

Deny Secret Group Helps Nazis Escape

[Are nazi bigwigs still sheltering war criminals and helping them escape abroad? No, say authorities, but rumors persist. Here's a look at the situation by a reporter who crisscrossed West Germany to check with people who should know.]

BY JOHN FIEHN

FRANKFURT, Germany, July 11 (AP)—Hans-Walter Zech-



Zech-Nenntwich

Nenntwich, 47, a former major in the SS nazi elite guards, was sentenced to four years in prison for complicity in the war time murder of Jews.

Three months ago he escaped from the Brunswick jail, made his way to Egypt, and calmly declared: "I could have walked out of prison any time of the day in a tuxedo, if you like."

Claims He Got Aid

He boasted that an underground of old officers of the SS and Wehrmacht planned every step of his escape.

This lent weight to rumors that a powerful underground, sometimes called "the Spider," exists to help Nazis reach sanctuary in Egypt or Latin Amer-



Zind (left) and Skorzeny

ica.

Dr. Ernst Thiele, Brunswick chief prosecutor, directing investigations in the Zech-Nenntwich case, dissented thusly:

"Every phase of his flight is known to us. There is no evidence whatsoever that former SS comrades helped him."

"Not the Slightest Proof"

And Dr. Ludwig Martin, chief federal prosecutor of West Germany, said:

"We have not the slightest bit of proof of the existence of an organization of old Nazis helping others escape abroad."

Security men of the three western allies—always looking for any signs of a possible re-birth of nazism—also have rejected the idea of a nazi underground.

But what about "the Spider"? If it doesn't exist now, it once did.

West German and western intelligence officers said it was formed in 1946 at an American

internment camp for Nazis at Glasenbach, near Linz, Austria.

Allied officials appear pretty certain that the Spider helped at least one top Nazi reach sanctuary abroad. That was SS Gen. Otto Skorzeny who freed Benito Mussolini from anti-fascists atop Mount Gran Sasso, Italy, in September, 1943.

Skorzeny escaped from an internment camp at Darmstadt in 1943 and fled to Spain. He now is a wealthy business man with offices in Madrid and a country estate in Ireland.

People who contend that the Spider's web still reaches far and wide point not only to Zech-Nenntwich's successful jailbreak.

Cite Other Cases

They also cite these cases:

In July, 1953, Dr. Hans Eisele, alleged to have killed thousands of inmates of the nazi Buchenwald concentration camp with carbolic acid in-

jections, escaped to Egypt. Eisele's whereabouts long had been known to authorities in Bavaria, where he lived. But nobody detained him or withdrew his passport.

Ludwig Zind, sentenced to a year in prison for his beer hall remark that "not enough Jews had been gassed" in nazi Germany, fled to Egypt before starting to serve his sentence in November, 1953.

Fled to Argentina

In July, 1963, Gerhard Bohne, charged with being a key figure in Hitler's so-called euthanasia — "mercy killing" — campaign against mentally and physically disabled persons, escaped to Argentina.

"It cannot be denied," said Chief Federal Prosecutor Martin, "that persons clinging to the nazi ideology help their comrades when in trouble. But the help they are extending does not violate any paragraph of our penal code."