

CIA Files Confirm U.S. Used

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U.S. intelligence agencies used a rogue's gallery of Nazi war criminals after World War II to help cope with the new threats posed by the Soviet Union and its communist allies, a long-secret trove of CIA records showed yesterday.

The collaboration was mainly with middle-ranking Nazis, men with obscure names but often deadly backgrounds. Among them were an SS officer who hunted Jews in Genoa, an emissary in Rome wanted for a 1944 massacre, a Nazi intelligence officer "well versed" in the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz and the "intellectual leader" of an SS think tank who was wanted in Poland for war crimes.

Their work for Hitler's Germany and then the Americans and other Western intelligence agencies is detailed in 20 CIA "name files," the first of several hundred to be made public. The CIA had refused to acknowledge the existence of the records until Congress passed a 1998 law requiring their declassification.

Files on Adolf Hitler and other notorious war criminals were among the 10,000 pages released yesterday, but the most striking disclosures were about a second tier of Nazis who aligned themselves with Western powers eager to use their expertise against the Soviet Union. Many of these lesser-known men "committed serious crimes, but in

the postwar period received light punishment, no punishment at all, or received compensation because Western intelligence agencies considered them useful assets in the Cold War," according to a panel of historians enlisted by the government to study the records.

Some of the links between ex-Nazis and Western intelligence agencies have been known, or suspected, for years. But in the absence of hard evidence, unfounded allegations and conspiracy theories also flourished. The CIA records, for example, should put to rest rumors that Gestapo chief Heinrich Mueller and former U.N. Secretary General Kurt Waldheim were U.S. intelligence assets, historians said.

On the other hand, the documents confirm that three Nazis charged with war crimes—Emil Augsburg, Wilhelm Hoettl and Klaus Barbie—were employed by the U.S. Army's Counterintelligence Corps or the Office of Strategic Services, the precursor of the CIA, according to former representative Elizabeth Holtzman (D-N.Y.), a member of a federal panel in charge of carrying out the 1998 law. She spoke at a news conference at the U.S. Holocaust Museum.

Another member of the panel, Washington lawyer Richard Ben-Veniste, said the files suggest that using the Nazis was "short-sighted and counterproductive" because of their "inherent defects as human beings and their vulnerability to being

blackmailed."

Historian Norman Goda of Ohio University noted that in the files "the moral question—should we use these people—is never asked." Instead, he said, U.S. intelligence officials apparently decided: "We can use them, but we certainly can't trust them."

Augsburg, for example, was an SS major at the Wannsee Institute—an SS think tank—who also took part in "special duties," a euphemism for the execution of Jews and others deemed undesirable by the Nazis. Although wanted in Poland for war crimes, he was used by the CIC from 1947 to 1948 as an expert on Soviet affairs. American University historian Richard Breitman said Augsburg became an informant thanks in part to his insistence that he had eight trunks of files about the activities of communist agents—although these were never found.

Augsburg eventually was dropped by the Army, but he remained a member of the Gehlen organization, a counter-espionage network organized at the request of U.S. occupation forces by Reinhard Gehlen, a German general who had been head of Nazi intelligence on the Eastern front. Augsburg was finally dismissed by West Germany's intelligence agency in 1966 amid suspicions he was a Soviet double agent.

There appears to be little new in the file on Barbie, the Gestapo chief known as the "Butcher of Lyon" for his hand in the torture, deportation

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and deaths of 4,000 Jews and Resistance fighters. The Counterintelligence Corps protected Barbie from French prosecution after the war and helped him reach South America. He stayed there until 1983, when he was deported to France to face trial. He died in a French prison hospital in 1991.

Hoettl, an SS major who worked in Budapest and Vienna and was "well versed" in the deportation of Jews to Auschwitz, was arrested by American troops in 1945. But he soon established himself "as a peddler of intelligence, good and bad, to anyone who would pay him," including Israel, France, West Germany, Russia, Hungary and the Vatican, according to historians who examined his 600-page file. He allegedly set up a Swiss bank account with purloined Nazi funds at war's end and lived comfortably in Vienna until his death in 1999.

In addition to Augsburg and Hoettl, nine other Nazis who belonged to organizations deemed criminal at the Nuremberg war crimes trials had contacts with the Gehlen organization. Two Nazis based in Italy, Guido Zimmer and Eugen Dollmann, were helped by U.S. authorities after the war.

Zimmer, who tracked down Jews in Genoa and Milan, and Dollmann, a suspect in a 1944 massacre of 335 Italian civilians, had a role in "Operation Sunrise"—wartime negotiations with the OSS that led to the early surrender of German forces in

northern Italy.

The file on Mueller indicates that he died in the final days of the Battle of Berlin and was buried, wearing an SS general's uniform, in a mass grave in East Berlin.

Historians called the Mueller file "a hit," but said Hitler's was "a miss." The one new document about Hitler was a 1937 prediction by a German surgeon, Ferdinand Sauerbruch, that "Hitler would wind up as

the craziest criminal the world had ever seen."

The Waldheim file includes a 1945 report, presumably from the British, indicating Waldheim's status as an intelligence officer in a German army group in the Balkans. Eli Rosenbaum, head of the Nazi-hunting Office of Special Investigations at the Justice Department, said he was dismayed that no one had asked the CIA to check Waldheim's background when he was nominated as U.N. secretary general in 1971.

Staff researcher Madonna Lebling contributed to this report.