The end of World War II was, the Allies decided, to be different. Although the Americans, British, and French agreed that there would be no demands for reparations, the Soviets insisted and got substantial reparations payments from the Germans, mostly in kind. There would be no demands for reparations, the Soviets insisted, analyzed, and documented, so future generations would know the truth and there would be no opening for the defeated to later deny their crimes, or create a “stabbed-in-the-back” myth.

The German city of Nuremberg was chosen as the location of the trial of the German leadership for two reasons. First, the Palace of Justice was both large enough to accommodate the trial court and remarkably undamaged. Second, because it was considered the ceremonial birthplace of the Nazi Party, there was a certain justice in bringing the Nazis to the noose there. The London Charter of the International Military Tribunal, signed by the Four Powers (Roosevelt, Churchill, and Stalin, with a cameo appearance by Chiang Kai Shek at the Cairo Conference) was the decision to put their defeated enemies on trial for their conduct during war time – for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

Stalin advocated the execution of 50 to 100,000 German officers, while Churchill suggested summarily executing (without trial) all of the Nazi leadership. Roosevelt was opposed to such bloodletting, no doubt in part for precedent it might set. Invoking our tradition of litigation, we insisted upon formal trials of the criminal German and Japanese leaders – both civilian and military. This necessitated melding together four very different legal systems to create a consensual agreement on the “laws” they broke and the penalties to be imposed. Evidence of the Nazi crimes would be presented, analyzed, and documented, so future generations would know the truth and there would be no opening for the defeated to later deny their crimes, or create a “stabbed-in-the-back” myth.

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property, and the wanton destruction of cities, towns, or villages not justified by military necessity.

**Crimes against humanity** – the murder, extermination, enslavement, deportation, or other inhumane treatment of any civilian populations before or during the war, or persecutions on political, racial, or religious grounds in execution of or in connection with any crime within the jurisdiction of the Tribunal.

A fourth category – "**a common plan or conspiracy** to commit those crimes" – war crimes and crimes against humanity and against peace – was also developed at American insistence. ("Indictment" against the defendants, para. 1.)

The “Nuremberg trials” process lasted from 1945 to 1949 and took place in several different countries and locations within Germany, and a separate International Military Tribunal for the Far East dealt out justice to the Japanese. The best known trial, that gained the most attention over the years, was the trial of the Major War Criminals that ran from November 1945 to October 1946. This included the surviving leaders of the Nazi Party and the German military, including Hermann Göring, Alfred Jodl, and Wilhelm Keitel. Twelve of the 22 who were tried were convicted and hung for their crimes; Göring committed suicide before his hanging.

The **Nuremberg Process** or International Military Tribunal was not perfect. With the passage of years, it has been derisively called “victor’s justice” or a “lynching party.” While it might be deficient in legal basis or in justice, in 1945-46, the “Nuremberg trials” ensured that there would not be mass executions of Germans and a resulting urge for vengeance like that which followed the “Peace of Paris” in 1919, and helped the re-integration of Germany back into the community of nations.

**Further Readings:**
Whitney R. Harris, *Tyranny on Trial* (Dallas, TX: Southern Methodist University Press, 1954).

**Announcements:**
Twin Cities Civil War Round Table - 15 Nov. 2016 – *The Forgotten George G. Meade* - www.tccwrt.com - info@tccwrt.com
St Croix Valley Civil War Round Table - 28 Nov. 2016 – *Sherman’s Carolinas March* - 715-386-1268 - rossandhaines@comcast.net
Cannon Valley CWRT - 17 Nov. CS Navy and the British – dnl1.peterson@gmail.com
Fort Snelling Civil War Symposium - 8 April 2017

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