

America's Secret Vanguard: US Army Intelligence Operations in Germany, 1944–47

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Two of the most riveting spy movies of all time, *The Third Man* (1949) and *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold* (1965), are set in post-war Central Europe. The time and place of the plots are no coincidence. Germany's location at the heart of Europe, its industrial potential, and its large, well-educated population gave it an inherent strategic importance that none of its conquerors could ignore.

When the Allied forces invaded the Reich in 1944–45, they were accompanied by a plethora of secret service and security organizations, which sought to exert control over the occupied territory, exploit the spoils of war, learn about the intentions of their wartime partners, and deny others the opportunity of doing any of the above. “Divided Germany during the Occupation was an intelligence jungle,” recalls James H. Critchfield, an American intelligence officer who served in post-war Germany and Austria. During those years, Soviet and Western intelligence “waged the largest, most concentrated and intense intelligence warfare in history on German soil.”¹

The United States and its intelligence services played key roles in the defeat and ensuing occupation of

Germany,² yet the historiography of American intelligence during this time period is decidedly uneven. While two particular agencies—the Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA)—have drawn ample popular and scholarly attention, historians have largely ignored the intelligence operations of the US Army.

This is surprising as well as unfortunate since the OSS and CIA played only minor roles in the US intelligence gathering effort in early Cold War Germany. The OSS disappeared from the scene when President Harry S. Truman ordered its dissolution in September 1945. And when the US government established the CIA as America's premier intelligence organization in 1947, Army leaders successfully demanded that the new agency defer to senior military commanders in occupied areas, including Japan and the US zone of Germany.³

The period between those events left the US Army virtually alone in shouldering American intelligence requirements in a time and place that were to prove critical for the readjustment of US global strategy from world war to the Cold War. “We were the CIA, FBI and military security all in one,” reminisces a

All statements of fact, opinion, or analysis expressed in this article are those of the author. Nothing in the article should be construed as asserting or implying US government endorsement of its factual statements and interpretations.

military intelligence officer who served in post-war Germany, “because those agencies weren’t functioning in Germany at the time...[c]onsidering the resources that were placed at our disposal in those immediate post-war years... and all the multitude of missions we

were required to perform—espionage, black market, security, political activities—we were achieving a minor miracle every day in getting as much information as we did.”⁴

This article serves as a first attempt to outline Army intelligence opera-

tions from the moment US troops entered Germany in 1944 to the proclamation of the Truman Doctrine in 1947, and to assess their role in the final defeat of National Socialism and in the unfolding contest between the United States and the Soviet Union.

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The Army’s Military Intelligence Community on the Eve of the Cold War

World War II greatly expanded and thoroughly professionalized Army intelligence. Opening in June 1942, the Military Intelligence Training Center at Ft. Ritchie, Maryland, trained thousands of G.I.s as prisoner-of-war interrogators, military interpreters, photo interpreters, and order-of-battle specialists. Following an eight-week course, the Army grouped the recruits into military intelligence specialist teams and deployed them overseas, principally to Europe.

A good number of “Ritchie Boys” were German émigrés who had left their country for political reasons under the Nazis, and many were Jewish.⁵ The émigrés’ generally superior level of education and intimate knowledge of Germany proved valuable assets as they pursued their Army intelligence duties during the war, and some continued to work for the Army during the occupation period.

As an organization, Army intelligence during that period is best described as a fluid community, composed of several agencies of varying size and different, if often overlapping, responsibilities. Unlike many other intelligence agencies, it was not a single entity with a clear structure and hierarchy, its adminis-

trative history being neither static nor monolithic. Between 1944 and 1947, the War Department and the Army managed over half a dozen agencies which dealt with the collection, evaluation, dissemination, and safeguarding of militarily and politically relevant information in Germany.

At the apex of Army intelligence stood the War Department’s Military Intelligence Division (MID), whose director doubled as assistant chief of staff of the G-2 (second section of the General Staff). The MID held overall responsibility for the development of strategic intelligence, establishing the Army’s intelligence priorities and requirements, collecting the appropriate information from subordinate agencies and other sources, processing the acquired data into finished intelligence, and passing the results to other agencies inside and outside the War Department. For its operating functions—collecting, analyzing, and disseminating intelligence—the MID relied on its executive arm, the Military Intelligence Service (MIS).⁶

The two most important intelligence organizations under the MID were the Army Security Agency (ASA) and the Counter Intelligence Corps (CIC). The ASA was responsible for the interception and decryp-

tion of foreign communications.⁷ The CIC had the task of countering enemy espionage and sabotage. Toward the end of the war, the CIC acquired a number of additional duties, including intelligence collection through espionage.⁸

During World War II, the Army relied mainly on the OSS for intelligence gathering, but when OSS was dissolved in September 1945, its espionage and counterespionage sections were briefly attached to the War Department as the Strategic Services Unit (SSU). The SSU reported directly to the office of the assistant secretary of war, not to the MID, and thus remained on the periphery of the Army’s intelligence community.⁹

The Military Attaché Branch also produced a steady stream of information for the G-2. The War Department appointed military attachés to US diplomatic missions, and one of the tasks of the attachés was the collection of militarily relevant information in their host countries. Typically, they used open sources, such as newspapers or information gleaned from conversations with local officials. The attachés reported their insights directly to the MID in Washington.¹⁰

