Preface to Landsberg Documents

FINAL DECISIONS on the sentences of war criminals convicted by the OMGUS Military Tribunals at Nuremberg and still confined in Landsberg Prison were announced Wednesday, Jan. 31, by US High Commissioner John J. McCloy.

Following in large measure the recommendations of his Advisory Board for Clemency, Mr. McCloy commuted to imprisonment 10 of the 15 death sentences originally handed down by the Military Tribunals and still under consideration. Five of the death sentences were confirmed. Previously, seven sentenced to death in the Medical Case had been executed—in April 1948 at Landsberg—and one death sentence commuted—also in 1948 by the US Military Governor.

An additional 69 prisoners, including 19 sentenced to life imprisonment, had their sentences substantially reduced by the High Commissioner’s decisions.

Of the five whose death sentences were confirmed, Paul Blobel, Erich Naumann, Werner Braune and Otto Ohlendorf, leaders of the SS extermination units, were responsible for the slaughter of many of the 2,000,000 persons killed in the ruthless liquidation program.

The fifth condemned prisoner, Oswald Pohl, personally supervised the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto in which 56,000 Jews were murdered or deported, and led the organization which administered the concentration camps in which hundreds of thousands perished.

CONCERNING THESE FIVE, Mr. McCloy said: "The enormity of the crimes for which these men were directly responsible was such as to place clemency out of reason." In a statement announcing his decisions, the High Commissioner stressed that sentences were reduced wherever a legitimate basis for clemency appeared. He granted such reductions, he said, where:

- The sentence was out of line with sentences for crimes of similar gravity in other cases.
- Reduction appeared justified on the ground of defendants’ relatively subordinate authority and responsibility.
- New evidence, not available to the court, supported such clemency.
- A defendant on some occasion had the courage to resist criminal orders at a personal risk.
- Acute illness of the prisoner or other special circumstances of a similar nature existed.

Mr. McCloy concluded: "I am satisfied that the dispositions now finally made in the individual cases are just to the individual and society. I have attempted to apply standards of executive clemency as they are understood in a democratic society. ... All of my decisions have been rooted in the firm belief in the basic principle of the rule of law which all must respect and to which all are answerable. With this principle, I have striven to temper justice with mercy."

The cases on which Mr. McCloy acted were those resulting from the 12 trials conducted before the OMGUS Military Tribunals in Nuremberg in 1947 and 1948. They did not include the trial of the 22 top leaders of the Nazi regime before the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg in 1945-46. They also did not include the trials conducted before the Military Courts in Dachau, which were exclusively under US Army jurisdiction. However, simultaneous with Mr. McCloy’s final decisions were announced the final decisions of Gen. Thomas T. Handy, commanding general of the European Command, concerning EUCOM clemency in the Dachau cases.

THE DOCUMENTS MADE PUBLIC on Jan. 31, are printed in this issue. They were previously reprinted in an English-language brochure, entitled "Landsberg, A Documentary Report," by the Special Publications Branch, Public Relations Division. A similar brochure, in the German language, was published and distributed by the Editorial Projection Branch, Information Services Division.

On the following pages are the documents, presented in five parts:

Series A is a statement by Mr. McCloy in which he generally discusses the basis for the clemency review; it explains the causes for delay in the final disposition of these cases and discusses some of the arguments which have been advanced against carrying out death sentences.

Series B contains the actual decisions on the sentences of each prisoner. This part includes a very brief resume and discussion of the cases and the action taken on the individual sentences. This action is listed in table form at the conclusion of each resume.

Series C is the text of the introduction of the Clemency Board’s report. This board spent several months in Germany examining the clemency petitions which had been filed in behalf of the prisoners, reviewing the records and judgments in the 12 cases and interviewing each prisoner.

Series D contains a brief description of the crimes committed by those prisoners under sentence of death whose sentences have not been commuted.

The final decisions of General Handy in respect to the review of cases under the jurisdiction of EUCOM.
Landsberg
A Documentary Report

Series A

High Commissioner’s Statement

Mr. John J. McCloy, US High Commissioner for Germany, announced Jan. 31 his final decisions regarding requests for clemency for war criminals convicted at Nuremberg. In releasing these decisions which cover all the cases over which he, as US High Commissioner, has jurisdiction, Mr. McCloy made the following statement.

Since my arrival in Germany I have received many letters and petitions asking clemency for war crimes prisoners convicted at Nuremberg and confined in Landsberg Prison.

