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SPY AND COUNTER-SPY The first of a series of articles on the world's intelligence services

How, in the ashes of the Nazi defeat, a German intelligence organisation was saved for the West by the man who now heads Bonn's Secret Service

Germany's Secret Phoenix

By SEFTON DELMER

DO you know who is head of the British Secret Service? You do not? Neither do I. Nor do more than a handful of top officials in Whitehall.

And even those who do know his identity never refer to him by name. By them, as by the few hundred officers of his own service, the Cabinet Ministers, and the civil servants and Service officers on the distribution list of his reports, he is talked of only as "C," the coldly impersonal cypher inherited from his predecessors by each successive head of Britain's Secret Service.

Such discretion is not, however, practised by the Secret Service heads of other countries. When the Americans set up the Office of Strategic Services during the last war, it soon leaked out that its chief was that flamboyant character "Wild" Bill Donovan. The Central Intelligence Agency which later took the place of O.S.S. was equally unwilling or unable to hide that one of the United States most successful operators in the fields of intelligence and underground diplomacy had taken charge of it—Allen Welsh Dulles.

As for the Germans, the identity of their Secret Service Chiefs was so well known to us during the war that at least one branch of Britain's propaganda service was able to make great play of the cut-throat intrigues and rivalries between Hitler's secret men, from Admiral Canaris and Heydrich, to Schellenberg, Kaltenbrunner, and "Gestapo" Müller. Only one of Hitler's spy chiefs escaped publicity, a quiet methodical young staff officer named Reinhard Gehlen, who from 1942 to the end of the war, as chief of the Army High Command department "Foreign Armies East," was in command of all anti-Soviet operations.

In the Limelight

Alas for this quiet Prussian. Now that he has become the head of Chancellor Adenauer's Secret Service the 59-year-old ex-General Gehlen has not been able to keep out of the limelight.

Mind you, I have little doubt that General Gehlen himself would prefer the anonymity of his British opposite number. He takes Garbo-like precautions to remain hidden. In his own organisation the name Gehlen is never allowed to be mentioned. His 6,000 subordinates call him "Number Thirty" or more simply "the Doctor." (Is it evidence of a subconscious hankering after academic distinction that this studious intelligence chief invariably affixes a "Dr." to the aliases he assumes on his travels? Two examples known to me: "Dr. Schneider" and "Dr. Fritz Wendlandt.")

And never, but absolutely never, has "the Doctor" in all the years that have gone by since the collapse of Hitler wittingly permitted a photograph to be taken of himself. Such pictures as exist of him today all date back to the old days under Hitler. Pictures showing him addressing his men on the Führer's birthday, sitting in a group with his staff, or receiving the report of a Russian officer fighting for Hitler.

The purpose of this photographic blackout, I presume, is to safeguard him from attempts on his life. For Gehlen, like everyone else in West Germany, has to do all his work in close proximity to the Iron Curtain and he is very conscious that his Soviet or Soviet-German antagonists might try to rub him out, or kidnap him in the same way that they have already succeeded in abducting some of his men. He never uses the same car two trips running (although he indulges a give-away passion for variations of the Mercedes 300). He carries a gun himself and wherever he goes he is accompanied by two bodyguards—even, as I discovered for myself, when he calls at Adenauer's office in Bonn.

But even if they had a good photograph of him I fancy the agents of Soviet-German spy chief Erich Mielcke would have a tough job memorising his face. For the fact is that Gehlen has one of those expressionless faces of which there are thousands sitting behind desks in German government offices.

I met him once, seven years ago, when we both of us happened to be calling on Dr. Hans Globke, Chancellor Adenauer's Chef de Cabinet. And, although I was fully aware of Gehlen's job and its importance, his features made so little impression on me that I find it hard to recall them today.

All I can remember is a lean and whippy little civilian in a light, sporty-looking grey suit—height about five foot seven—who struck me as a typical cavalry officer in mufti. Deep-set light blue eyes looked out at me from a smooth, sallow, thin-lipped face. The most distinctive thing about him were two enormous ears which stuck out from his head like jug handles.