Until 1947, when the US Air Force became an independent military service, Army intelligence also included the intelligence branch of the Army Air Forces (AAF), the Air Intelligence Staff (or A-2). Air Force intelligence focused foremost on the procurement of information needed for strategic bombing and air power. Perhaps more than any other Army intelligence agency, the A-2 suffered from the effects of demobilization, as the AAF's manpower overseas fell from about 1 million men at the end of the war to 385,000 at the end of 1945.¹¹

In Europe, Army intelligence personnel served at every command echelon—in G-2s at division, Army, and Theater level, and S-2s (staff) at the regiment and battalion level. The divisional G-2s oversaw intelligence specialists in the field who operated in four types of teams during World War II: interrogation, interpretation, photo interpretation, and order of battle. So-called "enemy equipment intelligence services," directed by the Army's individual technical services, collected technical intelligence on and from enemy forces.¹²

When the Army established the Office of Military Government, United States (OMGUS) in May

1945, this organization, too, set up its own intelligence component. The Office of the Director of Intelligence provided the military governor information pertaining to issues beyond the military sphere in US-occupied Germany, such as economic, political, and social intelligence. Denazification and the monitoring of communist subversion figured among the top priorities of OMGUS intelligence during the early years of the occupation.¹³

Last but not least, in 1947 the Army set up the United States Military Liaison Mission (USMLM) in Potsdam, a city in the Soviet-occupied part of Germany. Originally established to provide liaison with the Soviet occupation forces in East Germany, the mission quickly evolved into an important collector of military intelligence on Soviet forces in East Germany, and later on the East German People's Army, because USMLM officers were authorized to travel freely across the Soviet zone.¹⁴

While the Army intelligence community's fragmentation and constantly evolving organizational structure complicated collection and analysis efforts, rapidly changing intelligence requirements in post-war Europe posed additional chal-

lenges. Until 1945, the various military agencies focused principally on Nazi Germany, but as the war in Europe came to a close, Army intelligence needed to readjust its sights quickly to the Soviet threat. The shift had to be executed with rapidly dwindling resources: units were transferred to the Pacific or were demobilized altogether and sent back to the continental United States, and in October 1945 the Army closed its wartime military intelligence training center at Fort Ritchie as a cost-reduction measure.¹⁵

Constant reorganization and downsizing made for a highly fluid military intelligence community whose exact nature appears to defy historical analysis. As an official historian of Army intelligence wrote in apparent frustration shortly after the war, "it would be easy to assume that the [Military Intelligence] Division did nothing but reorganize."¹⁶ But the difficulty of describing the structure of Army intelligence in its near-constant state of flux must not obscure the fact that the various agencies conducted a wide range of operations in Central Europe, which profoundly shaped American perceptions of the emerging Cold War.



Nazi Subversion

On the afternoon of 11 September 1944, a five-man patrol of the First US Army's V Corps crossed the Our River from Luxembourg, becoming the first American military unit to set foot on German soil in World War II.¹⁷ With the US invasion of the Reich, the engagement of Army intelligence in Germany began in earnest.

The convulsions of the dying Nazi regime and its potential post-war legacy posed the most immediate challenge to invading forces. As Army units marched into and eventually occupied large chunks of the former Reich, military intelligence gathered tactical information on the retreating German forces; ran counterespionage operations against Nazi

spies and stay-behind agents; assessed Nazi plans for a last stand in the Alps (dubbed the "Nazi redoubt"); participated in the removal of Nazi officials from public life (denazification); oversaw US propaganda operations toward the enemy population; aided in the control and settlement of hundreds of thousands of Soviet POWs, Polish

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forced laborers, and Jewish concentration camp survivors (Displaced Persons, or DPs); and exercised censorship on US and German mail.

Army intelligence considered some of these tasks, such as propaganda and denazification, extraneous to its core intelligence mission and divested itself of them shortly after the war. Other missions, such as the gathering of tactical intelligence on the Wehrmacht and conducting counterintelligence against Nazi spies, became unnecessary with Germany's surrender in May 1945. The Nazis' feared last stand in the Alps proved nonexistent upon investigation. As the G-2 division of XXI Corps noted drily, Hitler's vaunted alpine fortress "is neither a Redoubt, nor is it National."¹⁸

Yet some threats commanded the attention of Army intelligence beyond the end of the Reich. The notion of a Nazi guerrilla movement operating behind the lines in occupied territory had some substance in fact. As the German fortunes on the battlefield turned for the worse, German intelligence officers in 1943 began discussing the need for a stay-behind organization that would support the Wehrmacht by using guerrilla tactics in Allied-occupied territory.

Since the Führer and many in his entourage regarded talk of an Allied invasion as defeatist, Nazi leaders did not execute plans for such an organization until late 1944, when US troops had already pierced the Reich. On 19 September 1944, SS leader Heinrich Himmler appointed

SS General Hans-Adolf Prützmann to head a guerrilla organization, which was to harass enemy lines of communication, assassinate Germans collaborating with Allied authorities, and spread Nazi propaganda to stiffen civilian resistance to the occupation. The Nazis dubbed this organization Werewolf (*Werewolf* in German), after a lowbrow, patriotic adventure story by an early twentieth century German writer named Hermann Löns.¹⁹

From the start, an inefficient organizational setup, overbureaucratization, and ineffective leadership plagued the Werewolf. Serving under the SS rather than the Wehrmacht, the would-be guerrillas had no direct access to the resources and expertise of Germany's professional military. Moreover, Prützmann turned out to be a bad choice to lead the Nazi stay-behind organization. Though intelligent and ideologically committed, he was also an arrogant, unfocused braggart.

