

Christmas Cards from Nuremberg (November 1945)

*John Q. Barrett**

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Justice Robert H. Jackson must have been exhausted when he returned to his home from work on Wednesday, November 28, 1945. “Home” was one of the large houses, located on the outskirts of Nuremberg in the United States occupation zone of the former Germany, that the U.S. Army had seized for use by officers. The trial before the International Military Tribunal (IMT) of the principal Nazi war criminals had begun the previous week.

Chief U.S. prosecutor Jackson had been in his job since April, away from the U.S. for the most part since May, away from the U.S. without break since September and away from the Supreme Court for all of its new Term. He knew that his Nuremberg work would last many more months. He was responsible for well over 500 U.S. and Allied personnel who were involved in the trial. Having delivered his opening statement on November 21, he was supervising his prosecution staff’s presentation of evidence and its preparations for the rest of the trial. He also was arguing procedural matters daily before the IMT, preparing for other substantive arguments and cross-examinations that he might handle, meeting and coordinating with his senior staff and his British, Soviet and French counterparts, and planning with U.S. military commanders the subsequent trials of many more prospective defendants.

On November 28th, Justice Jackson received midday a memorandum from two of his closest staff members and advisers, his son and executive assistant Ensign William E. Jackson (U.S. Navy Reserve) and his spokesman and longtime legal colleague Lieutenant Gordon E. Dean (USNR). In the memorandum, entitled “Problems,” Bill Jackson and

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Gordon Dean wrote candidly that the U.S. executive trial counsel, on whom Justice Jackson was relying for day-to-day staff supervision and trial management, was a disaster. That afternoon, Justice Jackson, Gordon Dean and others also had to deal with the public announcement that Jackson's deputy, Major General William J. Donovan (U.S. Army), was leaving the staff and Nuremberg because of their fundamental disagreements. That evening, Jackson had a dinner meeting with his trial counsel to discuss the IMT's very problematic ruling that every captured German document, whatever its length, would have to be read aloud in court in full before it would be received in evidence.

After all of that, Robert Jackson sat down and wrote holiday cards. He wrote on U.S. Army-produced folded paper cards, printed on poor quality stock. On the cover, the cards read "Greetings" and "Nürnberg Germany 1945." They depicted two winged angels wearing military policeman uniforms (helmets, boots and long coats), floating above the Earth, holding together a glowing candle that lit the dark, starry sky.

Jackson wrote that evening, in longhand, to his sisters (both younger) and their families back in New York State. One card went to his sister Ella, her husband Erie Springer, their daughter Ruth and her husband, and their baby daughter Karen. The other went to Jackson's baby sister Helen, her husband Percy Adams, and their eighteen-year-old son Harold. The letters, reprinted below, are similar. They report some of Jackson's isolation and hard circumstances and also the progress of his work. The letter to Helen, who Jackson had helped to raise after their father's death when she was ten and Robert was twenty-two, expresses his paternal concern for his own daughter Mary, pregnant while her husband Tom was still away in military service. It also expresses Uncle Bob's deep affection for nephew Harold, whose military service was about to begin. (In 1946, the Army took Harold and ultimately sent him to Germany. That fall, Justice Jackson arranged for Harold to be present in Nuremberg to witness the IMT delivering its judgment.) Both letters include some of Jackson's wit. They display his direct style, his clever writing ability and his optimistic spirit.

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CHRISTMAS CARDS FROM NUREMBERG (NOVEMBER 1945)

Dear Ella + Erie + Ruth + Ken + Karin:-

It seems early to be sending a Christmas card but it takes a long time to get one there. This is all I can get in Nurnberg but the saintly look on these boys faces is good.

It is certain that I will spend Christmas here in Germany – already we are planning a tree and Christmas carols and trying to make life bearable. We are among a very stricken people – without homes many of them. Europe is a sick country – getting over one war and soon it will be getting ready for another.

We are going ahead with our case and it is going very well. We have so much evidence our whole problem is how to get it all in within a reasonable time.

We are much cut off from the news here and know little of what goes on in the U.S.A. The Radio is not too good and gives little U.S. news. We get no papers from home.

But it is all very interesting.

Karin must by now be a big girl. I should like to see her. I am trying to get a little Swiss handkerchief over to her but may send it to Irene [Mrs. Jackson] to be sent on.

Anyway my love to all

Sincerely

Bob

Nurnberg Germany
Nov 28 1945.

CHRISTMAS CARDS FROM NUREMBERG (NOVEMBER 1945)

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Nurnberg Germany
Nov 28 1945

Dear Helen and Percy and Harold:-

It is a little early to send Christmas cards but the mail service is so bad that it seems best to get them on the way.

I suppose by now Harold knows what he is in for by way of Army service. At least you will know he is not going to war. The physical training will do him a lot of good for life and the experience will be something too. I have seen so much army and so many Generals – had lunch today with three – that I will hardly know what it is like when I get among civilians. By [sic – But] maybe Harold did not pass the physical.

Mary is home now and I am sorry I can not be home for the great event but it does not look possible. A girl is entitled to have some man around at such a time and it looks like Tom can't be either.

There is not much here to write about. A city completely in ruins in its centre with thousands of people still buried in its ruins is a sad sight by day and a ghastly sight by night. The country side is beautiful however. I went deer hunting last Sunday – but did no danger to the deer. Any way I saw several and got good and tired. Gordon Dean shot a hare. It was a lot of fun.

CHRISTMAS CARDS FROM NUREMBERG (NOVEMBER 1945)

The trial is going very well and we have so much evidence that it threatens to take a long time. But it looks pretty good for making the case.

We all keep well – and take shots for nearly everything – flu – typhoid – ~~th~~ typhus etc

It is pretty mean living here. ~~We~~ I shaved by candle light this morning because the power was off and we rarely have good reading light. The water is not safe to drink. I can't go out without a guard and shifts of guards patrol the house. I am almost as much a prisoner as Goering. But I think I will get out sooner.

Hope to see you – but probably not till next summer Love to all

Bob