



THE LAST DAYS OF HITLER

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF JOSEPH MENEGELE

GERALD ASTOR

THE READER WILL BE TOTALLY ENGROSSED, HORRIFIED, AND ULTIMATELY ILLUMINATED.

Kirkus Reviews

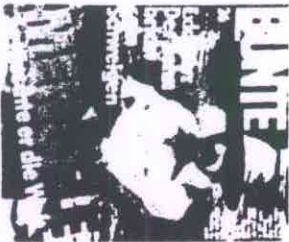
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copy to MENEGELE

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X-rays of the skull taken from the grave at Emlau were superimposed by computers upon photographs of Mengele to prove that the body was that of the long sought war criminal.
Credit: Black Star



Using photographs obtained from Rolf Mengele, the cover of the German magazine *Bunte* featured a straw-hatted, smiling Mengele with Rolf's memoirs. The pictures proved to be less exclusive when Stern, using a set from the Bossertis who be-friended Mengele, published a se-ries at the same time.
Credit: Wide World Photos

Elsa Guldian, who worked as a maid for the man she knew as Señor Pedro, holds a 1945 photograph of Mengele. He asked her to live with him in 1978 when she said she was quitting to be married.
Credit: Camara Trea, Black Star



Flight

German Army routed, troops surrendering by the tens of thou-sands, a resourceful man like Mengele could rather easily have circumvented checkpoints alert to deserters.

In 1945 Irene Mengele rented a small cottage from a farmer at Autenreid, a tiny community several miles from Glinzburg, and moved in with Rolf, the son born to her and Joseph in 1944. Many believe that Joseph Mengele hid in this house during the immediate post World War II years. When Hans Eberhard Klein questioned the owner about his tenants he maintained that he never saw any person there other than Frau Mengele. Lawyer Gerald Posner, a Mengele archivist, says he spoke with a person who swore he saw Mengele in the Glinzburg area during these years. Klein says, "There is no evidence that Mengele was in Glinzburg," which is not a flat denial that the fugitive did once reside in Autenreid in the Glinzburg area.

Felix Kuballa, a German reporter, put together one account of Mengele's movements after Auschwitz for a 1985 TV broad-cast. Kuballa believes Mengele left Auschwitz headed either for the KZ Grossrosen or Bergen-Belsen. While accompanying a transport to one of the camps he probably fled.

Kuballa turned up a witness named Thomas Bergtold, a native of Burgau, not too far from Glinzburg. Bergtold told Kuballa that he was a prisoner of war in a British camp near Neunmunster. While chatting with comrades about bartering cigarettes for food, another inmate noticed Bergtold's Swabian dialect and inquired about his hometown. After he told him, the newcomer asked if Bergtold knew Glinzburg and the Mengele factory. When Bergtold said of course he did, the other man said, "I am Mengele. I come from Glinzburg."

The official story given by Rolf Mengele to the magazine *Bunte* after his father's certified death, based on letters and conversa-tions with the doctor, says: "At the end of the war, my unit was located in Cechostovakia. During the night of the armistice, we

White House nor the U.S. Department of State under any administration had ever denounced Mengele or applied pressure on a country where he supposedly resided. Interestingly, Senators D'Amato and Specter, both Republicans calling for the capture of Mengele, did not embarrass their leader, President Reagan, by asking why his administration had not moved against Mengele.

To continue the chronicle of the trackers, Beate Klarsfeld had returned to Asunción to further press her case. Accompanying her were Menachem Rosensaft, a member of the Children of Auschwitz Survivors (his mother and father had both been imprisoned there), Bishop Francis Mugavero, the Roman Catholic head of the Brooklyn, N.Y., diocese whose participation lent an air of ecumenicism, and Brooklyn District Attorney Elizabeth Holtzman. Herself Jewish and a twin, as a member of Congress she had sponsored the formation of the Office of Special Investigation. Additionally, some said Mr. Holtzman might have had further reasons to be interested in the case, such as a possible rumor for the U.S. Senate seat occupied by Alfonse D'Amato. In any case, once again the Paraguayans proved polite but firm in their insistence that Mengele did not live there anymore. They did offer a concession, though: the outsiders could monitor the efforts of the government to find the person they said was not there.

The Mengele hunt was further stimulated by an expedition to Auschwitz of survivors on the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of the camp. Among those making the pilgrimage were Marc Berkowitz, Ruth Eliaz, who had killed her own newborn, Vera Kriegel, who saw the "wall of eyes" in the doctor's laboratory. From Poland the group traveled to Israel, where a tribunal staged a mock trial. Dignitaries present included Gideon Hausner, the prosecutor of Eichmann, Simon Wiesenthal, for-

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mer Nuremberg trials prosecutor Telford Taylor, and historian Yehuda Bauer.

