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Questions Remain in the Mengele Case

Our intelligence sources are not convinced that Dr. Josef Mengele, the Nazi war criminal, is dead. They believe that evidence of his alleged drowning in 1979 could have been manufactured in an elaborate hoax to throw off legions of Mengele hunters, some of whom may have been getting uncomfortably close to the Auschwitz "Angel of Death."

At first blush, the evidence of his demise is impressive. It includes not only the remains found in Brazil, but letters and other documents. There is also the testimony of Mengele's son and exiles who knew him while he was on the lam.

But American and Israeli intelligence sources told our associate Lucette Lagnado that the story of Mengele's accidental drowning is contradicted by other evidence:

- The testimony of Gilda Stammer, the Hungarian woman who claims that she and her husband gave Mengele refuge in Brazil for several years starting in 1962, doesn't jibe with other, more authoritative evidence. Also, her husband has yet to be interviewed to confirm or deny her account.

- Stammer said Mengele lived alone in Brazil. Yet there is documented evidence that his second wife, Marta, and stepson, Karl-Heinz, were with him in South America through 1964.

- Members of Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner's staff admitted to the CIA that Mengele lived in Paraguay until 1965—three years after Stammer said Mengele had settled in Brazil. The staff members also told the CIA that Mengele moved to Portugal in the late 1960s and "sent correspondence, including Christmas cards, to them

from Portugal until late 1980"—a year after he was supposed to have drowned.

- Stammer insists that Mengele was never away from their home for more than a day or two during the years he spent with them. Yet a CIA report indicates that Mengele was a frequent visitor to Paraguay after 1965. Our associate also interviewed a Paraguayan rancher who said he stayed in the room next to Mengele for extended periods as late as the 1970s. A room was kept for Mengele at the small Europea Hotel in Asuncion, the rancher said.

- The circumstances surrounding news of Mengele's death were bizarre, to say the least. After years of inaction, West German police got an anonymous tip that led them to raid the home of Hans Sedlmayer, a longtime executive of the Mengele family tractor firm. There they found documents that led to the evidence of Mengele's drowning. It couldn't have come at a more suspicious time—just as several governments were zeroing in on Mengele, and after millions of dollars in reward money had been offered.

- Before the drowning story broke, the Mengele family attorney, Fritz Steinacher, publicly affirmed that he was "still" Josef Mengele's lawyer. Steinacher also made a secret visit to Israel a few weeks before the tip to West German police led to the discovery of the old Nazi's supposed grave in Brazil.

Did Steinacher return from Israel with alarming news for his client? Did this have anything to do with the sudden appearance of evidence a few weeks later that Mengele was dead?

The Mengele mystery still has not been solved.