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WEST GERMANY

NEWSPAPER INTERVIEW WITH
RETIRED BND CHIEF

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DOCUMENTARY

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Report forwards a translation of excerpts of an interview with the retired chief of the West German Federal Intelligence Service (BND) which were published in the West German newspaper "Abendzeitung" of 1 July 1968, pp. 3 and 5. A copy of "Abendzeitung" is submitted as enclosure (1).

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Excerpts of an Interview with the Former BND Chief General Gehlen Published by the West German Daily Newspaper "Abendzeitung":
The Great Stranger for Eighteen Years: A Visit With General (Ret.) Reinhard Gehlen, Retired Secret Service Chief

1. NEIGHBOURS ACTED AS HIS BODYGUARD

Among the scattered hills of the community of Berg, an inconspicuous forest road leads down to the eastern bank of the Lake Starnberg. Every morning, for 18 years, unless he was travelling or sick, the man living out there, used this narrow, green road to go to his mysterious headquarters in Pullach near Munich. His name became a legend, and very often, photographers sat in trees or behind bushes to take pictures of him; pictures which have been a desired item all over the world. They failed.

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1 Enclosure
1. One (1) copy of
the "Abendzeitung" of
1 July 1968

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Thus, our correspondent, Jochen Wilke (VOLUNTAS), described his visit with retired General Reinhard Gehlen, chief of the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND) (Federal Intelligence Service), who retired on 1 May 1968. Wilke's report on his visit was published in a recent issue of the magazine "Neue Revue" from which the following passages have been extracted:

If you are ready now to follow me inconspicuously to General Gehlen then please leave behind all your TV imaginations, or you will be very disappointed. No lurking assassins. No chirping wireless set inside a ball-point pen. No gun holster. No periscope on the chimney. No camouflaged entrance through which you can reach the "Holy of Holies". Even the modern radar antenna in the garden, later on turns out to be the clothes-drier installed for the convenience of his wife. Instead, a wide open entrance for the visitor, and a medium-sized, slim man in a gray summer suit steps out of the house to welcome the guest. Just as if you were visiting an acquaintance somewhere. Even the distrustful shepherd was locked up before my arrival. The dog likes to snatch at moving trouser-legs. "Should we not close the gate?", I asked the general. With a wave of his hand he replied: "Oh no, that will be done by somebody in the family".

2. CLANDESTINE SIGNS AS A WARNING

Believe me; It is hard to understand that the chief of the BND was never caught face to face, although dozens of experienced photographers chased him. Nevertheless it is a matter of fact, although he moved about quite freely at home as well as abroad. He was travelling much and even made camping trips, certainly not to public places, but to guarded places equipped with radio-telephone. There are some photographs from those days, but naturally taken from distances which do not permit recognition of his face.

For a long time the photograph showing Gehlen as Wehrmacht Officer was the only one existent (it is published with this article). A second picture, which is also published herewith, shows Gehlen in a sailing boat together with one of his daughters. He frequently attended the Sunday meeting of the Protestant church in Berg, went shopping, participated in the parents' consultations of the school and visited his neighbours regularly as is customary in the countryside. They knew his true name. And no photographer got to him? For this, Gehlen has a very sympathetic explanation on hand. He is convinced that his fellow citizens made a sport of screening him against strangers. They played the James Bond game voluntarily and gave him clandestine signs if strangers had been in the store when he shopped. "Once I got a rather excited warning telephone call from the pharmacy that there was a suspicious car and somebody inquiring about me". The general informed the police. They found reporters from BBC in London had come to Berg to locate the house of the BND Chief. They did not find it.

Furthermore, shortly afterwards a newspaper with loud claims of self-congratulation published a photograph with the name of "Gehlen", but actually showing quite another general - the Knight of Niedermeyer. We are sitting in the living room around the tea-table. Mrs. Herta Gehlen née von Seydlitz-Kurzbach, the retired president and a friend of his who talks to him with his old pseudonym "Dr. Schneider". In the background, the garden slopes toward the lake, much sun, books on the wall and a strikingly beautiful engraving of the old Moltke, still the idol of every German General Staff Officer. No maid appears. Mrs. Gehlen does the serving herself. The whole house shows a modesty, very rare with respect to the representatives of our state. It is quite different to sit opposite a 67-year old gentleman named Gehlen in the friendly atmosphere of a tea hour, from encountering him on the jungle paths of the secret services. The person who is dependent upon guesses, suspicions and rumors would shiver with this man and his incomparable intrigues. He would take him for the intellectual issue of Batman, icy and cunning, ready for any infamous action. Prestige can be also detrimental, for Gehlen can be imagined capable of anything even that there is no Gehlen - that he is a phantom. The man who is considered to be an international star of the espionage profession said: "And you have to think as well that I volunteered for the university when I was a young officer, primarily in order to prevent getting detached for the secret service". The well-known German saying refutes: As the tree is bent, the tree is inclined.