In the wake of such events came a deluge of publicity as journalists now descended on both Ginzburg and South America. Indeed, the search for Mengele became a kind of cottage industry. Hotels in Asunción housed a steady stream of reporters, writers, and TV journalists. Alejandro von Eckstein priced his offerings at between \$1,500 and \$3,000. ABC-TV interviewed him, and he chauffeured Gerald Posner, a New York lawyer, about the country. Posner announced that he had amassed a collection of 25,000 pages of documents on Mengele and had interviewed 800 people in South America. He became something of a voice of authority for *Time*, among others, though there is no evidence his 25,000 pages were closely examined for their value.

Posner also talked on ABC, declaring that Mengele had lived in Asunción "for nearly five years" and that a family (Alban Krugg's survivors?) last saw Mengele "in 1982." It turned out that Mengele had been dead for three years. Posner completed his ABC piece with: "I have evidence that I believe is trustworthy that Dr. Mengele in the last eighteen months has visited both Brazil and Chile"—an active year for a corpse. Posner also said he was writing a book with John Ware, the producer of the Granada TV film in which "Nazi Mueller" regaled the interviewer with tales of Mengele in Paraguay in 1978.

More equivocal and disingenuous before ABC-TV's cameras was President Alfredo Stroessner, who told correspondent John Martin, "I will be very sincere," said Stroessner. "I don't know where he is and we cannot find out where he is."

The prevailing mood of the hometown, Ginzburg, to all of this was resentment—not toward its fugitive son but to the reporters who came to town to chronicle him, his family, and his background. Unfair, was the consensus, to blame the town for

ALEJANDRO VON ECKSTEIN Emigrated 1959
From ESTOWA in Paraguay in 1936 (was
a witness to Mengele sightings and profited
from it)



the Bosserts broke down and admitted that their friend Peter Hochbichler was Joseph Mengele and that he had been buried at Embu in 1979. That was on June 5, 1985. The next day the police rounded up Gita Stammer; her husband Geza was at sea, a passenger on a ship commanded by one of his sons.

On June 7 the Brazilians, accompanied by a horde of reporters, photographers, and TV cameramen, exhumed the body that had been buried as Wolfgang Gerhard. One investigator branched the remains of the skull for the cameras, and observers, including forensic scientists, feared that the casual digging might damage bones and make identification even more difficult.

Within a few days an impressive international team of specialists was on the scene prepared to aid the Brazilian experts. At first the reaction of many Nazi hunters was skepticism. In Israel, Isser Harel and Menachem Russel both expressed doubt. The Klarfelds suspected a hoax. Wiesenthal was dubious. Gerald Posner appeared on TV to say he had contacted a source in São Paulo who told of the coroner's insistence that he had buried a fifty-two-year-old man in 1979: Mengele, of course, would have been much older.

There was good reason to be wary. Jorge Laque remembered a "dead" Mengele in Paraguay that proved out to be a Czech doctor. Erwin Erdstein had claimed that he killed Mengele in Brazil during the 1960s. In 1970 a report had come from Assunção that Mengele had died; the corpse bore the name of Flores. The Institute of German-Paraguay Relations had reported Mengele's demise in Bolivia in 1976; the body was cremated and there was a report that the missing man had committed suicide in Portugal.

Many with strong reservations wondered why the family and friends would have allowed his death to pass unmentioned for

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six years, during which time the Mengele family suffered the badgering of the media. Joseph Mengele's lawyer in Germany, Fritz Seineracker, who defended a number of war criminals, had promised he would inform authorities when his client died.

Wiesenthal began to take the possibility seriously as he learned that unlike other instances this investigation had begun in West Germany and was based on information obtained from a raid on Hans Sedlmeier's home. The first report from experts indicated that the man who had lived with the Stammers and had been befriended by the Bosserts was indeed Mengele. David A. Crown, former chief of the CIA Laboratory and Gideon Epstein, an analyst of the Forensic Document Laboratory at the Immigration and Naturalization Service of the United States, both handwriting specialists, said they were "thoroughly convinced beyond a shadow of doubt" that the papers collected from the Stammers and Bosserts were written by Joseph Mengele.

Matching the bones with the living being who swaggered through Auschwitz was more difficult. There was a paucity of records for comparison purposes. Much talk centered on a pelvic abnormality. Wiesenthal said Mengele had fractured a hip in a motorcycle accident. The dossier on Mengele indicated only a fender-bender incident in the summer of 1943, and Ella Lingen could not recall any period when Mengele was laid up with an injury. However, no one could locate a medical history that covered Mengele's war wounds or other desired details. The dental records, for example, were all World War II reports, and most of the original teeth of the corpse had been replaced.

On the other hand the forensic scientists could determine the precise height of the Embu body, which matched Mengele. The age at death also fitted the long-time fugitive. And although the details on the teeth were sketchy, the investigators could declare: "Skeletal evidence indicates the upper central incisors

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