

John's Super-Spy Rivals Muscled Him Out of Bonn

By Joachim Joesten

"Beware of the devilry of secret service intrigues; don't ever drink from the poisoned cup of counter-intelligence, for that poison is lethal . . ."

This strange warning was conveyed in a letter addressed on March 30, 1953, by the then head of West Germany's military intelligence service, Lt. Col. Friedrich Wilhelm Heinz, to the then head of the Federal Security Office, Dr. Otto John. Since then, both men have left office, the former by dismissal, the latter by defection.

It may seem surprising that West Germany, having no armed forces of its own as yet, should possess a military intelligence service. Actually, Bonn has had a normal or preparatory Defense Ministry for about four years, an embryonic military intelligence service developed within the agency. Since 1950, it has been headed by Lt. Col. Heinz.

John's Empire

Also in 1950, there was established the Federal Office for the Defense of the Constitution, or Federal Security Office. Dr. Otto John became its chief. Although these two agencies were designed to serve widely different ends—one for the purposes of military intelligence, the other to combat subversives of the extreme right and left—they soon became involved in a bitter wrangle over jurisdiction. The battle was intensified by personal rivalries between Heinz and John.

To complicate matters even further, there existed, long before either of these two German secret services was set up, a hush-hush organization known as the "Gehlen-Apparat." All that originally was known about this hybrid outfit was that it had been set up by the Americans, with headquarters at Pullach near Munich; that it operated a far-flung network of espionage and counter-espionage behind the Iron Curtain; that it was headed by a former Nazi general, Reinhart Gehlen, and that it was financed out of United States Secret Service funds.

Gen. Gehlen unquestionably is one of the most intriguing "living legends" of the postwar period. For a long time, his personality and background were cloaked by such impenetrable mystery that reporters could not even come by the general's proper first name. So somebody called him "Gustav" and the name stuck.

It is still being widely used as a nickname, as in the catch phrase "Grußen Sie Gustav" ("Give my regards to Gustav") which is coming into fairly general use as a synonym of "Mind your own business." It was first employed as a challenge to supposed secret listeners on the telephone, since it is widely assumed in Germany—rightly or wrongly—that the Gehlen-Apparat has been engaged in wire-tapping, even within the Federal Republic.

Fierce Triangle

There was no love lost between Dr. John and Gen. Gehlen, any more than between the latter and Col. Heinz. All three—looking to the day West Germany would regain her sovereignty—fought fiercely for supremacy in a field where the Marquis of Queensberry rules have never been applied.

The downfall of Col. Heinz was of Dr. John's making, but with a friendly assist from the Gehlen organization. It came about last September, after Dr. John had painstakingly compiled a voluminous dossier, "F. W. Heinz" which was

brought to Chancellor Adenauer's attention.

Heinz was incriminated on various counts: He had been an active Nazi and terrorist (which he never denied); he had been mayor of a town in the Soviet zone in 1945-6 (he used his office to spy on the Russians, said Heinz); above all, he had had traitorous dealings with a mysterious Dutchman, a double or triple agent named Jan Eland (blackmail, Heinz claimed).

After studying the Heinz dossier, Adenauer summoned his "Defense Minister," Theodore Blank, and ordered him to fire his intelligence chief forthwith. This was done effective October 1, 1953.

John Under Fire

No sooner had the Heinz case been settled than there appeared in a German magazine an article charging that Dr. John himself had been a friend of Eland's, had paid him hush money and had sent him off to Switzerland. Almost coincidentally with the publication of this article, Eland died in Zurich on November 3 under mysterious circumstances. An investigation of his death is still pending in Switzerland.

Again, a few months later, there appeared in the London Daily Express a series of articles written by its star reporter Seton Delmer. He charged that the "Gestapo boys" were coming back in Germany with a vengeance. Mr. Delmer specifically named Gen. Gehlen and Dr. Hans Globke in this connection.

Informed observers, watching these fireworks, quickly put two and two together: Gen. Gehlen was gunning for Dr. John, and the latter (who had worked closely with Seton Delmer in London in 1944-5) was firing back from both hips.

In spite of all the (rather silly) attempts that have been made, both in Bonn and elsewhere, to cloak or distort Dr. John's startling act, informed sources in Germany have never for one moment been unaware of the real background of his desertion: John, after having eliminated his weaker rival, Heinz, was himself being pushed to the wall by his stronger rival, Gehlen.

One week before Dr. John crashed through the Iron Curtain extension that bisects Berlin, Gen. Gehlen had banded to Dr. Hans Globke, Chancellor Adenauer's state secretary and chief of personnel, one of those fat, deadly dossiers marked "Otto John." It was placed immediately on the Chancellor's desk for his urgent personal attention.

Exactly what this dossier contained is not known yet, and perhaps never will be. It is taken for granted, though, that it dwelt heavily on certain alleged aspects of Dr. John's private life, which shocked Adenauer so much that he told Globke: "I never want to see that man (Dr. John) again."

The security chief, alerted by his own informants in the chancellery, took Adenauer at his word and departed for good.

Otto John was regarded as "Britannia's man." After his successful escape from Nazi Germany, in July, 1944, he had gone to London by way of Spain and Portugal. In the last months of the war, he had worked closely with British intelligence officers and had made anti-Nazi propaganda broadcasts over BBC. His candidacy for the post as president of the Federal Security Office was warmly sponsored by the British occupation authorities.

Gen. Gehlen, on the other hand, was and is "America's man." After a brief spell of captivity after the

German surrender, he was set up in his old business in 1946, but under new management. Since then, the Gehlen-Apparat has mushroomed to extraordinary proportions. It has a staff of more than 1,000 persons—not counting informants and agents in the field—no compared to the 800 employed by the Federal Security Office in Cologne.

Gehlen Rules Uneasily

Now Gen. Gehlen is riding on top, but he is far from being a happy man. His organization has been falling to pieces in the past few weeks. It is not so much a question of Dr. John having betrayed the identity of Gehlen's agents in the eastern zone (he can hardly have known more than a few of them). Rather, there has been a stampede of Gehlen men who think that Dr. John knew all about them and that he is telling the Russians all he knows.

Nor is that all. On December 11, 1953, Gen. Gehlen, in preparation for his new role as "central intelligence chief" of Western Germany, appeared before the EDC Committee of the Bundestag. It was, of course, a small and select group of well-screened members of Parliament who were allowed to attend this exclusive briefing on the organization and activities of the Gehlen-Apparat. One of those present was a member of Chancellor Adenauer's own party named Karl Franz Schmidt-Wittmack. This gentleman went over to the Reds one month after Dr. John had done so.

There is only one possible conclusion: What the Russians, at this stage, don't know about the Gehlen-Apparat, just isn't worth knowing. The Bonn Republic is not yet five years old, but it has already had three intelligence services, which have killed each other off, leaving both Americans and British high and dry.