

Nazi ‘Butcher of Lyon’ was a German intelligence agent

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Klaus Barbie, the Nazi war criminal famously known as the “Butcher of Lyon”, was an agent of the German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) in the 1960s. This was revealed recently by the news magazine *Der Spiegel*.

Adopting the name Klaus Altmann at the time, Barbie operated under the code name “Eagle” (agent number V-43118) and provided the BND with at least 35 political reports in 1966. His payment for this—up to DM 500 (deutschmarks)—was transferred to him via a branch of the Chartered Bank of London in San Francisco. BND files praised the “quintessentially German attitude” of this “decisive enemy of communists”. At the turn of 1966-67, the BND terminated contact with its source, Barbie *alias* Altmann, paying him a final cash settlement of DM 1,000.

This last point was discovered by a history student at the University of Mainz, Peter Hammerschmidt. He is currently working on a degree thesis entitled “‘The Butcher of Lyon’ in the pay of the United States: Concerning the relations between Klaus Barbie and the American secret service”. In September, Hammerschmidt was able to view Barbie’s BND file as part of his scientific work and released his findings about Barbie’s BND past earlier this year.

As a captain in the SS (Hitler’s elite force) from 1940 to 1942, Klaus Barbie tortured and murdered people in the German occupied Netherlands and Belgium. During this time, he was “head of Jewish affairs in the main office of the Reich (empire) Security Department” in The Hague.

From November 1942, he was chief of the Gestapo (Nazi secret police) in Lyon in the area of southern France administered by the pro-fascist Vichy regime of General Petain. His horrifically cruel crimes committed there earned him the title “Butcher of Lyon”. His victims were workers, peasants and members of the resistance—including Jean Moulin, whose arms, legs and ribs were broken in the course of daily interrogations. Women were beaten unconscious, raped and sodomised. Thousands of men and women were tortured, sent to extermination camps or killed by Barbie. These included 41 Jewish children from Izieu, France, aged 3 to 13, whose deportations were arranged by Barbie on April 6, 1944. They died in the gas chambers at Auschwitz.

Towards the end of 1944, Barbie suddenly disappeared, going into hiding somewhere in Germany shortly before the end of war. Accused of numerous crimes, he was sentenced to death *in absentia* by the French authorities for the first time in 1947, and again in 1952 and 1954 following the discovery of further crimes.

However, the wanted war criminal was protected by both the intelligence service of the US army, its Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC), and the German authorities. Hammerschmidt claims that Barbie’s name appeared on the CIC’s payroll in April 1947, although it had been on the allies’ wanted list in the spring of 1946. This saved him from extradition to France and he was able to live in Germany undisturbed.

As an agent of the CIA from 1950, Barbie recruited members for the far-right League of German Youth (BDJ) that was later to be banned. The BDJ was the German vanguard organisation of the infamous Gladio

NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organisation) troops in Europe. This paramilitary organisation with close ties to extreme right-wing terrorists was set up to carry out sabotage and assassinations behind enemy lines in the event of an attack from the Soviet Union. Aided by the US in 1951, Barbie emigrated to Bolivia under the name of Klaus Altmann via the so-called “rat lines”.

Unlike many other war criminals in South America, Barbie did not simply disappear from the scene, but rose to the position of official adviser to Bolivia’s right-wing military dictatorships. Operating from the army’s headquarters, he passed on experience acquired in Lyon that was useful to members of the military secret service in their suppression of political opposition: “interrogation techniques”, “torture methods” and “anti-guerrilla tactics”. Under René Barrientos Ortuno’s military junta, Barbie rose to the post of military advisor for counterinsurgency in 1964-65, receiving a diplomatic passport in 1966.

At the same time, Barbie managed a sawmill under the name of Altmann. He became rich owing to the Vietnam War, when he sold vast quantities of cinchona plant—the raw material for the antimalarial analgesic quinine—to the German chemical company Böhlinger in Mannheim.

He was simultaneously involved in the arms and drug trades. From the mid- to late 1960s, the Butcher of Lyon travelled to South American countries and to Spain and Portugal, supplying their respective dictatorships with weapons. After Colonel Hugo Banzer Suárez’s bloody CIA-backed coup in 1971, Barbie was promoted to a paid consultant to the interior ministry and counter-espionage division of the Bolivian army. In addition, he established his own paramilitary force, which he used to support the military coup by General Luis García Meza in 1980.

During the rule of President Hernán Siles Zuazo two-and-a-half years later, the Bolivian police arrested Barbie on January 19, 1983. In the same year, he was extradited to France and brought to court in Lyon. According to Hammerschmidt, who was also able to carry out research in the US National Archives (NARA) in Washington, a CIA document from December 1983 mentions that the prevailing French government of Francois Mitterrand—for domestic political reasons—had purchased Barbie’s sudden extradition from Bolivia with weapons: small arms, machine guns, antitank weapons and ammunition.

Barbie was accused of crimes against humanity and sentenced to life imprisonment on July 4, 1987. He died in prison in 1991.

The shared history of German intelligence and the CIA

The close cooperation between Barbie and the CIA has been known for some time. What is new is that the Nazi criminal was also on the payroll of the BND. This is not so surprising, however, because the BND was

established by US intelligence agencies.

