

ROBERT H. JACKSON AT THE NUREMBERG TRIALS,
1945–1946 AS REMEMBERED BY HIS PERSONAL
BODYGUARD

*S/Sgt Moritz Fuchs**

Having been shipped to the European Theatre of War in October 1944 as one of thousands of infantry soldier replacements, Pvt. Moritz Fuchs was sent via Scotland, Omaha Beach and Belgium to the First Infantry Division: the “Big Red One.” Our 26th Regiment, 3rd Battalion, was fully involved east of Aachen in the Battle of the Huertgen Forest, where I was wounded on November 19th. Our whole squad was wiped out that day. Whitey Swarthout, our platoon leader who had been with the 1st Division since the African Campaign, was due for a prized thirty-day leave when he became the first soldier I saw get killed. Deadly shrapnel from the German 88 millimeter guns burst in the pine trees, spraying all over the ground.

Evacuated through Cherbourg, I spent three months at the Army Hospital at Blandford, England. The Army took thousands of casualties in the Huertgen Forest, even before the Battle of the Bulge began in December. I returned to my outfit in February 1945, to the very same area that was lost and recovered by the Army after the Bulge. We crossed the Roer River, and the Rhine at Remagen, before engaging again in battle in the Harz Mountains. It was there, in April of 1945, that news came that President Roosevelt had died. Our 1st Division was transferred to Patton’s 3rd Army as we moved eastward and ended the war on May 8th, in Czechoslovakia. Our battalion commander, Lt. Col. John T. Corley, was still in charge when we pulled back to Ansbach, south of Nuremberg.

Our battalion was charged to supervise German Schutzstaffel (S.S.) prisoners clearing rubble from the streets of Nuremberg. Sometime in July, Col. Corley assigned me to protect the Honorable Robert H. Jackson, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, who

* Moritz Fuchs is a retired Catholic priest of the Diocese of Syracuse, living in Fulton, New York. He is associated with the Robert H. Jackson Center, Jamestown, New York.

had been named by President Truman to be the Chief Prosecutor at the International Military Tribunal ("IMT"). For the first couple of weeks of the trial I still wore the insignia of the 1st Division, 26th Infantry, and was provided with a .45 caliber pistol. After the trials were underway I was to wear a plain, unidentified Army uniform and was provided with a .357 magnum snubnose handgun in a shoulder holster and an extendable blackjack. I was his only bodyguard.

That was fifty-nine years ago, when I was only twenty years old. Having seen the war on the front line, and now being assigned to be at the Palace of Justice for the highest ranking Nazis on trial, I appreciated the unusual privilege that the assignment as personal bodyguard gave me. I had no experience in law, but gradually came to appreciate being just a spectator of the proceedings of the IMT. I was on duty around the clock, and was present wherever Mr. Jackson was, in the courtroom or nearby, wherever he went.

The Hollywood movie on Nuremberg provided visuals and information that were considerably inaccurate. For example, I did not come from Brooklyn, as portrayed in the film, but rather from Fulton, New York. Nor did Mr. Jackson ever have to ride in a jeep. I was not a driver for him because at that time I did not know how to drive. I became a Pfc. only after the war ended, and became a S/Sgt only on the Nuremberg assignment. Of special note, the movie intimating or suggesting a romantic link between Jackson and the secretary, Mrs. Douglas, is totally without foundation. Call it Hollywood hype, or artistic license.

Mr. Jackson was provided a comfortable small estate at 33 Lindenstrasse, Fuerth-Dambach, a few miles northwest of Nuremberg. The property had a tennis court and was well landscaped for privacy. A Military Police (M.P.) sentry was posted at the road entrance at all times. Some smaller buildings provided quarters for the two drivers and two cooks. A Mrs. Hassler scheduled and supervised the maid and housekeeper.

The house at Fuerth-Dambach had two floors and several rooms upstairs, where Jackson and Douglas lived, and where his son Bill Jackson also had a room. Some rooms were used as offices or reception areas, where a considerable number of VIP guests and attorneys often came to consult and plan strategies. Steps from the driveway led up to a small porch enclosure, where I had a single small room immediately to the right with full view of the sentry post and the front door. So I acted as greeter to all guests. An intercom

system enabled me to announce visitors to the staff upstairs.

