

1 JUN 1972

Our Man in Pullach

The Service: The Memoirs of General Reinhard Gehlen translated by David Irving. World, 400 pp., \$10.00

The General Was a Spy by Heinz Höhne and Hermann Zolling, translated by Richard Barry. Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 347 pp., \$10.00

Gehlen, Spy of the Century by E. H. Cookridge. Random House, 402 pp., \$10.00

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When the Third Reich fell, the Allies were able to make use of a lot of Nazi junk. Like the telex machines in the Reuters office in Berlin, which up to a year or two ago still preserved a special key with the double lightning-flash of the SS, much of Hitler's furniture served the conquerors' purposes until equipment built for new requirements could be introduced. General Gehlen was such a piece of junk. Unfortunately, he stayed in service for another twenty-three years. Long after his espionage machinery had become obsolete and unreliable, the Gehlen keys continued to tap out the only message they knew: Bolshevik Russia is the merciless arch-enemy of human civilization, only a tight-wing authoritarian state can resist the Red Terror, anyone who doubts either of the above propositions is a "Staatsfeind."

Reinhard Gehlen, a small and reticent man with jug ears, was the head of *Fremde Heere Ost* (Foreign Armies East), the German military intelligence service on the eastern front during World War II. After the war, he sold himself, his men, and his files to the Americans on the condition that he be allowed to operate autonomously. In 1955 the "Gehlen Organization" was transferred to the Federal Republic under the name of "Bundesnachrichtendienst" (BND). From then until he was pushed into retirement in 1968, after a long series of scandals and official complaints, Gehlen ran a West German espionage service with branches and agents all over the world.

That is the framework. Within it lies a Bosch landscape of swarming, terrifying, terrified figures: an armed parachutist fleeing from Soviet patrols in Lithuania, a double traitor feasting on smuggled lobsters, SS veterans training subversion squads to enter socialist Hungary, and a swan carrying packets

of information under its wings across a Berlin lake. A woman opens her legs to Russian officers in Vienna; another is led to the guillotine in East Germany for high treason. Everywhere, men looking over their shoulders are touting folders of secrets for dog-eared wads of money. All these were Gehlen's creatures. Somehow, looking back on this landscape in his memoirs, he can say: "My own view was that in the long run only he who fights with a spotless shield will triumph."

Such is Gehlen's view of himself. His memoirs were sold in advance for a gigantic sum to the right-wing Springer newspaper chain for serialization, but proved to be so eccentric, and indeed so dull, that the Springer journalists were obliged to pad them out with apologetic notes. Their most startling page claimed that Bormann was a Soviet spy and escaped to the Russians after the fall of Berlin, a claim for which Gehlen advances no real evidence whatever. Gehlen, to the anguish of the Springer press, denies or ignores most of the really sensational anecdotes about his postwar activities. Instead, he delivers interminable, whining discourses about the internal bureaucracy of the BND in its headquarters at Pullach, near Munich, and about its budget grievances.

But Gehlen's memoirs, though utterly unreliable and at times deliberately misleading, retain some historical interest. In the first place, they tell us something about Gehlen's world outlook. Secondly, they confirm beyond doubt the disgraceful unconstitutional campaign waged by Gehlen and his men against the Social Democrats and their "Ostpolitik," the patient effort to dismantle the cold war ramparts of legal fiction and paranoia which separated West Germany from Eastern Europe.

Gehlen's own politics, as revealed in this book, remain those of a moderate Nazi. There is, for instance, the characteristic blindness to the torments and feelings of any people other than the Germans. Consider this passage, in which Gehlen is describing the life of the Soviet population under Nazi occupation:

After twenty years of arbitrary injustice and terror, the re-establishment of elementary human rights such as the dignity of man, liberty, justice and the sanctity of property united every inhabitant of the Soviet Union... in a com-

mon readiness to support the Germans.

Incredulous, I read this sentence several times. But yes, this is what Gehlen—who was there—says life was like for the happy Russians and Ukrainians dancing around the traveling gallows under the benevolent gaze of Himmler and Koch, those well-known purveyors of liberty, justice, and the rights of man. Note, too, that "re-establish." Gehlen is referring to the liberty and human dignity universally prevalent under the tsars.

This was the man on whom the Americans relied for their intelligence picture of the Soviet Union after 1945. In another splendid paragraph, he explains how he was able to conclude that the Sofia Youth Festival of 1968 was subversive. The advance publicity called for "the right to education and the democratization of education." These slogans, Gehlen sagely observes, "could only be regarded as 'progressive' in the pejorative sense of the word. They were bound to rouse the suspicions of the cognoscenti."