It is a fundamental principle of American justice that accused persons shall be given every opportunity to maintain their innocence. If found guilty, it is recognized that they should be permitted to establish mitigating circumstances. In conformity with this latter principle I decided to appoint an impartial board to review these petitions, to examine each case and to consider whether any basis existed for clemency.

Such a board was appointed in March, 1950, and was composed of three well-qualified, distinguished and impartial Americans who had not previously been identified in any way with the Nuremberg trials. Its members were: the Hon. David W. Peck, Presiding Justice, Appellate Division, First Department, New York Supreme Court, chairman; Commissioner Frederick A. Moran, Chairman, New York Board of Parole; and Brig. General Conrad E. Snow, Assistant Legal Adviser, Department of State. The Board commenced its deliberations in Washington and, in July of 1950, established itself in Munich, Germany, where it conducted proceedings during the course of the summer.

The Board submitted its recommendations to me at the end of the summer. In a statement which is being released at this time, the Board has described the general basis on which it proceeded. After reviewing the Nazi criminal programs which were the basis of the Nuremberg trials, this considered statement disposes of certain general arguments commonly made on behalf of a number of the defendants. These arguments include the following: (1) the excuse of ‘superior orders’; (2) claims that the offenders are being punished under ex post facto laws; (3) the allegation that the delay in carrying out the death sentences should itself be sufficient grounds for commuting them. I urge everyone to read the Board’s statement. I call attention to the comments of the Board on conditions in Landsberg Prison. (See page 62.)

With the assistance of the Board’s recommendations, I have considered each individual request for clemency and in every case I have made the final decision.

Sentences have been reduced in a very large number of cases. They have been reduced wherever there appeared a legitimate basis for clemency. Such reductions have been granted where the sentence was out of line with sentences for crimes of similar gravity in other cases; where the reduction appeared justified on the ground of the relatively subordinate authority and responsibility of the defendants; where new evidence, not available to the court, supported such clemency. Where I was convinced that a defendant on some occasion had the courage to resist criminal orders at personal risk, I took such facts into consideration. It is notable that several of the defendants did have the courage to resist or repudiate such orders without suffering any serious consequences. In certain cases my decision to grant clemency has been influenced by the acute illness of the prisoner or other special circumstances of similar nature.

Fifteen of the prisoners convicted at Nuremberg and now at Landsberg are under sentence of death. In these cases I have taken into account every factor which could justify clemency and have resolved every doubt in favor of the convicted man. Ten of the sentences will be commuted to imprisonment.

The remaining five sentences will be confirmed. In each of these cases the enormity of the crimes for which these men were directly responsible was such as to place clemency out of reason. Four of them were leaders of the SS Einsatzgruppen or extermination units which were engaged in the ruthless liquidation of all possible opponents of Nazism in the conquered territories. Their crime was the slaughter among others of Jews, gypsies, insane people and communists who fell into their hands. In all, approximately 2,000,000 helpless human beings were exterminated in the program.

The other prisoner sentenced to death at Nuremberg whose sentence is not commuted is the former leader of the organization responsible for the administration of the concentration camps (WVHA). Hundreds of thousands of people died of starvation or abuse or were murdered in these camps. In addition to many other atrocities this man personally supervised the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto in which 56,000 Jews were murdered or deported.

Objection has been voiced to the execution of these death sentences as contrary to the provision of the Basic German Law of 1949, abolishing the death penalty in Germany. This provision, however worthy of respect,
been that eleven of the original death sentences have been commuted, one by the Military Governor and ten on the basis of my own review. Had the death sentences been carried out when they were originally imposed, men whose sentences have since been commuted would have been executed.

There is one other matter in connection with the Nuremberg sentences upon which I wish to comment generally. It is the charge that sentences against certain former members of the German army malign the German military profession as a whole.

The sentences rendered at Nuremberg against members of the military profession were based on charges of excesses beyond anything which could possibly be justified on the grounds of military security. The individuals in question were convicted for directing or participating in savage measures of reprisal and oppression against civilian populations far exceeding the limits of international law or accepted military tradition. Nevertheless the heat of battle or true military considerations could persuasively be pleaded, a conscious effort has been made to moderate the sentences. In reaching my conclusions I have recognized, as did the courts and the Clemency Board, the bitter character of partisan warfare on certain of the fronts. But with every allowance for these considerations there still remain excesses which can not be rationalized or excused. Where sentences were imposed upon former officers, they have, of course, been based on individual responsibility and participation. These sentences reflect upon the individuals concerned, not upon the honor of the German military profession.