Prützmann never managed to turn the Werewolf into anything like the powerful organization portrayed by German radio propaganda, and he committed suicide shortly after falling into British hands in May 1945. An optimistic estimate puts the total membership of the Werewolf at 5,000 to 6,000 mostly underage boys recruited from the Hitler Youth. Many were as politically fanaticized as they were militarily inexperienced.²⁰

How well did Army intelligence understand that this organization posed at most a limited threat? Mili-

tary intelligence personnel obtained reliable information on SS plans for a Nazi subversive organization from German prisoners of war as early as August 1944.²¹ In the spring of 1945, an informant provided Sixth Army Group General Staff, G-2, with a stolen German memorandum on the administration of the Werewolf organization, including Prützmann's name and central role in this endeavor.²²

By April 1945, Army intelligence had identified the Werewolf as the fulcrum of Nazi subversion and was in a position to describe the brief history and administrative makeup of the organization fairly accurately: "The most serious threat to our security in the immediate future would appear to be the Werewolf organization," concluded the Combined Intelligence Committee of the Supreme Headquarters of the Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF). "Information about the Werewolves is at present scanty, but this much is clear. It was founded toward the end of last year, as an organization to resist the occupying powers by guerrilla methods. It is a single organization, designed to operate on all fronts and is commanded by SS Obergruppenführer Prützmann."²³

Some of the Army's early intelligence reports on Werewolf activities were alarmist and cast the organization as a serious security threat. A report from the French First Army to the US Fifth Army estimated the strength of the Werewolf "to be better than 22,000," and predicted "that after Germany's total occupation the organization may count close to 50,000 members dedicated to National Socialism and ready to carry out any mission."²⁴

In a similar vein, the G-2 of the US Seventh Army reported that the Werewolf was “not a myth,” that it had cells in every major German city, and that it was set to continue its activities after the military defeat of the Third Reich.²⁵ But as information on the Werewolf moved up through successive echelons of command and was put into context, Army intelligence assessments of the organization became decidedly less alarmist. In April 1945, SHAEF’s Combined Intelligence Committee reported that apart from one or two incidents of isolated resistance, the population of Allied-occupied Germany appeared to be “apathetic and supine,” and that “no serious opposition” had been encountered to date.²⁶ In mid-May 1945, SHAEF acknowledged various cases of murders and sniping of Allied soldiers, as well as the appearance of Werewolf notices against collaboration in Allied-occupied portions of Germany, but noted that so far the Werewolf had failed to materialize as a serious threat.

In the few instances where Allied forces encountered actual Werewolf partisans, the latter usually surrendered quickly. The G-2 of the Third US Army reported that the Counter Intelligence Corps captured an entire Werewolf headquarters after its members were ordered to surrender by a German soldier who had submitted to the Americans earlier.²⁷ In the southwestern German city of Speyer, the French arrested two young Werewolves who had been observed loitering near a bridge and were found to possess two notched pistols. “They were not particularly brave during interrogation,” the report noted, “and denounced a

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dozen German civilians possessing firearms.”²⁸

The most dramatic incident commonly associated with the Werewolf occurred shortly before the end of the war. On 21 October 1944, US troops captured the German city of Aachen near the Belgian-Dutch border. Most of the Nazi administrators, as well as much of the civilian population, had fled the city, and the Americans appointed a local politician with anti-Nazi credentials, Franz Oppenhoff, as mayor.

Bent on making an example of Oppenhoff so as to discourage other Germans from collaborating with the advancing Allied forces, Himmler decided to have the US-appointed mayor assassinated. In January 1945, he instructed Prützmann to use the Werewolf for this task, but Prützmann ended up assembling a small hit squad made up mostly of regular SS soldiers, apparently for lack of suitably trained Werewolves.

Using a captured US B-17 “Flying Fortress,” the Luftwaffe dropped the SS commando over Belgium, where they crossed back into Germany and headed for Aachen. On 24 March, two of the assassins, SS Major Herbert Wenzel and SS sergeant Josef Leitgeb, reached Oppenhoff’s home where they identified themselves to the mayor as downed German pilots. Oppenhoff offered them sandwiches and advised them to surrender to the Americans.

When the team leader, Wenzel, hesitated to execute the hospitable

mayor, Leitgeb grabbed the pistol from him, pointed it to Oppenhoff’s left temple, and pulled the trigger. The mayor died instantly. On their flight from Aachen, the two SS men survived a shootout with American soldiers, but Leitgeb subsequently stepped on a mine and died. Wenzel disappeared in the chaos of post-war Germany and was never heard from again.²⁹

Nazi propaganda touted Oppenhoff’s murder as a spontaneous vendetta carried out by local Werewolves.³⁰ In reality, “Operation Carnival,” as the Nazis named the hit job, was a carefully hatched assassination plot executed by hardened SS men with critical logistical support from the Luftwaffe. Though the US Army’s intelligence services had been unable to prevent Oppenhoff’s murder, they quickly recognized it as an isolated incident, not as a harbinger of things to come in occupied Germany.³¹

Moreover, Army intelligence realized that the main danger of violent acts ascribed to the Werewolf, such as Oppenhoff’s assassination, lay not in the acts themselves but in their exploitation by Nazi propaganda and their potential for fanaticizing segments of the German population.³² This threat did not materialize. As Army intelligence noted at the end of the war, the assassination of Oppenhoff had failed to discourage Germans from working with Allied occupation forces.³³ In only one case did the Army execute an alleged Werewolf

for attempted sabotage and espionage, though it remains unclear whether this individual had committed any physical acts.³⁴

