

1 June 63

'I Had to Obey the Law ...'

Adolf Eichmann Dies on the Gallows; Self-Possessed, Defiant to the End

By Arye Wallenstein
Reuters

TEL AVIV, June 3 (Friday) — I watched Adolf Eichmann hang. He dropped through the gallows trapdoor to his death just before midnight.

Eichmann was calm, self-possessed and defiant to the end.

Just before the noose was put around his neck, he said:

"Long live Germany, long live Argentina, long live Austria . . . I had to obey the laws of war and my flag.

"I am ready."

He then looked at the journalists facing him from a yard or so away, and with a ghostly smile on his lips, said:

"After a short while, gentlemen, we shall meet again—so the fate of all men. I have been believing in God all my

life, and I die a believer in God."

Eichmann, 56, was the first man to be executed in the Jewish state since Israel was established 14 years ago.

A few hours before his execution, President Yitshak Ben Zvi rejected Eichmann's last plea for mercy.

A terse official announcement said: "The President of the state of Israel has decided not to exercise his prerogative to pardon offenders or reduce sentences in the case of Adolf Eichmann."

Eichmann, former head of the Gestapo's Department for Jewish Affairs, was sentenced to death for playing "a central and decisive part" in the planning and implementation of the Nazi program to exterminate six million European Jews.

Israel's Supreme Court, in rejecting his appeal, described him as a "fanatical enthusiast" and spoke of his "insatiable blood-thirstiness" in carrying out "these unspeakably horrible crimes."

Eichmann's body was cremated early today and the ashes scattered on the high seas, an official communique announced. The cremation took place on board an Israeli police boat.

The announcement said:

"A similar procedure was followed with the remains of the Nazi war criminals executed by order of the Nuernberg International Tribunal."

The gallows on which he died last night were in a small
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Eichmann Executed; Calm, Unrepentant

room—only 3½ by 4 yards in size—at Ramleh Prison near here, which was surrounded by a cordon of security men.

Eichmann's last minutes on earth were marked by neither remorse nor repentance.

In a cloak-and-dagger operation, I was taken from a house in Tel Aviv to the police station at Ramleh, from which, about an hour later, I was escorted into the heavily guarded prison compound surrounded by a double perimeter of barbed wire.

Minutes later, as I sat in a small room adjoining the improvised gallows chamber, I was told by the prison warden, Shmuel Yogeve: "In five minutes the condemned man will be walking into the room next door."

Three minutes later I heard in the corridor outside a firm voice barking "forward march," in Hebrew.

The Canadian evangelist missionary, the Rev. William Hull, appeared in the corridor and right behind him I saw Adolf Eichmann, flanked by two guards to whom he was manacled.

Eichmann looked no different than he did in his bullet-proof glass cage in the Jerusalem courtroom. But here he was dressed in a simple brown open-necked shirt, and slacks to match.

He walked erect and looked straight forward. His face was pale and drawn.

A few seconds later, Eichmann stood under the noose, with three guards tying his hands behind his back, his ankles and his knees.

I heard Eichmann speak the first words he uttered in the death chamber: "It's too tight. I can't stand."

A guard loosened the knot around his knees.

Beside me, Mr. Hull was saying in a low voice: "Jesus, Jesus."

Seconds ticked by. The noose hanging from an iron chain tied to a wooden cross-beam was placed around Eichmann's neck.

When a guard holding a black hood in his hands asked Eichmann, "Do you want it?" he answered "I don't want it."

He then turned to the reporters facing him and said, "Long live Germany, long live Argentina, long live Austria. These are the three countries with which I have been linked most, and which I shall never forget."

"I greet my wife, my family and my friends."

"I had to obey the law of the war and my flag."

"I am ready."

Eichmann's face was ashen, but I could detect a defiant expression on it as he spoke



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to us his very last words in German.

He said he was a "Gottesgläubiger"—a believer in God—which was the Nazi expression for Christians who had left the church under the directives of the party, but still professed to believe in God.

A voice boomed out in Hebrew: "Mukhan" (ready).

The noose was in position. Eichmann's eyes were half shut, head turned slightly to the left, his glance fixed on the floor.

A second "Mukhan" was heard, and I was aware of some movement from behind a curtain on my right.

The square, black-painted trap door under Eichmann's feet snapped down, the rope became taut, and Eichmann dropped into the dark pit under the scaffold.

Mr. Hull, standing beside me, said in a low voice, "Jesus Christ..."

I approached the trap-door and looked down. Eichmann's body was hanging with almost no swing. Later the prison doctor said death was instantaneous.

Eichmann was told by Prisons Commissioner Arieh Nir, about four hours before his execution, that the President would not exercise his prerogative to commute the death sentence.

His only reaction, according to NIR, was a clipped "Jawohl" (all right).

I had the impression that Eichmann received the news calmly and in a resigned manner. Eichmann was not told at the time when the execution would take place, the commissioner added.

The condemned man merely asked for a bottle of wine of which he drank half.

His last meal, which he ate five hours before his execution, included cheese, bread, olives and tea—the usual prison supper, guards said.

One of Eichmann's last requests was for permission to read two letters from his family which he was told had arrived for him during the day.

Only a few minutes before midnight, he was led out of his death cell, to walk the 30 yards to the gallows chamber.

He had to climb only one step on this last walk, from one wing of the prison to another, along a corridor lined by empty cells.

Mr. Hull saw Eichmann in the death cell shortly before the hanging. Later he told me: "Eichmann today refused to discuss the Bible. He said 'I have no time to waste on it.'"

He described Eichmann as "quite defiant in his manner."

"I asked him if he had changed his mind about confessing in Christ," the evangelist said. "He said he had peace in his heart, he was ready to die, and that death would be a release for his soul."

"I asked if he had a message for his wife. He said: 'tell her I take it calmly. That I have peace in my heart, and this is proof to me that my belief is correct.'"

Mr. Hull explained his attempts to save Eichmann's soul and told me that at one time he had hopes of achieving some measure of success. "But today I would say he either changed his mind during the past week, or had been deceiving us earlier," the pastor said.

During the two hours I spent in Ramleh Prison compound, I saw no other prisoners and could hear no sound from the other wings.

The town of Ramleh was



ADOLF EICHMANN

... executed for atrocities

under a blanket of mist, as I drove through it on my way back to Tel Aviv. There was hardly a soul in the dark streets.