium gebracht, wo er sich einer Entwöhnungskur unterziehen musste.' This simply means that he was brought to a medical institution, where he had to subject himself to a withdrawal treatment. The poor interpreter had never heard the word 'Entwöhnungskur', for which I don't blame him – many native tongue German people hadn't, and he wasn't native tongue German. I was sitting in the visitors' gallery, which we often did in order to find out how our friends were doing, and I heard the German, and I said to myself, 'Oh my God, he can't handle that! What's he going to do?' I saw an expression of utter consternation on his face, and he said, 'And he was – he was – taken to a hospital, where – where something terrible happened to him!' He had no idea what it was, but he knew enough to know that it was something very unpleasant!

Upstairs in the court-house we had a section which was called the reviewing section, where the transcript of the preceding day was gone over by interpreters of the third team. It was absolutely necessary to have three teams of interpreters: two teams alternated in the court-room, with one team on stand-by in the radio room behind, with phone connection, and the third team was up in the reviewing section, going over the previous day's transcript word for word: hearing the original, seeing the text of the translation and correcting it. We had to fight for the third team: the personnel people could not understand why the interpreters needed three teams.

Sometimes one of the interpreters would say, 'Do you mind letting me go on the mike for the next one?' For instance, Wolfe Frank did all the final statements of the defendants; we had an agreement on that. Early in the trial he had said, 'Please, whatever we do, let me do the final statements!' And he did a beautiful job. There would be long periods in court when your language was not spoken and you sat there doing nothing, but then you might suddenly have to go into action if your language came in. German-English, which was my spot, was pretty busy, because most of the language spoken in the court was German. The prosecutor might speak English, French or Russian, but there was almost always a German answer, so the interpreters interpreting out of German were almost always busy. Sometimes we had to have a special interpreter because of a particular witness. I remember there was the case of the university library in some great Belgian university town, that the Germans were accused of having stolen, lock, stock and barrel, and somebody on the witness-stand testified in Flemish; we had a Flemish-English or Flemish-German interpreter standing next to the witness, and the interpreters picked up from there.

One of our first stars in interpreting came from the States, and was a student of German. He had lived in Germany, and had probably studied at Heidelberg or Göttingen or somewhere, and he was a graduate of Pennsylvania State College. He did very well at the beginning of the trial. Then, one day, we had a witness on the witness-stand who was a witness for the defence, and he wanted to show that not all people in concentration camps were mistreated – some had a wonderful, clean and healthy life in agriculture, working on the fields. There are a lot of fields around Dachau, and he was talking about that concentration camp, describing in detail how you go about cutting up seed potatoes and planting them, and then ‘hilling’ them, ‘häufeln’ in German, where you make these hills around them. I was monitor on that day. The monitor sat close to the interpreter, and if he had problems the monitor could sometimes help. I heard him slowing down, and I realized that he could have handled Nietzsche and Schopenhauer very well, but that he had absolutely no idea of agriculture. He couldn’t figure out for the life of him what ‘eyes’ had to do on potatoes! So in such cases, of course, the reviewing section had a lot of work to do. Sometimes the German defence counsel, who listened in both German and English, jumped up and said, ‘This is not what the witness has said!’, and so on, but they didn’t protest this time; it wasn’t really very important.