After Germany's unconditional surrender on 8 May 1945, Army intelligence remained alert to the possibility of Nazi subversive activities. As the G-2 of Seventh Army pointed out, there was an abundance of fanaticized Hitler Youth, including many strong personalities and prospective leaders, with plenty of time on their hands to stir up trouble.³⁵

Indeed, as the occupation forces settled in, anti-American posters popped up in several German cities in the US zone of occupation,³⁶ women and girls associating with G.I.s received (mostly anonymous) threats,³⁷ and intelligence officers registered "a notable increase in the arrogance of civilians" toward G.I.'s.³⁸ From summer 1945 to spring 1946, the CIC, in conjunction with British intelligence, apprehended a number of former Hitler Youth personalities who apparently were in the early stages of building a subversive Nazi organization.³⁹ The Army's G-2 division in Washington judged this measure, called Operation NURSERY, a complete success.⁴⁰

Army intelligence eventually came to the conclusion that the post-war Werewolf posed a hollow threat. Extensive telephone wire-cutting constituted virtually the only physical acts perpetrated against the occupation forces of the US Army, and the evidence collected by military intelligence officers suggested that civilians stealing cables for their personal use committed most of this "sabotage." In one of the rare



instances in which the Army apprehended a wire-cutter, the perpetrator turned out to be a 12-year-old boy who "claimed that he was acting on orders from the station master who had told him the wire was no longer in use."⁴¹

In its last political intelligence report before its dissolution, SHAEF concluded:

No acts of overt resistance traceable to an organized resistance movement have been reported. The rapid collapse of Germany and the thoroughness of counter-intelligence methods have broken up all efforts...to form resistance groups and encourage Werewolf activity; subversive activity now only amounts to scattered and unconnected incidents of sabotage. If in fact active resistance develops in the future it will arise more from disaffection dur-

*ing the prolonged occupation than from the original Werewolf planning.*⁴²

In the immediate post-war period, Army intelligence agencies received numerous reports on such scattered resistance activities. In Goppingen, girls associating with US soldiers received threatening notes, signed with a rubber stamp impression of "The Black Hand."⁴³ In Berlin, the local G-2 reported on two underground organizations, "Deutschland für Deutsche" (Germany for Germans) and "Kreuz und Kette" (Cross and Chain), which bullied anti-Nazis cooperating with the occupation forces.⁴⁴ In Hofgeismar, a small town in northern Hesse, the 78th CIC Detachment investigated a local football team suspected of doubling as a front organization for neo-Nazi activities.⁴⁵

Very rarely did such groups commit acts of violence, however, and Army intelligence deemed it "improbable" that the various sub-

versive neo-Nazi groups were “part of a widely spread organization.” Rather, they appeared to represent “a natural reaction to the occupation” by returned German soldiers, who were as frustrated by military defeat as they were by German women who preferred the company of comparatively affluent G.I.s to that of penniless Wehrmacht veterans.⁴⁶

As the first post-war winter approached, Nazi subversion seemed to gather strength. In late 1945, Army intelligence received the first reports on a far-flung neo-Nazi movement calling itself *Edelweiss Piraten*.⁴⁷ Allegedly organized throughout occupied Germany, gangs of young men, boys, and some women were reported to be harassing German girls dating American soldiers, beating up Polish DPs, and engaging in extensive black market activities. Members of the *Edelweiss Piraten* often congregated at railway stations, sported edelweiss flower pins (long the symbol of German youth resistance) for mutual recognition, and spouted Nazi rhetoric. The ostensible aim of the organization was, as a CIC special agent put it, “the reestablishment of a nationalistic State.”⁴⁸

Goaded into action by a growing volume of reports on the nefarious activities of the group, the CIC in early 1946 launched a US-zone-wide operation (Operation VALENTINE) to infiltrate and incapacitate the *Edelweiss Piraten*.⁴⁹ Based on intelligence collected by local informers, and in cooperation with US military police and German police, the CIC arranged the arrest of hundreds of *Piraten* across the zone.⁵⁰

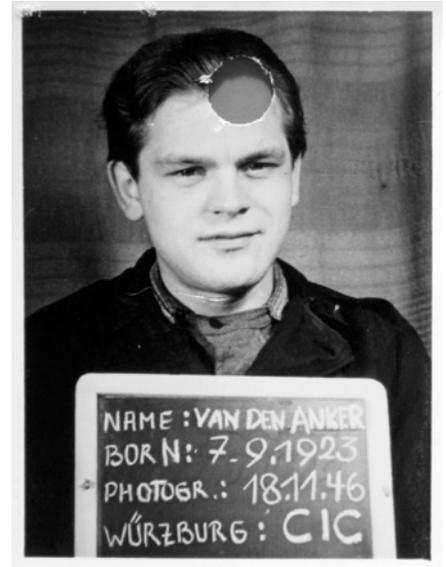
German police and CIC special agents carefully interrogated the arrested to learn more about their

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mysterious organization. What emerged from these interviews, though, was not a map of an all-powerful, well-organized Nazi subversive movement, but rather a snapshot of the bleak realities of post-war Germany.