Suddenly the conversation turned to memoirs. Will Reinhard Gehlen take up his pen? That is a subject which makes publishers and magazine editors think of immense editions. But at this time, this question seems to be of no interest to him. As a professional, he is conscious of the fetters which will bind him when writing:

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his memoirs. The secrecy limits him more than anything else. Therefore his literary efforts will be restricted to an official report on his secret service career for the government.

Besides his old hobby waits for him, which he will enjoy thoroughly this summer: aquatics. Accidentally, because of the housing problem in Munich in 1949, he was forced to purchase an old house at the Lake Starnberg, here on this estate, the general became an enthusiastic sailor. His new boat lies down on the shore. He saw it at an exhibition in Essen and then he bought it by telephone for few thousand marks. ("Of course with a trailer, to transport it.....").

Travels? Without order, except of official duties? And freer than before, like a normal tourist? A long-drawn Yes from the mouth of the retired president - but here, the second voice, the voice of "Dr. Schneider", makes itself heard: Probably, I have something to do beforehand. And from the leisure time already a piece is cancelled. "Now, I shall show you the house", the general said, "if you are interested." We step out on to a small veranda to start the round and here Gehlen appears as he is known from the old photos - the man with the dark sun glasses, which I now actually saw him wearing for the first time, due to the long rays of the setting sun above the lake. If he'd also turn up his collar now, then he'd resemble precisely the descriptions I have read about him previously.

3. A HOUSE OF HIS OWN FROM THE MAIL ORDER FIRM

The house is similar to a bungalow and came from a mail order firm. A few personal touches made by the house-owner himself have worked miracles and the marks of the standardized type of construction have disappeared. For instance, the collar, the added room with the General's writing desk, its walls lined with books, the garden, and the small fully automated kitchen. This is a house for a married couple, where a guest can spend the night also. His son and family live in the old house, a Bavarian style frame-house, which is situated 50 yards up the hill from the general's. His son Christoph Gehlen is a physicist in Munich. If the two daughters come for a visit, they can choose where to stay - with the parents or with their brother. The houses are on the same estate.

While guiding me through the house, the general recalled his visits to America. There all rooms were shown him candidly when he inspected a house or an apartment. The same with him and he doesn't omit even the bedroom, in spite of the feeble protests of his wife; the protest of all housewives in civilized countries. "But it is not yet tidied up!" Oh! Before I forget, in the course of this tour I finally discovered something which is remotely reminiscent of the exciting profession of the house-owner. I refer to the battery-powered alarm system. Oddly enough, I did not find a television set. General Gehlen never watches any of the TV espionage or secret service series. "They are all very fantastic", I said. "Yes," the expert replied, "and certainly romantic, too. In reality, the modern intelligence service, with its electronic and computer techniques, consists to a great extent of statistics, documents and diligent work".

What can be said about the person of the general? You already know that he is medium-sized and that he wears a grey suit. From a foreign press report it could be learned that he may not be a normal man, he may be a superman; without heart, only brain.

I have known General Gehlen for many years - admittedly as an outsider, as a journalist - and I disagree with this image. He has a good heart and appreciates the people around him; he is a thoughtful human being. Occasionally, the chief of a secret service must make critical decisions. This is the natural way of such institutions. Yet there is no evidence that Gehlen ever denied humanity and human ethics. If he had not become an officer then he would likely have applied himself to medicine. He has a burning interest in psychology and psychiatry. His intimate friends assert that he was out for a "ourer of souls". Gehlen, the son of a publisher, obtained his character molding in the "Reichswehr" and the General Staff. He calls himself a reluctant chief of the secret service because of his earlier striving against transfer to the counter intelligence during his tour in the "Reichswehr". In a new French book ("Le général gris") compiled from several sources, one can find the following description of General Gehlen:

A mixture of intellectual, realist and diplomat; resembles British colonial colonel in plain clothes. Wears a ^{with} battered ~~and~~ turned-up coat-collar. ~~I~~ ^{is} a leading bank clerk.

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The same source reports that the department of state-security in East Berlin keeps the following personal description in readiness:

Height: 1.72 meter. Figure: slim. Hairs: few, sparse, nearly bald-headed. Face: pale. Nose: pointed. Gray moustache like Hitler.

Resembles a bank executive. Generally he wears a Tyrolisan hat with a green band, which looks shabby. Sport coat in trench-coat form.

I don't want to break the security regulations of the BND when I state that the comparison with Hitler's moustache is only meant to be a polemic. The moustache of Gehlen is more elegant.

Comments of Approving Officer:

The major significance of this newspaper article would appear to be as a public announcement to both hostile and friendly governments that General Gehlen is now officially disassociated with BND and truly retired and that, if and when he travels, he will be merely Reinhard Gehlen, retired general. The publication of the first photograph since 1944 of General Gehlen is noteworthy and re-emphasizes this thesis.