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# Additional Material: GIs Souvenir Hunting and Looting in Germany

The American soldier in the Second World War was an avid souvenir hunter on the battlefield. Soldiers stuffed their war trophies into sea bags alongside their uniforms, letters from home, and all other personal belongings. Some servicemen packed their bags so full of “liberated items” they had little room for other objects. When the first GIs left Europe for home, they steamed home with an impressive assortment of trophies. The 28th Infantry Division, one of the first units sent back to the U.S. after the war, brought home 20,000 weapons to their 5,000 men.



**Figure 12.1** GIs pose with a captured Nazi flag after mopping up the area known as the Falaise Gap

What did soldiers take as war trophies? Pistols knives, watches, flags, medals: all was fair game for GIs to take from their enemy counterparts. Souvenir hunters established a hierarchical list of German items that GIs wanted the most, and at the top was the vaunted Luger pistol. Primarily, there were four motivations for why GIs took objects from the battlefield. A soldier often took objects as keepsakes, as it was a good opportunity to impress his family and friends, or just a quiet reminder to himself of a formative period in his life. Once the entrepreneurial-minded soldier realized there was a market in selling pistols, knives, and flags to the non-combat troops in the rear, a new motivation for looting arose. During the harsh winter of 1944 and 1945, some soldiers took objects out of necessity. Shortages in supplies during the February and March offensives prompted GIs to take German equipment, as well as non-standard issues like field glasses, watches, and personal vehicles. Later on, once American soldiers witnessed the concentration and labor camps within Germany, GIs stole pictures of loved ones, wedding bands, and other personal items not for keepsakes, profit, or necessity, but rather revenge.

For the most part, the U.S. Army allowed their soldiers to collect souvenirs from the battlefield. Dwight Eisenhower's command, the Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expedition Force (SHAEF), strictly prohibited the taking of civilian possessions, however. While SHAEF drew a discernible line between souvenir hunting and looting, GIs saw little difference between the two when they entered Germany in spring 1945. Eisenhower's headquarters placed considerable importance on the prevention of soldiers taking items from Germany homes, worrying lawlessness could derail a successful occupation. The construction of anti-looting orders was a difficult proposition, but the implementation of these directives was an even more monumental undertaking. To ensure American troops maintained discipline, SHAEF ordered officers to closely govern their soldiers' conduct and threatened harsh punishment for offenders as well as commanding officers. The threat, however, proved hollow, as the anti-looting orders were simply passed down through commands without any direction exactly how to stop such actions. More importantly, the officers who were in a position to actually stop GIs from stealing often had the same motivations to take objects as did their troops. In the end, American soldiers did not loot on the same scale as the Red Army. GIs, however, did garner a reputation for their lust for battlefield souvenirs, accounting for the large number of German military objects that are in the United States today.

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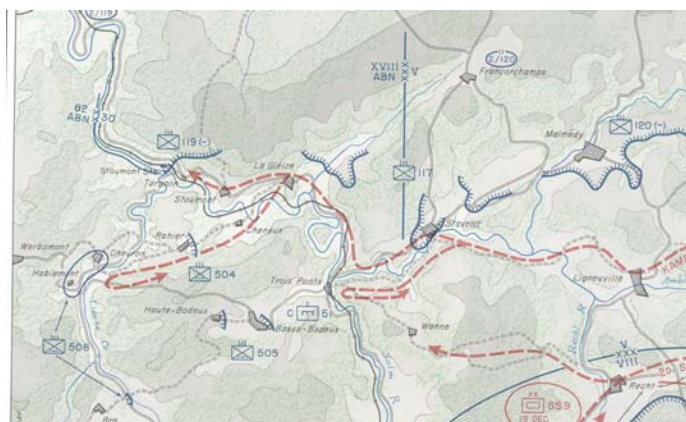
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## The “Damned Engineers” and the Battle of the Bulge, December 18, 1944

On December 16, 1944, in the midst of a blizzard, some 200,000 German soldiers with 1,500 tanks overran American infantry units in the Ardennes Forest along the border between Germany and Belgium. To the center and south of the surprise attack, the Germans drove as deep as 70 miles into the American lines, killing and capturing thousands of American soldiers in their wake. Only at the crossroads at the village of Bastogne did American paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division hold out against the German onslaught. And, they only barely held out against the German tank, infantry, and artillery attacks coming from all directions.

