

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 8 PARADEWASHINGTON POST
30 June 1985

Can Josef Mengele Be Caught?

BY JACK ANDERSON

FOR 25 YEARS, I have been searching for Josef Mengele, the Auschwitz death camp doctor who for a terrible moment in time was god of the inmates, with life-or-death power over them. He routinely decided who should go to the gas chambers, who should be used for hideous medical experiments, who should be worked to death.

Witnesses remember him as a soft-spoken man who conducted his horrors with gentle efficiency while sweet melodies from his phonograph mingled with the cries of the tortured, and fragrant scents from his garden mixed with the smell of cooking flesh. Inmates called him the "Angel of Death."

Mengele kept meticulous accounts of his experiments, but both he and his files vanished after the Russians overran Auschwitz in 1945. I picked up his trail in 1960. I found some of his hideouts—a remote village in the fetid jungles of Paraguay, a cozy hotel room in Asunción, a Nazi settlement in the hinterlands of Chile. One time, I was only three weeks behind him.

Can he be caught? At this writing, he is still on the loose—the world's most-wanted fugitive. But his luck at last may be running out.

Last Sept. 2, I recounted in PARADE the anguished recollections of the Auschwitz twins. The Justice Department has since ordered a worldwide manhunt for Mengele, coordinating efforts with West Germany and Israel to find and prosecute him for "crimes against humanity." And nearly \$3.5 million has been put up as a reward for Mengele's capture—by Israel, the friends of the Simon Wiesenthal Center. *The Washington Times*, West Germany and the Nazi-hunters Simon Wiesenthal and Beate Klarsfeld.

Despite reports from Brazil on June 6 that Mengele may have died several years ago in a drowning accident, many believe he is still alive. Witnesses say he is now a haggardly handsome man

with a beleaguered air. They say he projects an eerily dignified presence, always wearing fashionable suits, even on steamy summer days.

According to his SS file, Mengele was born on March 16, 1911, in Günzburg on the Danube. He earned advanced degrees in medicine and philosophy. Photographs show a darkly handsome young man, with a trace of a smile, in immaculate civilian attire.

In 1943, he was assigned as a camp doctor at Auschwitz. Though only 32 years old, he was swiftly promoted to chief medical officer. A confidential SS evaluation said of him in 1944: "Mengele has always proved to be an excellent officer, respected and well-liked... He thoroughly commands the field of anthropology... Mengele has not displayed any weakness in character."

I sent my associate Lucette Lagnado to the scene of Mengele's crimes to look for witnesses and documents. At the Auschwitz Museum in Poland, the chief curator said that, after a 20-year search, she had found only a few documents: One was a paper signed by Mengele, "enclosing" a boy's hand for analysis.

After the war, Nazi war criminals were rounded up for prosecution. But Mengele was scarcely mentioned at the doctors' trial at Nuremberg. Lagnado spoke with Telford Taylor, who had been the chief American prosecutor at Nuremberg, and searched through his papers. The only relevant document, dated Nov. 7, 1947, noted that Mengele had sent to Berlin 20 to 30 shipments of blood at regular intervals. "It goes without saying that this blood was not derived from any blood donors," the document continued. "In fact, Auschwitz inmates were forced to submit to Dr. Mengele, who would then syphon their blood... until they would die."

Though the American prosecutors wanted to bring him to justice—and Dr. Gizella Perl, who had served under Mengele at Auschwitz, offered to testify against him—Mengele escaped prosecution. Taylor notified Washington tersely: "Our records show that Dr. Mengele is dead as of October 6th, 1946." The case against him was closed.

One Nuremberg investigator, Hans Wolfson, did try to pry information from the Mengele family, which he found living in luxury in Günzburg, in the American zone of Germany. Hours of interrogation yielded nothing. "They lied like hell," he recalled. One document, perhaps meant as a smoke screen, suggested the family had disinherited him.

How did the Angel of Death elude the Allied dragnet? Documents give brief, tantalizing references to Mengele. But either no follow-up was made or the file has vanished. Great gaping holes pock his escape route, a trail overgrown by years of assiduous cover-up.