The war had uprooted countless young Germans: orphans, discharged soldiers, escaped prisoners of war, youth fleeing from the Soviet zone, and ideologically corrupted ex-Hitler Youth who lacked parental supervision. With no place to go, many drifted across Germany and lived as vagrants. Given that many had served in the military or one of the various Nazi organizations, they were inclined to embrace a primitive nationalistic creed to create a sort of *ersatz* community.⁵¹

The case of one *Edelweiss Pirat*, Karl Hans Strassmuth, is illustrative. Born in Hanover in 1927, Strassmuth moved to East Prussia with his family in 1933. In 1941, he joined the Hitler Youth and in January 1945 was drafted into the *Volksturm*, a paramilitary organization set up at the end of the war and consisting mostly of older men and underage boys. While Strassmuth fought the advancing Soviets as a machine gunner, both his parents were killed in an air raid. When the Red Army invaded East Prussia, he took refuge with a neighbor. In September 1945, he managed to flee west. Eventually, he reached Bremen and joined one of the many roving *Edelweiss* youth gangs that spent their days on the margins of society.⁵²



Young Edelweiss Piraten arrested during Operation VALENTINE in 1946. Photo: Courtesy of NARA.

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Like many other *Edelweiss Piraten*, Strassmuth had not joined his group in order to build a fourth Reich, but rather out of despair and for lack of an alternative. Strassmuth's gang, observed a CIC agent who had infiltrated the group, "was nothing more than a band of roving transients, who could never stay in one city for any lengthy period for fear that they would become too well known."⁵³

The information gleaned from the interrogation of hundreds of *Edelweiss Piraten* like Strassmuth led Army intelligence officers to conclude that "[t]he Edelweiss Piraten presents no security threat. It is a name adopted by... loose living youths... who have been forced into small gangs in order to obtain food and lodging. The gangs are formed usually in the vicinity of railroad yards or stations. The goods they steal are usually sold to black market operators. The Edelweiss insignia is seen frequently in Germany, and it has become fashionable to wear the badge."⁵⁴

By early 1947, Army intelligence had succeeded, through a combination of skillful information gathering, perceptive analysis, and stern countermeasures to all but eliminate subversive activities of the *Edelweiss Piraten*, whose remaining members migrated to the more laissez-faire British zone.⁵⁵ A CIC special agent suggested that in the future the problem of violent vagrant youths might be solved not through repression, but rather by "forceful[ly] settling down of a large number of homeless youths," which

"would prevent such incipient subversive organizations as the Edelweiss Pirates from progressing and developing further."⁵⁶

The Soviet Threat

By the time the specter of Nazi subversion faded, US military intelligence had already turned its attention eastward. Army leaders had never entirely trusted their Soviet ally, and during the war, Army intelligence kept a steady eye on communist and Soviet organizations suspected of engaging in espionage, propaganda, or subversion.⁵⁷ Likewise, the Army carefully investigated rumors that Stalin was exploring a way out of the war. "Under certain conditions," the Joint Intelligence Committee of the Joint Chiefs of Staff concluded in August 1943, "the USSR has the capability of concluding a separate peace with Germany."⁵⁸ A few weeks later, suspicions about Soviet disloyalty led the MID's executive organization, the Military Intelligence Service, to recommend the secret registration of communists serving in the Army and their removal from sensitive positions in case Moscow were to drop out of the war.⁵⁹

Such suspicions led to the establishment in the Signals Intelligence Service (the precursor of ASA) on 1 February 1943 of a small, highly secretive unit to decrypt intercepted Soviet diplomatic messages.⁶⁰ Among its missions would have been an effort to determine if there was any foundation to recurring rumors that Stalin was considering a separate peace. When knowledge of

the unit reached the White House, a member of President Franklin Roosevelt's entourage sent word to MID Deputy Director Col. Carter W. Clarke to cease all cryptanalytic efforts against the Soviet Union. Not considering this a formal order, Clarke disregarded the instruction, and Army decryption efforts against Soviet traffic continued. The effort became the foundation for the interception and decryption program and counterespionage efforts collectively referred to as VENONA, which eventually involved NSA, CIA, and the FBI and which produced abundant evidence of large-scale Soviet espionage operations in the United States.⁶¹

Months before the war ended, Army intelligence expressed concern over Moscow's designs on post-war Europe. In January 1945, the Joint Intelligence Committee—to which the Army was a major contributor—produced a detailed "Estimate of Soviet Post-War Capabilities and Intentions."⁶² An attempt to forecast Soviet foreign policy



Col. Carter W. Clarke advocated decryption of intercepted Soviet communications during WW II. Photo: Courtesy of NARA.

through 1952, the paper clearly foresaw the end of US-Soviet alliance once the war had ended.

*In carrying out its national security policies the Soviet Union will rely heavily upon the development of its own influence upon other nations. In peripheral areas, such as Eastern Europe, the U.S.S.R. will insist upon control or predominant influence; in other areas, such as Central Europe, it will insist upon an influence equal to that of the Western Powers; in more remote areas, such as Western Europe, it will probably be content to wield a merely negative power such as would prevent an anti-Soviet orientation of the countries involved. In carrying out these policies, the U.S.S.R. will use the Communist parties and other means at its disposal. The methods it may employ are likely to seem repugnant and aggressive to governments not under Soviet influence.*⁶³

With regard to Germany, the committee's ominous forecast turned out to be mostly accurate. Not even a month after Germany's surrender, the G-2 of XXI Corps reported that the German Communist Party (KPD) had reemerged, that it sought to use denazification as a tool to nationalize certain industries, and that its leaders looked with optimism to the future.⁶⁴