I am satisfied that the dispositions now finally made in the individual cases are just to the individual and society. I have attempted to apply standards of executive clemency as they are understood in a democratic society. I have made every effort to decide each individual case objectively, dispassionately and on its own merits. With the subordinate or less influential figures, I have endeavored to grant a greater measure of clemency than to those whose high positions placed on them a greater responsibility.

All of my decisions have been rooted in the firm belief in the basic principle of the rule of law which all must respect and to which all are answerable. With this principle, I have striven to temper justice with mercy.

Series B

Final Decisions
of US High Commissioner

I am announcing herewith my decisions on the review which I have undertaken of the sentences rendered by the Military Tribunals established under US Military Government Ordinance No. 7 for the trial of war criminals.

In large measure my decisions are based on the report of the Advisory Board for Clemency for War Criminals which was appointed to review these cases.

In all cases where the Board has recommended commutation of a death sentence I have accepted the recommendation. A very limited number of additional death sentences have been commuted, although the Board, in its report, found no ground for clemency. As regards sentences of imprisonment, in a few instances my own examination of the circumstances of individual cases has resulted in my reaching a result slightly different from that recommended by the Board as to the precise degree of modification warranted. In general, however, my decisions follow the substance of the Board's report.

I have adopted certain general recommendations made by the Board. One of these was the increase in the amount of time credited to prisoners against their sentences for good behavior from five to ten days a month. This is the amount generally allowed in prisons in the United States. Moreover credit for good behavior is a standard and effective method of enforcing prison discipline.

ON THE RECOMMENDATION of the Board I am also granting all prisoners credit against their terms of imprisonment for all forms of pre-trial confinement imposed by Allied governmental agencies subsequent to May 8, 1945. Such a credit has heretofore been allowed in a number of cases but in some it appeared that full credit had not been given.

My conclusions as to modification of specific sentences of prisoners at Landsberg under my jurisdiction and certain general comments which I have to make concerning these cases are as follows:

** Case 1 — Medical Case **

Defendants were charged with performing medical experiments on concentration camp inmates, including high altitude tests, freezing, experiments with the use of typhus and malaria germs, artificially induced infections, salt water tests, etc.

The direct or indirect participation of professional practitioners in these crimes is a betrayal of the medical profession. The experiments were never the result of a free and voluntary proffer of their bodies by the unfortunate victims. They were imposed upon helpless human beings who had neither the opportunity nor the power to avoid the tests. Death or agony was the usual result of these experiments.

The worst offenders in this category of crimes have already been dealt with, but all of those presently imprisoned had a guilty part. Several of the men for whom clemency is asked were not only physicians, but also professional soldiers of very high rank.

If there had been any sense of obligation to either profession, they would not have played any consenting part in these outrages. Though difficult to find room for clemency, the Board has found, for reasons such as lack of primary responsibility, age and limited participation, a certain basis for the modification of sentences.

Accordingly, after reviewing these recommendations, I have arrived at the following decisions:

Fritz Fischer — from life to 15 years
Karl Genzken — from life to 20 years

Siegfried Handloser — from life to 20 years
Gerhard Rose — from life to 15 years
Oskar Schroeder — from life to 15 years
Hermann Becker-Freyings — from 20 years to 10 years
Wilhelm Beigelbock — from 15 years to 10 years
Herta Oberheuser — from 20 years to 10 years
Helmut Poppendick — from 10 years to time served

** Case 2 — The Milch Case **

Defendant was Erhard Milch, State Secretary in Hermann Goering's Air Ministry, who was convicted for advocating and exploiting slave labor.

The sole defendant in this case is the former Field Marshal Milch. The conduct of this former officer in the field of military affairs is not subject to question. It is his almost violent advocacy of, and pressure for, slave labor and disregard for the life and health of such labor in the airplane factories which is the gravamen of this offense.

His petition for clemency urges instability of temperament due to nervous strain, aggravated by a head injury. The board has recommended a reduction of sentence from life to fifteen years. This is a sharp reduction considering the high responsibility of this man, but I am prepared to follow it.

** Case 3 — The Justice Case **

Defendants were leading judges, public prosecutors and government officials who perverted law to suit the arbitrary requirements of Nazi racial ideology and presided at the "People's Courts" and "special" courts.

The defendants in this case, as in the Medical case, cast discredit on the professions of which they were members. There are offenders in every calling, but it is peculiarly disheartening to find them among those who are called upon to uphold law and impartial administration of justice. These defendants were not only prepared, but in most cases eager to disregard judicial and legal principles in order to advance the most brutal racial and political principles. I have had difficulty in finding a justification for clemency in any of these cases. As in the medical case, however, the Board for reasons such as limited responsibility has recommended certain reductions which I have followed with relatively minor modifications.

