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stuttgart, west germany, april 28 (up1) -- the prosecution calls the three defendants cold blooded murderers who killed four american soldiers and a german policeman during a two-year reign of terror designed to bring about a revolution.

the defense has said the admitted +urban guerrillas+ are +prisoners of war,+ +partisans,+ who opposed american actions in vietnam and an unjust social system.

they refer to themselves as urban guerrillas members of a red army faction. the public knows them as the baader-meinhof band.

a court here was expected to pass sentence on the three thursday in a session scheduled to begin at 9 a.m. (0800 gmt).

the defendants, andreas baader, 33, jan carl raspe, 32, and gudrun ennslin, 36, were accused of planting bombs in the spring of 1972 in the headquarters of the u.s. 7th army in frankfurt and the u.s. army european command headquarters in heidelberg that killed an american colonel and three american enlisted men.

they also were accused of killing a policeman during one of a series of bank holdups they carried out to finance their operations.

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a fourth defendant, ulrike meinhof, hanged herself in her prison cell here a year ago. meinhof, a 32-year-old former journalist, was considered the ideological leader of west germany's left-wing anarchist movement.

another defendant, holger meins, died 18 months ago after a hunger strike.

through hunger strikes, their refusal to attend most of the courts sessions, and their conduct when they did attend the defendants turned the two-year trial into a grim circus.

+we dont talk to people like you, we shoot them,+ a defense witness told the court.

the circus went on until the end.

the defense lawyers made their final pleas wednesday not in the guarded courtroom in the local prison but to reporters in a stuttgart hotel. thus, it had no legal weight.

defence lawyer otto schily in his plea said the defendants bombed american headquarters to oppose the vietnam war.

+the bombings were acts of resistance against genocide in vietnam,+ he said.

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baader, a university dropout, told the court in one of the few sessions he attended, +we urban guerrillas are a little motor to start up the great revolution by armed force.+

the defense demanded a mistrial on the grounds legal authorities admitted planting listening devices at meetings between the defendants and their lawyers.

they also asked dismissal of the case on the grounds of the court was biased and public sentiment so opposed to the left wing that a fair trial was impossible.

the prosecution asked life sentences.

the trial ended at a time west germany was rocked by the murder of siegfried buback, the countrys chief prosecutor.

a terrorist band calling itself the ulrike meinhof commando said it was responsible for the murder early this month.

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baader-meinhof-1

stuttgart, west germany (ap) - three leaders of the baader-meinhof urban guerrilla gang were convicted thursday of four counts of murder and sentenced to life imprisonment, a stuttgart court announced.

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three weeks ago, chief federal prosecutor siegfried buback, who led the state's case against the terrorists, was assassinated in karlsruhe by a group calling itself "commando ulrike meinhof."

meinhof, 41, was the accused co-leader of the gang that styled itself "red army faction." she committed suicide in her jail cell last may as the trial neared its first anniversary.

the three convicted terrorists were not present to hear the guilty verdict. they began a hunger strike a month ago to protest official eavesdropping on jail-cell conversations with their defense attorneys.

judge eberhard foth, who headed the five-judge tribunal, explained the verdict in the heavily guarded courtroom packed with 200 reporters and spectators.

he said the gang carried out the heidelberg bombing by smuggling three cq) bombs into the headquarters complex in two civilian cars, which were left parked there.

bonner, who was standing beside the cars when the bombs detonated, died instantly, "his body torn apart and pieces strewn over a large area," foth said.

woodward and peck, who were walking near the two cars, died of injuries shortly after the blasts, foth said, and "other persons could easily have been killed.

foth said bloomquist was killed and several other american soldiers injured when the gang set off three bombs at the v corps headquarters office building and officers' club 13 days earlier.

altogether, the three terrorists staged six bomb attacks in six separate cities around west germany in 1972. this included the blasting with five pipe bombs of the hamburg headquarters of conservative publisher axel springer, the judge said.

he said the "basic conviction" of baader, ensslin and raspe was to "use their weapons to kill and wound," and that "bomb arsenals" discovered in their network of hideouts proved they had planned further attacks.

baader, a smart college drop-out and convicted arsonist, was described by foth as "the recognized leader of the red army faction." the judge said this had been proven by testimony and written evidence

ensslin, the daughter of a protestant pastor, played an "important role in the criminal conspiracy" and sought to maintain a "determining influence" over the group even from her prison cell, foth said.

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the three-hour statement was read in the fortress-like courthouse

specially built for the proceeding at maximum-security stammheim prison in suburban stuttgart. baader, ensslin and raspe are jailed there in a high-rise cell-block.

foth said that although the three did not personally plant all the bombs, they planned "where and when the crimes were to be carried out" and sought to kill their victims.

the court rejected defense claims that the bombings were legitimate protests against the vietnam war based on "emergency self-help" provisions of international law.

"not everyone can declare himself a subject of international law and conduct war on his own," foth said.

the judge stressed the three terrorists were tried and convicted of criminal offenses, rejecting their argument that the bombings were carried out for political motives.

"in view of the judgment, some of you may ask, 'where is the politics?'" foth said. "the answer is: there where it belongs, outside the courtroom."

the stormy trial was repeatedly delayed by protest motions of the leftist team of defense lawyers as most of whom are facing prosecution for allegedly smuggling secret messages from prison cells to and sympathizers outside the prison.