That interpreter sooner or later went back to the States. He was very highly specialized in sophisticated vocabulary, and that is not what you need in simultaneous interpreting – you must be very broadly informed about vocabulary. Otherwise you can’t handle it, because you don’t know what people are going to say next. Sometimes things were sprung on us. Baldur von Schirach, the Reich youth leader, was also Gauleiter of Vienna, and that was his greatest undoing, because he was responsible for the deportation and death of many, many Jewish families. He was one of the few defendants who made what you might call a confession of wrongdoing on the witness-stand. I happened to be on duty on the morning when he came on to the witness-stand in his own defence. I was on the German–English mike. I came in, got into my seat in the interpreter’s box, the defendant was brought in by the guards and led to the witness-stand, and he stuck his hand into his tunic and brought out a prepared statement. To the interpreters, that is very bad, because it means the man is going to speak fast, faster than he would if he were speaking freely; it means he doesn’t have to wait and think; and the interpreter has an awful time keeping up. Normally, if it was at all possible, the defence counsel would see to it that the interpreters got a copy, which helped. You had the text in front of you: if you missed something in the hearing, you could look it up. But on this day, I think Baldur von Schirach wanted nobody to know what he was going to say. He started out, ‘It was my guilt, that I loyally served a man who committed murder a millionfold.’ The original German text read, ‘Es war meine Schuld, dass ich getreu einem Mann diene, der millionenfach Mord begangen hat.’ I translated that immediately, as well as I could, and I thought I was right. When the thing

was printed, the editor changed it to 'a million murders', and I've been furious ever since! There *were* such disappointments, and of course we made mistakes too. Simultaneous interpreting is not very high in quality, especially when it has to be done in a court-room in a hurry, and a professional linguist can quibble with it very easily, because you can sometimes see that what the interpreter says, although the meaning is exact, is not *literally* the translation of what he hears – very often it cannot be.

Colonel Dostert was chief interpreter first, then Wolfe Frank was, then I was. When I became chief interpreter I instructed all the interpreters that when they had a witness on the stand and he started with the German word 'Ja', they were never to translate that as 'Yes' until they were absolutely sure that that was what he meant. Because 'Ja' in German is 'Well', among other things, the typical 'Well' that President Reagan, for instance, started with in his press conferences when he got a question that he had to think about. This is what a German does when he says 'Ja'. Very often a witness was asked about something, the answer to which could be incriminating to him and others if it wasn't very carefully thought out. And he might answer, 'Ja, das war nämlich so', of which the only correct translation is, 'Well, let me show you, this is the way it happened.' It's completely different in word material in English from the German, and yet in a court of law this is the correct way to translate it, or else you're hanging a man, wrongly. Because once that 'Yes' is on the transcript, the man is stuck. Interpreting in these cases had a lot of pitfalls, and very often at the end of the day we were not exactly overjoyed at the way it came through. We would run upstairs to the reviewing people and say, 'Hey, that wasn't exactly the best way to do it. Have you checked that?' You had a lot of safeguards against mistranslations – I don't think any that occurred remained in the transcript.

The defence had their own English experts in the court-room. And there was a very good German lawyer who also knew English, Professor Hermann Jahrreiss, who acted as adviser to the court, and in the publication of the trial record. So there were many, many ways in which everything was checked and double-checked before it was actually printed or used by the judges as material for their considerations.

Maxwell-Fyfe was fabulous, he was magnificent. And Goering was very good, very quick. Our chief prosecutor, Justice Jackson, was a very erudite gentleman, a fine lawyer and a wonderful legal writer – his indictment was marvellous – but with less trial experience, I think, than Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe. He once put a question to Goering that was strictly a question of law, and Goering said, 'I can't answer that question, since I was not the leading jurist in my country, thank God!' It was intended as a direct slap at Justice Jackson, who had been Attorney-General in the United States and was a justice on the Supreme Court. But Sir David was fabulous. We all admired him. He was very fast, so he was a problem to us interpreters. But then, of course, the presiding judge, Lord Justice Lawrence, watched for that, and many a time he would take his

pencil – he didn't use a gavel – and tap it, which made a terrific noise because the microphone was standing right next to it, and he would say, 'You're going too fast! Slow down!' That was when the yellow light button had been pushed by the monitor. Of course, if the *monitor* wasn't on the ball there were problems. We very rarely used the red light. Even if the interpreter had a coughing spell and was physically unable to go on, we would much rather have a stand-by slip in and take over the microphone. Once, early on, we had a Russian witness on the stand, and the Russian-English interpreter was one of our senior interpreters, who had a long experience of conference interpreting and wasn't really fast enough for simultaneous. He jumped up in the court-room, pulled off his earphones, and shouted, 'Get me out of here, I can't stand it!'

