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An American in Barbie Case Disputes Finding by the U.S.

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WASHINGTON, Aug. 17— One of the six former Army intelligence officials who were criticized in a Justice Department report for obstructing justice in 1950 and 1951 by helping Klaus Barbie escape prosecution for war crimes, disputed the accusation today, but said he could not remember the events in question.

"That's not correct," Col. David Erskine said when asked to comment on the Justice Department report's conclusion that he and several others agreed on a plan to prevent Mr. Barbie from being extradited to France, which involved lying to United States civilian officials in occupied Germany about his whereabouts.

But Col. Erskine, of Kensington, Md., also said "it's very difficult for me to remember anything that happened so far back." The colonel, who is 82 years old and retired from the Army in 1954, said he could not recall ever having seen Mr. Barbie or having had any dealings concerning him.

Col. Erskine and Joseph Vidal, of Buena Park, Calif., also retired, are the only two officials criticized for obstructing justice in the Barbie case who

are still alive, according to Allan A. Ryan Jr., the Justice Department official who wrote the 218-page report on Mr. Barbie's relations with the United States. The report was released Tuesday.

Mr. Vidal could not be reached for comment.

Mr. Barbie, who was chief of the Gestapo in Lyons, France, from 1942 to 1944, has been accused of murdering and torturing French Resistance fighters and Jews and sending thousands to death camps. The 69-year-old former Nazi is now awaiting trial in France for "crimes against humanity."

Mr. Ryan's report concluded that the Army Counter Intelligence Corps employed Mr. Barbie as an anti-Communist spy in postwar Germany, hid him from United States civilian authorities to prevent his extradition to France to stand trial for war crimes in 1950, and helped him escape to Bolivia in 1951.

Mr. Barbie lived in Bolivia until February, when he was expelled to France.