On the northern edge of their advance, the German offensive fared much worse than in the south. The elite German 1st SS Panzer Division failed to break through the U.S. 1st, 2nd, and 99th Divisions on Elsenborn Ridge. This successful defense forced the densely compacted German armor units to move along narrow roads and across stone bridges in valleys in the Ardennes's tree-covered hills. This made them vulnerable to American attacks and reduced the tanks' effectiveness. German tanks, such as the King Tiger II, could not bring their incredible firepower to bear as they moved in long columns along narrow roads.



**Map 12.1** German movements are denoted by the red arrows, and American defensive positions are in blue.

Source: U.S. Army Center of Military History

Making matters worse, the lead German unit, *Kampfgruppe Peiper* with 5,800 soldiers and 100 tanks under Lieutenant Colonel Joachim Peiper's command, never could cross key rivers and streams. Their several attempts were stymied by tiny elements of the U.S. 51st and 291st Engineer Combat Battalions, who held bridges against German attacks or blew them to block the German advance. The most dramatic confrontation occurred on December 18th along Lienne Creek at the Village of Habiermont, Belgium. The American engineers blew a bridge over this creek right in front of Peiper's eyes. The frustrated SS commander sat in his tank, pounded his fist on his knee, and swore "*Deise Verdammten Ingenieure!*" In English, Peiper's words meant "These damned engineers!" Actually, another translation could be "These fucking engineers!" Ultimately, this bridge's demolition dashed Peiper's hopes for a breakout. Several days later, he and his remaining 800 men retreated eastward on foot when his tanks ran out of fuel. The efforts by the 291st and 51st Engineers helped seal the German defeat in the Battle of the Bulge.

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## International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg Trials)

Following the Second World War's devastation, most people dreamed of peace and rebuilding the fragments of life the conflict had destroyed. For the four major allied powers, France, Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union, the war did not end with the cessation of hostilities. Instead, in November 1945 the victorious Allied powers met at the International Military Tribunal (IMT) in Nuremberg, Germany, to prosecute 21 high ranking Nazi military, political, and economic leaders for their roles in the war. The trial itself, and its outcome, would set the precedent for international criminal courts that put individuals on trial—an untried concept to that point.

The origins of the International Military Tribunal can be traced back well before the end of hostilities in 1945. A Soviet "Extraordinary State Commission" investigated German war crimes in Russia as early as 1942. Responding to the brutal tactics employed during Germany's 1941 invasion, the USSR exhibited an early intention to punish summarily German prisoners as criminals. This search for justice had justification, since any possible chivalry observed during earlier wars was noticeably vacant from Germany's wartime conduct on the Eastern Front. Political ideology clashed on the battlefield as much as nationalistic



**Figure 12.2** A view of the courtroom during the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg, Germany. The defendants are to the left in the photo.

*Source:* Photographer: Ray D'Addario, Courtesy of United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, No. 63117.

motivations. Nazi directives to bring about the end of not only communism but also the Soviet population were interpreted by most Germans as license to commit atrocities. Indeed, much of the extermination of Jews and ethnic and racial minorities occurred in Soviet territory at the hands of the Nazis.

For the Western Allies, their reasoning for seeing a legitimate trial was perhaps less vengeful than the Soviet Union. After Hitler's May 1st suicide in Berlin, Allied forces raced to prevent other high-ranking Nazi leaders from cheating them of retributive punishment. Reluctant to replay events which led to interwar German militarism, the Allies sought punishment of Nazi leaders but also hoped to ensure continued peace. Beginning on June 25, 1945, the four major allied powers convened an international conference at Church House in London. The American, British, French, and Soviet representatives spent weeks discussing important issues of policy and procedure and how the coming trials of German war criminals would be conducted. Though the Soviet Union had taken the first official steps that led the delegation to the conference, using force by numbers and self-proclaimed legitimacy, the United States quickly assumed the leadership position. Throughout the symposium, the United States propelled the discussions and employed more man-hours and resources than their counterparts combined.

