

Leading Nazi worked for Germany's post-war intelligence service for 13 years

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On December 14, 2014, *Spiegel Online* reported that the German intelligence agency (BND) had employed a former top-ranking SS officer, Hartmann Lauterbacher, on a permanent basis from 1950 to 1963. During the Nazi dictatorship, Lauterbacher rose to become the deputy of Baldur von Schirach and head of the Reich Youth department. He was subsequently accused of numerous war crimes.

It is clear from recent findings that Lauterbacher, a fanatical Hitler supporter who died in 1988 at the age of 78, was the highest-ranking Nazi official recruited by the BND to its full-time staff. At *Spiegel*'s request, the BND released Lauterbacher's personnel file. This revealed that Lauterbacher, who escaped from a British prisoner of war camp in Lower Saxony in 1948 and went into hiding in Italy, was employed by the BND precursor, the Gehlen Organisation, in 1950 and given the registration number V-6300 and code name "Leonard."

He then lived in Munich and West Berlin, rising to head a unit within the BND. In 1951, the intelligence service leaked false information to the press in order to spread the deception that Lauterbacher had fled to Argentina. Three years later, he was provided with new identity papers in Schleswig-Holstein. According to *Spiegel*, the personnel file suggests that the former district administrator of Eckernförde and the personal assistant to the then-governor of Kiel, both former Hitler Youth (HJ) leaders, had helped in the subterfuge.

One of Lauterbacher's tasks was infiltrating the East German FDJ youth organisation with the aid of former Hitler Youth officials. It is alleged that while posing as a businessman, he also coordinated espionage activities in various countries in North Africa. His collaboration with the BND came to an end in 1963, when the agency allegedly began to regard him with suspicion. His last monthly payment was 1,280 marks plus a 960-mark bonus. This later enabled him to receive a comfortable

pension.

Hartmann Lauterbacher is by no means the only leading Nazi member to have worked for the BND. Reinhard Gehlen, head of the Gehlen Organisation, was Hitler's military intelligence chief on the Eastern Front. From 1942 to 1945, Gehlen led the "Foreign Armies East" espionage department in the army's general staff. Immediately after the war, the Gehlen Organisation was absorbed into the service of the OSS, the American intelligence agency that became the CIA in 1947. After 1945, Gehlen's task was to establish a German foreign intelligence agency, mainly directed against the Soviet Union. In April, 1956, the Gehlen Organisation was transferred to the authority of the German government under the new name of BND (German Intelligence Agency). Entire sections of the Nazi SS (Security Service) were incorporated into the agency.

In the 1960s, the BND also occasionally employed leading Nazi war criminal Klaus Barbie, the infamous "butcher of Lyon", and Alois Brunner, a close associate of Adolf Eichmann.

Hartmann Lauterbacher was born in Reute (Tyrol) in Austria in 1909. In 1923, at the age of 14, he founded the first branch of the German Youth in Austria organisation. Two years later, he took over the leadership of German Youth and transformed it into the Hitler Youth in 1927. That year, he also began training as a chemist at the druggist academy in Brunswick and joined the Nazi party (NSDAP) with membership number 86837.

From 1930, he was mainly involved in building the Hitler Youth in the South Hanover-Brunswick district. He became a HJ regional leader in Westphalia Niederrhein in 1932 and chief regional leader in 1933. In 1934, he took over as HJ staff leader and became Reich Youth leader Baldur von Schirach's deputy. Lauterbacher was intimately connected with leading members of the Nazi regime. Joseph Goebbels was best man at his wedding in

1935.

In August 1940, Lauterbacher left the leadership of the HJ and initially became deputy Gauleiter (regional leader) of the South Hanover-Brunswick district. A few months later, in December 1940, he was promoted to Gauleiter and labour deployment commissioner. At 31, Lauterbacher was the youngest of all the Nazi Gauleiters. In 1942, he was further appointed to the position of regional defence commissar.

Lauterbacher was simultaneously building a career in the SS. In November 1940, he was admitted into the SS as a brigade leader and rose to the rank of SS group leader by the end of January 1944.

The infamous “Lauterbacher operation” of September 1941 resulted in the ghettoisation of the Jewish population in Hanover. Lauterbacher ordered the expulsion of approximately 1,200 Jews from their homes and assigned them to horrific conditions in 15 so-called “Jewish houses”. This was the precursor to the deportation of the Hanoverian Jews to the death camps in December 1941.

Lauterbacher, the fanatical Nazi, was still rallying the population to resistance on April 4, 1945, just a few days before the Allied troops reached Hanover. He arranged for the radio and newspapers to spread slogans like “Better dead than a slave”, and threatened, “Whoever hoists a white flag or gives up without a fight is a dead man.”

However, he himself took flight and disappeared from Hanover on April 8, 1945. After the war, eight judicial proceedings were launched against Lauterbacher, due to alleged offences including crimes against humanity. But like so many others, he was never held accountable. In early July 1946, the higher British military court in Hanover acquitted him of the charge of ordering the murder of German and Allied inmates of Hamelin prison at the beginning of April 1945.

In August 1947, further proceedings were initiated against Lauterbacher in the Dachau internment camp, where he was accused of having ordered the shooting of 12 downed American pilots. This trial also ended with his acquittal in October 1947.

The Hanover public prosecutor, who in 1947 had opened a case against Lauterbacher that was followed by further investigations in Munich and Hanover, terminated the investigation because of a statute of limitations. Hartmann Lauterbacher, the former deputy Reich Youth leader, appeared at the Nuremberg trials as a witness for his former boss, Baldur von Schirach.

He was arrested by a British detachment in Carinthia a few weeks after his flight from Hanover in June 1945, and

interned at the Sandbostel camp near Bremervörde. Lauterbacher managed to escape under still unexplained circumstances, on 25 February 1948.

In early 2009, the *Braunschweiger Zeitung* newspaper published a report based on American intelligence documents, according to which the Anti-Communist Front—an organisation of high-ranking Wehrmacht and SS officers—was presumed to be behind the escape. Already by this time, Lauterbacher is alleged to have had connections with the CIC (Counterintelligence Corps of the US Army), collaborating with it to establish an “international anti-Bolshevik organisation” in Hungary.

A little later, Lauterbacher went into hiding in Rome, where he was apparently commissioned by Allied intelligence agencies to participate in the organisation of the so-called “ratlines” under the code name “Bauer.” Along these ratline escape routes, including the so-called “Vatican route,” Nazi war criminals like Adolf Eichmann, Joseph Mengele, Klaus Barbie and many other fascists were brought to South America or Middle Eastern states with the help of people smugglers.

In April 1950, Lauterbacher was arrested in Italy and brought to the La Frachette camp in Rome. He purportedly fled from there to Argentina in December 1950—a hoax perpetrated by the Gehlen organisation in 1951 to conceal the fact that they had already recruited him to their permanent staff in 1950.

Following his official retirement from the BND in 1963, Lauterbacher worked for dictatorial regimes in Africa and the Middle East. From 1977 to 1979, he was official youth affairs advisor to the Sultan of Oman, Qabus ibn Said. In 1988, he died in Seebuck am Chiemsee in southern Germany, without ever having been held accountable for his atrocious crimes during the Nazi dictatorship.

The Hartmann Lauterbacher file is another piece in the mosaic of the BND’s Nazi history, which while remaining yet largely concealed, continues to shape Germany’s intelligence agencies to this day.



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