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AUSTRIA/NAZI

BROKAW: World War II and the post-war years are full of stories about agents who played both sides of the street. Tonight there's yet another story, a true one, about a double dealer who worked first for the Nazis and then after the war for the United States. Robert Verbelen is a wanted man in his own country, but for the moment, he's safe. Phil Bremen picked up the trail in Austria.

BREMEN: Robert Verbelen was a police chief in Belgium during World War II, collaborating with the Nazis. For murder, torture, and other war crimes, Belgum sentenced him to death in 1947. But by then, Verbelen was in Austria where he is today a free man. After the war, instead of going to jail, Verbelen went to work as a spy for the United States Army. Army records, recently uncovered, show Verbelen was on the U.S. payroll for 11 years while American and Soviet troops occupied Austria. The records, heavily censored, do not say what Verbelen's intelligence duties were or how much he was paid in money or special favors. In 1959, Verbelen was granted Austrian citizenship. As a citizen, he could not and cannot be extradited. Belgian reports said Verbalen got that citizenship with the help of well placed Austrian friends. Verbelen claims his American friends also put in a good word for him. In the 1960s, veteran Nazi hunter Simon Wiesenthal got Austria to arrest Verbelen and jail him for three years, but then the Austrian legal system decided there was no case. Now investigators from the Anti-defamation League are trying to build a case all over again, interviewing those who suffered at Verbelen's hands. *John *Masmen was a Belgian resistance leader beaten and shot on Verbelen's orders. President Eisenhower thanked Masmen for sheltering two downed American flyers until Verbelen raided their hiding place. One of those Americans, then a bomber pilot, now is living in Illinois. Eugene *Dingledein remembers being captured by Verbelen in August 1944. DINGLEDEIN: He had us lined up with our face to the wall and our hands up in the air, and he was kicking and hitting us with a pistol and threatening to shoot us.

BREMEN: Dingledein and his wife cannot understand why their government would employ such a person. Back in Vienna, Verbelen these days writes spy thrillers and gives speeches. Anti-Communist, he calls them. Verbelen says he never saw an American named Dingledein and never tortured anyone. He admits having used several false identities but claims his American employers knew exactly who he was. What they knew and when, and how much they cared to know the Justice Department now is trying to find out. Phil Bremen, NBC News, Vienna.

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