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ON PAGE C-7

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# Those Who Helped Klaus Barbie

Klaus Barbie, the notorious Nazi war criminal whose escape after World War II was arranged by U.S. Army intelligence agents, is awaiting trial in France for crimes against humanity. As the Gestapo chief in France's "second city," he earned the title "Butcher of Lyon."

Barbie's wartime crimes were known to the Army's Counterintelligence Corps. Yet it secretly engineered his flight, with false identity papers, from occupied West Germany to Italy and finally to refuge in Bolivia.

The disclosure of deep American involvement in Barbie's escape from justice brought a formal apology from the U.S. government to the people of France last year. But opinion is divided over the American intelligence officers who dealt with Barbie. Should they be required to answer in court for what they did or didn't do more than 30 years ago?

Former Supreme Court justice Arthur Goldberg believes they could and should be brought to trial. He made that point in a private letter to Defense Secretary Caspar Weinberger.

"Our failure to prosecute the . . . American CIC officers," he wrote Weinberger, "will be a source of embarrassment to us when Barbie is tried for his war crimes. . . ."

On the other hand, Allan Ryan, who conducted the Justice Department's exhaustive investigation of the Barbie case, disagrees. He does not see "any jurisdiction under military law to put these people on trial." The Justice Department view is that the statute of limitations rules out any action by a civilian tribunal.

Some of the men who worked with Barbie or helped him escape are still alive today. Most are retired; all are held in high repute. I had my associate Lucette Lagnado track down some of them:

■ CIC Agent Robert Taylor, who recruited Barbie as a paid informant in 1948 and later fought to save him from French authorities. He described Barbie to his superiors at the time as "an honest man both intellectually and personally . . . absolutely without fear," and added: "He is strongly anti-communist and a Nazi idealist who believes that he and his beliefs were betrayed by the Nazis in power."

In the anti-communist hysteria of the Cold War era, this clear suggestion that Barbie was a Nazi fanatic caused not a ripple at CIC headquarters. Thirty-six years later, Taylor admits he was "taken," saying: "I have regrets today." He insists he was unaware that Barbie had been a member of the Gestapo.

■ Col. David Erskine, who approved Barbie's recruitment and made the decision to help him evade the French, though the record

shows he knew of Barbie's alleged war crimes.

The Army's European Command sent Erskine a memo on May 3, 1950, saying: "French newspapers are making a large splash stating that Barbie is guilty of war crimes. . . . Request any information regarding Barbie." Erskine convened a strategy meeting the next day, at which, the record shows, it was decided "that Barbie should not be placed in the hands of the French." Erskine declined to be interviewed.

■ Col. Dale Garvey, who also approved the recruitment of Barbie, "provided that he break off any connection he may have with illegal SS elements." The evidence, of course, is that Barbie didn't do this.

"I made the decision that I made on the basis of the best information I had at the time," Garvey said.

■ Capt. Eugene Kolb, who was the regional CIC operations officer responsible for Barbie. He said he didn't know Barbie was an accused war criminal. Indeed, he says today he is not convinced of Barbie's guilt. "Some of the allegations may have some truth, but some have been exaggerated," he said.

Kolb described Barbie as an excellent intelligence officer, who didn't need to use force to get information during an interrogation. He believes it was right not to have turned Barbie over to French intelligence, which he said was infiltrated with communists at the time.

Kolb's one regret is that the Barbie affair has caused embarrassment to the Army intelligence community.

■ Maj. Erhard Dabringhaus, who in 1948 drew what seemed like a routine assignment as Barbie's control officer. He learned about Barbie's background from another German informant, but was ordered not to reveal it. When French intelligence asked Dabringhaus about Barbie, he obediently told them nothing. But he protested to his bosses—in writing. Not long afterward, he was transferred. His incriminating memo disappeared from Army files.

Thirty-five years later, when Barbie was finally extradited to France from Bolivia, Dabringhaus recognized him on television. He wrote an indignant letter to NBC News, telling about the Army's secret role in shielding Barbie. Since then, Dabringhaus has assisted the Justice Department in its investigation of the coverup.

For blowing the whistle, Dabringhaus has received death threats from the Ku Klux Klan, ominous phone calls in the middle of the night and vilification from some old CIC buddies. "They told me I should have kept my mouth shut," he said.

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