

WEST GERMANY

In from the Cold

The most wanted man in West Germany for the past 20 years has been Reinhard Gehlen, the shadowy chief of West German intelligence, whom the Communists honored with a standing offer of \$250,000 to anyone who could kill him. An assassin almost collected in 1953, but the bullet-resistant glass in Gehlen's Mercedes deflected the revolver slugs. That was the closest the Communists came, for Gehlen was a furtive quarry. He allowed no pictures to be taken (the only postwar photograph of him was a sneak shot taken in 1957), traveled under aliases, continually switched the license plates on his cars, and was known by sight only to a handful of top Western officials. Last week the West German government announced that its master spy will retire in April, when he reaches 66.

Hitler's Wrath. Gehlen was a colonel on the General Staff in Russia in 1942 when the Wehrmacht suddenly ran into unexpected Soviet resistance. Gehlen was given the mission—until then largely ignored by the overconfident Germans—of assessing the capabilities of the Red Army. As chief of intelligence on the Eastern front, he quickly won a reputation for precise forecasting of Russian moves, but his predictions of Soviet victories so angered Hitler that he ordered Gehlen sent to an insane asylum.

Instead, Gehlen fled with the retreating Wehrmacht into the Bavarian Alps,

where he cached away 50 steel cases of intelligence data on the Red Army. Reckoning that the wartime alliance of the U.S. and Soviets would soon crumble, he greeted the victorious invading Americans with a proposal: his secrets in return for U.S. financial backing. The U.S. accepted and installed Gehlen and his wartime staff in a heavily guarded compound near Munich that had formerly served as headquarters of Deputy Führer Rudolf Hess. There, behind double rows of concrete walls and steel fences, Gehlen plotted some of the crucial undercover moves of the cold war. He recruited agents throughout Eastern Europe, even had a minister in the East German government in his employ, smashed a Czech-run spy ring in West Germany and provided the West with a realistic assessment of Soviet power that helped the U.S. to call Soviet bluffs over Berlin. The Central Intelligence Agency regarded Gehlen as one of its best investments.

Soviet Agents. In 1956, after West Germany had gained sovereignty, Gehlen's organization ended its dependence on the CIA. Gehlen, who was known in the trade as Herr Doktor, enjoyed Konrad Adenauer's close confidence. When Adenauer stepped aside in favor of Ludwig Erhard, Gehlen's standing declined in Bonn, partly because Erhard mistrusted espionage, and partly because of disclosures that two of Gehlen's aides had been double agents in Soviet employ. But Gehlen recovered a measure of his former influence under the Grand Coalition, even though he warned Chancellor Kurt Kiesinger and Foreign Minister Willy Brandt that their diplomatic initiatives toward Eastern Europe might provoke the Soviets into some kind of serious political retaliation.

Gehlen turns over to his hand-picked successor, Lieut. General Gerhard Wessel, 54, an organization of 3,500 full-time employees that ranks after the CIA and Britain's MI-6 as the free world's most ubiquitous intelligence service. Though he will slip into retirement as furtively as he conducted his operations, Gehlen can take some pride in the fact that his reputation for omniscience has entered the German language. In response to an unanswerable question, a West German is likely to reply, "Das weiss nur der Gehlen" (Only Gehlen knows that).



GEHLEN IN HANNOVER, WEST GERMANY (1957)
Only Herr Doktor knew.

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