In early June 1945, the CIC reported "signs of communist activity, which [had] taken a fairly clear definite form." In the industrial West German city of Wuppertal, the CIC

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took the drastic step of squashing an illegal communist party organization.⁶⁵ Based on reports coming from Germany, the MID in Washington concluded that the Nazis had suppressed the communist party only temporarily. With the Nazi oppressive apparatus gone, KPD members were busily rebuilding their party with the ultimate goal of controlling the new German regime.⁶⁶

By early 1947, Army intelligence concluded that the KPD would not achieve its ambitious goal of decisive political control in the Western zones, and that the overall political balance in the American zone of occupation had tilted in favor of the noncommunist parties.⁶⁷ But in the East, the Soviet military administration authorized a forced merger of the KPD with the noncommunist Social Democratic Party (SPD) in early 1946.

Though the SPD was much larger than the KPD, communists loyal to Moscow assumed all key positions in the new "Socialist Unity Party of Germany" (SED). Army intelligence judged the merger a victory for Soviet zone communists.⁶⁸ Indeed, the SED would eventually become the dominant political party in the Soviet-controlled German Democratic Republic.

The resurgence of the communist party in Germany went hand in hand with Soviet propaganda, subversion, and espionage activities across Central Europe. One country of concern for Army intelligence was Czechoslovakia, which bordered on the US-

occupied zone of Germany in the southeast. Though nominally independent, the country remained in Moscow's crosshairs after the Red Army entered Prague in May 1945. The local communist party gradually expanded its influence and eventually assumed power in a violent coup in 1948.

As the counterintelligence section of the US Forces in the European Theater (USFET) noted in early 1946, the Soviet intelligence service (NKVD) dominated the Czechoslovak security service. The same report observed that "Czech agents have no difficulty in crossing and recrossing the border into Germany, due to the complete lack of border control." Specifically, the report pointed out that three Soviet citizens employed by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA) had crossed from Czechoslovakia into Germany on an UNRRA mission. While the UNRRA mission had been bona fide, the three Soviets were known informants for Soviet intelligence, and Army intelligence suspected that they had used their official mission as cover for illegal covert activities. USFET had received this information "from a reliable source in Prague," proof that Army intelligence engaged in espionage operations in Soviet-controlled territory in Central Europe as early as spring 1946.⁶⁹

Berlin was another focal point for Army intelligence. The Red Army had conquered the city in May 1945, but the Allies had agreed to administer the German capital jointly. On



Soviet officers arrested on suspicion of espionage in the US occupation zone of Germany in 1946. Photo: Courtesy of NARA.

4 July 1945, soldiers of the 2d Armored Division of the US Army entered Berlin,⁷⁰ and the city was subsequently divided into four occupation sectors, one for each of the three principal World War II Allies, and France.

The city's location deep inside the Soviet zone, its dense population, the eager willingness of residents to procure and sell information, and the ease with which one could cross from one zone to another quickly turned Berlin into a hub for all sorts of covert and subversive activities. In March 1946, US military authori-

ties in Berlin arrested 12 German communists on charges of intimidation, attempted espionage, and making critical remarks about US occupation policies. These were the first arrests reported to have been made in connection with the political activity of any party members in Germany.⁷¹

Army intelligence also registered a growing resolve of Soviet authorities to kidnap people of intelligence value or considered hostile to Moscow. In the summer of 1946, a source inside the Berlin criminal police informed Army intelligence

of a report from the missing persons bureau to the effect that 337 persons had disappeared in the city during the month of June. Of those, 245 had vanished in the Soviet sector. The source pointed out that "not all of the disappearances in the Russian Sector are assumed the result of the direct action of the Russian authorities"—in other words, many or most had to be considered kidnappings.⁷²

A little over a year later, the 970th CIC detachment in Berlin reported that Soviet intelligence had abducted six German employees of the Civil Administration Branch of the Office of Military Government for Berlin Sector (OMGBS). "It is therefore reasonable to conclude," the CIC noted, "that an almost complete penetration of subject office has been successfully effected by Soviet Intelligence."⁷³

The uncertain future of Soviet-US relations and the menacing presence of Soviet forces in central Europe prompted the MID to take a closer look at Red Army strength and deployments. In September 1945, the division launched a coordinated effort to collect Soviet order of battle information from the various Army intelligence agencies.

MID officers collated the material and used it to produce *Soviet Military Roundup*, a weekly publication on Soviet forces worldwide. *Roundup* drew on a large and diverse set of sources, ranging from top secret reports to publicly available information. Initially, the MID distributed *Roundup* only to the G-2, USFET, and to certain military attachés stationed in countries adjacent to the USSR, but other agencies soon requested copies, and circulation was

expanded to include the Office of Naval Intelligence; the War Office; Air Force Intelligence (A-2); the G-2, US Army Forces in the Pacific; and the SSU.⁷⁴ The popularity of *Roundup* highlights the importance Soviet issues had attained within the US military intelligence community just a few months after the end of World War II.

