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## Why I believe the king of the Nazi hunters, Simon Wiesenthal, was a fraud

By [Guy Walters](#)

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For millions around the world, Simon Wiesenthal is seen as a hero.

Often credited with bringing to justice some 1,100 war criminals, the Nazi hunter and Holocaust survivor is regarded almost as a saint, a man who did more than any government to lock up the perpetrators of some of the worst crimes the world has witnessed.

Nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize, the recipient of a knighthood and more than 50 other honours, Wiesenthal is particularly remembered for his role in tracking down the notorious architect of the Holocaust, Adolf Eichmann.



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**Revered: But did the Nazi hunter build his reputation on fantasy?**

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After he died at the age of 96 in September 2005, the eulogies poured in from around the world.

Wiesenthal was lauded as the 'permanent representative of the victims', a man who had not only sought justice, but prided himself on never forgetting his six million 'clients', as he called those who died in the Holocaust.

Those who read his memoirs could only marvel at his wartime heroism and incredible escapes from death at the hands of the Nazis.

It seemed as if Wiesenthal's mission was almost divinely given, the gods sparing his life for some higher purpose.

The accounts of his hunts for fugitives were no less sensational, as Wiesenthal told how he engaged in a battle of wits against the sinister postwar Nazi networks and their sympathisers.

It was the ultimate feelgood story of revenge, and the world lapped it up.



**Rewriting history: Wiesenthal is shown attending a trial of suspected Nazi war criminals in Vienna, Austria in 1958**

TV programmes and movies were made, and soon Wiesenthal became a household name, a symbol for the triumph of hope over evil.

Those who thrilled at his life story can now do so once more, thanks to a new biography written by the Israeli historian Tom Segev.

The figure who emerges in the book is far more complex than one might expect.

Dr Segev shows that so much of Wiesenthal's account of his life was the product of exaggeration and self-mythologising.

Appearing on Radio 4's Today programme this week, the author said Wiesenthal was 'a storyteller, a man who lived between reality and fantasy'.

He excused Wiesenthal's inclination to fabricate stories about his past, saying it was his way of making it easier to deal with the real atrocities he had experienced in the concentration camps.

I'm sorry, but this compassionate approach simply does not wash with me. For the truth is that the great Nazi hunter is far, far worse than Dr Segev makes out.

In my view, Simon Wiesenthal was a liar and a fraud. In fact, I'd go so far as to say he was one of the biggest conmen of the 20th century.

I spent four years working on a history of Nazi-hunting that was published last year, and the material I gathered on Wiesenthal was enough to make me scream out loud.

When I started my book, I too believed that the great man was just that — great.

But when I looked at all his memoirs, biographies and original archive material, I realised that, like so many others, the image I had built up of Simon Wiesenthal was hopelessly incorrect.

## **The Lvov State Archives have no record of Simon Wiesenthal having studied at Lvov Technical University**

There were too many distortions and inconsistencies, too many outright lies — none of which could be explained away by sympathetic psycho-babble offered by the likes of Dr Segev.

The fact is that Wiesenthal lied about nearly everything in his life.

Let us, for example, start at the beginning and look at his educational record.

If you visit the website of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, you'll learn that he 'applied for admission to the Polytechnic Institute in Lvov', but was turned down 'because of quota restrictions on Jewish students'.

The website then claims that he went to the Technical University of Prague, 'from which he received his degree in architectural engineering in 1932'.

Other biographies — published during Wiesenthal's lifetime — state that he did in fact go to Lvov, in either 1934 or 1935, and gained a diploma as an architectural engineer in 1939.

All of these accounts are rubbish.

The Lvov State Archives have no record of Simon Wiesenthal having studied at Lvov Technical University.

The archives have records for other students from that period, but not for Wiesenthal — and there were no quota restrictions on Jewish students at that time.

Neither did he graduate from Prague. Although he matriculated on February 21, 1929, Wiesenthal never completed his degree. He passed his first state examination on February 15, 1932, and then he left that same year.

Despite a lack of academic credentials, he would fraudulently use his supposed engineering diploma on his letter paper for the rest of his life.

During the war, Wiesenthal claimed to have spent years in and out of a succession of concentration camps.

Although he certainly spent time in camps such as Mauthausen, he also said he had been in Auschwitz — a claim for which there is no record.

Then there is his supposed career as a brave partisan. In two of his memoirs, he claims to have joined a group of partisans after escaping from a camp in October 1943.

According to an interview he gave the American army in 1948, he claimed he was immediately made a lieutenant 'on the basis of my intellect'.

## **Since there exist at least four wildly differing accounts of Wiesenthal's activities, serious questions about what he actually did should surely be raised**

He was soon promoted to major, and he was instrumental in 'building bunkers and fortification lines'.

'We had fabulous bunker constructions,' he said.

'My rank was not so much as a strategic expert as a technical expert.'

One only needs a basic grasp of World War II military history to know that Wiesenthal's claims are highly dubious.

Partisan groups do not build 'fabulous bunker constructions', they instead rely on mobility to outwit the enemy.

As a Jew, it is also highly unlikely that he would have been made an officer in such a group, which was usually anti-semitic.

Wiesenthal would also give another account of his experience in the partisans, in which he joined a more ad hoc and smaller band — hardly one to build bunkers and fortifications or have a formalised promotion structure.

Since there exist at least four wildly differing accounts of Wiesenthal's activities between October 1943 and the middle of 1944, serious questions about what he actually did should surely be raised.

