

On the morning of October 16, 1946, five of the Nazi war criminals who had been tried and convicted at the Nuremburg Trials were seated at the prison morning mess table. Their breakfast was interrupted by a United States Soldier who asked for their autographs. They had never seen this person before and his unfamiliar face aroused the suspicions of Herman Goering. When he inquired as to the identity of the mysterious soldier he learned that Master Sergeant John Woods was the official hangman for the prisoners and that his real purpose had not been collecting autographs but estimating bodyweight of three of the five men seated at the table.

The gallows had been secretly constructed in the prison gym and the executions would begin that evening. Goering was first on the list. He had stated earlier that if he was to be executed, it should be by firing squad instead of being hung like a common criminal.

Early that evening Goering asked the guard to go into the luggage room and bring him some of his personal belongings. Within an hour, he had committed suicide by biting down on a glass capsule filled with cyanide that he had secretly hidden in his belongings.

Sergeant Woods, on hearing of Goering's death, was enraged at missing the opportunity of hanging the infamous war criminal, but continued with the other hangings as scheduled. Woods was a professional who had hanged hundreds of people and these executions were no different.

The routine for hanging each convicted criminal was the same. Two of Sergeant Woods' team picked up a prisoner in his cell and brought him to the bottom of the gallows. The prisoner's hands were tied behind his back with black silk hair ribbon. Two soldiers escorted him up the steps then the Chaplain or Catholic Father carried out a brief ceremony and he was asked if he had anything to say. Some of them had something to say. Some of them did not.

When the subject finished speaking, Sergeant Woods placed a hood over their head while his assistant strapped the prisoner's feet with a regulation G. I. web belt and set him on the trap door facing the steps. The noose was placed around his neck by Sergeant Woods himself, who then waited for the thirty seconds or so it took for the noose to adjust. The hangman waited for a silent signal - just a nod - from the officer in charge. He then reached back, took hold of the lever and released the trap.

The ten executions took one hour and twelve minutes. Sergeant Woods, when asked if the hangings had any effect on him replied, "It was a job. Those Nazis didn't mean anything to me. They were just criminals in hoods."

Sergeant Woods and his crew had something to eat and drink and retired for the evening.