

BOOKS

# Why America saved Nazis for its own ends

Reviewed by David Lee Preston

When the Justice Department acknowledged in August 1983 that the U.S. Army had recruited Nazi SS and Gestapo officer Klaus Barbie for espionage after World War II and had smuggled him out of Europe, the department said Barbie had been the only such war criminal our country had employed and protected.

But two months ago, the department's Office of Special Investigations released an extraordinary 92-page report detailing the Army's 10-year postwar employment of Robert Jan Verbelen, a convicted Nazi war criminal who had used his position as a U.S. informant to escape justice in his native Belgium.

Verbelen, now 77, lives comfortably in Vienna, where as an Austrian citizen he avoids extradition. Tried in absentia and convicted by a Belgian court in 1947 for the murder of 101 people while commander of a Flemish fascist security corps, Verbelen now lectures to neo-Nazi groups and writes spy novels.

The Verbelen report included a list describing 13 unnamed Nazis and Nazi collaborators — some charged with murder, mass murder or torture — who were employed after the war as informants by the Army's Counter-Intelligence Corps in Austria. Their names were withheld, the report said, "to fulfill the United States' obligation to protect the identity of intelligence operatives."

Clearly Barbie, Verbelen and the others represent only the tip of a large iceberg of intrigue floating in the swirling sea of postwar American affairs. That conclusion is established beyond doubt by Christopher Simpson's *BLOWBACK*, a stunning tour de force of investigative journalism and maybe the most important in a wide array of books examining the myriad kinds of fallout from the Nazi period.

Thoroughly documented — at times astonishingly so — and compellingly written, *BLOWBACK* is the first comprehensive account of how the U.S. government systematically and secretly recruited and protected

**BLOWBACK**  
**America's Recruitment of Nazis and Its Effects on the Cold War**  
Christopher Simpson  
Weidenfeld & Nicolson  
388 pp. \$19.95

thousands of Nazis and Nazi collaborators, many of whom were brought to this country to live.

Using interviews, archival material and more than 400 requests under the Freedom of Information Act, Simpson has compiled an authoritative history that directly links former high-level Nazis with developing U.S. perceptions of the Soviet Union and with perpetuating the Cold War.

As alignments shifted in the wake of World War II, the United States found itself in need of intelligence about its erstwhile ally, the Soviet Union. And Nazi Germany had it. Capitalizing on this situation, former German Wehrmacht Gen. Reinhard Gehlen — who had been instrumental in organizing the murder by starvation of 4 million Soviet POWs — persuaded the Americans to allow him to set up an espionage organization that soon became the most important source of U.S. information on the Soviet military.

But the Gehlen Organization — which included war criminals such as SS veterans Franz Six and Emil Augsburg, top officers in the Nazi extermination of Jews — deliberately painted the most alarming picture of Soviet military strength, thereby both justifying continued U.S. reliance on the organization and also seriously misleading Americans about the extent of a perceived Soviet threat.

"In my opinion," says Victor Marchetti, formerly the CIA's chief analyst of Soviet strategic war plans and capabilities who broke with the agency in the 1970s, "the Gehlen Organization provided nothing worthwhile for understanding or estimat-

ing Soviet military or political capabilities in Eastern Europe or anywhere else."

Simpson contends that George F. Kennan, chief of the State Department's Policy Planning Staff who authored the pivotal doctrine of "containment" toward the Soviet Union, helped to bring Nazis into the United States. Kennan declined to be interviewed for the book.

Simpson documents the development of Operation Bloodstone, a clandestine State Department program to recruit Soviet-bloc emigres from 1948 until mid-1950, a program that came to include "the cream of the Nazis and collaborators, the leaders, the intelligence specialists, and the scholars who had put their skills to work for the Nazi cause," he writes. Simpson interviewed one of these men, former SS Wannsee Institute member Nikolai N. Poppe, now 90 and living in comfortable retirement in Washington state.

Frank Wisner, a young Wall Street lawyer and Office of Strategic Services operative, helped to engineer the Bloodstone project. Within the OSS — the wartime covert operations agency that presaged the CIA — Wisner and Allen Dulles used the so-called Secret Intelligence Branch to

work directly with Gehlen, according to Simpson.

After Dulles became CIA director in 1953, Wisner gained control of all American covert warfare throughout the Cold War — becoming, according to Simpson, "the driving force behind most of the Nazi utilization operations." Wisner suffered a nervous breakdown in 1958 and was dragged screaming from CIA headquarters; in 1965, he blew his brains out with a 20-gauge shotgun.

The book's title is spy jargon for unintended adverse domestic consequences of overseas intelligence programs — and Simpson suggests several negative implications from our country's employment of Nazis and collaborators.

A postwar East-West struggle for employment of German scientists and secret agents — one of the opening shots of the Cold War — helped to undermine chances for superpower peace as early as the Potsdam Conference in the summer of 1945, Simpson writes. Meanwhile, covert operations and political warfare employing Nazi collaborators also helped provoke the Cold War and set back American efforts to win friends in Eastern Europe, he writes.

"The CIA's present techniques for

virtually every type of covert operation... were first formulated during the agency's work with the Eastern European collaborationist troops it inherited from the Nazis," Simpson writes. Covert techniques using U.S.-trained Ukrainian guerrillas — including former Nazi collaborators — to foment strife in the Soviet Union beginning in 1949 served as the prototype for subsequent CIA programs among the Hmong and Meo peoples in Southeast Asia, anti-Castro Cubans and Nicaraguan contras, he writes.

Col. John V. Grombach, a wartime Army intelligence agent who later worked simultaneously for the State Department and the CIA, had links to SS General Karl Wolff, a major war criminal, according to U.S. Naval Intelligence Command files obtained by Simpson through the Freedom of Information Act. Using his own private network of contacts, Grombach employed a former Goebbels propagandist and other ex-Nazis and collaborators to gather political ammunition that helped Sen. Joseph McCarthy purge the State Department — setting a precedent for such contemporary extralegal operatives as G. Gordon Liddy and Oliver North, Simpson argues.

Monsignor Krivoslav Dragovic, the Croatian Catholic Church prelate whom the Army paid to help Klaus Barbie relocate to South America, was "known and recorded as a Fascist war criminal, etc.," according to top-secret Army documents obtained by Simpson through the Freedom of Information Act. Many Croatian fascist war criminals similarly aided by Father Dragovic came to the United States, where some Croatian cells have been linked to bombings, extortion and murder, Simpson writes.

Members of Nazi-aligned organizations who were brought to the United States from Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union have become a potent force in the right wing of American political life, he writes.

*BLOWBACK* is at once an indictment of and a plea to the United States. The book clearly delineates the extent to which American intelligence agencies ignored the criminal pasts of Nazis they employed. But that story could not have been told so meticulously, so authoritatively, without the information act under which several government agencies released much of the damning documentation to Simpson.

During a period when the Reagan administration has tried to emasculate the information act, the Army in particular should be commended for its efforts to comply with the act — efforts that have enabled Simpson to begin setting the historical record straight in an area that for too long has been analyzed on the basis of rumor, assumption and incomplete information.

We still don't know the full story, but we now have a solid base for further research. Because Simpson shows himself to be a thorough and responsible reporter, *BLOWBACK* stands both as an example of the very best in American investigative journalism and as an eloquent and convincing testament to the enduring value of the Freedom of Information Act.

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## David Lee Preston review of BLOWBACK by Christopher Simpson, 8/7/88 Phila. Inquirer

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Thu, Jan 28, 2021