But although there is a dearth of Gehlen photographs there is no lack of other details to make up the picture of the man who is not only one of the most influential and powerful Germans active today, but also, in the view of Washington, the West's most successful operator in collecting and evaluating intelligence from the Soviet world.

Take only the amazing story of how Gehlen at the end of the war not merely escaped the trials and internment which were the fate of Hitler's other generals, but even managed to salvage his espionage organisation from the wreck and get it working again within a few months of the collapse. Only a genius of diplomacy and psychology could have brought off that miracle. No story could be more revealing of the character of this soldier whom Adenauer affectionately calls his "lieber General"—his dear general—because of his services in restoring Germany to military power and importance.

Remember 1918

Consciously or subconsciously Reinhard Gehlen must have had at the back of his mind in those desperate last weeks of the war the memory of how the German generals of 1918 successfully played on Western fears of Bolshevik expansion to preserve their army and their power as a caste. He must have remembered it all the better as he himself took part as a young officer in the army's clandestine come-back at that time. For Gehlen, the son of a Prussian officer turned publisher, had in 1920 at the age of 18 entered the new Reichswehr as an ensign.

Gehlen's 1945 plan for German military resurgence also relied on his being able to exacerbate and exploit the coming breach between Stalin's Russia and the Western allies. Not that he was alone with this idea. Many German leaders were thinking and even talking on these lines, from the leaders of the Conservative Resistance to men like Himmler and Security Chief Walter Schellenberg.

What was original about Gehlen's concept was that he planned to use the know-how of his anti-Soviet intelligence unit as his stake in the game. He planned to offer his services to the victorious Americans. For his own work had shown him that O.S.S. had not even begun to function in the Soviet Union. He reckoned that Washington would jump at the chance of obtaining the help of an expert agency like his. And he was right.

As early as January 1945 he took the first steps to put his plan into effect. Shortly after having been received by the Führer for what was to be his last personal report—the date was January 9, 1945—Gehlen summoned the key members of his staff to a conference. They met in his room in the underground steel and concrete shelter of the Army High Command's "Maybach" H.Q. at Zossen, near Berlin.

How to Surrender

Gehlen addressed his experts. "We shall shortly have to leave here," he told them. "We shall be on the run and unable to take our files with us. I therefore want you to make a rapid but thorough review of all our material while there is still time. Everything that is of real value to future operations—and I include in this operations which we may undertake in a Germany which is defeated and occupied—you will now have microfilmed in three copies. The original documents will all be destroyed. The microfilms you will place in three waterproof canisters, one set in each."

Then he split his men up into three parties, each of which contained at least one expert in the various fields covered by the organisation. To each party he assigned one canister. These canisters had a defence mechanism which exploded them if anyone tried to open them by force.

"If we are overrun by the enemy you will go into hiding in three separate groups," he said. "You will stow away your canisters in safe caches inaccessible to the enemy. If you have to surrender you will do so only to the Americans. Under no circumstances will you surrender to the Russians. You will disclose nothing to your captors about our work, unless you receive permission from me in writing."

By the time the microfilms had been made—several miles of film to each canister — the Russians had already got to the Oder river. Gehlen decided it was time to move out of Zossen and begin the trek south. In a convoy of army cars Gehlen and his men drove down towards Bavaria.

They remained together as far as Miesbach, a village in that alpine area between Bavaria and Austria which Hitler had designated as the "impregnable redoubt" where his armies would make their last stand. Here Gehlen ordered the three groups to separate.

"The Americans will be here any time now," he said to his men in farewell. "Do as I have ordered and all will be well. I will keep in touch with you by secret courier."

When the other two parties had left for their prearranged hide-outs, Gehlen and his team went off on foot to theirs. They climbed a mountain above the Schliersee, the alpine lake into whose volcanic depths other fleeing Secret Service groups had already sunk cases of secret documents, including several loaded with forged Bank of England notes.

From the Valley

Gehlen climbed and climbed until he reached the Elendsalm, where he had secretly prepared a chalet for his party. And on the Elendsalm and the mountain top above it he now awaited the coming of the Americans.

