How the Nazis Escaped Justice
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Sunday 27 January 2013

As the world falls silent in memory of the Holocaust, a new book reveals how many of its architects were helped to live out their days in South America.

The innocuous-looking vans he helped to develop began arriving at the Third Reich’s mental hospitals in 1940.

Doctors in white coats herded patients, officially dubbed “useless eaters”, into the hermetically sealed compartments in the back. The revs of engine could not conceal the screams. But within 20 minutes all those locked inside were poisoned to death by exhaust fumes.

Walther Rauff, the notorious SS colonel who was instrumental in creating the Nazis’ infamous “mobile gas chamber” was held personally responsible for murdering at least 100,000 people during the Second World War. His victims included Communists, Jews, Roma and the physically and mentally ill.

Yet Rauff escaped to South America after the war. From there he travelled with impunity to Germany as a company representative until the late 1950s. Germany only issued a warrant for his arrest in 1961 and he was never brought to trial. Rauff died in Chile in 1984 and hundreds of old Nazis flocked to his funeral in the capital, Santiago.

As the world today remembered the horrors of the concentration camps, a new book has laid bare how many of its architects were able to escape justice for decades, and in many cases until death. Rauff, and dozens of other top Nazis who fled to South America after the Second World War, were sheltered by a “coalition of the unwilling” on both sides of the Atlantic.

German historian Daniel Stahl’s book, Nazi Hunt: South America’s Dictatorships and the Avenging of Nazi Crimes, published just as Germany remembers this week’s 80th anniversary of the Nazis’ accession to power and the world marks Holocaust Day, is based on extensive research in European and South American archives. It comes to the shameful conclusion that key officials on both continents, including the courts, police and governments, were reluctant to track down Nazi war criminals and even spent decades actively preventing their prosecution.
Rauff’s case was typical. His address in Santiago was known to post-war West Germany’s foreign ministry, and Hans Strack, the German ambassador to Chile, was ordered to request his extradition. But Stahl shows how Strack sympathised with war criminals in exile and delayed applying for Rauff’s extradition for 14 months. When he finally did so in 1962, Chile was able to refuse extradition request because his murders had by then occurred too long ago under the country’s statute of limitations.

Official reluctance also prevented the arrest of one of the world’s worst Nazi war criminals, the infamous Nazi doctor Josef Mengele who carried out hundreds of brutal medical experiments on patients at Auschwitz concentration camp. Attempts were made to track Mengele down in 1960 following rumours that he was hiding in Brazil or Chile. Yet he was never found.

Stahl concludes in his book that Mengele was never caught because French police officers employed by Interpol refused to conduct searches for war criminals because they were implicated as Nazi collaborators.

“As henchmen of the Vichy regime, they collaborated with the Nazis until 1944,” he writes.

Interpol’s secretary general in 1962, Marcel Sicot, is unmasked by Stahl as regarding the prosecution of war criminals as “victor’s justice”.

The Brazilian government’s concerns about its own moral legitimacy are singled out by Stahl as the reason why Gustav Wagner, an SS officer accused of complicity in the murder of 152,000 Jews at the Sobibor extermination camp, was never sent to Germany to stand trial. In the late 1970s judges at Brazil’s supreme federal court refused a request from the then West German government for Wagner’s extradition, citing alleged inaccuracies in the application.

According to Stahl, West Germany’s ambassador to Brazil at the time explained the Brazilian authorities were worried Wagner’s extradition would encourage opponents of the government to make demands that could compromise their authority. He said they feared opponents would demand all crimes in Brazil should be prosecuted, “including those committed by the military and the police”.

Stahl writes that the reluctance of German and French authorities to prosecute Nazi war criminals began to wane in the early 1980s when a new generation was entering the government, police and the judiciary. He cites the arrest and trial of Klaus Barbie, the infamous Gestapo chief in France known as the “Butcher of Lyon”. Germany and France, he points out, jointly pursued Barbie and obtained his extradition from Bolivia. He was finally deported to France in 1983 to stand trial for offences he committed 40 years earlier.

Yet evidence revealing how a “coalition of the unwilling” prevented Hitler’s henchmen from facing justice continues to emerge. Just two years ago, leaked German intelligence files revealed that for a decade before he was caught, the West German government knew that Adolf Eichmann – the Nazi SS officer responsible for organising the Holocaust – was hiding in South America. Mossad eventually tracked down and kidnapped him in Argentina in 1960. He was flown to Israel where he was convicted of crimes against humanity and hanged in 1962.
The main part of America’s share of that scramble for Nazi experts was Operation Paperclip, which recruited about 1600 of them. Many were saved from prosecutions for atrocities, and instead relocated to the US, where they became respectable citizens and went to work on a variety of government projects. Following are ten Nazi war criminals who got away with it and escaped accountability because they were useful to the US. Walter Schreiber Experimented On Auschwitz Inmates by Freezing Them, and Infected Other Prisoners With Gangrene. Doctor Walter Schreiber (1893 â€“ 1970) was a prominent epidemiologist. "Ratlines" were a system of escape routes for Nazis and other fascists fleeing Europe in the aftermath of World War II. These escape routes mainly led toward havens in Latin America, particularly Argentina though also in Paraguay, Colombia, Brazil, Uruguay, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Guatemala, Ecuador and Bolivia, as well as the United States, Spain and Switzerland. Nazi guards at Belzec death camp in occupied Poland in 1942. AP. How the Nazis escaped justice. holocaust-south-america.jpg. Clockwise from top left: Josep Mengele (Brazil); Klaus Barbie (Bolivia); Walther Rauff (Chile); Adolf Eichmann (Argentina). How the Nazis escaped justice. holocaust1.jpg. Former concentration camp prisoners attend a ceremony at the memorial site of the former Nazi concentration camp Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oswiecim, Poland, on Holocaust Day. AFP. How the Nazis escaped justice. holocaust3-epa.jpg. Prisoners in Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Nazi German Concentration and Extermination camp. However, thousands of other notorious Nazis not only escaped justice, but also never faced charges. Others received punishments seemingly incongruent with their ruthless acts against countless Jewish prisoners. Only a very small percentage of the estimated 150,000 Nazis who committed war crimes were ever legally charged. Some managed to escape to South America or the Middle East, while others lived in plain sight in Germany. Some of the most notorious Nazis were even able to exploit Cold War politics and avoid responsibility by finding a safe haven within the US government or CIA. This list of War Crimes How Nazis Escaped Justice in South America. After World War II, dozens of Nazi criminals went into hiding in South America. A new study reveals how a ‘coalition of the unwilling’ on both sides of the Atlantic successfully stymied efforts to hunt and prosecute these criminals for decades. Von Felix Bohr. 24.01.2013, 17.22 Uhr. And yet Wagner stood accused of complicity in the murders of 152,000 Jews at the Sobibor extermination camp in German-occupied Poland. Josef Mengele, the notorious concentration camp doctor at Auschwitz, also benefited from mistakes and delays because French officials with Interpol, the international police force then headquartered in Paris, refused to conduct international searches for Nazi war criminals.