

# Ex-state justice, Nuremberg judge Christianson dies

Published May 28, 1985

Copyright permission granted by Star Tribune

**By Bruce Benidt**  
Staff Writer

William C. Christianson, former Minnesota Supreme Court justice and a judge at the Nuremberg trials of Nazi war criminals, died Monday in Red Wing, Minn., at the age of 92.

Christianson was appointed by Gov. Edward Thye to the Minnesota Supreme Court in March 1946, replacing Luther Youngdahl, who had resigned to run for governor.

Christianson's appointment ran only until January 1947, after he failed in the fall of 1946 to win election to a full six-year term. He had managed Thye's campaign for lieutenant governor in 1942 and for governor in 1944.

In 1947 Christianson was named by Gen. Lucius Clay, U.S. Army commander in Europe, to be on of three judges to serve on the Nuremberg military tribunal that tried German industrialist Friedrich Flick.

Flick and his associates controlled the largest private steel manufacturing business in Germany during World War II. Flick and two associates were found guilty of war crimes.

Christianson then served as presiding judge at the trial of Hitler's cabinet, which lasted until the spring of 1949. Most of the 21 defendants, which included SS generals and directors of Nazi espionage programs, were

convicted of planning aggressive war and other war crimes.

William L. Christianson, Christianson's son and also an attorney in Red Wing, said the Nuremberg trials were the highlight of his father's career.

"That's the epitome right there," the younger Christianson said. "Not many people in the law business had had an experience like that."

Christianson said his father considered the trials an historic first. He said his father was careful to judge the Nazi leaders on the basis of international laws that the German government had agreed to honor, so that there was no basis for accusations of "ex post facto" recriminations against the Nazis.

He said his father was proud of the fact that the Nuremberg tribunals helped establish in international law the principle that obeying the orders of military superiors was not an excuse for committing war crimes.

When Christianson returned to Minnesota in 1949, Youngdahl, then governor, appointed him judge in the first judicial district.

Christianson served on the district bench until his retirement in 1963. He then became a part-time judge in Hennepin County.

Christianson was born Dec. 5, 1892, in Moody County, S.D., and attended

school in Jasper and Austin, Minn. He graduated from Highland Park College in Des Moines, Iowa, and from the University of Chicago Law School. He served in the Navy in World War I.

He practiced law with the Bentley and Christianson law firm from 1922-1946 in Red Wing, and served as assistant county attorney for Goodhue County and city attorney for Red Wing.

In 1929 Christianson married Myrtle Lorenz of Waseca, Minn., who taught high school in Red Wing. She died in 1977.

The family prefers memorials to the Goodhue County Historical Society of the Seminary memorial Home in Red Wing.

The funeral service will be 3 p.m. Wednesday at the United Lutheran Church in Red Wing, with internment at Oakwood Cemetery in Red Wing. Visitation will be from 3 to 5 p.m. and from 7 to 9 p.m. today at Bodelson Funeral Home in Red Wing.