The MID cautioned that the constant reorganization of Soviet forces and large-scale transfers of troops into and out of Soviet-occupied Germany rendered precise order of battle estimates difficult.⁷⁵ Still, *Soviet Military Roundup* provided a steady stream of assessments of the location, strength, and composition of Soviet forces worldwide, with a heavy focus on Central Europe. From April through late May 1946, *Roundup* estimated there were 700,000 Soviet troops (six armies, or 40 divisions) in East Germany.⁷⁶ In late May, *Roundup* registered a slight drop, estimating the number of Soviet troops in East Germany at 628,000, organized into four armies, or 34 divisions.⁷⁷ *Roundup* from 24 May 1946 noted that, while the Soviets intended to decrease troop strength significantly across southeastern Europe, Moscow planned to concentrate the remaining forces in East Germany: “The troop transfers [to East Germany], when completed, will not necessarily constitute a net increase in the already large Soviet-North European occupation forces, for it is probable that the additional troops are to be used to absorb the effects of the third stage of Soviet demobilization on occupation forces in Germany and Poland.”⁷⁸

MID Deputy Director Clarke supported this projection in a memoran-

The numbers show that Army intelligence had captured the main trend of Soviet troop deployment in the Soviet Zone.

dum to the chief of staff in February 1947, when he estimated Soviet troop strength in East Germany at 500,000. Though this number constituted a decline vis-à-vis the 1946 estimates, it was a small one compared to the demobilization of much larger Soviet forces elsewhere—in Poland, for example, Soviet troop strength was estimated to have declined by nearly two thirds, from 350,000 in November 1946 to 120,000 in February 1947.⁷⁹ And even taking the slight post-war drop into account, Red Army forces outnumbered their US counterparts in Germany by more than three to one in early 1947—if Army intelligence estimates were correct.

How accurate, then, were the MID’s Soviet order of battle estimates? The available data indicates that, while Army intelligence assessments of Soviet force levels were not always precise, they accurately grasped the continued, massive presence of Soviet troops in East Germany. As Army intelligence had noted, there was indeed a heavy turnover of Soviet troops in the immediate post-war years, but constant rotation notwithstanding, the bulk of Soviet forces in Europe remained in East Germany.

At the end of the war, the Soviets had about 1.5 million soldiers in Germany. In the immediate post-war era, demobilization led to a significant reduction, and Soviet troop levels bottomed out at the end of 1947, when 350,000 Red Army soldiers were stationed in the Soviet zone of occupation. By 1949, however, the number had risen to 550,000.⁸⁰

These numbers show that Army intelligence had captured the main trend of Soviet troop deployment in the Soviet Zone: decreasing in the months immediately following the war, but increasing thereafter and stabilizing at a high level in the late 1940s. Understandably, Soviet military power in East Germany inspired awe among Army leaders and Washington decisionmakers who were painfully aware of the concurrent rapid decline of US Army troop levels in the US zone of occupation: from 3,077,000 on V-E Day⁸¹ to 399,740 on 1 January 1946; to 161,789 on 1 January 1947; to 109,528 on 1 January 1948; and to 81,071 on 1 January 1949.⁸²

The Red Army’s continued presence in East Germany, combined with a steady stream of disturbing information on Soviet covert activities across Central Europe, had a profound impact on the US military’s strategic outlook on the USSR. Shortly after the end of the war, military intelligence strategists in Washington moved from estimates of Soviet intentions to possible responses by the United States. In October 1945, the Joint War Plans Committee requested from the Joint Intelligence Staff, “as a matter of priority, a list of 20 of the most important targets, suitable for strategic bombing, in Russia and Russian-dominated territory.” The Joint Intelligence Staff duly produced a list of targets, with detailed information on how bombing of each would affect the Soviet economy and war-waging capability.⁸³

Over the following months, US estimates of Soviet intentions and

capabilities evolved into a gloomy war plan scenario in the European theater. “It seems probable,” a study of the Joint Chief Planners estimated, “that further Soviet expansion in the various parts of Europe and Asia within the next five to ten years will be accomplished by step-by-step advances, with each step taken in a manner and at a time calculated to avoid risk of a major conflict. Such a course endangers the security of the United States.” If war broke out in Europe, the study predicted, the “Red Army should have little difficulty in completely overrunning Denmark, Germany and Austria and most of Belgium, Holland and France.”⁸⁴

From Moscow, the newly appointed US military attaché, Brig. Gen. F. N. Roberts, sent a detailed assessment that emphasized aggressive Soviet designs as well as the country’s military power. According to Roberts, Soviet foreign policy aimed “toward the ultimate attainment of dominant world-wide influence,” and he concluded that “[t]oday, there is no power or combination of powers on the Eurasian continent which is capable of equaling the military strength of the Red Army.”⁸⁵

Roberts sent his report just four days before the deputy head of the US embassy in Moscow, George F. Kennan, dispatched his famous “long telegram,” a passionate indictment of Soviet policy as intrinsically aggressive and hostile to the West. In order to keep Soviet belligerence in check, Kennan advocated “long-term, patient but firm and vigilant *containment* of Russian expansive tendencies.”⁸⁶ Given the similar thrust of Kennan’s and Roberts’s

missives, and their proximity in time, it is likely that the military attaché and the diplomat had coordinated their messages or had at least exchanged views on the subject of Soviet foreign policy and military strategy beforehand.

In Washington, the Joint Intelligence Committee reached a more differentiated—but still worrisome—conclusion. The committee did not believe that Moscow would deliberately start a war, however, it warned that the USSR would pursue an opportunistic foreign policy aimed at extending Soviet power as occasions arose. “It is possible,” the

committee stated, “that these courses of action by miscalculation would lead to open warfare.”⁸⁷ In view of Joseph Stalin’s attempt to drive the Western Allies out of Berlin during 1948–49 and his successor Nikita Khrushchev’s brinkmanship during the Cuban missile crisis (1962)—both of which pushed the superpowers to the edge of war—the committee’s estimate appears to be a realistic assessment of Soviet foreign policy.

