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The Barbie Connection

From under a Rock

New York.

IT began many years ago, and all who care to know have learned some of the story. But Washington declines comment.

Toward the end of World War II, U.S. intelligence was split by

By John L. Hess

conflicting goals: to find and punish enemy war criminals or to enlist as many people as possible for use against the Soviets.

Among hundreds who slipped through that crack was Klaus Barbie, "the butcher of Lyons."

As a Gestapo chief, Barbie had directed the deportation, torture and murder of thousands. He is said to have beaten to death with his own hands the leader of the French Resistance, Jean Moulin.

At the Liberation, Barbie made his way to the American zone of occupation in Bavaria and was signed up as an agent. A former U.S. Army officer recalls paying him \$1,700 a month, which was high wages in those years.

In 1949, the French learned where he was and asked that he be extradited. The U.S. authorities stalled, then said they had lost touch with him. He had in fact been provided with phony papers and spirited to Bolivia.

The French learned in 1963 that Barbie was working in South America with the CIA and West German intelligence.

As an expert in Gestapo police methods, he enjoyed close relations with several military regimes. It was not until a liberal government took over in Bolivia last year that Barbie was finally shipped to France.

All of Europe now knows that much of the story. But Washington refuses to open the dossier on Barbie, on grounds of national security. It might, on the contrary, be very good for our national security to open it.

Our view of secret services is pretty much the James Bond story. In truth, the secret services are more like rocks in marshy ground; tip one over and weird things crawl out.

We got a glimpse of some of these creatures in the Watergate trial: E. Howard Hunt (himself an author of spy thrillers), the incredible Gordon Liddy, the brutal Cubans. We'll get another glimpse in Seymour Hersh's forthcoming book, "The Price of Power: Kissinger in Nixon's White House."

Mr. Kissinger himself, incidentally, served in Army intelligence in postwar Germany, but what I am referring to here is Mr. Hersh's description of a breed of "false-flag" CIA agents who doubled as gangsters and smugglers in South America.

One of them turned up briefly in the plotting against President Salvador Allende of Chile. This agent was a drunk, a brawler, some sort of racketeer and a terrible security risk.

Add him to the list of criminals and crimes that have been linked to "The Company" only in the last few years: the Wilson-Terpil Libyan connection, the worldwide Nugin-Hand banking scandal, a car-theft ring in Southern California, a shady bank in the Bahamas, an international swindler based in Liechtenstein, and so on.

These are cases that have emerged despite CIA efforts to keep the lid on.

What else is hidden under those rocks? And what for?

What, after all, did Klaus Barbie ever do for us? Our postwar operations in Eastern Europe were a bloody failure, and our dealings with Latin dictators have been a disgrace.

We confuse intelligence with covert action, with romance and adventure. But secrecy often engenders crime and folly, not information. Our most reliable source of information today as in the past has been the humdrum study of communications and publications.

Compare that with the help-wanted ads now being run by an unleashed CIA:

"Careers . . . with new horizons! Assignments in foreign lands that challenge your every talent."

In short, more Gordon Liddys.

It should make us feel very insecure.