He did not have to wait long. Through their binoculars Gehlen and his officers were two days later able to make out the first American armoured spearheads racing through the alpine valleys below in the dash that was to take them to the gates of Prague.

"It will be a few days yet before the Amis leave their jeeps and come to have a look around up here," said Gehlen. "And when they do come it will be by day. They'll be too spooked to come up by night. So we shall be quite safe sleeping in the chalet. No need to camp out."

In this prediction—his last as an Intelligence Chief of Hitler's Wehrmacht—Gehlen was to be proved correct. It was almost a week before one sunny morning a burst of automatic fire against the walls of the chalet was followed by the arrival of a platoon of G.I.s. The general decided the time had come for him to climb down from his mountain and give himself up.

Unlike other high officers, Gehlen made no attempt to disguise his identity or his importance. On the contrary, from the very first, Gehlen presented himself to his captors as the chief of Hitler's anti-Soviet Intelligence. He produced his pay-book and his papers to prove it.

"Lieut.-General Reinhard Gehlen," he hopefully announced with a bow and a click of his heels. "I command the High Command department Foreign Armies' East. Intelligence you know . . . like you!"

But the lieutenants and sergeants of the American C.I.C. screening the prisoners were not interested in mere generals, not even intelligence generals. Kraut generals were a dime a dozen. They were after bigger game . . . Gauleiters, war criminals, Gestapo men.

And to his consternation Gehlen was ignored. It was weeks before he was at last sent to Wiesbaden to be interrogated by a certain General Patterson, an American intelligence man, who was interested in finding out all about the German intelligence and how it worked.

For most of that first conversation Gehlen was examining Patterson, not Patterson Gehlen. And much to his relief he elicited that Patterson was not one of those U.S. officers who believed that Stalin was the only true democrat among the allies of the United States. Gehlen decided to put his cards on the table—microfilm archives, hidden teams of experts, captured Soviet documents revealing secrets of the Russian establishment—everything.

A Scoop

General Patterson could not believe his luck. He had a scoop. A real scoop.

But so too had Gehlen. For this was the opening he had longed for. Gehlen, his archives, his staff, were now all carefully assembled by the Americans, studied and interrogated. The Germans sat down to write papers on the history of their operations and their methods. Gehlen told his men to hold nothing back. Soon American intelligence officers began to come to him for advice about the Red Army, the situation in the Soviet occupied territories. How should they evaluate this bit of information, what should they do about that?

It was not long before Gehlen and his experts were removed from the dreary interrogation centre and transferred to the heavily guarded U.S. Army intelligence compound in Frankfurt-am-Main. There they were assigned offices of their own to work in. That made them virtually free men. They were able to see their wives and go out into the town when they wished.

That was important for them, both as private individuals, and as members of a nation which at that time was jobless and hungry. But more important was the significance of this development in history. For Gehlen and his staff officers now went into action again against the Russians.

Under the direction of General Patterson, Gehlen began to establish contact once more with some of the army of agents he had left behind as Hitler's armies retreated from the Russians. The Americans provided the necessary funds and soon the Gehlen machinery was ticking again—like the heart of a man who has died for a few minutes and is then massaged back to life by a skilful surgeon.

The information procured by the Gehlen organisation, especially from occupied Germany, which the Russians by now had closed to the Western allies, was so impressive in comparison with the Americans' own meagre information, and Gehlen's analyses were so shrewd and imaginative that Patterson's chiefs in Washington began to be interested. Patterson was ordered to fly Gehlen to the United States so that the Pentagon could look him over.

And it was in Washington that Gehlen made his all-important deal—the deal which was the dream of Himmler and Schellenberg, the deal which enabled him to revive a section of Hitler's General Staff and lay the foundation of German rearmament at a time when such rearmament was still anathema not only to the Allied Governments but to the German public.

