

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1

WASHINGTON POST
3 July 1983

DECLASSIFIED AND RELEASED BY
CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY
SOURCES METHODS EXEMPTION 3B2B
NAZI WAR CRIMES DISCLOSURE ACT
DATE 2000 2006

Barbie's Connection

Tom Bower is deputy editor of the British Broadcasting Corp.'s "Panorama" program. This is the first of three articles adapted from his forthcoming book, "Barbie: Butcher of Lyon," to be published in the United States by the Pantheon Press.

By Tom Bower

Klaus Barbie began working for the Counter Intelligence Corps of the U.S. Army in the spring of 1947. He remained on the Army's payroll as an intelligence agent until early 1951 when he was smuggled out of Germany to Genoa, Italy, with the help of CIC and the Central Intelligence Agency. From Genoa, Barbie made his way with his family to Bolivia where he prospered as a businessman. In February of this year he was arrested and extradited to

France to stand trial for "crimes against humanity."

This is the story of his American connection. It is based on interviews with several of the Americans directly involved with him, on historical records of CIC operations in Germany at the end of World War II and on records deposited in the national archives of France.

During the German occupation of France, Barbie was the Gestapo chief at Lyon where, according to French indictments, he ordered and participated in numerous atrocities—murders and acts of torture—inflicted on Jews and members of the French resistance. In the face of the Allied advance in 1944, he fled to Germany and turned up in 1947 in Bavaria. He

was spotted there one day, standing on a railroad platform in Augsburg, by Kurt Merk who had spent the war in Dijon, France, as a member of the Abwehr, the intelligence arm of the German army.

Merk already had an American connection. It came about in this way. Soon after the German surrender, Reinhard Gehlen—the head of *Fremde Heere Ost*, the section of the German General Staff which, through the Abwehr, specialized in eastern Europe—made a deal with an American intelligence officer, Gen. Edwin Sibert, to hand over to the Americans all his invaluable records.

Sibert was deeply suspicious of the Russians, a view not wholly shared by his superiors at the time, the summer of 1945. Gehlen was taken to Washington for extensive interrogations at the War Department. The department subsequently informed Sibert by telex that Germans were not to be used to gather intelligence about the Russians.

Sibert ignored that directive. It was the Army's view in Europe that such intelligence

was needed and that only experienced Germans could provide it.

A recruitment effort was launched. Kurt Merk was signed on in April, 1946, by an officer of the 970th Counter Intelligence Corps Detachment, Robert Taylor, who now lives in Syracuse, N.Y.

The CIC's mission at war's end had been thoughtfully considered during the months before the D-day landings and was detailed by Allied headquarters in handbooks and numerous briefing papers. That mission was to spearhead the demilitarization and denazification of Germany. CIC was under orders to arrest any German who might pose a threat to the Allied occupation, arrest nearly all Nazi Party officials and any member of a paramilitary force which was part of the Nazi regime.

Within a year this task was largely accomplished and a new mission for CIC rapidly evolved. The divisions in Germany between the Russians and the other Allies had hardened. The Cold War had begun. Former allies had become enemies and German enemies had become friends. There was now a

place for Germans in the CIC's scheme of things.

Merk became a valued and trusted CIC informant in the year before he spotted Barbie at the railroad station. After their chance meeting, he persuaded Barbie to join him in this new career.

Barbie's interview for the job took place at an office of the 970th CIC at the small Bavarian town of Kempten, 60 miles from Munich. Barbie was hired in April, 1947, with the approval of a regional CIC officer, Dale Garvey, who now lives in Kansas. Barbie's first handler was a young CIC officer, Robert Taylor. Today, Taylor and Garvey claim to have no specific recollection of Barbie.

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One who does remember Barbie is Earl Browning, now living in Washington. As an officer working near the front lines during the war, he saw a lot of action: Aachen, the Ardennes, Remagen and then down to the south of Germany where he was among the first to enter the Dachau concentration camp. By the time he returned home from Europe in September, 1945, he had "seen enough to convince me that the Germans were not very nice people. I had been appalled by what I saw. Dachau had been a great shock."

In early 1946, Browning was asked to return to Germany as a CIC regional commander of the 970th CIC detachment, whose celebrated alumni include Henry Kissinger and J.D. Salinger, the novelist. The mood among the Allies and within CIC, Browning recalls, had drastically changed: "The Germans were no longer our enemies. Denazification was no longer so important. People were more suspicious of the Russians."

Browning shared those suspicions. In September, 1946, he launched what he called "Operation Sunrise" to penetrate the Communist Party in Bremen. Browning believes it was the first covert operation of its kind in the U.S. zone. His best recruits were members of the Bremen Communist Party with weak loyalties to the cause.

During that autumn, Browning says he received a telex from Dale Garvey, the operational chief at CIC headquarters in Frankfurt. It alerted CIC detachments that a senior Gestapo officer wanted for many war crimes had been seen in the U.S. zone and that he should be arrested on sight. The Gestapo officer's name was Klaus Barbie.