The turnover was considerable, but this was mostly because people did not come with the expectation of staying that long. They were borrowed from various agencies, or they left their professions on leave of absence, and they simply couldn't stay. We had some *very* good people, who were by no means over-strained, but they had to go home when their time was up. The man who had trouble with potatoes, for instance, came back later for a second tour, in which he was more fortunate and did quite well.

There is a certain age beyond which you are not fast enough. *I* couldn't do simultaneous interpreting now. You pick up the telephone and dial the weather service, and while you are hearing the forecast you tell someone else in the room the same information in French. That's the way it is. Then again, the weather forecast is code – it is something that is anticipated, you know the terms. It is much easier to do that than translate a witness on the witness-stand. And the older people very often had trouble. We had a marvellous British linguist, probably the best German-English linguist we had, who was in her late fifties, and she started off as a court interpreter. It didn't work; it was much too fast for her. Another thing: the trained linguist, who has gone through a good school and done, say, book translation, cannot stand what he or she has to do in simultaneous interpretation, because you cannot verify, you cannot check by going back to a dictionary. There is no such thing as an exact translation of any word – only non-linguists think that. So that is why a very precise and well-trained linguist doesn't by any means make a good simultaneous interpreter. They can't reconcile all that they know and have learned about language work with the business of giving an instant solution, as you have to.

You didn't have time to think about the content of what you were saying, but it came back to you in your sleep, in nightmares. You couldn't possibly handle the information about concentration camps all day long without being affected by it. Nobody could. We had among our interpreters some who had been in concentration camps, and they were the best, of course, for that kind of material. But it was probably very hard for them at times, to be brought back to it again. *I* didn't particularly have nightmares; some interpreters did, and told me about it. But you couldn't distance yourself from it.

Peter Uiberall, interpreter

Everybody was very interested in Goering, who was undoubtedly the most intelligent of the bunch, in a rather bad way – a *Condottiere* type, a Renaissance type, who apparently had no ability to distinguish between good and bad. He was one of the biggest robbers in world history; he stole, or ordered to be stolen, some of the greatest art collections of European countries. He was an early Nazi; he was with Hitler in the Munich putsch, and when he was injured he was smuggled into Austria and taken to the castle of an acquaintance of his, where he was nursed. When he came to power one of his first acts was to put that man in a concentration camp and take his castle. Cesare Borgia couldn't have done a better job. So from that point of view, in a sort of negative sense, Goering was always very interesting.

Hess was also very interesting to me. I did not have the impression at any time that Hess was crazy. The entire episode of Hess's flight to Scotland will sooner or later be cleared up to a point where it will be understood that Hitler *must* have known about it: Hitler wanted his trusted and – he thought – accepted deputy to go to Britain and persuade the British to join forces against the Soviet Union. Had that succeeded, it would of course have been a great coup; since it did not succeed, Hitler had to denounce Hess, as he did, and disavow him and replace him. I think Hess was sane. It is interesting to read the various evaluations of the psychologists. He had times of mental disturbance, according to some of them. I remember the scene in the court when he got up and said something like, 'I want to announce that from now on my memory is fully at the disposal of the court.' That doesn't sound like an insane person. He *could* have had fits of amnesia, without being insane. He was a well-educated man, who had lived in foreign countries. He was probably responsible for more of *Mein Kampf* than Hitler himself. So he is also interesting, in a bad sense, because though he could not actually be charged for what happened in Germany while he wasn't there, he was to a high degree responsible because he laid the groundwork for much of it.

