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SPY BOSS WITHOUT SUNGLASSES AND BEARD

A Visit to the Legendary Reinhard Gehlen

By Mascha Michaelsen

Reinhard G e h l e n, a name full of puzzles, a life full of secrets, a past under Hitler, a man about whom rumors, assumptions, and slander flew thick and fast for years, because the general and chief of intelligence seldom talked with reporters and never let himself be photographed voluntarily. He did not want to become known by the public either professionally or privately.

Who is he really? How does he live? What does he think? Not until now in his 72nd year was he ready to receive Politiken's reporter, Mascha Michaelsen, for a conversation in his home on Starnberg Lake in Bavaria. Gehlen tells about his views on Willy B r a n d t, on the G u i l l a u m e affair, the accusations against the chief of counter espionage, G ü n t e r H u i l a u, and about the allegation that he mainly hired old Nazis as spies.

Two doorbells, Junior and Senior, are placed under the metal sign on the garden gate, "Beware of the Dogs." There is no name, only the house number 27-29. It is Waldstrasse in Berg, postal zone number 8131. A quiet, exclusive district. Lonely villas lie in large gardens hidden behind ancient trees. A fresh wind blows over Starnberg Lake.

I press the doorbell over "Senior," and shortly after a clear male voice is heard on the intercom. Even though I am expected and have prepared for days for this visit to one of this century's most mysterious men, I still have stage fright. Simply the question of how I should address him gives me a headache. Shall I address him as General or Mr. President? Reinhard Gehlen himself gave me the answer. He came walking up the driveway and reached out his hand with a friendly smile, so I only said, "Hello, Mr. Gehlen."

No Gift From the Americans

Like all other gardens here, the garden slopes down towards the lake. The man of the house, dressed in a dark gray suit and very well-groomed, leads me past the large house on whose terrace there are tricycles and other toys.

"That's where my son lives with his family," he explains. I stand still and look at the brown manor-like house, "So that's the much-discussed house which - according to Der Spiegel - the Americans gave you as a present?"

Gehlen laughs, shakes his head, and continues laughing. "Yes, this is the house, but it is not a present from the Americans. I

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myself have bought and paid for it. Since the lot is so big, I was able to build a small pre-fabricated house for myself and my wife. That's sufficient for us now when the children have left home."

His wife, Herta, with whom Gehlen has been married since 1931, is not there. She has an appointment with the hairdresser. In the kitchen the old housekeeper whom the Gehlen family has had for 60 years clatters with pots and pans. The home is simply, tastefully, and pleasantly furnished.

Lots of Guillaume's

The lower part of the house has been rebuilt into three connecting studies with a view of the lake. The walls are completely covered by bookcases, and there are books on the desk. Reinhard Gehlen reads a lot, preferably astronomical, scientific, and technical books.

And now when I sit across from the former president of the BND (Bundesnachrichtendienst, the West German intelligence service) and sip a glass of sherry, I first ask the famous expert what he thinks about the Guillaume affair which led to the change of chancellors in Bonn.

"Look here," says the former chief of intelligence service, "there are lots of that kind of affairs. Guillaume is not any isolated case. When I was still chief of the BND in Pullach, I was asked years ago whether it was possible that there were East Bloc spies in the ministries in Bonn. With the scope that the Eastern intelligence work had, I had to assume at that time that there would be at least one source for the opponent in almost every ministry. Otherwise it would have been unnatural."

Reinhard Gehlen laughs when I exclaim, "Terrible!"

"Since we now are talking about the subject of the intelligence service," Gehlen continues, "then let me give you my opinion about it. The average citizen thinks of any intelligence service as something James Bond-like, where superhuman, good-looking spies make the impossible possible and even seduce beautiful women. That's not how the intelligence service is in reality. It is a scientific institute. Intelligence work is thorough and laborious work day in and day out, accuracy, yes, pedantry. Intelligence work requires intuition and knowledge of human nature."

Trust More Important Than Money

I discover Johannes Lindworsky's book, "The Mental Processes of Humans", at the end of the bookcase. Reinhard Gehlen follows my glance and says, "As chief of an intelligence service you are obligated to take care of your people. You must give every

single one the feeling that you are there for him. The most important thing is not the money you pay for an agent. Agents who work for money only are poor employees. They easily let themselves be converted by the opponent. Trust is important. Because when one loses trust, he defects. Then even the best ones defect. The same is true of the employees in the center."

This seems to be one of the subjects about which Reinhard Gehlen likes to talk. But that is not very surprising, because General Gehlen has been intimately acquainted with the subject of intelligence since 1942. After he had taken over the section "Fremde Heere Ost" which handled intelligence reports about the Soviet Union, Gehlen's work methods were so reliable that his map of the enemy's positions hardly differed from the enemy's own operational map. He also succeeded in keeping his intelligence files after the war since he had the majority of them duplicated in good time and had buried them.