The results are as follows:

Herbert Klemm — from life to 20 years
Guenther Joel — from 10 years to time served
Rudolf Oeschey — from life to 20 years
Oswald Rothaug — from life to 20 years
Ernst Lautz — from 10 years to time served
Wilhelm von Ammon — from 10 years to time served
Franz Schlegelberger — from life to release on medical parole

FEBRUARY 1951
Case 4 — The SS and Concentration Camp Case

Defendants were administrators of the concentration camps or of economic enterprises of the SS conducted with slave labor. Some of the defendants were directly identified on a large scale with the genocidal program of the Third Reich.

The case is concerned with the administration of the Concentration Camps as an adjunct of the SS. Two of the defendants were sentenced to death. One of them, Oswald Pohl, was found to have had personal responsibility for the administration of the camps. The liquidation of the Jews in the Auschwitz camp, the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto and the pillage of the Jews in the East in the action known as “Action Reinhardt” were among the crimes chargeable to this organization. Not only was Pohl, according to the judgment, the head of this administration, but he personally directed and supervised the destruction of the Warsaw ghetto, and he personally selected prisoners for medical experiments. I naturally can find no basis for clemency, and the Board recommended no modification of the sentence.

On the other hand, in the case of Eirenschmalz, the only other defendant sentenced to death in this case, I have ordered a radical commutation of his sentence. This is due to the introduction of new evidence dissociating him from the offenses on which the original death sentence was chiefly based. Though he was a part of the whole criminal organization, his individual connection with exterminations has by reason of the new evidence become remote.

Kiefer likewise benefits from the new evidence relating to Eirenschmalz. The Board has found reasons for recommending the reduction of other sentences in this case, and I have generally followed its recommendations.

My conclusions in these cases are as follows:

Oswald Pohl — Death. No modification
Franz Eirenschmalz — from death to nine years
Karl Sommer — from life to 20 years

Karl Mummenthey — from life to 20 years
August Frank — from life to 15 years
Heinz Karl Fanslaw — from 20 years to 15 years
Georg Loerner — from life to 15 years
Hans Loerner — from 10 years to time served
Hans Baier — from 10 years to time served
Hans Bobermin — from 15 years to time served
Hermann Pook — from 10 years to time served
Leo Volk — from 10 years to eight years
Erwin Tschentacher — from 10 years to time served
Max Kiefer — from 20 years to time served
Hans Hohberg — from 10 years to time served

No mention is made of Case No. 5 (Flick) or Case No. 6 (Farben) as all of the defendants have been released or are now eligible for release.

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Case 7 — The Hostages Case

Defendants were generals assigned to southeastern Europe, charged with criminal disregard of the civilized rules of warfare in respect to the treatment of hostages and civilians.

In the so-called Hostages or Southeast Generals Case the Board has recommended no alleviation of the sentences of former officers Wilhelm List and Walter Kuntze, nor can I find any extenuation for the energy, as demonstrated by their own signed orders, with which they appear to have carried out the terrorization policy of their Command.

Their high rank set a certain tone to the brutalities practiced in this area and their own orders can only be read as incitations to excess. There is, in short, more in these cases than the mere transmittal of a patently illegal order, bad as that might have been. In spite of an effort to give full weight to the harassing character of the local partisan and guerrilla warfare which these and other officers had to face in this campaign, the conclusion is inescapable that these highly responsible officers, as the Board found, passed far beyond the limits permitted by justifiable military considerations, both in their acts of omission and commission.

While the tribunal recognized that in extremity, and as a last resort, the shooting of hostages under certain restrictions was a concomitant of warfare of this type, the evidence established that many of the executions involved hundreds of gypsies and Jews and others who did not bear the slightest relation, either in location or causation, to any incidents against German troops. The taking and shooting of hostages were also in arbitrary and grossly excessive ratios to the offenses prompting the action.

The Board suggests that List and Kuntze, both elderly men, may have such physical infirmities as to raise the desirability of further medical examination to determine whether any medical parole is appropriate. In accordance with this suggestion and in accordance with a practice which has become standard in the administration of United States prisons in Germany, I have directed that
medical examinations be made of them and that a report be rendered which would provide a basis for a determination of this matter.

The sentences of other officers charged with excessive reprisals have been reduced because they had lesser responsibility or, in some cases, showed evidence of humane considerations.