In the last years of the Second World War, German politicians as well as generals and officers of the army were preparing themselves for the German defeat. They were banking on the mutual hostility of the US, France and Great Britain to the Soviet Union. Carl Friedrich Goerdeler, the right-wing bourgeois politician, former mayor of Leipzig and long-time advisor to Hitler—also one of the “men of July 20” who attempted to assassinate Hitler—wrote in a memorandum to the generals on March 26, 1943: “The two Anglo-Saxon empires share, as does Germany, the vital interest that Bolshevism does not penetrate further to the west. Only Germany can stop the spread of Bolshevism. If Germany is weakened by losses from the war and an unfavourable peace treaty, then Bolshevism will find it easier, perhaps all too easy, to make its way west ...”

Towards the end of World War II and immediately afterwards, the US was particularly intent on gaining access to the Nazis’ scientific and technical knowledge. During the Cold War, it maintained an extensive spy network with the help of ex-Nazis.

Particularly important in this respect was the role of Reinhard Gehlen, Hitler’s chief of military intelligence on the Eastern Front. From 1942 to 1945, he headed the general staff’s espionage division “Foreign Armies in the East”. Gehlen had kept his files safely stored in the belief that he could pass them on to the US after the war, thereby continuing the “fight against Bolshevism” to Germany’s advantage—and his own. “In a Europe arming itself in defence against communism, Germany would again be able to find its place”, writes Gehlen in his memoirs.

Directly after the war, he and his “Organisation Gehlen” were placed at the disposal of the US intelligence service, known then as the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and later the CIA. Gehlen was commissioned to set up a German foreign intelligence service, which was to be directed primarily against the Soviet Union. The US was prepared to use “any bastard, as long as he was anti-communist”, as Harry Rositzke, head of CIA operations in the Soviet Union, put it. Entire leading divisions of the SS Security Service (SD) were sometimes incorporated into the BND.

The German government under Konrad Adenauer (Christian Democratic Union) was not initially informed about the CIA’s cooperation with Gehlen. Gehlen first made contact with the new federal government and the Social Democratic Party at the end of 1950. Hans Globke, Adenauer’s right-hand man, was the first to be officially associated with the general who worked with his agents in Pullach near Munich. “I immediately found a good contact and got the impression that he rightly valued the importance of my organisation”, Gehlen later wrote. Globke, a lawyer at the time, was author of the commentary on the Nazis’ Nuremberg race laws published in 1936 (Commentary on German Racial Legislation, Wilhelm Stuckart and Hans Globke, Munich and Berlin: 1936).

By the summer of 1949, about 400 employees of the BND, most of them in senior positions, originated from the Nazis’ security apparatus. In an internal investigation in the early 1960s, approximately 200 BND staff were identified as former members of the Nazi security agencies, some of them involved in war crimes. An estimated 25 to 30 percent of BND staff had Nazi backgrounds even into the early 1970s. Gehlen himself headed the BND until his retirement in May 1968.

Gehlen, Globke and Barbie were not isolated cases. The names of senior officials, judges, public prosecutors, SS and party members from the Third Reich, all of whom continued their careers in the German Federal Republic more or less without interruption, would fill volumes. When the first German parliament assembled in West Germany, more than half the new deputies had been members of the Nazi party before 1945.

The prosecution of Nazi criminals like Adolf Eichmann and Klaus Barbie was sabotaged and thwarted. According to Hammerschmidt, one of Barbie’s relatives testified to the police in April 1961 that Klaus Barbie and his family had been taken abroad by the Americans. She named the city of La Paz in Bolivia as his place of refuge and revealed Barbie’s new

name, Altmann. However, investigations were prolonged and court proceedings were first temporarily adjourned on March 20, 1967, and finally closed by the Munich prosecutor owing to lack of evidence on June 22, 1971. The US authorities behaved no differently. Hammerschmidt claims the State Department was informed by the Pentagon in 1971 that it was “an obligation of national security to continue to keep Barbie’s files secret”.

Meanwhile, leading circles in Germany regard it necessary to deal with the Nazi past of major German corporations and government agencies. According to *Der Spiegel*, the BND itself has been working for weeks with the historians Jost Dülffer (Cologne), Klaus-Dietmar Henke (Dresden), Wolfgang Krieger (Marburg) and Rolf-Dieter Müller (Potsdam) in relation to the history of the BND in its first decades. Allegedly, they have been given full access to all the BND files, even “secret” and “top secret” files.

Advocates of “unrestricted access” to their own history are aiming to boost the clout of a German foreign policy that increasingly pursues its own imperialist interests. This is also the reason for the publication of a committee report on the Foreign Office, commissioned by former Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer (Green Party). In 1952, two-thirds of the senior officials in the Foreign Office were former Nazi party members; among division heads it was four-fifths. The office supported the crimes of the Nazi regime, largely on its own initiative. (See “The German foreign office and its defenders”)

But, as in the past, there are bound to be fierce clashes when it comes to opening up the history of the BND. Hammerschmidt says that his request for access to files at the BND was initially refused in the summer of 2010. It took an official complaint to the chancellor’s office before he was able to inspect the BND’s file on Barbie a few months later.

The four historians from Cologne, Dresden, Marburg and Potsdam currently cooperating with the BND will be able to see all the files, but will not be allowed to publish everything they find. The BND reserves the right to exercise a veto on the grounds of non-disclosure of classified information. Further conflicts are therefore inevitable. *Der Spiegel* reports that journalist Gaby Weber recently had to lodge a complaint with the Federal Administrative Court in order to be allowed access to BND files on the Nazi mass murderer, Adolf Eichmann. However, the BND countered by appealing to the security interests of the Federal Republic of Germany—almost 50 years after Eichmann’s execution in Israel.



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