I ask Gehlen what he thinks about the series of articles by the former British intelligence officer, E. H. C o o k r i d g e, which, among others, the Swiss weekly, Die Weltwoche, has published about him and which has been published as a book.

"I do not want to say anything about the numerous inaccuracies and untrue information in his book. I could say a lot about it. But my oath of secrecy does not permit it. It is a complete puzzle to me from where Cookridge has many of his allegations. And he certainly is not right in his allegation that I have served many masters. I have solely worked in German interest against the East Bloc with an independent German organization in cooperation with the Americans. Just as soon as a new German government was established, my organization was systematically taken over by it."

Old Nazis

"And the allegation that you employed old Nazis in your organization which kept cropping up, how about that?"

"Naturally a small number of former Nazis were employed. They were those who were capable of certain jobs and who were not politically or criminally tainted. But it is nonsense when they say that I employed only Nazis. It would have been illogical of me. Formerly I always had difficulties with those guys. Then why should I employ them after the war?"

"In order to return once more to the most recent events in the Federal Republic, what do you think about the resignation of Chancellor Willy Brandt?"

Reinhard Gehlen does not think for long. "I have never been a member of any party, neither the Nazi Party nor any other later. I wanted to and would even today like to do something for my country

above the parties. Incidentally, my former organization has always worked for the country's external security. I have never wanted to have anything to do with the internal security which inevitably has an effect on domestic policy. I can at any time confirm that none of the German governments ever have received any reports of domestic policy from me. But to return to your question. I consider Willy Brandt a politician who definitely has been guided by good intentions in his goals. However, almost half of all West Germans considered his foreign political ways and domestic conceptions illusions and dangerous. But as a former official I do not wish to comment on it."

The Nollau Case

"Since I now have taken the bull by the horns, I should like to hear your opinion about the most recent affair in the Federal Republic."

Gehlen made a slight gesture. "I know what's coming already," he says and leans back in the armchair. "The thing about Günther Nollau, isn't that true?"

I nod. Gehlen continues, "In England it is taken for granted by everybody that the affairs of intelligence and security services are not discussed publicly. The damage to the whole is always greater than the benefit. Even in the English Parliament some years ago when a member asked about the British intelligence service, the Prime Minister answered, 'It is not in the public interest to answer this question.'

"And thus it was. It is also regrettable for us and damaging to the cause that such extensive reports were published in the German newspapers in connection with the Guillaume case. As far as Dr. Nollau personally is concerned, he must have been checked thoroughly before he was hired by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (counter-espionage). It was not my case, and I have no knowledge of negative facts."

Since 1968, i.e., for six years already, Gehlen, who was born on 3 April 1902 as the son of an "oberleutnant" in Erfurt, has been retired. He has written two books, "Der Dienst," a biographic retrospective view of his life, and "Zeichen der Zeit," an evaluation of the world situation. As a reaction to these books he receives letters from the whole world almost every day. Reinhard Gehlen answers these thoroughly and carefully.

Grateful

"When you look back on your life, how do you see it?"

"I can only be grateful to fate, both as far as work is concerned and privately. Everybody makes mistakes here in life. I don't at

the present moment know what fundamental mistakes I have made. I was able to give much human help which was especially satisfactory. The only thing that does not satisfy me is the fate of my country."

During a walk in the garden he philosophized, "Europe and Germany must join together; that is absolutely necessary in order to stop further advances of Communism and in order to make peace in the world on that foundation. The world problems continually become more urgent and overshadow the political problems even now. Just think of how important the cooperation of industrial countries with the raw material-producing countries is, the race problems, the problems of the Third World, etc."

Gehlen's Greatest Worry

To Reinhard Gehlen Communism is now as before the greatest problem:

"When you read Werner Keller's book, 'East Minus West Equals Zero,' he says to me, "you will understand me. It is up to the West to treat the East right. Let us take the example of Alexander Solzhenitsyn. He is a symptom of the beginning weakness of Communism. Already for a long time an inner emigration has taken place in the Soviet Union and naturally in the other East Bloc countries. But when the Soviet Union needs financial help, whose central point now as before is armament, then it is always the West that helps. Keller is completely right when he says at the end of his book, 'The decision lies with the West.'"

Finally Gehlen tells me a funny story. Previously he always drove in his official car to the BND in Pullach. Always camouflaged as an ordinary citizen and behind sunglasses. Now and then he picked up a medical student who hitchhiked to Munich in order to save money for the train. He earned money for his studies as a photographer.

"One morning a resident here in Berg told me that this student had gotten the assignment from a weekly paper to photograph the BND president, secretly of course, because he was very camera-shy. He had already sat for one whole day in a tree across from my house with a concealed camera. But without success."

That was the last time Gehlen picked the student up in his car. The risk was too great.