We became sort of acquainted with them from daily observation – hearing their lawyers, and hearing themselves if they went on the witness-stand. You did have a wonderful opportunity to observe them if you were an interpreter, especially since you were not always busy. Of course we didn't know what they talked about among themselves, since they didn't do very much of that in the court-room. I would say – speaking also for some of my colleagues – that our favourites were probably Speer and Schacht, for very selfish reasons: they were both very good in English! Schacht was perfect in English, fluent. His name was Hjalmar Horace

Greeley Schacht – I think his mother was American. And whenever an interpreter got stuck on some technical term that a German witness used, you would see either Speer or Schacht or both quickly whip out a piece of paper, write the English term on it, and send it along the line to the defendant who was sitting closest to the interpreter, who slipped it under the glass partition. So we were grateful to them. They were interested in good translation, as we were, and were helping where they could. In the case of Schacht it was a very ‘innocent’ friendship, because he was acquitted; in the case of Speer it was less so, because he was undoubtedly heavily incriminated and served twenty years.

Streicher was a despicable individual. I can only compare him to the head man in a lynch mob, and that’s not strong enough. There was nothing particularly significant about him, other than his inexorable hatred of the Jews, whom he held responsible for everything evil in the world. He was certainly not an intellectual. He was the type of person who most clearly represented everything that was rotten and bad – the mob side – about the National Socialist movement. He was pretty much shunned by the others. But that was very often quite hypocritical, because the others had sometimes committed much more heinous crimes, while he was fighting mostly with words. He was small fry compared with some others.

Funk was also a small individual. So many of them were little people who had been propelled into high positions in the Nazi hierarchy by their talent for being followers of Hitler. Funk was the president of the Reichsbank, the national bank, and he had said in his defence that he didn’t know about the concentration camps or any of these things that were going on. And then came the day when the film was shown in court, and it showed among other things the gold teeth and fillings and the hair of concentration camp victims, and the dolls of the children who were taken to the camps. All this material had been collected and shipped to Berlin, and had been found after the war in the vaults of the Reichsbank building, the bank of which Funk was president. And that was when he broke down, because he could no longer deny that he knew about the concentration camps.

One time Goering lashed out at a witness who testified rather damagingly against him and other Nazi leaders. His name was von dem Bach-Zelewski, and he was a high-ranking official in the SS. He had been on the witness-stand for quite some time and had been interrogated by prosecutors of the participating nations. As he walked away from the witness-stand and out of the court-room he had to pass by the corner of the defendants’ dock, where Goering sat. Goering jumped up and lunged at the witness, trying to slap him, shouting, ‘Verfluchter Schweinhund!’, which means ‘Damned pig!’ He was restrained by the guards, of course, and the witness was safely conducted out of the court-room, and at the end of that session, while people were leaving the court-room, Lord Justice Lawrence announced that he wanted the defendant Goering, his defence counsel and a guard to remain in the court-room, and also a

German-English interpreter. Since I was on duty I was the one to stay behind, and when the court-room had emptied the presiding judge gave Goering a lecture about behaviour. He told him that if this happened once again, he would be put on rations of bread and water, deprived of his exercise rights, etc. etc. And I found myself, a former refugee, in the enviable position of being able to deliver that lecture, in German, to Hermann Goering. It was a strange impression, the man in this much-too-large uniform – he didn't look like anything, let alone like the feared Goering who was responsible for so many terrible crimes. He didn't seem real. There was no feeling of triumph in my mind. It was just an unusual situation, and the sort of thing you don't forget.