Gehlen agreed to form a German Intelligence Service which would get information from behind the Iron Curtain for the Americans. As Gehlen himself tells the story nowadays he made three demands to the Americans before accepting:

1. The staff of his unit should be exclusively under his orders. They should work as a purely German organisation on a fixed dollar budget financed by the Americans.
2. No member of his unit should be made to work against German national interests.
3. Until Germany regained her sovereignty and formed a government of her own, he, Gehlen, should be regarded by the Americans as a trustee of German interests in matters of intelligence. He should be free to pass his organisation over to the German Government after Germany had regained sovereignty.

The Americans accepted Gehlen's terms, granted him a fixed budget of 3½ million dollars a year (they increased it soon after) and provided for him, his staff, and their families a special compound of their own at Pullach, near Munich, where they could live and work in secret. Ironically the compound which was allocated to Hitler's former spy chief was the Rudolf Hess settlement, a housing estate consisting of a score of one- and two-family houses, which had originally been built to house Nazi Party functionaries with large families. It had been used as a secret staff headquarters by Hitler during the war and a number of prefabricated huts had been added which came in most useful now.

Secret Work

Here now behind a high barbed-wire fence and with a battalion of German auxiliaries under U.S. command guarding them the Gehlen team set to work in conditions of secrecy, amounting almost to isolation. Even the children of the Gehlen men were not allowed to leave the camp for fear that they might give away what was going on. They were sent to a special school in the camp and with them went Gehlen's own four youngsters.

But Gehlen, whose Flemish family motto *Laet vaeren nytt* ("Never give up") now hung once more on the wall of his private sanctum, had got where he wanted. For not only was he able to turn his unit into a shadow German General Staff but more important still he was now in a position to supply the Americans with the kind of intelligence which would make them feel that it was essential to re-create the German Army to help in the defence of Europe against the Russians.

And he was doing so at exactly the same time as the German Communist spy corps sent into the West from the Soviet zone of Germany, in order to demonstrate their indispensability to the Kremlin were reporting to their Russian masters the allegedly nefarious Allied plotting against Moscow in the Western zones of Germany.

Among the staff officers whom he recruited for his organisation was his old chief at the High Command, Lieut.-Gen. Adolf Heusinger, later to become the first Inspector-General of the new West German army. Heusinger is today chairman of N.A.T.O.'s standing military committee, a position which, like his previous command of the Bundeswehr, he owes very largely to the good words put in for him with the Americans by the influential Gehlen.

Not that Heusinger did intelligence work for Gehlen while he was in Pulach. As Heusinger tells the story Gehlen called on him early in 1948, just after he had been released from internment and suggested he should join Gehlen's unit to keep himself up to date on the Red Army.

"It might be a good thing," said Gehlen, according to Heusinger, "if you inform yourself about the military situation in the East. You can do that if you join my shop."

The Academy

Other old staff officer comrades likewise took jobs with Gehlen. And soon there was almost as much planning being done in Pullach for the new German Army which Gehlen felt sure the Americans would require before long as for the job of providing the Americans with intelligence reports. Quite a number of top officers of the new Bundeswehr graduated from "the Doctor's" academy.

But while Gehlen was taking former generals and staff-officers on to his pay-roll in the higher echelons of his new intelligence unit (and even today most of the officials who represent him in his more important liaison functions with government and industry are old staff officers of "sound" conservative background) his operatives were also recruiting at a lower and more secret level many former members of Himmler's S.D. and Gestapo.

"We had to do this" is the usual explanation given by Gehlen men. "The Soviet authorities were using so many S.D. and Gestapo men in their service that this was a good way of penetrating the Red espionage and counter-espionage outfits."

One result of this engagement of S.D. men by both the Gehlen service and the espionage services of his Soviet-German rivals was that the battle between Gehlen and the Communist spy chiefs Wollweber and Zaisser and their present successor Erich Mielcke became a war between rival gangs of S.D. men, with many of them working for both sides or rapidly changing from one to the other. Every week this astonishing war between the two rival armies of ex-Himmler thugs takes its fresh toll of arrests, murders and kidnappings.

Of these I will tell in my next article.

A forged Communist identity document produced by Gehlen's organisation.

Wartime picture of Gehlen. His appearance today is little changed except that he has a moustache.

Gehlen, on left, on wartime visit to interrogation camp for Russian prisoners-of-war.