

GERMANY'S SECRET PHOENIX-II

Berlin Battleground of Spies and Counter-Spies

Bonn's Secret Service is nowhere more effective than in the bridgehead of West Berlin, its window on the Soviet world...



By SEFTON DELMER

Marx behind the wall is Reinhard Gehlen, looking older now than in this picture. The wall hides his headquarters at Pullach, near Munich. Gehlen is known to the British Secret Service as "Rusty," but there is nothing rusty about his organisation.

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Famous Speech

BERLIN remains the main battlefield in the war between the two rival gangs of Hitler's former Secret Service men.

On the one side are those working under Communist Security chief Erich Mielcke for East Germany and Moscow. On the other, those working for the West under 59-year-old Reinhard Gehlen, Hitler's former chief of anti-Soviet espionage, who, after spying for the Americans during the first ten post-war years, is today the Secret Service chief of Chancellor Adenauer's Federal Republic. Hardly a week passes without announcements from both sides of agents captured, of murders, abductions and disappearances.

While I was in West Berlin recently the newspapers there announced the shanghaiing from West Berlin of Heinz Brandt, a former leader of the Soviet-German metal workers' union, who two years earlier had escaped from the East to the West. The Soviet-Germans promptly retorted that Heinz Brandt had been arrested on Soviet-German territory at Potsdam while trying to recruit informants for the service of Reinhard Gehlen.

And as I write the West German newspapers are full of the trial for treason of a certain Commander Walter Krenz of the West German Navy. Krenz is a former officer of Hitler's Navy who became a spy for the Russians after the war. Under instructions from his Soviet masters he joined the new German Navy in 1957 as a radar specialist. For four years he passed them all the N.A.T.O. secrets that came his way.

Earlier in the year a deputy of the West German Parliament named Frenzel was sentenced to a long term of imprisonment for espionage. Gehlen men had caught him too passing N.A.T.O. secrets—he had obtained them by virtue of his membership of the Bundestag's top secret defence committee—to contact men of Prague's Communist government. And so it goes on.

Many Change Sides

The fact is that cases like that of George Blake and the former R.N. petty officer Harry Houghton, sensational in Britain because of their rarity, are by comparison commonplace in Germany. There the political upheavals, the defeats suffered by such super-patriots and super-chauvinists as the Kaiser and Hitler, the to-ing and fro-ing between militarism and authoritarianism and anti-militarism and anti-authoritarianism, coupled with the post-war division of the country, have produced among many Germans an opportunism in their loyalties unparalleled in Britain since the Jacobites and the Vicar of Bray.

As a result it is quite common for agents of the Gehlen service to be turned round by the Communists, and for agents of Mielcke to be turned round by Gehlen.

The Communists have boasted more about their prowess in this respect than Gehlen. For with a population in their zone which is at best apathetic to the Ulbricht regime, they must for ever try to impress it with the efficiency of their Security Service.

Gehlen, too, however, has allowed one or two of his triumphs to become known. Most impressive of these was his success in planting an agent in the office of Ernst Wollweber himself, the first almost legendary spy chief of Soviet Germany.

The agent was a certain Walter Gramsch who went under the cover name of "Brutus" in the Gehlen service. Because he was personally known to Wollweber as a Social Democrat and a transport expert, he was able to get himself a job in Wollweber's Transport Commissariat early in 1946.

This was only a few months after Gehlen had started up his espionage organisation again under American auspices. The Soviet-Germans had no

suspicion of Gramsch. He quickly worked his way up to the important position of director of the department "Fleet and Harbours".

From this position "Brutus" was able to send back much valuable information, not only about Soviet troop movements but also about the organisation, the personnel, and the activities of Wollweber's spy net. Wollweber far from suspecting Gramsch, went out of his way to praise him for the devotion and thoroughness he showed in his work in the Commissariat.

Gramsch might still be working as "Brutus" for Gehlen in the Soviet German administration had not Gehlen signalled him to drop everything and flee to West Berlin. The date was November 8, 1953.

What caused this sudden recall? The West German spy chief himself had fallen for a "Brutus", a former Himmler protégé called Geyer. Geyer, who had been working for Wollweber and his predecessor, had allowed himself to be taken on by a man doing "research work" in East Germany for Gehlen. He had so greatly impressed his bosses in the Gehlen service with his efficiency that after a time they called him to West Berlin and set him to work there in a branch of their organisation.

