



Sir David: Cross examination

By Nick McDermott

HE was the most important Nazi to be captured by the Allies and face trial at the end of the Second World War.

But Herman Goering, far from being humbled by his downfall, proved a formidable defendant at the Nuremberg hearings, easily outwitting a U.S. prosecutor.

It took a Scottish lawyer to turn the tables against the overweight Luftwaffe chief - who had been nicknamed 'fat boy' by his captors.

Newly discovered letters written by prosecutor Sir David Maxwell Fyfe at the war crimes trials have shed fresh light on the historic encounter in 1946.

In correspondence to his wife back home in Britain, Aberdeen-born Sir David said he felt he had knocked Goering 'off his perch' following their courtroom clash.

But, it seems the Nazi field marshal also won the grudging admiration of the British barrister. Sir David wrote:

**'I hope to have a go at Hess'**

'I must say I take my hat off to the old brigand. He keeps his interest up.'

The clash between the pair is enshrined in legal history after the British lawyer's forensic questioning cut Goering down to size.

It was a turning point in the trial. Goering, charming and confident, had dominated the other prisoners and was determined to make them follow his line of defence. He became their leader.

He insisted everything they had done was the result of their patriotism. He also denied complicity in the Holocaust.

During his cross-examination, his mocking and evasive replies got the better of U.S. prosecutor Robert Jackson, who became so angry at one point that he refused to continue.

Contrasting his own performance with that of the less experienced Jackson, Sir David wrote to his wife Sylvia: 'Friday morning, I think that

# Goering? I knocked him off his perch

## How a Scottish lawyer turned the tables on Nazi 'fat boy' at the Nuremberg trials

my cross examination of Goering went off all right. Everyone here was very pleased.

'Jackson had not only made no impression but actually built up the fat boy further. I think I knocked him reasonably off his perch.'

After Goering was forced to exercise and take his meals alone, unity among the other prisoners - who included Nazi foreign minister Joachim von Ribbentrop, Hitler's number two until 1941 Rudolph Hess, and army chief Wilhelm Keitel - fell apart.

In another letter to his wife in March 1946, Sir David wrote: 'We have at last finished with Goering and on Monday I hope to have a go at Hess. Then about Wednesday or Thursday I hope to knock Hell out of Rib [Ribbentrop] and if I could do the same for Keitel with reasonable speed we might get the trial within bounds.'

In a final act of defiance on October 14, 1946, Goering committed suicide with a phial of cyanide hidden in his cell. It was just hours before he was due to hang for war crimes.

Sir David's letters were discovered by his grandson, Tom Blackmore, in the vaults of London solicitors Allen and Overy, who then set about transcribing them.

The 205 documents are being made available to the public after being given to the Churchill Archives Centre at Cambridge University.

In the correspondence Sir David - later Lord Kilmuir - describes in detail his legal clashes with many of the top-level Nazis at Nuremberg.

Allen Packwood, director of the Churchill Archives Centre, said: 'There is no doubt that Nuremberg was a pivotal moment in the development of international criminal law and these hitherto unseen private letters show this history in the making.'

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