

Arno Hamburger, Nürnberger (1923-2013)

*John Q. Barrett**

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I am sad to report the recent death of Arno Siegfried Hamburger, age 90, in Nuremberg, Germany, his hometown.

Arno Hamburger was born in February 1923 in Nuremberg. His father Adolf became a leader of the city's Jewish community, which numbered about 9,000 people during Arno's youth.

Arno grew up under Nazism—his 1930s boyhood occurred very directly under the anti-Semitic Nuremberg laws, and in sight of the Nazi Party rallies and related madness. He was only fifteen when, in August 1938 (i.e., three months before *Kristallnacht*), *Gauleiter* Julius Streicher led the mob that demolished Nuremberg's grand Synagogue.

Arno soon escaped Nuremberg and Nazi Germany. In December 1938, he obtained a *Deutsches Reich* passport—on its cover, next to a swastika, it is stamped “J” in red ink. He left Germany and reached Italy. In August 1939, he obtained a German visa authorizing his travel to Palestine. On September 9, still in Italy, he received official British permission to stay as an immigrant in Palestine for two years, subject to pursuing school studies. He obtained passage on a ship from Trieste and, on September 22, 1939, he arrived in Tel Aviv.

In Palestine, Arno Hamburger learned Hebrew and English. He joined the British army. By late 1944, he was back in Europe, fighting as a British soldier.

When the war in Europe ended in May 1945, Arno had no information about the fate of his parents. He took a jeep and drove to

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Nuremberg. He found his parents living in a makeshift hut in the city's Jewish cemetery. He learned that much of his extended family had perished. (In that same cemetery today, a plaque on the tombstone of Arno's parents memorializes five other family members who were killed by the Nazis at Sobibor, Mauthausen and Izbica.)



Remaining in Nuremberg, he was hired by the U.S. Army to work as a document translator and an interview interpreter, including at the International Military Tribunal at the Palace of Justice.

Arno Hamburger went on to live a long, full life. He became the president of Nuremberg's Jewish community—he helped to rebuild it, including with immigrants whom it assisted and educated about being Jews and about living in modern Germany. He also was a politician, serving on Nuremberg's city council for over forty years.

Arno Hamburger was a leader in building Nuremberg's modern identity as a city of human rights. His political and personal support were important to the construction, development and many successes of museums, memorials and teaching institutions, including the Documentation Centre at the former Nazi Party Rally Grounds ([click here](#)) and the Memorium Nuremberg Trials—Courtroom 600 ([click here](#)).

When the Memorium was dedicated in late 2010, the honored guests included leading national government officials from Germany, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom and the U.S., leaders from the International Criminal Court and other world institutions, and Arno Hamburger and other veterans of the Nuremberg trial proceedings.

During those dedication events, Arno participated on a panel with Moritz Fuchs, who during 1945-46 served as U.S. chief prosecutor Robert H. Jackson's bodyguard (and after returning to the U.S. became a Catholic priest). When Father Fuchs, in his panel remarks, described the Ten Commandments as the sure basis of all good laws, Arno reached across another panelist and took Fuchs's hand in a strong grasp of affirmation. This occurred in Courtroom 600, the site of the international Nuremberg trial, where now, as then, a brass relief sculpture above one of the doors depicts the Ten Commandments embraced by the scales of justice.

That evening, at the Lord Mayor's celebratory dinner for dignitaries and friends, I had the good luck to be seated with Arno. He was in an especially valedictory mood, proud of Nuremberg and very hopeful about its future.

I once asked Arno why he, an only child whose offspring lived in Israel, had not, at least following his father's death in 1974 (his mother, Lotte, had died fourteen years earlier), resettled in Israel (which he did visit often). He shrugged at me in a gently dismissive way and said, with a smile, "*Ich komme aus Nürnberg*—I am from Nuremberg."

I was very lucky to be Arno Hamburger's friend—he was a generous person, a special teacher, a hero.

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Some links—

- a 2010 *Haaretz* profile (in English) of Arno Hamburger and his life in Nuremberg—[click here](#);
- a *Nürnberg Nachrichten* obituary story (in German)—[click here](#);
- another obituary, in English, from the *Jerusalem Post*—[click here](#); and
- video excerpts of Arno Hamburger, from a 2008 interview, speaking about translating Nazi documents/Holocaust evidence, the Nuremberg trials, and Nuremberg today—[click here](#).

