

Peter Calvocoressi (1912-2010), Nuremberg Prosecutor

*John Q. Barrett**

Copyright © 2010 by John Q. Barrett.
All rights reserved.

Peter John Ambrose Calvocoressi, age 97, died on February 5, 2010, in Dorset, England.¹ He was, to my knowledge, the last surviving British attorney and senior officer to have participated in the Nuremberg trial.

Peter Calvocoressi was, as a young man, a barrister. During World War II, he became a Royal Air Force Wing Commander and an intelligence specialist. Serving at Bletchley Park, he was part of the team in “Hut 3” that interpreted decrypted German army and air *Enigma* messages, selecting the information that was sent to Allied military commanders in the field. Calvocoressi later wrote about this work in two of his many books, *Total War: The Causes and Courses of the Second World War* (1972) and in *Top Secret Ultra* (1980).

In summer 1945, Calvocoressi, still a RAF officer affiliated with British intelligence, became *de facto* a member of Justice Robert H. Jackson’s London staff that was preparing to prosecute Nazi war criminals.² Calvocoressi’s Bletchley Park colleague and friend Colonel Telford Taylor, a senior member of Jackson’s team, told Jackson of “Calvo” and arranged for his recruitment. Calvocoressi provided expertise on German military and Nazi Party organizations, assembled and analyzed evidence for trial, handled liaison work with leaders of U.S. intelligence

* Professor of Law, St. John’s University School of Law, New York City, and Elizabeth S. Lenna Fellow, Robert H. Jackson Center, Jamestown, New York (www.roberthjackson.org). An earlier version of this text was posted to my Jackson Email List on February 8, 2010.

For an archive of selected Jackson List posts, many of which have document images attached, visit www.stjohns.edu/academics/graduate/law/faculty/profiles/Barrett/JacksonList.sju.

To subscribe to the Jackson List, which does not display recipient identities or distribute their email addresses, send a note to barrettj@stjohns.edu.

¹ For obituary stories, see *Peter Calvocoressi: Writer, Publisher & Lawyer*, LONDON TIMES, Feb. 9, 2010, available at www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/obituaries/article7019655.ece; Ian Irvine, *Peter Calvocoressi: Author, Academic & Wartime Intelligence Officer at Bletchley Park*, THE GUARDIAN, Feb. 8, 2010, available at www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2010/feb/08/peter-calvocoressi-obituary; *Peter Calvocoressi*, LONDON TELEGRAPH, Feb. 5, 2010, available at www.telegraph.co.uk/news/obituaries/culture-obituaries/7168318/Peter-Calvocoressi.html.

² For a *YouTube* film clip that includes Calvocoressi speaking in later years about the Allied decision to prosecute captured Nazi leaders, see www.youtube.com/watch?v=nIwXnlUWtn4.

agencies, and participated in drafting what became the Nuremberg indictment.

Beginning later that fall, Calvocoressi was a member of the British prosecution staff at Nuremberg. He worked closely with Jackson, Taylor and others on the U.S. staff, and with each chief prosecutor and his national team. In spring 1946, a grateful Jackson suggested the possibility that the United States Army award a Commendation Ribbon to Calvocoressi (“although he is not of our own staff”).³ That August, during trial of the cases against indicted organizations, Calvocoressi appeared before the International Military Tribunal. He cross-examined, with skill and subject matter mastery, former German Field Marshal Gerd von Runstedt, who testified as a defense witness for the German Army High Command.⁴ During the subsequent Nuremberg trials that the U.S. conducted during 1946-49, Calvocoressi continued to assist then-chief of counsel Taylor (and later described himself as, in this work, “an honorary American”).⁵

Following Nuremberg, Calvocoressi ceased law practice and became a prolific author, historian, leading publisher and many other things. In 1947, he published *Nuremberg: The Facts, the Law and the Consequences*, one of the smart, enduring books on the international trial and its legacies. Just last year, he published a 9th edition of *World Politics Since 1945*, which *Foreign Affairs* noted as an event “worth celebrating” because the book “remains one of the best overviews of contemporary international history, full of elegant writing and shrewd judgement.”⁶

Those qualities, which are indeed represented in the book, characterized the entirety of Peter Calvocoressi’s long, accomplished life.

³ See Justice [Robert H.] Jackson to General [Robert J.] Gill, 25 May 1946 (unsigned carbon copy), in the Robert H. Jackson Papers, Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Box 106, Folder 1. An image of this document is attached at the end of this file: www.stjohns.edu/media/3/fbd2e0f2be21484b9abbdce0edb71609.pdf?d=20091030%20Jackson%20List%20Sonnenfeldt.

⁴ See XXI TRIAL OF THE MAJOR WAR CRIMINALS BEFORE THE INTERNATIONAL MILITARY TRIBUNAL, NUREMBERG, 14 NOVEMBER 1945 – 1 OCTOBER 1946 at 32-48 (proceedings of Aug. 12, 1945).

⁵ Peter Calvocoressi, *A Personal Tribute*, 37 COLUMBIA JOURNAL OF TRANSNATIONAL LAW 665, 666 (1999) (remembering Telford Taylor).

⁶ Lawrence D. Freedman, *Recent Books on International Relations: Military, Scientific, and Technological*, 88 FOREIGN AFFAIRS (May/June 2009), at 173.