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U.S. to help in wide search for 'Angel of Death'

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Attorney General William French Smith said yesterday he has ordered a full-scale investigation into the whereabouts of Josef Mengele, the "Angel of Death" doctor in the Nazi-run Auschwitz concentration camp.

Saying the effort will be carried out by the department's Office of Special Investigations, Mr. Smith said, "We will use the effective techniques which OSI has used in the past to trace and locate Nazi war criminals.

"The investigation will seek to compile all credible evidence on the current whereabouts of Mengele as well as information concerning his movements in occupied Germany and his suspected flight to South America," said a statement issued by the department.

It said the probe also will seek to determine the "credibility of reports" that Mengele has visited the United States in the past.

"The Office of Special Investigations has excellent rapport with other concerned agencies and countries, and we can expect an authoritative report from them on the past and current whereabouts of Dr. Mengele," Mr. Smith said in his statement.

A physician and former major in the Nazi secret police, Mengele is wanted by the West German government on murder charges. Among his alleged crimes were experiments on twins and the gassing and cremation of prisoners at the Auschwitz camp, where an estimated 4 million Jews and others were killed.

He would be 73 if still alive. He was reportedly last seen in Paraguay in the 1970s.

Last month, a Jewish group said it had obtained recently declassified documents indicating that Mengele may have been arrested and freed by U.S. military forces in Austria in 1947.

Rabbi Marvin Hier, dean of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, a Los Angeles-based center for Holocaust studies, said in New York that the two documents were obtained two months ago under the Freedom of Information Act. He said the center plans to sue for access to four other documents withheld by the Army on the grounds of national security.

The Pentagon said at the time that it could not confirm the report.

"None of the documents indicate any American units had any contact or captured the doctor after the war," said Defense Department spokesman Michael Burch.

Mr. Smith's announcement came following the conclusion of a three-day mock trial of Mengele in Israel — the central event in a meeting of Auschwitz survivors celebrating the 40th anniversary of the liberation of the camp, which is in Poland.

Testimony ended yesterday with the presiding panel calling for Mengele's arrest on charges of crimes against humanity by any "state willing to try him under its laws."

A statement read by panel member Telford Taylor, who was the chief U.S. prosecutor in the 1946 Nuremberg war crimes trials, accused Mengele of "acts of brutality against the bodies and souls" of Auschwitz inmates.

Isser Harel, a former Israeli intelligence chief who caught Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann, said Israel considered a commando raid to capture Mengele after he eluded Israeli agents in a posh Buenos Aires suburb.

Mr. Harel made the revelation in the mock trial held by Jews who survived Mengele's experimentation on twins and dwarfs at Auschwitz in his quest for a race of genetically superior Germans.