Some of those who doubted his version of events — such as the lateformer Austrian Chancellor Bruno Kreisky — went so far as to accuse Wiesenthal repeatedly in the 1970s and the 1980s of being a collaborator with the Gestapo.

Kreisky's claims were supported by unsubstantiated evidence provided by the Polish and Soviet governments, and when Wiesenthal took Kreisky to court, it was Wiesenthal who won.

Two affidavits made by former members of the German army also asserted that the Nazi hunter was a collaborator, but such claims must be treated with extreme caution.

Smearing Wiesenthal is a popular pastime for anti-Semites, Holocaust deniers, so-called 'Revisionists' and other such cranks.

But the multiplicity of conflicting accounts demands that questions about the authenticity of his story must be raised by those who, like me, have no agenda.

However, I have no compunction in stating that the biggest lie he spun was over his involvement in the hunt and eventual capture of Adolf Eichmann, a supposed coup with which he will always be associated — and quite unjustifiably.

According to the myth, Simon Wiesenthal started hunting Eichmann almost as soon as the war was over.

By the early 1950s, he had all but given up, until he had a supposedly chance meeting with an Austrian nobleman called Baron Mast in the

late autumn of 1953.

## Unfortunately, Wiesenthal's intelligence was useless

Baron Mast showed Wiesenthal a letter he had received in May that year from a former army comrade now living in Argentina, in which the writer had come across the 'pig Eichmann', who was living in Buenos Aires and working nearby.

In his first published memoirs, *I Hunted Eichmann*, Wiesenthal recalls how he was terribly excited by the news, but realised that he was out of his depth.

A few months later, on March 30, 1954, Wiesenthal finally sent a dossier on Eichmann to the World Jewish Congress and the Israeli consul in Vienna, in which he shared the contents of the Baron's letter and revealed that the criminal was working at the construction site of a power station 65 miles from Buenos Aires.

Unfortunately, Wiesenthal's intelligence was useless. Not only was he unable to supply Eichmann's alias — Riccardo Klement — but at the time of the Baron's letter, Eichmann was in fact working more than 800 miles from Buenos Aires, and by March 1954 he was living in the Argentine capital trying to establish his own business.

However, there was worse to come.

In 1959, when the hunt for Eichmann was heating up, the Israeli intelligence service, Mossad, asked Wiesenthal if he had any more information on the criminal.

On September 23, he wrote to the Israelis and told them that he suspected Eichmann was in 'northern Germany' and that he 'does visit Austria from time to time'.

Once again, he was supplying useless information.

From other sources, the Israelis had established that the fugitive was in fact in Buenos Aires, and the Wiesenthal lead was another dead end.

After Eichmann was kidnapped the following year by Mossad agents, Wiesenthal at least had the grace to deny that he 'personally had something to do with Eichmann's arrest', and that he had deposited all his files in Jerusalem.

However, with the Israelis remaining tight-lipped about his involvement, he decided to fill the information vacuum and started placing himself right at the heart of the hunt.

He would write that although he said he had sent all his files to Israel, he had actually always kept the Eichmann file. This was completely untrue.

Perhaps Wiesenthal's most shocking lie concerning the Eichmann affair was to claim that he told the Israelis in his letter of September 1959 that the Nazi was actually in Argentina.

As we have seen, he told them that Eichmann was likely to be in Germany — a minor difference of several thousand miles.

Curiously, Dr Segev has seen both the September 1959 letter and the later claim, yet he chooses to ignore the differences in his book.

The plain facts are that Wiesenthal lied about his degree, his wartime experiences and his 'hunt' for Adolf Eichmann.

Any man who utters so many untruths does not deserve to be revered. Although some excuse Wiesenthal's 'story-telling', there are simply too many other lies to take him seriously.

Furthermore, by stating that Wiesenthal 'lived between reality and fantasy' to deal with his wartime experiences is an insult to all those Holocaust survivors who merely told the truth.

- Guy Walters is the author of *Hunting Evil* (Bantam)

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Not surprising.

This 'storytelling' is what most have come to expect of some people.

- keith anthony, pulborough,england, 10/9/2010 08:37

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Winston Churchill was by all accounts quite an unpleasant man too, flip-flopping between parties to stay in power, making poor decisions in peacetime, and generally having a personality that would make Gordon Brown seem immediately loveable.

All that makes no difference in light of what he achieved and what he stood for. Same for Simon Wiesenthal. He might have been a bit creative with his past. but he didn't invent the fact the Nazis committed atrocities and he dedicated his life to catching them.

- C.M. Burns, Windscale, 10/9/2010 08:34

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This article is a little bit strong against the man especially with all the "lack of records". Its a well known fact that records get lost, errors are made and quotes taken out of context, intentionally or accidentally. There are too many assumptions made here from 60 years on. I don't buy it.

- Mark C, Phoenix, USA, 10/9/2010 08:19

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"Let he who is without sin cast the first stone"

Don't worry Guy.

One day when you're rich, and famous, and dead, somebody desperately trying to attract attention to their book will no doubt stoop to criticise 'the man', rather than honour 'the Legend'!

- Brian, Lifeof, UK, 10/9/2010 07:51

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So to sell his book...he has to lower the prestige given to a great person...very low indeed...Here's hoping his book does not do well.

- victor arram, westcliff, 10/9/2010 07:39

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Here come the BNP-alerted numpties...

- Ben, Dover, 10/9/2010 07:26

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