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PROGRAM The Today Show

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CITY Washington, DC

SUBJECT Klaus Barbie

BRYANT GUMBEL: Still more revelations about one of World War II's most wanted war criminals, the infamous Klaus Barbie.

It's known that he worked for U.S. counterintelligence immediately following World War II. But, was he a CIA agent paid with our tax dollars, even in the 1970's?

Investigative reporter Ernest Volkman has written in an upcoming edition of "Family Weekly" magazine that Barbie's CIA activities and his criminal activities continued in the years that he was in Bolivia. What kind of criminal activity are we talking about here, Mr. Volkman?

ERNEST VOLKMAN: Name it. First of all, he ran, or helped to run Bolivia's cocaine traffic which, as a lot of people know, beginning around 1971 was virtually nationalized by the military junta that was running the country. He recruited for them a gang of paramilitary thugs that in fact was the enforcement squad for the cocaine traffic.

GUMBEL: How large a gang are we talking about here?

VOLKMAN: Somewhere around 6,000 people all together. These are the people who guarded the landing strips to make sure people didn't steal the cocaine. These were the people who made sure that the farmers weren't cheating when they were selling the cocoa base for the cocaine. These were the people who made sure that the traffic rolled nice and smoothly.

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GUMBEL: And the CIA employed him at this time as what?

VOLKMAN: Basically, as an informant. Barbie had very good connections with high-level officials in the Bolivian government, and for that reason the Agency felt that he was in very good position to keep tabs on what was happening there. So, as a result, he was regarded as an almost perfect informant.

GUMBEL: Are you saying the Agency was aware of his drug dealings at the time that they took him on as an employee?

VOLKMAN: That's -- that's difficult to say. I wouldn't be able to say that as a matter of fact. The problem is, however, that unless the CIA and Bolivia was deaf, dumb and blind they must have known of the, (A), the cocaine traffic, and,(B), the fact that Klaus Barbie was very closely connected with it, since it was a matter of common knowledge in Bolivia.

GUMBEL: How high up with -- within the CIA, in fact, within the American government, would you say knowledge of --of Barbie's employment with the CIA went?

VOLKMAN: That's very difficult to say. Very often people at the top level -- they're made aware of intelligence from a particular point, but they may not be told the specific source of it. So, I -- I want to be fair about this. I -- I can't say definitively everybody above a certain level in the CIA was aware of the fact that we were using a Nazi war criminal, and a rather infamous one at that, as an informant in Bolivia.

GUMBEL: Your charges are startling. I -- I presume the CIA is aware of what you're saying?

VOLKMAN: I would presume so.

GUMBEL: What's been their response?

VOLKMAN: They have not made any response, although their normal response in such circumstance is to say that we -- we simply don't discuss these sorts of allegations.

My concern, frankly, is not so with the CIA as it is with the Special Justice Department Task Force which has been assigned the job of investigating links between Nazi war criminals and the CIA.

GUMBEL: Why are you concerned?

VOLKMAN: Well, because I'm concerned that the Justice Department, in order to carry out that job, will need some

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cooperation from Central Intelligence Agency. Indeed, unless the CIA tells them of which Nazi war criminal....

GUMBEL: If they can ascertain the information.

VOLKMAN: Exactly right. So, I -- I -- I am concerned that the Justice Department Task Force become aware of these things.

GUMBEL: You're presently working on a book about the CIA. Does the Barbie case represent a -- an example of business as usual?

VOLKMAN: What it represents is an argument for ultimate expediency. It -- it's an argument that says look, after the War, particularly, and even up through the present-day, we have very urgent intelligent priorities and for that -- for that reason we have to recruit just about everybody.

GUMBEL: How....

VOLKMAN: And if we have to ignore a Nazi war criminal, we'll have to do it.

GUMBEL: How do you suggest we -- we avoid things like this in the future and still allow the CIA the confidentiality necessary to get the job done?

VOLKMAN: I think basically somebody's going to have to convince me beyond a shadow of a doubt that your intelligence requirements are so strong that you have to recruit a Nazi war criminal as an intelligence agent.

GUMBEL: And a war criminal that's dealing in drugs.

VOLKMAN: Exactly right.

GUMBEL: Those are the worst kind.

VOLKMAN: Exactly right.

GUMBEL: Ernest Volkman. Again, thank you very much.

VOLKMAN: Thank you, Bryant.

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