Some pictures that I have show staff and guests at a Christmas party held at the house in December, 1945. The pictures show the camaraderie and good spirit that prevailed around Mr. Jackson. Knowing that I could have left the Army earlier, Mr. Jackson sent a note home to my mother at Christmas expressing his appreciation for my staying on. Near the end of the trial, late in the spring of 1946, Justice Jackson recommended me for the Army Commendation Medal for my having served him well.

Mr. Jackson was provided with the use of a Mercedes touring car, a gas guzzler that had belonged to Joachim von Ribbentrop, the Nazi Foreign Minister. It had sixteen cylinders—a double row of eight—and a seventy-five-gallon tank capacity that got three miles to a gallon. The front had a sort of Packard look. The top folded back. The hubcaps screwed on and held the wheels. We had the car up to 120 mph once on the Autobahn. Once when we had a flat tire, the inner tube simply disintegrated; hardly a piece of it was left larger than a thumbnail. The dashboard looked like an airplane cockpit. A supercharger kicked in at 40 mph. Leather upholstered, the car had jump seats enabling seven persons to sit in back.

A smaller car was also available; it is shown in one picture. One time we drove to Rothenburg, a quaint medieval walled city west of Nuremberg. Another time, arrangements were made for several of the staff with Mr. Jackson and his son, naval Lt. William Jackson, to go hunting. I was the only one to shoot a deer, which Mr. Jackson himself later dressed out. He and others were assured and comforted to see that his personal bodyguard was a good marksman. Other short trips included Dachau, Berchtesgaden, Oberammergau and Innsbruck. There were surely many other excursions, but those stand out in my memory, now at age seventy-nine, fifty-nine years afterwards. The time sequence of events has faded in my memory, but I know that I accompanied Mr. Jackson and his staff to London and Berlin on business, and later to Nice and Rome, where he went to be at the consistory when Pius XII elevated Cardinal Spellman to Archbishop of New York. On a short flight to Paris, he went without me since I had the flu.

The Palace of Justice courtroom in Nuremberg was fairly well presented in the movie. It had been well modernized, and well planned. A note of discrepancy with the movie was that in reality all eight judges sat all the time, both the four judges and the alternates.

A translating system that was just being developed at the United Nations organizational meetings in San Francisco was adapted to enable all in the courtroom to listen not only to speakers verbatim, but also, by turning a knob, to a translation from any of the other languages—English, French, German, or Russian. In order to simultaneously provide the choices, twelve translators sat in a boxed corner of the courtroom. The defendants were able to select their own lawyers to represent them, including even former Nazis or anyone they could find. The defendants, it seemed to me, were given whatever benefits of law offered to citizens of the prosecuting countries by their legal systems.

In August, 1946, Mr. Jackson and some key staff returned to the United States. He would return in September for the sentencing. The trip home offered me and a driver the opportunity to accept Mr. Jackson's offer to come along, now that most of the work had been done. Our flight was via Gander, Newfoundland for refueling, and I can remember that we each had to wear a parachute harness. Among passengers I recall were Mr. Jackson, Elsie Douglas, Bill Jackson, Capt. John Vonetes and one of the drivers, Bob Vlastnik of Chicopee, Massachusetts. Mr. Jackson invited both Vlastnik and me to stay at his home, Hickory Hill at McLean, Virginia, until we went to the Army separation center at Ft. Dix. We were pleasantly given great hospitality by Mrs. Jackson. In later years, that estate became the home of the Robert Kennedy family.

In the fall of 1953, during my years of study at Theological College, Catholic University of America, I visited with Mr. Jackson in his Supreme Court chambers in Washington. Then he died a year later in October, 1954. When I was ordained a priest in Syracuse, May, 1955, Mrs. Douglas came for my ordination and first Mass in Fulton, New York. Were he still alive then, I'm sure he would have come too.

Mr. Robert H. Jackson became for me a hero among national leaders. I found him to be an exemplar of knowledge, culture and ethics. He was sensitive to the dignity and value of human beings, and hence, appropriately outraged at the abuses perpetrated by the Nazis against human beings. I admired his integrity. He deserved my deepest respect and high esteem, as he was honest and articulate in perceiving and expressing in precise and legal terms the abhorrence we all sensed after learning of so many horrors from the very records the Nazis kept.

I liked the man very much and hold him in highest esteem. He

2004]

A Tribute to Justice Robert H. Jackson

17

knew himself to be human, but with his background of faith and learning, he is one who deserves highest honors as a statesman. He did his part well and is worthy of the admiration and pride of our nation.