If my colleagues and I were not on duty in the court-room, and we knew that Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe was going to be 'on', as we called it, we made sure that we were present to listen. And everybody respected the presiding judge, Lord Justice Lawrence. It was fabulous how he controlled the proceedings. The young lawyers had a hard time sometimes, because he would cut them back if he thought they were too long. So many times I heard the phrase, 'Is all this detail really necessary?' One day, I remember, he seemed to doze off. I've never forgotten that. There was German being spoken on the stand at the time, and the German-English interpreter lowered his voice and then **SUDDENLY SPOKE LOUD**. We could see Lawrence's head bob up, and we smiled at each other – we had done it without disturbing anybody! We liked him very much, especially since he was the saviour of the interpreters when some speaker was too fast, or wasn't close enough to the microphone, which also happened sometimes. The speaker would turn his head to the right or the left, and we wouldn't get it, you see. And he was absolutely impartial. There was never any doubt about that. The fairness of the Nuremberg Trial is something that impressed me at all times. There were many war crimes trials after World War Two, none like Nuremberg. The standards of fairness that were applied in Nuremberg were unique – they were unfortunately not copied everywhere else – and we were very proud of that. The court-room procedure was based on the procedural law of all the participating nations, and especially in the sense that any feature which favoured the defendant was to be included.

Alfred Steer, administrative head, language division

The defendants behaved on the whole very well. You see, this was the first time that this interpreting system had been used, and the general judgement was that it wouldn't work. And when the defendants first came into the court-room you could see that they, too, were sneering at this dumb idea that the Americans were putting on. However, it tickled me no end that Speer was the first one to grasp that this idea was workable and was saving an enormous amount of time. He became very much interested, and we called him our assistant. I would put in a new interpreter, for instance, as I was constantly having to do because of the turnover, and he would spot the new interpreter immediately. Of course

he spoke French and English quite well. You could see him tuning in to the new interpreter, and he would listen for a little while and then look over at me and make some appropriate sign, either a thumbs up or a sign meaning 'He'll never make it!' And he was right every time!

Some of the defendants pretended to pay no attention. This was particularly true of Streicher. I don't think he was normal – he was subhuman. The others, I think, accepted it. Goering was an extraordinary individual. He had this characteristic we now call charisma to an extraordinary degree. I never saw it fail. I think anyone who went into the court-room and watched him for any period of time felt this, and I would have people, American officers from outlying places, saying to me over and over again, 'Gosh, I'd like to get that man out of that gaol cell and have him over to the house and fill him full of a couple of beers, and it would be a lot of fun to hear what he has to say!' Over and over again we got this reaction. We could also see very clearly how he leered at every nubile female in sight. There were two French court reporters particularly, one of whom had a very decided bustal development, and he would just – the German word is 'glotzen', meaning 'to devour with the eyes' – as she came and went. The court reporters took down everything verbatim, and they could not stand to stay there a whole session; they would take only half an hour. So they would be constantly coming and going. That Goering. What a scoundrel! But, charisma or not, he was a proven criminal.

Hess was a very strange case. As you know, he was examined by a number of different psychiatrists and specialists of various sorts. I talked to one of them, who sat in the court-room for days and days and did nothing but simply observe Hess. He came to the conclusion that Hess was suffering from a kind of intermittent insanity: his mind came and went more or less at will. There were times when he could behave almost like a normal individual, and there were times when he was simply completely off. This psychiatrist did something which I thought was very interesting: he placed a number of small lights along the railing of the dock, which would throw a light on the faces of the defendants when they showed movies of the terrible situation in the concentration camps, these things that used to make me wake up screaming in the middle of the night for weeks thereafter. He would watch their faces, and he said that when these things came on the screen there was a triumphant leer on Hess's face. Nuts, completely nuts.

Jodl was a little, short, sawn-off fellow. He was a very smart man, and he had heard us preparing document books in advance, and observed that the presentation of the case concerned was made more effective when the interpreter had a written version rather than simply interpreting it as he heard it. The defendants were told that they were going to have an opportunity to make a final statement to the court in their own defence, and he passed me a note in the court-room, asking, if he wrote out his defence statement in advance would I translate it for him in advance? I said of course I would. So he sent me over a single half-sheet,

very neatly written, saying this: that when he had entered the military service and then entered the war, he had done so under the impression that loyalty to one's nation was the highest loyalty that could be demanded of one – there was no obligation to a higher entity or set of values at all – and that this trial had seemed to indicate that that conviction was in error, that there *was* a higher morality to which he and all other military men should owe allegiance, although of course the nation was important. And he said that if this trial established that precedent, he was willing to accept whatever punishment this court meted out and he would be satisfied. Well, I mean, there's a man. I admired that man, I certainly did. He was the only one who had anything positive to say: all the others were complaining, or making wild accusations, and so on. This was a man who looked straight at the facts and made a logical conclusion, in spite of the fact that it involved his own execution.

