

Review by Robert Derrick Butterfield

## **BOOK REVIEW: 'Hunting Evil' by Guy Walters, published by Bantam Books, 2009**

Over sixty years have elapsed since the defeat of Nazi Germany, yet the crimes and atrocities committed by Hitler's regime still beggar belief.

Unprovoked military aggression leading to the invasion and occupation of a dozen European countries, precipitating the Second World War, must come at the top of the list. According to conservative estimates, over fifty-seven million people perished in that war, including twenty-five million in Russia. The continent of Europe was laid waste, and took years to recover from the devastation. Bitter and hateful feelings still linger on.

Secondly, there were the concentration camps in which millions perished as a result of extermination or merely brutal treatment. It is well known that six million Jews were murdered in the Holocaust, but there were also large numbers of gypsies, political opponents and even the mentally ill, who were mercilessly liquidated by gassing and other means. A system of mass murder was set up and run on industrial lines, and an attempt was made to wipe out a whole race.

In addition, there were the atrocities carried out by the Gestapo and SS, in their reign of terror in the occupied countries. The use of torture was common against all those who resisted Nazi domination, and sometimes whole communities were massacred as a reprisal, whenever German

soldiers were killed. In short, anyone who showed the least opposition to the Nazis was dealt with, in an extremely brutal manner.

This book investigates what was done-and what was not done-to apprehend and punish those responsible for these crimes. What exactly did the Western Allies, Britain and America, do to bring to justice the perpetrators of these atrocities? It is well known that many Nazi war criminals managed to evade justice. How were they able to do so? As it is not really feasible to investigate all the war criminals-there are thousands of cases- the author has selected four well known fugitive Nazis, and limited himself to tracing the fates of them, namely;

Adolf Eichmann, one of the chief architects of the Holocaust, responsible for sending thousands of Hungarian Jews to their deaths.

Josef Mengele, the Chief Doctor at the Auschwitz camp, responsible for conducting many operations and experiments of a highly painful and sadistic nature upon inmates. Franz Stangl, former Commandant of the Sobibor and Treblinka camps in Poland, where thousands perished.

Klaus Barbie, The Gestapo chief of Lyon in France during the war, who personally tortured many resistance members, and rounded up Jews.

In October 1943, the Moscow Declaration was signed by the Foreign Ministers of Britain, the US. and the USSR. In it, they declared their loathing of

Nazi war criminals and promised to “pursue them to the uttermost ends of the earth and deliver them to the accusers, in order that justice may be done.” (Walters, 2009, p. 43) Viscount Simon, the British Lord Chancellor, urged that a United Nations War Crimes Commission \*(UNWCC) be formed to deal with these men. (Walters, 2009, p. 44) However, the Russians, suspicious of the British treatment of Rudolf Hess, never joined it. President Roosevelt was unhappy and only wanted ‘the ringleaders’ punished. (Walters, 2009, p. 45) And Sir Anthony Eden only signed the declaration reluctantly. These disagreements and divisions would hamper the developments of bodies like UNWCC and ultimately render them largely ineffective. In March 1945, the Americans set up CROWCASS (The Central Registry of War Criminals and Security Suspects), a database for war crimes. Unfortunately it was underfunded, understaffed and disorganized. Mengele, Stangl and Eichmann were arrested and detained by the US army in 1945, but were later released. Due to the malfunctioning of CROWCASS, the Americans did not realize the importance of their prisoners, and simply let them go.

The full bestiality of the Nazi regime was only apparent as the allied armies entered Germany and overran the camps. In April, 1945, the British entered Belsen. Hardened soldiers were shocked by what they saw, and even today, contemporary descriptions can still chill the blood.” The inhabitants had lost all self-respect ..... and were degraded morally to the level of beasts. Their clothes were rags, teeming with lice and both inside

and outside the huts was an almost continuous carpet of dead bodies, human excreta, rags and filth.” (Walters, 2009, p. 54) Public opinion was shocked, and there were increasing demands that the perpetrators be punished.

As a result of this pressure, some Nazis were punished immediately after the war. After trials, the Belsen commandant, Josef Kraemer and many of the camp’s personnel were hanged. In Dachau, American soldiers shot any SS men they could find, after having witnessed the barbarities of that camp. And, of course, there was the Nuremberg Tribunal in 1946, in which many of the remaining Nazi leaders were tried and sentenced. Hitler had, of course, evaded justice by committing suicide, as had Goebbels, Goering and Himmler, but ten leading Nazis were put to death and many others were imprisoned. However, many others escaped.

How were so many others able to escape justice? The answer lies mainly in the political climate that existed after the war. The overriding priority of the Western allies at the time was to contain the spread of communism. All Eastern Europe was communist, and President Truman feared that Western Europe could go the same way. So he decided to build up West Germany as a strong economic power, that would be able to act as a bastion against communist expansion. For this, he needed the help of former Nazis. Men like Karl Hermann Abs, for example. Abs had been a key figure in banking in the Third Reich and had made sure that adequate financing was available to fund Nazi aggression. However, such a man, and many like him were essential to the revival of the West

German economy. Abs had the essential financial expertise to direct investment into profitable industries and get the country back on its feet again. So, a blind eye was turned to Abs's contribution to the Nazis, and he was given an important post in the financial reconstruction of Germany. And there were thousands of many former Nazis who were treated in the same way.

Eichmann, Barbie, Stangl and Mengele all managed to escape to South America to evade justice. How did they manage that? The answer is twofold. Firstly, they took advantage of post-war conditions in Europe to hide for a while. Secondly, they received a great deal of help from Nazi sympathizers to cross the Atlantic. They could not have survived alone. They needed refuge, money, visas, passports, tickets and other kinds of help to be able to make that journey. Who provided them? Once we know the answer to that question, we will know why they were able to evade justice for so long.