My associate managed to get hold of a file on Mengele, heretofore unavailable in the West, which had been kept by the Polish Military Commission for the Investigation of Nazi War Crimes. Various memos and letters, dating to 1947, indicate that Mengele was hiding out not in the American zone, as the press has speculated, but in the Soviet zone of occupied Germany under the alias "Dr. Scapesius." The Poles tried to follow the Scapesius clue, but the Soviets reported that there was no evidence that Mengele/Scapesius had ever been in their hands. As one report put it, "Mengele was one of the few doctors in Auschwitz, maybe the only one, who disappeared without leaving a trace."

The Polish investigation concluded: "Until 1950, Mengele resided in Germany. Then, most likely through Greece and Spain, he left for Latin America." U.S. intelligence sources believe Mengele escaped through Italy, probably disguised as a priest. Both U.S. and Polish sources agree that the Nazi underground, known as "Odessa" but also called "Spider" by Nazi romantics, smuggled Mengele out of Europe. All sources also agree, in the words of the Polish report, that "Josef Mengele is still hiding out in the territories of Latin America."

I began my search in 1960 in Buenos Aires, where I cultivated the confidence of some former SS officers. (On Nov. 13, 1960, I revealed in PARADE the whereabouts of several Nazi mass murderers on the lam in South America.) These men spoke admiringly of Josef

Continued

Mengele and praised his "courage" for defiantly using his real name. Thanks to family wealth, he had acquired a small factory that produced pharmaceuticals. He lived comfortably in the German section of Buenos Aires and was treated with deference.

One SS officer, recalling a discussion, said Mengele spoke appreciatively of Communist racial experiments. He told how Stalin had sought to create perfect police by crossing Lithuanians with natives of Kirghiz—the first known for strength and fearlessness, the latter for cunning, cruelty and indifference to human life. He had done similar research at Auschwitz, Mengele said.

Mengele lost some of his arrogance after Adolf Eichmann was kidnapped by Israeli commandos in 1960. Suddenly he dropped from sight. I later learned that he had holed up in the rain forest along the Paraná River, which divides Argentina and Paraguay. He lived in rustic splendor, I was told, on the Paraguayan side. The nearest town was a haven for ex-Nazis, who were heavily armed. No intruders could approach the Mengele home without being challenged. All other access was obstructed by barriers of marshy backwaters, fallen trees and thickets. But just in case some Israeli commandos penetrated the area, my sources said, Mengele kept a boat for a fast getaway.

Thereafter, Mengele apparently kept on the move, assuming phony identities, using forged passports, staying with trusted Nazi collaborators. A brief prepared for Sen. Alfonse D'Amato (R, N.Y.) by several Western intelligence groups asserts that Mengele "lived in Paraguay from 1959 until 1965." The staff of the Paraguayan dictator Alfredo Stroessner admitted that the death camp doctor had "moved to Brazil" in 1965 and then "to Portugal in the late 1960s." Staff members said Mengele "sent correspondence, including Christmas cards, to them from Portugal until late 1980."

One witness met Mengele in Venezuela; another encountered him at a ski resort in Switzerland; still another saw him in the south of France. There is a report that he once stayed only seven miles from his family's home in Günzburg. Another hideout, I heard, was a Nazi colony in Chile called Colonia Dignidad.

A 1972 CIA cable, quoting a petty criminal, reported that Mengele "lives in Encarnación, Paraguay, and is involved in narcotics." It added: "Mengele's current alias is Henrique Wollman. Stroessner, the Paraguayan president, is protecting him."

Stroessner's protection is well known. What's not well known is that the U.S. Embassy in Paraguay has tried to discourage Mengele's pursuers, apparently for fear of offending Stroessner. The exception was Robert White,

who served as ambassador in the late 1970s. After settling in, he asked to see the Mengele file. "There was no such file," White told Lucette Lagnado. "I was surprised that nothing had been filed, since Mengele lived a few blocks away from the American Embassy."