The decisions are as follows:

- Wilhelm List — life. No alteration
- Walter Kuntze — life. No alteration
- Lothar Rendulic — from 20 years to 10 years
- Wilhelm Speidel — from 20 years to time served
- Helmut Felmy — from 15 years to 10 years
- Ernst von Leyser — from 10 years to time served
- Hubert Lanz — from 12 years to time served
- Ernst Dehner — from seven years to time served

Fritz Schwalm — from 10 years to time served
Herbert Huebner — from 10 years to time served

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Case 9 — “Einsatzgruppen” or Extermination Squads Case

Defendants were officers of the SS Elite Guard and in charge of the extermination squads which were responsible for the murder, as the International Tribunal found, of 2,000,000 people.

This case includes most of the death sentences which have heretofore been confirmed but which have not been executed. These men, or at least many of them, are typical of the most inhuman and degrading aspect of the whole Nazi spectacle. Their organizations were one of the chief instruments of the extermination policy of the Nazi regime.

The political and racial character of most of their victims, which included women and children, belies any pretense that the wholesale executions were military or bore any relation to military security. The murders which certain of these organizations committed were on such a large and vicious scale that the mind has difficulty in comprehending them. Certain of the crimes are of truly historic proportions. The evidence in these cases consists mainly in undisputed reports of the organizations, the statements of the leaders themselves, some of whom are among the defendants.

Whereas a careful examination of these cases and the Board’s recommendations does afford grounds for clemency in certain individual situations, no rationalization or explanation whatever can justify the existence of these organizations themselves, or the policy which motivated them. In some of these cases, no matter how one strains to find an area for the application of clemency, the responsibility of the defendants is so clear and direct and the nature of the offenses so shocking that clemency has no meaning as applied to them. In these individual cases no mitigating circumstances whatever have been found.

There are other defendants where, with difficulty, I have found a basis for commutation of the death sentence to one of confinement for the rest of their natural lives. Though deeply guilty it can be said of them that their
offenses as proven by the record were on a less imposing scale.

In cases of still other individuals where the sentence of death has been heretofore confirmed, I feel injustice would be done if the sentences were carried out. This is due largely to the introduction of new and persuasive evidence which has recently been made available. The Haensch and Steimle judgments are examples. Though guilt still attaches to them the directness of their connection with the crimes is substantially lessened by this evidence. Had it not been for the lapse of time since the original sentence, this evidence would not have been considered. In such cases I have not only commuted the death sentence, but have substantially reduced the time of future confinement.

In ordering the reduction of sentences I have followed very closely the recommendations of the Clemency Board, and my action is based upon the prisoner's subordinate responsibility, or the relative remoteness of his connection with the murders, and in some cases, the refusal of the prisoner himself to continue in this brutal business. In no case have I permitted the execution to take place where the Board recommended clemency. In certain cases I have commuted the death sentence, though the Board itself recommended no clemency.

In order that it may be known why no clemency was granted in certain cases, I have appended to my decision in each such case a brief statement of the crimes for which the defendants were adjudged and sentenced and for which, after extended examination and review, no extenuation could be found.

The results in these cases are as follows:

Paul Blobel  — death. No modification
Ernst Biberstein — from death to life imprisonment
Walter Blume — from death to 25 years
Werner Braune — death. No modification
Walter Haensch — from death to 15 years
Waldemar Klingelhofer — from death to life imprisonment
Erich Naumann — death. No modification
Otto Ohlendorf — death. No modification
Adolf Ott — from death to life imprisonment
Martin Sandberger — from death to life imprisonment
Heinz Hermann Schubert — from death to 10 years
Willi Selbert — from death to 15 years
Eugen Steimle — from death to 20 years
Heinz Jost — from life to 10 years
Gustav Noske — from life to 10 years
Waldemar von Radetzky — from 20 years to time served
Erwin Schulz — from 20 years to 15 years
Franz Six — from 20 years to 10 years
Lothar Fendler — from 10 years to eight years
Felix Ruehl — from 10 years to time served

(Continued on page 55)

Case No. 4 [SS and Concentration Camps]: Oswald Pohl is shown on the extreme left in the first row. Others in the photograph include: Hans Baier, Hans Bobermann, Franz Eirenschmalz, Heinz Karl Fanslaw, August Frank, Hans Hohberg, Max Kiefer, Horst Klein, Georg Loerner, Hans Loerner, Karl Mummenthey, Hermann Pook, Rudolf Scheide, Karl Sommer, Erwin Tschentacher, Joseph Vogl, Leo Volk.

(OCCWC photo)