Army intelligence collection and analysis on the Soviet Union reached the highest level of US policymaking. Via his special counsel, Clark



The Soviet threat as seen in 1947. US military intelligence predicted Soviet forces would quickly overrun much of Western Europe in the case of war. Image: Courtesy of NARA.

M. Clifford, President Harry S. Truman on 18 July 1945 requested from Secretary of War Robert Patterson a report that would discuss Soviet activities affecting US security, estimate present and future Soviet army and air force policy, and recommend US actions vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.⁸⁸ In his response, Patterson touched upon all the major issues Army intelligence had previously raised with regard to Soviet foreign policy and military strategy. He argued that “Soviet policy and practice in maintaining overwhelming military strength facing US forces in Europe and in Korea is a direct threat to the US.” Furthermore, he contended “that the Soviets are making every effort to raise the standard of efficiency of their forces in all places.” With regard to Moscow’s relationship with communist parties outside the USSR, Patterson noted the “Soviet habit of using local Communist Parties to weaken nations friendly to the US, and to prejudice US interests in those countries,” which represented “an important long-range threat to our security.” When it came to making recommendations on US foreign policy vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, Patterson urged firmness:

To summarize, I see only one real possibility of dealing with the policies at present pursued by the U.S.S.R. That is to be firm against any compromise of our fundamental ideals, the support of which is our responsibility to the world. This requires that the United States be strong internally and assist in strengthening those other nations which share our ideals. The hope is that in time there will evolve in the Soviet

A review of Army intelligence operations in Germany from 1944 to 1947 reveals an organization that was not perfect but performed well overall.

*sphere a responsiveness to the desires of the peoples of the world, including the Soviet peoples, for a just and real peace.*⁸⁹

Patterson’s advice foreshadowed the proclamation of the Truman doctrine of containment less than a year later: before a joint session of Congress, President Truman on 12 March 1947 requested \$400 million in aid for Greece and Turkey in order to assist their governments in resisting communist aggression. In his speech, Truman also demanded that “[i]t must be the policy of the United States to support free peoples who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressure.”⁹⁰

The roots of Truman’s containment policy are manifold—Stalin’s reluctance to withdraw the Red Army from northern Iran, Moscow’s support of communist parties

outside the USSR, and Soviet expansion into Eastern Europe and Asia. But Soviet intelligence operations in Germany, Moscow’s vigorous support of communist organizations across Central Europe, and the continued presence of a massive Red Army contingent in the Soviet occupation zone also were key concerns. Army intelligence had carefully investigated and continuously reported on these issues since the end of the war, thus feeding directly into the decisionmaking process that resulted in Truman’s promulgation of containment in the spring of 1947.

Army Intelligence and National Security

A review of Army intelligence operations in Germany from 1944 to 1947 reveals an organization that was not perfect but performed well overall. Though cumbersome, constantly in flux, and working with dwindling resources, the Army’s military intelligence community correctly identified and successfully addressed two key threats to the American occupation and US national security: Nazi subversion and Soviet power.

In due course, the rethinking of American security priorities opened the door to wide-scale US-German collaboration. In 1946, Army intelligence sponsored the establishment of a German proto-intelligence organization under former Wehrmacht general Reinhard Gehlen, which was to provide the Americans with military information on the Red Army (Operation RUSTY).⁹¹ In the same year, Army intelligence began par-



President Truman addressing Congress on 12 March 1947. Photo: Courtesy of NARA.

In the absence of any other fully operational US intelligence agency in post-war Germany, Army intelligence acted as the US government's principal intelligence collector in Central Europe well into the 1950s.

ticipating in a program run by the interdepartmental Joint Intelligence Objectives Agency to recruit German scientists to work on US missile and defense projects (Operation PAPERCLIP).

Both initiatives had long-term consequences. While Gehlen's intelligence organization eventually became West Germany's (and, after 1990, Germany's) official foreign intelligence service, the *Bundesnachrichtendienst*, German rocket scientists recruited in the course of Operation PAPERCLIP contributed directly to the US space program and the successful Apollo 11 moon landing in 1969.⁹² In some cases, Army intelligence and other

US agencies ended up working with individuals who were deeply compromised by their association with the Nazis.⁹³

From a national security perspective, Army intelligence accomplished its mission. According to the Army's latest intelligence field manual, an intelligence organization should produce "timely, relevant, accurate, predictive, and tailored intelligence about the enemy and other aspects." Its most important task "is to drive operations by supporting the commander's decisionmaking."⁹⁴

Measured by its own yardstick, Army intelligence in post-war Ger-

many acquitted itself well. Two key potential threats were investigated thoroughly and assessed in a timely manner. Predictions on future Nazi subversive and Soviet behavior were well-argued and reasonable. And the intelligence collected by the Army in Germany drove strategic planning at the War Department, if not foreign policy crafted at the White House.

In the absence of any other fully operational US intelligence agency in post-war Germany, Army intelligence acted as the US government's principal intelligence collector in Central Europe well into the 1950s. Especially against the backdrop of radical demobilization, the military intelligence community's unwieldy structure and the rapidly changing security environment of Central Europe, Army leaders and Washington decisionmakers could hardly have asked for more.

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