

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT

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JENNINGS: Good evening. We begin tonight with an American apology to a foreign country. After World War II, France was trying to put on trial the head of the Gestapo in the French city of Lyon. His name, now familiar to millions of people, is Klaus Barbie. Barbie was wanted by the French in connection with the murder of 4,000 Jews, for ordering 7,500 other Jews and French resistance fighters into Nazi concentration camps. The French couldn't put him on trial because U.S. Army Intelligence was hiding him. Now, the United States has told France it regrets what Americans did. And here's ABC's John Martin.

MARTIN: The announcement was made at the Justice Department by Special Prosecutor Allan Ryan, who investigated for six months and said U.S. Army officers had broken the law to protect spy operations. RYAN: These were American officers who were acting in what they perceived to be the best interest of the United States government. And, therefore, the government must pay a responsibility for those actions.

MARTIN: Ryan released a 800-page report which shows, he said, that U.S. Army Counter-Intelligence personnel innocently recruited the former Gestapo chief in 1947 without knowing he was suspected of war crimes in Lyon, France. The report says the officers broke the law by hiding and relocating Barbie when they learned he was wanted by the French. As for Barbie's alleged ties to the CIA and South America between 1951 and this year... RYAN: There was no relationship between Barbie and the CIA or any other government agency during those years.

MARTIN: Ryan said an apology was needed because shielding Barbie had delayed his prosecution. RYAN: Justice delayed is justice denied. If we are to be true to that principle, and we ought to be true to it, we cannot pretend that it applies only within our borders and nowhere else. We have delayed justice in Lyon.

MARTIN: There will be no prosecutions of Americans because the statute of limitations have run out. And with this apology, the government says it hopes that after 36 years the Klaus Barbie affair is finally at an end. John Martin, ABC News, Washington.