

Americans at Wimbledon (1945)

*John Q. Barrett**

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From June through August 1945, United State Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, President Truman's appointee to serve as U.S. Chief of Counsel for the prosecution of the leading Nazi war criminals, negotiated with his British, Soviet and French counterparts in London. On August 8th, they signed the historic London Agreement creating the International Military Tribunal and the Charter defining its procedures.

At the end of August 1945, Justice Jackson flew from Europe back to the United States for a week of pretrial consultations, including with President Truman. Jackson left his colleague Sidney S. Alderman, on leave as Southern Railway Company general counsel and Jackson's principal deputy during the London negotiations, in charge of the U.S. staff. During Jackson's absence, staff members worked on evidence gathering and analysis, interrogations, legal analyses, and early drafts of what would become the October 1945 indictment of the individuals and organizations that soon would be prosecuted before the IMT in Nuremberg in Allied-occupied former Germany.

Alderman also supervised and participated in some moments of staff recreation. On Sunday, September 2, 1945, for example, he and three colleagues—Francis M. Shea, former University of Buffalo Law School dean and Assistant Attorney General heading the Claims [today Civil] Division in the U.S. Department of Justice; Col. Telford Taylor, U.S. Army, a former New Deal agency lawyer; and Lt. (j.g.) Bernard D. Meltzer, U.S. Navy, another former young government lawyer in Washington—began a day off by having lunch in the Officers Mess in the Grosvenor House hotel on Hyde Park. They ate and made plans for the day with a reporter, Henry T. Russell of the NEW YORK HERALD-TRIBUNE.

After lunch, the five men packed into a four-person car and drove about 8 miles from central London to Wimbledon's All England Lawn

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Tennis and Croquet Club. The Wimbledon tennis tournament had been suspended since 1940 and the Club, including its Centre Court viewing stands, had been severely damaged by German bombing during the war. But Centre Court itself was undamaged. And so while Alderman watched, the others played doubles. Shea picked Russell, a very good player, to be his partner. Frank Shea and Henry Russell then defeated Tel Taylor and Bernie Meltzer in three straight, very close sets. After the match, the players and Alderman had tea with bread, butter and jam.

On the drive back into London, Meltzer, the smallest, sat on Alderman's lap. At the U.S. Officers Club, they had drinks and maybe some food. Shea, Meltzer and Russell then retired for the evening. Alderman and Taylor, both accomplished and passionate musicians, stayed on at the Club, talking at length about music.

Work resumed the next day. Jackson returned from Washington a week later. He and staff then decamped to Nuremberg, where they lived, worked and prosecuted for the next year. Jackson never became much of a tennis player, even though the house he occupied outside Nuremberg—which Taylor subsequently occupied after Jackson's return to the United States in 1946 (the year the Wimbledon tournament resumed)—had its own tennis court.