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Letters

Army Counterintelligence's Dealings With Klaus Barbie

To the Editor:

The July 6 Associated Press dispatch on the Klaus Barbie case amounts to a gratuitous assault on the integrity of the U.S. Army Counterintelligence Corps and on me personally.

The article purports to cite admissions by retired U.S. agents that they helped "hundreds of Nazis . . . to escape prosecution." The subsequent paragraph implies that I made such an allegation, and quotes me as having said, "We did not have any great pangs of conscience." All this is nonsense.

The facts are that very few rather than hundreds of "Nazis" were employed, that extremely few if any of these faced prosecution and that the Barbie case represented a singular exception to a general rule of avoiding dealings with persons with a questionable political background. Further, when exceptional circumstances led us to employ such persons, we did so with considerable moral qualms.

The facts with regard to the Barbie case are that war crimes charges against him were not raised during his period of employment. Charges of his "torturing or killing hundreds" and of involvement in death-camp roundups began to circulate much later, and the sobriquet "Butcher of Lyons" is of recent vintage.

To our knowledge, his activities had been directed against the underground French Communist Party and Resistance, just as we in the postwar era were concerned with the German Communist Party and activities inimical to American policies in Germany.

After the war, Barbie, as a Gestapo official, was apprehended and interned

in accordance with "automatic arrest" policies. He was interrogated and subsequently released without any war crimes charges being raised.

Because his skills were badly needed, given the ambitious operations assigned to the C.I.C. and the shortage of experienced and professional American agents, he was subsequently employed as a recruiter of sources within the German Communist Party and some extreme right-wing groups.

Contrary to the report that nothing came of French appeals for information on his whereabouts, French authorities knew all along where Barbie was and what he was doing, and until 1951 made no formal request for his extradition. They asserted they wanted to interrogate him about his activities directed against the Resistance, with a view to identifying collaborators. French authorities were given access to him for such interrogation.

When French authorities finally pressed for Barbie's extradition, American reluctance to hand him over was based on two considerations. First, it was known that Soviet and Communist agents had thoroughly penetrated French intelligence agencies. Consequently, he would have been intensively interrogated about American intelligence activities, jeopardizing not merely our operations

but also the security and indeed the lives of sources recruited by Barbie.

Second, it was known that the Barbie case functioned as a political football (as it still does today) in the centuries-old conflict between the French political left and right. It was primarily the left which at that time raised the charges against him and pressed for his extradition, as part of an ongoing effort to discredit some leading centrist and right-wing political leaders.

It should be noted that French extradition requests then and later were more pro forma than real, and that today the French seem most reluctant to bring Barbie to trial because it involves the reopening of old scars.

I certainly do not claim that any of us who dealt with Barbie should be absolved of all guilt, and we all had pangs of conscience then and we have them now. While intelligence operations cannot be conducted by adhering to some rigid puritanical moral code, intelligence personnel are certainly not devoid of moral scruples. We certainly did not live by the code that the end justifies the means.

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Cape Elizabeth, Me., July 9, 1983.

The writer, a Counterintelligence Corps officer from 1943 to 1963, was chief of operations in the Augsburg region in 1949/50.