Geyer's job in West Berlin was to help direct the work of a group of Gehlen operators in Soviet Germany. He had access to some of the most important files in the Berlin section and learned the identities of many more than the 30 agents under his control.

Geyer kept it up for more than a year. Then, when he had prepared a coup which he feared would give him away, he escaped across the sector border to Soviet Berlin and safety. It did not take the Gehlen men long to discover his defection. And the moment they did, they sent out signals to all the agents they thought might be endangered ordering them home. "Brutus" was one of those saved.

Secret Telephone Link

Among Geyer's victims was Werner Haase, a tough and courageous ex-officer of Hitler's Army, who under the name of Heister had command of Gehlen branch 120a in West Berlin. He had arranged to lay a secret telephone cable across a canal called the Heidekamp between West Berlin into the Soviet Sector in order, as he drily put it when obtaining approval for his scheme, "to facilitate inter-sector communications."

Alas, for the gallant Haase. The Gehlen agent who was to have received the cable on the other bank had been arrested as a result of Geyer's denunciation and he had given away the plan. On the even-

This series on the world's Secret services will be continued next month with articles on the elaborate organisation which protects the lives of American Presidents and their close relatives.

ing of November 13, 1953, Haase arrived at his station on the canal. He waved to his fellow agent whom he could see waiting for him on the Soviet side.

Then Haase knelt down and placed a toy steamer in the water to which a length of string was attached on which the cable was to be dragged to the other side. But just as he sent the model steamboat hissing on its way across the water, a posse of Wollweber men leaped out from behind a clump of bushes just behind him. They carried him off to the Soviet German security headquarters, and he was later sentenced to penal servitude for life.

Although Gehlen himself would always deny this, the greatest triumph of his organisation is one for which the credit has generally been given to his erstwhile American employers, the Central Intelligence Agency of Allen Welsh Dulles.

In 1956, when his period of service with the Americans was almost at an end and his espionage organisation was about to be transferred to the Bonn Government, Gehlen, through one of his Russian agents, obtained the text of Nikita Khrushchev's secret speech before the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party. It was the sensational speech in which Khrushchev denounced the crimes of Joseph Stalin. Before the Soviet propagandists were able to edit and howlerise it the Americans had published it throughout the world.

Gehlen is particularly well equipped for staging coups of this kind. For he and his officers, reinforced in the meantime by many civilian technicians and experts, have had long experience in handling Russian defectors and sending them back to work in the Soviet Union itself. Nor have all the agents Gehlen left behind him in Russia and the East European countries as Hitler's armies retreated, been expended yet. There are still a number there whom Gehlen has deliberately refrained from using. They await their turn to serve.

One point in particular appeals to me about these hidden agents. Many of the secret signallers whom Gehlen has installed with special high speed transmitters at various points in Soviet Europe share a common characteristic. They all suffer from some grave physical disability.

Why has Gehlen chosen to be served by an army of cripples? Because he expects that cripples will not be called up for military service, and so can be relied on to remain in the area to which Gehlen has assigned them.

This business of information-getting through agents forms only a comparatively small portion of the duties of the Gehlen organisation. Interception of radio messages and cypher breaking—for which he has the latest and most up-to-date electronic computer equipment—and the interrogation of travellers is equally important, and less dangerous. But probably the most valuable part of all the work done by the Gehlen service is that concerned with the evaluation and interpretation of intelligence, with the study of Soviet newspapers and periodicals, particularly the technical, scientific and economic publications, and the compilation from them of data revealing what is happening and what is going to happen.

Scientists Came Back

Of particular usefulness in this field are the German scientists who have returned to Germany from Russia after spending the post-war years in Soviet research plants. For many years they worked in the Soviet Union helping the Russians to design space rockets, and to perfect new radar devices and many other scientific developments. They got to know the Soviet technicians' methods and way of thinking their approach to technological problems. Now they are back.

All these scientists have been carefully examined by the Gehlen men. Many of them have been taken on to work for the organisation.

Ostensibly they are employed in German industry to cover they share with many other Gehlen operatives. For ever since the Gehlen service started up again its cover has been industrial and business enterprises, some of them genuine, others mere camouflage.

The branches stretch right through the Balkans and South East Europe to Turkey, Persia and the Middle East, and use many genuine German firms as their front. But the sector in which the Gehlen organisation is still strongest and most effective is, today as before, Berlin and East Germany.

It is a power which puts a great responsibility on this little German staff officer who was once the most successful of Hitler's spy chiefs—a responsibility not only to Germany but to the world.

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