The judges had a special room in the court-house where they could meet to consider requests by the prosecution and defence, and talk these things over in private. So we set up a special miniature simultaneous system in a small room, and I put in four interpreters whom I considered particularly gifted and particularly discreet. They were used a good deal.

Justice Jackson – I didn't much like that gentleman. His cross-examination of Goering was a flat failure. I thought Goering was far superior to him. He was way ahead of him: he could foresee what Jackson was going to say next and take a position, and make Jackson's question when it came sound kind of ridiculous. There was no mystery why he was the second man in the Third Reich. He was not only a charismatic ladies' man; he also had a superb mind. Maxwell-Fyfe was far superior to Jackson in cross-examination. He would just bore in and bore in. At one point Goering was waiting for the interpretation, and he said, 'Well, witness, you understand English quite well, don't you? Suppose you answer right away?' He was pushing him, pushing him. This is what you need in a cross-examination, and what you expect an able attorney to be able to do. And Jackson didn't do it.

Ron Chapman, clerk

Occasionally we would get into the actual court-room where the trial was taking place – not often. Occasionally we would take messages through to the prosecutors from their secretaries. We would leave a slip of paper on their desk; naturally we never spoke. I remember walking in one day with Anadins for Mr G.D.[Khaki] Roberts. He had a headache and he phoned through for some. I do always remember that particular time, because as I walked in Goering was right on the end of the front bench. He was leaning on the end, and he turned round and looked up as I walked over to Mr Roberts. I tried to walk out without looking at him. It was like a magnet – you wanted to look, and yet you felt embarrassed.

The most amazing thing in the court-room, I think, was the translation, the interpreting side of it. Four languages had got to be spoken and heard, simultaneously. The British Signal Corps did all the wiring, and laid many miles of wire in there. It was a very sophisticated network. The interpreters couldn't wait until the whole question had finished, and then translate it, because it would take so long, and it would lose its continuation. I know for a fact that it was such a stressful thing for these translators that two or three of them had nervous breakdowns during the trial. It was really terrible, because they could not afford to get a word wrong or it could give a different meaning to the question. Mind you, when documents were being read out it was easy, because the documents had all been prepared in four languages, and all the interpreters had to do was sit there and read from a document.

You went and sat in the visitors' gallery, which held about 150 people and was up at one end of the court-room, looking down on the dock. You had a little dial on the arm of your chair, with S, 1, 2, 3, 4. That was Speaker, English, German, French and Russian – I can't remember the order exactly. So if a British prosecutor was speaking you could get him on either S or 1. If a French prosecutor was speaking, you still turned to 1 and you got it in English. You got different translators' voices coming over the earphones. If Goering was talking and you wanted to hear him in German, you turned to Speaker and you got Goering's voice coming over the earphones. The eight judges – two from each nation – had their own earphones, so that they could follow every word.

The British judges lived not far from us, and they went to the court-house every day in a bullet-proof car. They were also escorted by a jeep, and two motor-cycles with military police. Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe, who was known as the Tiger of Nuremberg, was the cleverest of all the prosecutors. And Goering was no fool, believe you me. He was the fat field marshal, he was baited and laughed at, but he was a very clever man, not the fool that a lot of people thought. They reckoned that when Maxwell-Fyfe cross-examined Goering it was the most exciting time of the trial. They were both clever, they were both fighting each other in