

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 47

BOSTON GLOBE
21 August 1983

A letter that led to uncovering US link to Barbie

Los Angeles Times

BABYLON, N.Y. — Sandra Sharkey says she was an abused child who "hates torture" and believes that wrongdoing should be punished.

A 1966 television report about the US government's relationship with a former Nazi war criminal sparked the 21-year-old woman to write a letter to her senator. The show featured two brothers named Newton, former British secret service agents who told about being tortured by the Gestapo during World War II.

"They state that this man is now working as an agent for the USA and France," she wrote at the time in a letter to then-Sen. Jacob Javits. "It seems that he has political protection and cannot be touched. For serving their country, the Newtons were left sick and crippled while their torturer is now on our payroll. It would seem to me that justice is not being served."

"I wrote the letter to get some steam off," she said last week. "I never expected anyone to do anything."

Sharkey did not know then that the unidentified Gestapo official discussed in the television show was Klaus Barbie. And it wasn't until last Wednesday that she discovered that the letter played a part in uncovering the United States' role in helping Barbie escape prosecution for 33 years.

That handwritten letter sparked the first official, although secret, admission to the State Department that the US Army had employed Barbie and shielded him from prosecution for "crimes against humanity." It also resulted in the CIA's blocking a move by Army intelligence to rehire the former Gestapo officer well after his alleged crimes were well-known.

Sharkey had nearly forgotten about the television show and the letter until Wednesday, when she learned from a reporter that the letter had been published

in a massive Department of Justice report on the Army's relationship with Barbie, known as the "Butcher of Lyon."

"I remember getting a letter back from Javits. I was sort of thrilled to get a letter signed J. Javits," Sharkey said. "But it was pretty apparent that nobody wanted to do anything. Nothing would be done."

But something had been done, although the action did not surface until this week when the Department of Justice published a report that outlined the US Army Counterintelligence Corps' role in hiring Barbie as an agent and helping to protect him from US and French authorities.

According to the report, Javits received Sharkey's letter in June 1966. It said, in part, "I would like to know why a man can go free after killing and torturing ... I'm wondering how many more people such as this are on the United States' payroll or getting rich from us."

Javits forwarded the letter to the State Department, which forwarded it to Army intelligence. On July 19, 1966, the Army sent its response to the State Department.

The response admitted that the Army recruited Barbie as an anti-Soviet intelligence agent in 1948, while he was in US custody for war crimes. It also said that when the Army learned the French wanted to arrest Barbie in 1951 for war crimes, it spirited him out of Europe and helped him resettle in Bolivia.

The memo suggested that the State Department tell Javits an investigation of Barbie's wartime activities was "inconclusive" and not mention he had been relocated to Bolivia.

"I am still naive and believe that if someone has done something wrong, they should be punished," Sharkey said. "I don't think governments think simply enough. They always say, 'Let's do it the sneaky way,' hiring someone like this instead of just going directly to the heart of a problem."