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

Using photographs obtained from Roll Mengele, the roving German magazine Bunt, featured straw-hatted, smiling Mengele with Alin memoirs. The pictures proved to be less exclusive when Sten, using a set from the Hossein who befriended Mengele, published a series of pictures of Mengele, notably his face and his glasses, found in a drawer of a bureau in his room in Brazil. Elsa (Milian, who von ked as a maid for the man she knew as Senor 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 Tres. Black Star

Flight German Army routed, troops surrendering by the tens of thousands, 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 Gunzburg, and moved in with Rolf, the son born to her and Joseph in 1944. Klein says, 'There is no evidence that Mengele was in Gunzburg,' which is not a flat denial that the fugitive did once reside in Autenreid in the Gunzburg area.

Felix Kuballa, a German reporter, put together one account of Mengele's movements after Auschwitz in a 1985 TV broadcast. 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 rode in the ZK of former prisoners. While accompanying an east-bound British B-424, Kuballa declared that a conversation with the driver, who identified himself in the cockpit as a captain, confirmed that he had seen Mengele in the camp. The driver said, 'I have no memory of Mengele in the cockpit during these years. I made no note of him anywhere in the cockpit or anywhere on the plane. He is unknown to me.'

The official story given by Rolf Mengele to the magazine Bunt after his father's certified death, based on letters and conversations with the doctor, says: 'At the end of the war, my unit was located in Czechoslovakia. During the night of the armistice, our unit moved south and east to Austria. During this movement we had a few accidents. We passed through the border between Hungary and Austria. On the night of the armistice, we were ambushed by the Hungarian border guards. We lost many men, and many were wounded. We continued our movement eastward. On the morning of the armistice, we reached the border between Austria and Germany. We crossed the border without incident. We then moved south to Austria. We arrived in Vienna on the evening of the armistice.'
Discovery of evidence against Dr. Mengele in South America generated renewed efforts to locate the former Nazi war criminal. Among those leading the hunt were a team from the Office of Special Investigations, which included Beate Klarsfeld, Menachem Rosensaft, and Brooklyn District Attorney Elizabeth Holtzman. The team's efforts were supported by a mock trial in Israel, with prominent figures such as Gideon Hausner and Simon Wiesenthal participating. The investigations also received public support, with the White House and the U.S. Department of State showing interest in the case.

The Mengele hunt was further stimulated by an expedition to Auschwitz on the fortieth anniversary of the liberation of the camp. Survivors such as Marc Berkowitz and Ruth Elias, who had killed her own newborn, marked the occasion. The event highlighted the continued interest in Mengele's whereabouts and the efforts of those seeking justice.

In the wake of this renewed interest, journalists descended on Ginzburg and South America, covering the event and interviewing witnesses. These efforts were part of a broader search for Mengele, which had been ongoing since his escape from a Brazilian prison in 1976.

Despite the efforts, Mengele remained elusive, and the search continued into the 1980s.
On June 7 the Brazilian experts, accompanied by a horde of reporters, photographers, and TV cameramen, exhumed the body that had been buried as Wolfgang Gerhard. One investigator brandished 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, Hier Hard and Menachem Russek both expressed doubt. The Klarsfelds suspected a hoax. Wiesenthal was dubious. Gerald Steinacher, the noted lawyer and former Austrian envoy, was skeptical. Fritz Steinacker, 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 there was a chance that the missing man had committed suicide.

The police rounded up Gitta Stammer; her husband Geza was at sea, a passenger on a ship commanded by one of his sons. She was quickly identified. The Brazilian experts discovered a passport and a letter that suggested the body was that of a dead man. The passport was that of a German named Hermann Geiberger, who had been in the Waffen-SS. The letter was from a relative who had been in Chile. The body was that of a German soldier who had died in a concentration camp.

There was good reason to be wary. Jorge Luque remembered a "dead" Mengele in Paraguay that proved out to be a Czech doctor. Erwin Erdstein had claimed that he killed Mengele in Paraguay in 1976; the body was cremated and there was a report that the missing man had committed suicide in Portugal. There was also a report that the missing man had committed suicide in Spain.

Many with strong reservations wondered why the family and friends would have allowed his death to pass unmentioned for six years, during which time the Mengele family suffered the badgering of the media. Joseph Mengele's lawyer in Brazil, Cesar Truzzi, had promised that when his client died the body would be exhumed.

Wiesenthal was convinced that the body was that of Joseph Mengele. He wrote to the Brazilian coroner with a copy of a letter from the Klarsfelds expressing the same opinion. He also wrote to the Brazilian newspaper, O Globo, expressing his belief that the body was that of the fugitive Nazi doctor. He was also able to obtain copies of the original letters that had been sent to the Mengele family.

The Brazilian coroner's opinion was that the body was that of a fifty-two-year-old man. Wiesenthal was skeptical. He knew that Mengele would have been much older.

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