Post-war Europe was in chaos. Political control had broken down in many areas, and martial law was being enforced by the victorious allies. There were hordes of refugees everywhere, all trying to get back home. It was not difficult for a hunted Nazi to get rid of his uniform, assume a new identity and merge into the crowds of refugees. As we have already seen, Allied efforts to track down Nazis were inept and half-hearted. In order to lie low, Mengele and Eichmann became farmworkers in quiet, remote areas of southern Germany for several years. No doubt, their employers may have harboured suspicions about them, but they said

nothing. Families and friends also helped them to hide, and did not betray them. Only several years later, when more evidence of the Nazi crimes came to light, did the four fugitives feel the need to leave Europe and hide further afield.

All four men then decided to escape to South America, via the so-called 'rat line'. This was a well-established escape route for fugitive fascists, from Germany, through Austria and northern Italy to the port of Genoa and then by ship to Argentina. Refuges along the way were provided by various Catholic priests and other sympathizers. One was Bishop Alois Hudal, based in Rome, who said he felt "duty-bound to after 1945 to devote my whole charitable work mainly to former National Socialists and Fascists, especially to so-called 'war criminals'."

Hudal and other priests procured identity documents issued by the Vatican Refugee Organisation, which could then be exchanged for the all-important Red Cross passports and visas. Money was provided to buy boat tickets. Argentina at the time was being ruled by General Juan Peron, an unashamed admirer of Mussolini, and he welcomed the fugitive Nazis with open arms. He wanted German technicians and scientists to come to his country to help in its development. Argentina already had a substantial German community which generally welcomed the fugitives. As for the Vatican, its role in the Second World War is nebulous. However, there is no doubt that there were considerable numbers of Nazi sympathizers in its ranks, who held positions of great power, and were able to use it to facilitate the escape of

fugitive Nazis. A second 'rat line' ran through Spain, run quite openly from an agency in Madrid, enjoying political protection from the Franco regime. (Walters, 2009, pp. 133-134)

Not only Nazis used the rat line. Klaus Barbie was arrested by the Americans and turned over to their intelligence services, the CIC in Munich. He had a comprehensive knowledge of the Red Army's order of battle and many other military secrets and the Americans wanted to pick his brains. He worked for them for two years, even though it is clear they knew exactly who he was. After he had outlived his usefulness, the Americans used the rat line to get him to Argentina. They also used it to get Nazi scientists and military strategists into the U.S. The German rocket scientist, Wernher von Braun was spirited into the U.S. in this way, later playing a key role in the U.S. space programme, which eventually landed a man on the moon.

When justice did finally catch up with the Nazis, it was often at the hands of Mossad, the Israeli intelligence agency. They traced Eichmann to his home in Buenos Aires, where he was employed at a Mercedes plant. He was abducted in broad daylight, flown to Tel Aviv and there had to finally face a trial for his crimes in 1960. He was found guilty and executed. Mossad also assassinated Herbert Cukurs, 'the hangman of Riga', a Lithuanian who had collaborated with the Germans in the murder of Jews. His death is a reminder that many non-Germans from eastern Europe hated the Jews too, and helped the Germans kill them. Barbie endured a similar fate. He went to

Bolivia, where he worked for the dictator Garcia Meza, reorganizing the secret police. However, Meza fell and when France demanded the extradition of Barbie, the new Bolivian government complied. There had been a campaign in France, run by Serge Klarsfeld, a prominent Jewish lawyer, to extradite Barbie and it had finally borne fruit. He returned to Lyon to face trial and died in prison of leukaemia.

Franz Stangl's fate was similar to Barbie's. He was tracked down to Brazil by the Wiesenthal organization, and then extradited by the Brazilian authorities to face trial in West Germany. He received a life sentence and died in prison in 1971.

The only one to die of natural causes was Josef Mengele. He is supposed to have died of a stroke in Brazil in February, 1979. He returned to his family in Germany several times, on a West German passport, which suggests that there were Nazi sympathizers in the government there. He missed Germany a lot, and wanted to be buried there, so perhaps his final punishment was to be separated from his native country, and not to have his wishes fulfilled. (Walters, 2009, p. 372)

This whole historical episode tells us a great deal about international politics, that it is based on political expediency and not on moral or ethical considerations. The Nazis were regarded as useful pawns in the new post-war power game and their criminal pasts were studiously ignored. The allied governments wished to establish West Germany as a bastion against further communist expansion in Europe, and used former Nazis to do so, turning a blind eye to their crimes. The

Americans' use of Barbie is the most blatant example of this type of political cynicism.

When Hitler and Mussolini came to power, they had done so with the support of powerful vested interests in German and Italian society, notably the Roman Catholic Church. When Nazi fugitives were fleeing from justice, these institutions came forward again and helped them. The four leading Nazis whose fates are traced in this book, would never have got to South America without this help. It is also clear that there were those in West Germany and Austria, who obstructed justice too. Mengele visited his family in West Germany, on a West German passport bearing his actual name. Austria did not issue an arrest warrant

for Stangl until 1961, despite the fact that his crimes were public knowledge.

That three out of the four did eventually come to trial, was mainly due to the extraordinary determination of certain people, who were determined that justice must be served. People like Simon Wiesenthal, the veteran Nazi hunter who found Stangl; Serge and Beate Klarsfeld, the French lawyers who campaigned for Barbie's extradition; the people in Mossad who apprehended Eichmann. They plugged away and made sure that the Nazi crimes were never forgotten, but were kept fresh in the public mind. They were also aided by political developments in South America, which stripped Barbie and Stangl of their political protection and made extradition possible.

---

## Reference

Walters, G. (2009). *Hunting Evil*. London: Bantam Press.