All these three books demonstrate—but none of their authors can bring himself to admit—that in truth Gehlen was a political idiot. His broad appreciations, colored by fascism and sheer crankiness, were worthless. For a time, no doubt, they were the appreciations that the State Department and later Chancellor Adenauer wished to hear. But when the cold war began to diminish, governments became impatient with Gehlen's morbid view of the Red threat. He sank into self-pity, comforted only by episodes like the escalation of the Vietnam war (although, as he writes, even there the Americans were too squeamish: "our own blitz campaign in France taught us that a massive and crushing use of force always costs less casualties").

The BND carried on a determined rear-guard action against the *Ostpolitik*, before and after Gehlen's own retirement, and a large section of the memoirs is devoted to the "illusions and unsound judgements" of Social Democrat politicians who do not realize that Russia "understands the word 'co-existence' in a purely offensive sense." It is rumored in Bonn that the BND recently played a part in subverting some of the Free Democrat deputies in Chancellor Brandt's governing

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coalition, in the hope of destroying his narrow majority in the Bundestag and bringing the Ostpolitik to an end.

If Gehlen was a political idiot, why was he hired? Something of the answer emerges from another absurd Gehlen statement, his assertion that Germany could have been defeated in 1939 by a resolute Allied attack because the Wehrmacht had only "812 trainloads of heavy artillery ammunition—apart from heavy field-howitzer ammunition." Now this statement is nonsense in itself: air strength and the use of tank forces at that stage mattered far more than certain categories of artillery. But, and this is typical of Gehlen, it is a silly strategic conclusion tacked onto a detailed and no doubt reliable piece of concrete information. Gehlen was a master of mosaic work and of finding out facts. He was tireless and exhaustive and forgot nothing. He was a dossier and cross-index man. It was Gehlen's facts that mattered; his appreciations, even on broad military matters, were crude and often quite wrong.

Höhne and Zolling, two journalists from the Hamburg magazine *Der Spiegel*, have produced a long and fascinating book which bears these conclusions out. Originally written as a series in the magazine, it is a book that seems to have resulted from some kind of subterranean deal with the post-Gehlen BND. Its new head, General Wessel, may have felt that it would be worth giving the *Spiegel* men access to a mass of classified detail, and even worth letting them blacken the reputation of Reinhard Gehlen himself, if they would convey the final impression that the BND under Wessel is a reformed, effective, and restrained organization which no German democrat need fear.

The book begins with an excellent essay on German attitudes toward intelligence services, pointing out that the public's traditional fear and dislike of intelligence work has historical grounds which no longer apply. No civil intelligence service ever evolved in the Wilhelmine Reich; such matters were kept in the hands of the military until, during the late Nazi period, they passed entirely into the hands of the SS. The citizenry were left with the impression of an arm of state which was not only totally unaccountable politically but which would send its critics to concentration camps. Against such a background, Gehlen was regarded with superstitious awe, and when the Social Democrats and *Spiegel*

itself finally broke the spell cast over the "Gehlen Organization," many Germans went so far as to say that any secret service was incompatible with a parliamentary democracy.

Gehlen's best work, unmistakably, was his achievement under the Nazis as head of *Fremde Heere Ost* (FHO). Military and economic intelligence, built up from a carefully constructed network of agents behind the Russian lines, among Russian prisoners of war, and in radio stations tapping Soviet communications, fed their data into a comprehensive filing system. (The best part of Gehlen's own book, incidentally, is the introduction by George Bailey which explains the unique importance of intelligence and staff work to the Prussian military tradition: a country without natural frontiers was drawn to the doctrine of preventive war, attack as the means of defense, which in turn entailed precise preparations and knowledge of hostile forces.)

But by 1945, Hitler could no longer stand the pessimistic accuracy of Gehlen's reports, and Gehlen himself was well aware that the war was lost. He and his lieutenants resolved to sell their entire operation to the Western Allies who, as Gehlen knew, lacked a proper intelligence network in Eastern Europe. Files and personnel were loaded up and secretly ferried across Germany to the Bavarian Alps, where Gehlen had the archives buried and where he settled down to wait confidently for the Americans to arrive.

His calculation was successful. Within weeks of the German surrender the Americans were negotiating with Gehlen. Höhne and Zolling observe correctly that these were the first postwar German-American negotiations of any kind, and that the railways, the posts, and the Gehlen Organization were the only three organizations of the Third Reich to have survived the defeat as intact institutions. In August, 1945, Gehlen and several colleagues were flown secretly to Washington. By July, 1946, he was back in Germany, officially installed among his files near Frankfurt. Gehlen's intentions were twofold: to commit the United States to the view that the Soviet Union intended to conquer all Western Europe, and (as he puts it himself) "to recover and reunify Germany's lost territories." In other words, to reverse the verdict of the war with American support.

