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Experts Make Firm Mengele Writing Match

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SAO PAULO, Brazil—Two American handwriting experts asserted "beyond a shadow of a doubt" Friday night that documents recovered by police here last week were written by fugitive Nazi war criminal Josef Mengele.

The dramatic announcement at Federal Police headquarters lent powerful technical support to the Brazilian conviction that Mengele lived clandestinely in Sao Paulo state for nearly 20 years. Still to be proved scientifically is that Mengele—the Auschwitz concentration camp "Angel of Death"—drowned in 1979 and was buried near here under a false name, as police believe.

But a new link in the tightening circle of evidence came Friday from forensic specialists who said the exhumed remains they are examining are those of a man who was between 60 and 70 years old when he died. Mengele would have been 68 if he drowned in 1979.

4-Day Study

Positive handwriting identification came after four days of independent study by Americans David Crown and Gideon Epstein, who joined the Brazilian investigation at the behest of the U.S. Justice Department. Brazilian handwriting specialists share the Americans' positive conclusions, a jubilant Sao Paulo Police Chief Romeu Tuma told reporters.

"We have made definite identification of Josef Mengele on various documents written in Brazil," said Crown, who retired three years ago after 15 years as head of the CIA's documents laboratory. "We are convinced beyond a shadow of a doubt that they are Mengele's."

The experts compared authenticated documents written by Mengele for the SS in the 1930s with material recovered from the suburban home of Wolfram and Liselotte Bossert, an Austrian couple who say they sheltered Mengele from 1974 until his death.

Epstein, a forensic documents specialist with the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service in McLean, Va., underlined the absolute judgment: "If we had found some problems, we would have given a qualified conclusion. The fact that we haven't means that we have no doubts."

Crown responded categorically to reporters questions: "It is definite. We are staking our reputations," he said.

Epstein and Crown said that they divided the Brazilian material, mostly letters, into 14 groups to weigh them against the authenticated material they brought with them from U.S. archives. Without detailing the points of similarity they discovered, the experts said that their study was complicated by the long interval—around four decades—between the writings. Still, they stressed, there was positive identification.

Tuma, whose patient investigation has diminished initial widespread incredulity that Mengele could have eluded his pursuers for so long while hiding in Brazil, called the handwriting identification "100% accurate."

"There is no doubt now that Mengele was in Sao Paulo," the police chief exulted.

The handwriting match powerfully supports testimony by the Bosserts, who say that Mengele lived in a house they own. The Bosserts also swear that they were present in 1979 when Mengele drowned in the surf at a Brazilian beach and that he was buried under the name Wolfgang Gerhard. A Nazi fanatic who died in Austria in 1978, Gerhard is portrayed in sworn testimony as Mengele's principal protector in Brazil.

Painstaking forensic examination by Brazilian and American specialists is under way on the remains exhumed June 6 from the Gerhard grave.

Tuma said Friday that doctors have now established to their satisfaction that the body buried as Gerhard—who was 53 in 1979—was that of a man who would have been in Mengele's age range when he drowned. The specialists said Thursday that the skeleton they are examining is that of a male and is of Mengele's approximate height.

Efforts by West German specialists to match Mengele's fingerprints with prints on documents found in the Bosserts' house has been unsuccessful so far, Tuma said. The technicians have not found large numbers of prints and are encountering difficulty in lifting the impressions they have found, the chief added. One good print was discovered but it was not Mengele's, Tuma said.

Meanwhile, forensic dentists are working slowly and with extreme care, Tuma said, because the six natural teeth and jaw that they are examining are in poor condition after six years in a grave that was sometimes wet.

Tuma's detectives are still seeking an unidentified dentist who fitted one of the natural teeth with a modern gold crown; they also want to know if the same dentist did the skeleton's bridge work.

Mengele is known to have lived in Argentina and Paraguay before coming to Brazil. Tuma has asked police in both countries to aid in the search for the dentist.

In Washington, Friday, Justice Department official Neal Sher said that a team of nine Americans is in Sao Paulo to assist the Brazilians with the investigation.

"There is excellent cooperation between the U.S. people who are there, the Brazilians and the (West) Germans," said Neal Sher, the department's chief Nazi-hunter. "We are there to offer what assistance we can to the Brazilians. . . . It's their country. It's their investigation."

Besides the two handwriting and documents experts, he said the Americans are a chemist, a medical pathologist, a dental pathologist, an anthropologist, a Justice Department lawyer and two U.S. marshals.

Sher, who returned to Washington from Brazil earlier in the week, briefed Atty. Gen. Edwin Meese III on the case Friday, and Meese issued a statement declaring the investigation "one of the department's most important tasks."

He refused to say whether he believes that the body exhumed in Sao Paulo is Mengele's. "We don't see it as serving any useful purpose to disclose any piecemeal conclusions of our investigation," he said.

Whether the body is Mengele's or not, Sher said, his Office of Special Investigations will continue its inquiry into whether the Nazi fugitive was ever in the custody of U.S. occupation forces in southern Germany after World War II.

Times staff writer Doyle McManus in Washington contributed to this story.

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