

## On My Mind

A. M. ROSENTHAL

# The Waldheim File

In 1948, the United States representative to the U.N. War Crimes Commission voted to list Kurt Waldheim as an "A" suspect — the most serious category — for his work in Yugoslavia as an Austrian officer during World War II.

The case vanished. No connection ever seemed to be made with the Waldheim fast rising in the Austrian Foreign Ministry.

Over the years the U.S. Embassy in Vienna then sent confidential reports on Mr. Waldheim to Washington. Some have been obtained by Prof. Robert Herzstein of the University of South Carolina history department. He has made them available to me, with a specific purpose in mind.

September 1961: "Waldheim is considered by many sources to be outstanding among officials in the Ministry and he has proven most cooperative and helpful in promoting U.S. interests."

July 1964: "The Embassy has found Dr. Waldheim extremely cooperative and friendly and considers him to be outstanding among Austrian Foreign Service officers. ... understanding and receptive to American thinking."

August 1966: "... a thoughtful, dignified individual who has been cooperative and helpful in promoting U.S. interests."

August 1968: "... cooperative and receptive to U.S. interests."

We do remember Kurt Waldheim, don't we? That was the first sentence in this column on Nov. 26, 1989. To help Professor Herzstein achieve his purpose it is important to ask it again.

Mr. Waldheim, with the help of the U.S. and other major powers, became Secretary General of the U.N. in 1971. He was re-elected four years later. But when he tried for a third term, the U.S. was one of only a few countries that wanted him.

Then he became even better known in the world. The details of his wartime record, which he had expunged from his official biography, became public, including services to the German military authorities as they de-

ported Serbs, Greek Jews and other prey to their deaths.

Still, he was elected President of Austria. In 1987 he was put on the U.S. watch list, prohibited entry as a foreigner who assisted or participated in "activities amounting to persecution" during World War II.

The questions that remained are emphasized now by the records Professor Herzstein obtained — and their affectionate euphemisms about his cooperation in promoting the interests of the U.S.

How was the record of Mr. Waldheim's service to the Third Reich military machine made to vanish from international diplomacy during all his years in the Austrian Foreign Ministry? Why did the U.S. turn out a sanitized biography in 1952, devoid of information about his wartime record and of that American War Crimes Commission vote in 1948?

Was the U.S. simply a little forgetful when it backed him for Secretary General in 1971? If so, why did a 1972 C.I.A. inquiry into his wartime record turn up nothing? Just a bungle?

Or was U.S. support of Mr. Waldheim for Secretary General made despite knowledge by some American officials of his war record? Was it payment for his "cooperation" as an Austrian diplomat and in expectation of favors as Secretary General?

How many other nations knew of his past but had similar expectations? Is painstaking forgetfulness still an American practice with, let's say, criminals of the K.G.B.?

Professor Herzstein, author of "Waldheim: The Missing Years," is working on another book about the concealment of the Waldheim past. (He also has a new biography out of Henry R. Luce.)

After years of investigation, Professor Herzstein says Mr. Waldheim "was protected by the U.S. Government, provided information in return for that protection and profited from the Government's willingness to obliterate his wartime service."

Now: His purpose in giving me the "assessments" above, which he got from the State Department, is to try to focus Congressional attention on opening the more important and still closed Waldheim files of the C.I.A.

Professor Herzstein and The New York Times are considering legal action to overturn C.I.A. refusals. But he thinks it urgent that Congress itself pass legislation preventing Government agencies from denying information about World War II war crimes.

Myself, I think passing such legislation would be the best way, productive and revealing, for members of Congress to show that they do indeed remember Kurt Waldheim. □

The New York Times A-19  
The Los Angeles Times \_\_\_\_\_  
The Wall Street Journal \_\_\_\_\_  
The Washington Times \_\_\_\_\_  
USA Today \_\_\_\_\_  
Associated Press \_\_\_\_\_  
UPI \_\_\_\_\_  
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