The ambassador conducted his own investigation, even venturing into Nazi hangouts. He eventually established that Mengele had been granted Paraguayan citizenship.

Despite these reports, the State Department told members of Congress who inquired about Mengele: "Our embassy has often heard reports that Josef Mengele and other Nazi war criminals are residing in Paraguay... But the embassy has... been unable to confirm the actual presence of Dr. Mengele in Paraguay at any given time."

Meanwhile, Lagnado attempted to smoke out the evil doctor in Paraguay. She began on Herrera Street, a bustling esplanade of shops in downtown Asunción where a few Jewish merchants had set up shop. She sought out Emilio Wolf, a butcher, who reportedly had spotted Mengele over the years in Asunción. A short, burly man, Wolf smiled graciously at his visitor.

"I am looking for information on Dr. Mengele," said Lagnado. The smile froze. "Get away from here!" Wolf shouted. "Get out! Do you want me to lose my store?" Lagnado later learned that Wolf had once identified a body as that of Edouard Roschmann, a former Nazi concentration camp commandant. The next morning, Wolf's shop was sprayed with machine-gun bullets from a passing car.

A few weeks earlier, the Paraguayan government had suggested that its small Jewish community put a paid announcement in the newspapers stating that it didn't think Mengele was in the country. At the risk of their comfortable existence, the Jews told the regime they couldn't publish such a statement.

Stroessner then leaned on Israel, reminding its diplomats of Paraguay's support in the United Nations and of the profitable military and economic ties between the two countries. It would be a shame, he said, to endanger this valuable relationship over something so trivial as an aging Nazi war criminal. Israeli sources told my associate that hunting for Mengele is not on their government's agenda. Isser Harel, former head of Israel's Mossad intelligence service and the man responsible for nabbing Adolf Eichmann, told Lagnado that it would take "a combat brigade" to get to Mengele. Since the 1960s, therefore, Israel has kept its Nazi-hunters out of Paraguay.

Nevertheless, the Nazi-hunter Wiesenthal traced Mengele to a community of German Mennonites in Paraguay. Mengele farm equipment (the family business in Germany) is widely used in the colony, and Wiesenthal was convinced that the Mennonites had sheltered the fugitive. Lagnado persuaded a leader of the Mennonites to meet with her. He

acknowledged that his community used Mengele farm equipment but denied it had ever shielded Mengele. Then the nervous patriarch abruptly fled.

Confidential sources said Mengele had lived for extended periods in the Europea Hotel, a small, German-operated establishment in downtown Asunción that reportedly had been a Nazi hangout. After some prodding, Frieda Dingeldein, the Paraguayan widow of the German who had owned the hotel (she now lives in a squalid Indian village outside the capital), conceded to Lagnado that Mengele "might have been" there. She quickly added, "But I would not have known about it." Her son—tall, blonde, blue-eyed Enrique Dingeldein—finally did agree that the doctor might have stayed at the hotel. "But only a few times," he insisted.

According to some regular guests at the Europea, Mengele sometimes would vanish for months. He never told his neighbors where he had been; his room was always waiting for him.

Where is Mengele today? Thanks to his wealth, he "is able to move freely," according to the CIA. Wiesenthal picked up eyewitness reports that Mengele had been spotted in Paraguay in June 1984. The CIA received similar information: "In August 1984, unconfirmed sightings of Mengele were reported in Paraguayan border cities."

There have been reports that he has become a major drug dealer. According to one CIA report, he owns a farm in partnership with another smuggler "45 kilometers from Asunción, near an airstrip." The alleged partner was arrested in New York for cocaine smuggling. But, lamented the CIA, "he escaped."

Some skeptics question why the world should bother with a worn-out, 74-year-old war criminal who is of no consequence in the 1980s. The answer may lie in the Phoenician legend: "From the teeth of the slain dragon there will spring up new enemies of mankind." Sinister mass murderers have continued to stalk the killing fields from Pol Pot's Kampuchea to Soviet-occupied Afghanistan. The dragon's teeth, no matter how old or festering, must be pulled. 19