In February, 1947, Browning replaced Garvey in Frankfurt and that summer undertook an evaluation of the CIC's network of agents and informants. A list of "unsuitable" agents was turned up. As Browning recalls it:

"I was sitting in my office when Jim Ratliff, my deputy, came in holding some paper. It was the Region 4 [the CIC unit based in Munich] informants list we'd received from Garvey. I read down it and saw the name Klaus Barbie. I couldn't believe it. I remembered very clearly that was the same German whom Garvey had said we should arrest when I was in Bremen, and here he was using him.

"Ratliff began running around the walls . . . shouting that Garvey was doublecrossing us. I immediately sent Garvey (now the Region 4 commander) an order to arrest Barbie."

It was the beginning of a bitter feud be-

tween Browning and Region 4 CIC officers who were determined to protect the former Gestapo chief. He had become, they insisted, one of their best agents.

Browning at one point was told that Barbie had "disappeared." In fact, however, he and Merk had become a team highly valued by American CIC officials. Merk had convinced the Americans that he and Barbie could be useful for three reasons. First, their wartime experience fighting the French communist resistance would be of significant value to the Americans in penetrating the German communist party. Second, he claimed they could satisfy American needs for information about trends and events in the neighboring French zone. Third, he convinced the CIC that, together with Barbie, he had access to an enormous network of agents stretching from Portugal to the Soviet border.

Barbie's unique contribution to the operation was his privileged entree to the *Kamradenschaft*, the secret brotherhood of Tor-

mer SS officers, all of whom felt strong bonds of loyalty to one another. At the beginning of his work as an agent, Barbie looked for those who had served in eastern Europe. Their archives and memory, combined with the information brought by the floods of refugees, could with careful analysis provide important pieces of the intelligence jigsaw.

To the CIC in Munich it seemed as if they had finally produced an important team. Frustrated by their own ignorance and pleased to be receiving any information, the Merk-Barbie handlers—Robert Taylor and an American named Hadju—accepted with gratitude anything the network delivered.

Earl Browning, by his own account, was neither grateful nor prepared to tolerate Barbie's continued use. Some government officials today dispute Browning's version of things. But Browning says that through October and November, he sent increasingly acrimonious messages to Garvey that Barbie be arrested. In December, Garvey agreed to turn over Barbie to the U.S. European Command Interrogation Center at Oberursel. The

center was operated by the Army's G-2 section.

Dick Lavoie, a young CIC officer, was assigned to deliver Barbie to Oberursel. During the ride, Lavoie said enough to confirm Barbie's suspicions that he might be in trouble, that the interrogation at Oberursel might lead to his arrest as a war criminal.

Earbie managed to jump out of the Jeep and run for the woods. Lavoie emptied his .38 firing at Barbie; one round nicked Barbie in the finger. But he escaped.

Within hours, CIC launched a massive manhunt, combing towns and villages where Barbie was known to have friends. According to one CIC agent, "They hunted him down like a dog." He was cornered, arrested and taken under heavy security escort to Oberursel. There he was made to change into rough prison clothes and was locked in a solitary cell.

(This version of Barbie's trip to Oberursel is viewed with skepticism by American officials.)

His interrogators ordered him to write an account of his war record. Barbie, years later,

said he was left alone in his cell for weeks and became desperate and depressed; he twice tried to commit suicide. Finally, fearing that he would be turned over to the French, Barbie began to write. But he boasted in a 1971 interview that he revealed very little: "I didn't tell them any more than I could write on one and a half sides of paper."

The interrogation reports from this period are still classified, but Barbie clearly denied having committed any crimes against the French. Moreover, G-2 was under considerable pressure to release him. Region 4 of CIC had appealed over Browning's head to the CIC commander, Col. David Erskine, and convinced him that Barbie was too valuable to lose, especially with Europe seemingly on the verge of a new war.

Additionally, by this time—early 1948—there was nothing unusual about using incriminated Germans. The Allies had condoned the wholesale reinstatement of former Nazis to their old jobs. Teachers who had lectured on the glories of the Nazi race theories were again teaching in the schools and universities. Judges who had passed death

sentences for trivial offenses in the notorious People's Courts were once again dispensing justice. Doctors who had knowingly condoned and contributed to the euthanasia programs were practicing medicine again. Government officials who had administered severe measures during the Third Reich were restored as powerful bureaucrats.

In that context, the use of one Gestapo officer who could give help against the communist threat seemed quite acceptable. So Barbie was released. He returned to Kempten where CIC officials were anxious to re-employ him. Earl Browning claims that he protested but finally agreed, provided strict limitations were placed on Barbie's activities.

Barbie resumed operations as an informant using such cover names as Ernst Holzer, Mertens and Behrens.

But Barbie was not out of the woods. When he was released by G-2, an unsympathetic American intelligence officer informed a French acquaintance that Barbie could be found in the American zone. The French would come looking for him.

NEXT: The discovery of Barbie