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NAZI WHITEWASH IN 1940'S CHARGED

By RALPH BLUMENTHAL

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American intelligence officials concealed the Nazi records of hundreds of former enemy scientists to try to get them into the United States after World War II, contrary to a Presidential order and against the objections of the State Department, according to declassified Government documents.

The documents, disclosed in a coming magazine article, reveal that American authorities knew that many of the specialists were "ardent Nazis" implicated in atrocities and doctored their dossiers to hide this.

How many Nazis got into the United States because of dossier changes is not clear. Not all of the dossiers were declassified.

It is also unclear if the State Department was able to prevent any of the Nazis from entering. Dossiers were changed to get around anticipated State Department objections.

Some Accused of War Crimes

The documents also show that among those hired for American research were several specialists who were later charged with war crimes at Nuremberg and one who was convicted and sentenced to 20 years in prison for medical experiments on prisoners at Dachau. At least one of these got into the United States.

Also among those whose files were upgraded, the records show, was Werner von Braun, a major in the Nazi SS who developed the V-2 rocket in wartime Germany and later headed the American space program. Dr. von Braun, who died in 1977, was initially labeled "a potential security threat" but the assessment was revised on the request of American military officials.

Between 1945 and 1955, some 800 former enemy rocket experts and other specialists were brought into the country under an American intelligence program first called Overcast and then Project Paperclip. By order of President Truman, the program was barred to active Nazi Party members or supporters of Nazism.

But documents disclosed in an article in the April issue of the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists show that officials of the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency under the Joint Chiefs of Staff had a practice of requesting changes in negative dossiers on specialists they wanted to recruit. The Bulletin is a non-profit monthly magazine published by the Educational Foundation of Nuclear Science in Chicago.

Declassified Documents Quoted

The article, by Linda Hunt, a reporter and documentary producer, quotes from hundreds of declassified documents obtained through the Freedom of Information Act. Some key documents were made available to The New York Times and verified independently.

Although a number of the officials named have since died or cannot be located, some of the events described were corroborated by a former State Department intelligence official cited in the documents.

"We got into several rounds because it looked like they were trying to dump" the Germans into the United States, recalled Herbert J. Cummings, a former assistant chief of the State Department's Bureau of Foreign Activity Correlation. Now retired in Washington, he confirmed that he was the unnamed official cited in the article as having "hit the ceiling" after finding discrepancies in the records of Paperclip scientists.

Among those listed in the documents as working for the Army Air Force in Heidelberg in 1946 and recommended for transfer to Wright Field in Ohio was Dr. Herman Becker-Freysing, former director of aeromedical research for the German Air Force. Shortly afterward he was convicted at Nuremberg and sentenced to 20 years in prison for a role in experiments on Dachau prisoners who died after drinking sea water to test its potability.

'Beating a Dead Nazi Horse'

Also listed as Paperclip recruits were three defendants acquitted at Nuremberg. Washington arranged for a fourth Paperclip scientist, Walter Schreiber, to be flown from the United States to Argentina in 1952 after disclosure of documents linking him to the Nazi euthanasia program.

Arthur Rudolph, a German-born top manager for NASA, moved back to West Germany and surrendered his American citizenship last year rather than contest charges that he had worked slave laborers to death at a Nazi rocket factory. His file too was revised, records show.

As told in the documents, by mid-1947 Paperclip had reached "a complete stalemate," according to a memorandum by the director of the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency, Capt. Bosquet N. Wey of the Navy. Captain Wey, now thought to be dead, complained that the State Department was "beating a dead Nazi horse" by demanding additional security checks of Paperclip candidates.

Subsequent documents show that thereafter, when the Office of the Military Governor in Germany provided unfavorable security reports on prospective Paperclip scientists, the Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency counseled Army and Navy officials in the program not to send the dossiers on to the State or Justice Departments.

Rather, said an agency memorandum of Nov. 28, 1947, "this agency intends to ask the Headquarters, European Command, to re-evaluate these reports with the comment that subjects of these reports were not considered to be potential security threats to the United States and it is, therefore, believed that their classification as ardent Nazis should be revised."