

# 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

### **Peter Uiberall, interpreter**

Ordinary Nurembergers behaved very well towards me. I have no complaint. But that doesn't qualify anything – after all, the war was lost for the Germans, and they were happy that it was over. The occupation forces were not abusing them; I did not have that impression *anywhere*. We had a lot of Germans working for us. I hired a lot. After the big trial was over we went from four languages to two, because the Subsequent Proceedings were only English–German, German–English. So we hired a lot of new people, and those with other languages went home. We had tests going on in various German cities, and those who qualified we brought to Nuremberg as translators or court interpreters. I'm quite sure they realized I was a refugee. There were quite a number of former refugees. And we could only do our work if we worked without a chip on our shoulder. There was no other way. I didn't see any abuse, in that respect, at all. We had people coming out of concentration camps, who were serving as linguists, and they did their work decently.

One of the most amazing, though somewhat gruesome, experiences was a letter of commendation that the interpreters received from a very high-ranking Nazi, for their work. It was Ohlendorff, the head of the extermination groups that killed thousands and thousands of Poles and Jews and people in the eastern areas. Ohlendorff had been tried, in the trial against the Einsatzgruppen, as they were called, and we staffed the

trial as interpreters. He was sentenced to death, but got a short reprieve because he offered to testify in other trials, which he did, and in that same period of time he asked permission to offer a letter of appreciation for our interpreting. And that, I think, was the best that was ever said about interpreters. The man was sentenced to death, and in his letter he expressed his gratitude for having been given a fair opportunity to be heard, thanks to the work of the interpreters. I'm very proud of Nuremberg, of the fairness of the Nuremberg Trial; I wouldn't say the same about other trials.

I remember a German colleague of mine, an interpreter who had been a lieutenant in the German armed forces. One day he came into the office in tears. I said, 'What's wrong?' And he said, 'I cannot go on. They are talking about the Warsaw ghetto, the uprising, the massacre. I was one of the German troops who had to do this. I just can't go on.' He was released from his assignment with the interpreting branch, but was later picked up by the German defence, and he worked for them as a linguist. A very, very decent young man, who just couldn't get over the memory of what he saw and what he participated in.