Chief American representative, Mr. Justice Robert H. Jackson, Associate Justice of the Supreme Court, took a strong stance during the proceedings. Known for his oratorical skills and quick-fused temperament, Jackson attempted to persuade the conference's participants that the German defendants should be indicted for conspiracy to wage aggressive war. Resolving basic viewpoints was far easier said than done. The Anglo-American concept of prosecution based upon conspiracy had no legal equivalent in the Soviet Union. As talks continued, disagreements over theories continued to bog down negotiations. During early

negotiations with Britain concerning the venue for the IMT, Jackson made it known he had no intention of allowing the trial to be held in any city in the Soviet zone of occupation for fear of undue Russian influence on the proceedings. While the Kremlin argued for Berlin—the major center of Soviet occupation—to be the location of the trial, the Americans proposed Nuremberg. Regardless of the extensive damage to the city incurred from Allied bombing and the destruction wrought during the liberation, Nuremberg still possessed a courthouse considered suitable. The Palace of Justice was not only one of the few remaining structures, but it also boasted a still in-tact jail on the premises with underground access to the courtroom, lessening the security risk of transporting the accused. Mostly, though, the Americans preferred the fact Nuremberg was in the U.S. zone and valued the symbolism of holding Nazism accountable in the same city where such fervent political rallies had traditionally been held.

On November 20, 1945, the International Military Tribunal officially opened. Prosecution for the USSR was led by General Roman Andreyevich Rudenko, former Procurator of Ukraine. For the British, Attorney General Sir Harley Shawcross acted as lead prosecutor. The French appointed François de Menthon, who resigned before trial's end to seek a political career and was replaced by Auguste Champetier de Ribes. The chief American legal representative was Supreme Court Justice Robert H. Jackson, chosen by President Truman for his reputation as a formidable prosecutor. Each of the four nations also provided two judges, one main and one alternate.

It was decided during the official indictment that the case against the 21 Germans would be divided into four separate parts. Each country representing the prosecution was charged with presenting one aspect of the case. The Americans prepared the case against Nazi organizations, the British argument dealt with the crimes against peace, the French would present German war crimes in the West and the Soviet Union with war crimes in the East. The tribunal plodded on for over a year while each prosecution in turn painstakingly developed their case against the accused. On October 1, 1946, the Tribunal convened to hear the judges' final verdicts and sentencing. Three of the 21 defendants were outright acquitted: Hans Fritzsche, Franz von Papen, and Dr. Hjalmar Schlect. Seven Nazi leaders received prison sentences: Karl Dönitz, Walther Funk, Rudolf Hess, Konstantin von Neurath, Erich Raeder, Baldur von Schirach, and Albert Speer. Twelve were sentenced to death by hanging: Martin Borman, Hans Frank, Wilhelm Frick, Hermann Göring, Alfred Jodl, Ernst Kaltenbrunner, Wilhelm Keitel, Joachim von Ribbentrop, Alfred Rosenberg, Fritz Sauckel, Arthur Seyss-Inquart, and Julius Streicher. Göring, perhaps the man the victorious powers were most eager to see pay for his war crimes, escaped the hangman's noose the night before his planned execution by ingesting a cyanide capsule.

While the other Allied countries celebrated the rulings as a triumph of impartiality and justice, the Soviet Union was less celebratory. Large volumes detailing the evidence and trial notes from Nuremberg were released in 1946, but the Soviet government was the only participating country who refrained from publishing them. The disputes throughout the tribunal between the Western nations and the Soviet Union can be seen as one of the earliest conflicts of the Cold War. Consensus was difficult for the Allies to attain. Conflicting politics caused disagreements, and in some instances controversy. Matters of only tertiary importance had taken center stage throughout the entire process, threatening to derail the aligned nations' unity. Additionally, the system of law each customarily used had forced incompatible

notions of correct legal philosophy and jurisprudence. Despite the dysfunctional aspects of parts of the trial, Nuremberg encouraged the establishment of an international criminal court, helping to set the standard for follow-on trials of lesser German war criminals, as well as similar actions against Japanese war criminals with the International Military Tribunal for the Far East.

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