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german authorities have admitted bugging the jail cells on two occasions because of fears the lawyers and terrorists were plotting violence to force their release.

one of the buggings was ordered in april 1975 while terrorists were holding hostages in the west german embassy in stockholm, sweden, in an unsuccessful effort to free the baader-meinhof defendants. two terrorists and two west german diplomats were killed in the raid.

the trial almost collapsed last jan. 20 when judge theodor prinzing was ousted as tribunal chairman for prejudice on a defense motion. foth replaced him.

the eavesdropping operations and the prinzing's disqualification -- which came after he presided over most of the testimony -- will be key factors in defense appeals of the verdict.

the baader-meinhof leaders went on trial may 21, 1975, charged in a 354-page indictment with masterminding a wave of anti-state bombing and shootings that killed the four americans, a german policeman and injured 54 other persons.

the indictment charged them with forming a criminal conspiracy and financing their campaign with car thefts, burglaries and bank robberies that netted them 200,000 dollars.

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1349 :baader - history:

stuttgart, west germany, april 28, reuter -- following is the chronology of the baader-meinhof story from the first bomb blasts in 1972 to today's life sentences:

1972:

may 11: two bombs explode at a united states army base in frankfurt. an american officer dies, 14 other people wounded.

may 12: sixteen people injured in bomb blasts at police buildings in munich and augsburg.

may 19: two bombs explode at hamburg headquarters of the conservative springer press.

may 24: three u.s. soldiers die and six others wounded in two explosions at american army headquarters in heidelberg.

june 1: andreas baader, holger meins and jan carl raspe arrested in hamburg, followed within days by gudrun ensslin and ulrike meinhof.

1974:

nov 9. meins dies in jail after hunger strike.

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1351 :baader- history 2 stuttgart:

1975:

may 21: trial opens in stuttgart of four surviving defendants.

aug 19: defence lawyers walk out in protest at defendants' physical conditions.

aug 26: defence lawyers demand a new trial, saying accused have already been condemned by the public. dexandprefued.

septx23: doctors say accused not fully fit to stand trial.

sept 30: decision to continue trial without defendants.

nov 11: court begins hearing witnesses. judges decide raspe's lawyer no longer to be paid state fees because of his misbehaviour in court.

1976:

jan 13: in declarations laszing three days, defendants say they members of an urban guerrilla group, accept +political+ responsibility for armed actions but refuse to answer questions on legal aspects.

1443 : second lead baader:

by george vine

stuttgart, west germany, april 28, reuter - the three leaders of the baader-meinhof group were jailed for life here today at the end of west germany's longest and most spectacular urban guerrilla trial.

security round government leaders and offices throughout the country was immediately stepped up to avert possible reprisals by the group's followers, government sources said.

defendants andreas baader, jan carl raspe and gudrun enselin, had been on trial in a specially-built bomb proof courtroom for 23 months, charged with murdering four u.s. soldiers and injuring scores of other people in bomb and shooting attacks in 1972.

each was sentenced to life imprisonment for setting off the bombs at american army installations in heidelberg and frankfurt where the four servicemen died.

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1433 : second lead baader 3 stuttgart:

in a two hour 40 minutes summary today, however, herr foth rejected defence claims that he had presided over a political trial. +politics has been left outside the door of this trial, where it belongs,+ he commented.

the judge said the trio, all in their 30's, had always acknowledged belonging to the baader-meinhof group, which they called +the red army faction,+ and had tried to explain their acts as an armed struggle on behalf of the proletariat.

after describing the wounds, injuries and damage caused by the various bomb explosions, herr foth said: +all this happened under the alibi of the anti-imperialist struggle.+

the group's co-leader, ulrike meinhof, went on trial with the other three but she was found hanged in her prison cell last may. a fifth original defendant, holger meins, died in november 1974 after a hunger strike.

under west german law, life imprisonment theoretically means convicts stay in jail until they die. but a justice ministry spokesman said today that people sentenced to life terms are normally freed after between 13 and 22 years in detention.

(pick up as required)

reuter gv/st

1437 :second lead baader 4 stuttgart:

the west german federal constitutional court, the country's highest legal body, is currently considering a request from a regional chamber for a ruling on whether life-long imprisonment is unconstitutional. a decision is expected in june.

herr foth, who presided over a bench of five judges, read out letters written by ensslin and meinhof hailing baader, who will be 34 next week, as the leader of the +red army faction+ (raf).

the letters also compared him with cuban leader fidel castro, south american left-wing revolutionary che guevara and former north vietnamese communist leader ho chi minh as someone who would +fight, go on fighting and fight again.+

the presiding judge said he could see no grounds for being lenient with any of the accused, including frau ensslin, 36-year-old daughter of a clergyman.

he told the court, the public benches of which were filled with about 150 spectators, that ensslin had written in a book she co-authored in 1964: +everyone has the right to a natural death.+

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1440 :second lead baader 5 stuttgart:

the judge went on: +this goes for the u.s. soldiers, policemen and others at whom these bombs were directed.+

west german justice and police officials have long feared attempts by radical followers of the baader-meinhof group to kidnap prominent people and thus force the release of the movement's hard-core leadership.

it was particularly with this in mind that security measures were increased throughout the country following the announcement of the sentences, the government sources said. extra armed policemen and other security officials were seen today patrolling the federal government quarter in bonn.

in april 1975, a gang of urban guerrillas took over the west german embassy in stockholm. they blew part of it up, killing two diplomats, when the bonn government refused to bow to their demands for the release of 26 baader-meinhof members, including the stuttgart defendants, held in west german prisons.

reuter gv/st