His first undertaking was to gather military information about the Soviet

Union from returned prisoners of war. He then established a network in the Soviet zone of Germany. Both were at first extremely successful. In the Soviet zone—later the German Democratic Republic—Gehlen was able to recruit agents at the highest level, including Hermann Kastner, a deputy prime minister who enjoyed the special favor of the Soviet authorities. In about 1953, Gehlen was persuaded to be more ambitious and became involved in setting up espionage networks within the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. Armed men trained in the United States and ferried by British power boats were landed in the Baltic republics and even, it appears, in the Crimea. Meanwhile, Gehlen developed a counterespionage operation at home.

It was on this basis that he made his first firm contact with Adenauer. Counterespionage was a trade which attracted a rabble of ex-SS men and Gestapo veterans to Gehlen's payroll, and inevitably the hunt for communist agents broadened into a witch hunt directed against all those who criticized the policies of West German rearmament in the Fifties. This interested Adenauer, who was inclined to suppose that anyone who opposed him, any Social Democrat especially, might be a crypto-Bolshevik. Through Globke, the drafter of Hitler's anti-Semitic legislation who became Adenauer's faithful state secretary in the Chancellery, Gehlen became indispensable to Adenauer both for his surveillance of political rivals and for his supply of alarming intelligence appreciations about the Soviet Union which could be used to impress the Americans.

It is this middle period of Gehlen's work, the high years of the cold war, that most interests Mr. Cookridge. Although he is less informative than Höhne and Zolling about Gehlen's early years, and inexplicably leaves out any reference to Gehlen's practice of spying on Adenauer's political opponents, Mr. Cookridge is full of anecdotes about clandestine adventures along the Iron Curtain. He is a writer who has produced many books about espionage and no doubt his sources are impressive. If he occasionally inspires mistrust, perhaps this is because one wishes that some of his dreadful stories were not true.

He states, for example, that the embryo of the Green Berets was a force of East European and Ukrainian refugees trained by SS veterans and

used for parachuted operations against the Soviet Union. He says the ehlen dispatched a large team of agents into Hungary when Imre Nagy took power in October, 1956, accompanied by a well-armed shock unit from the CIA's private army in Germany." During the 1953 uprising in East Germany, according to Cookridge, Gehlen directed the movement of his East Berlin agents from street to street by radio. He used the facilities of Radio Free Europe, both the staff and the equipment, for his own purposes whenever it suited him, with the diligent support of American officers from the "Office of Policy Co-Ordination." He spied elaborately on Britain and France and, through American military installations in West Germany, on the United States itself.

Mr. Cookridge takes a robust, uncritical view of the cold war. If the Reds get it in the neck, he cheers, and, being a sportsman, he gives some applause to the best-managed triumphs of the other side. This approach misses some points: For instance, he gives a disagreeably lip-smacking account of the huge sentence handed out to Teodor Szczendziolorz, a member of a Polish spy ring who was the first agent to be tried by a West German court. It would have done Mr. Cookridge credit not to have gloated over this case. The agent, like his master Colonel Kowalski, was a noncommunist Pole who had been, in his country's service before the war. West Germany was rearming with the declared intention of seizing back a third of his country's territory. In such circumstances, Szczendziolorz and his colleagues deserve some honor or at least understanding for what they did.

But in the later Fifties, Gehlen's outfit began to show signs of age. The East Germans methodically infiltrated and rolled up his best networks there, and agent after BND agent appeared at East Berlin press conferences to confess his sins. Gehlen's reports became wilder and less reliable, and his organization became dangerously cozy (Professor Trevor-Roper, in his preface to *The General Was a Spy*, points out that all intelligence services require constant change and renewal if they are not to fossilize). There followed two disasters.

In 1962, as Defense Minister, Strauss arranged for the arrest of the *Spiegel* editors for alleged disclosure of military secrets, and had the *Spiegel* building searched. Gehlen, who disliked Strauss, had to some still disputed degree been in touch with *Spiegel*;

moreover, an emissary from headquarters at Pullach had helped the authors with the series of articles in question. Adenauer had Gehlen brought to Bonn and, in a moment of fury, ordered his arrest. Gehlen, stammering with terror, managed to argue his way out of this, but his relationship with Adenauer never recovered.

The second disaster was the discovery that Felfe, one of Gehlen's senior desk officers at Pullach, had been for years an East German agent. Felfe was a German hero of his times. He and his accomplices, Clemens and Tiebel, were old SS men from Dresden, now in the East, who regarded both half-states of Germany as impostors with fat wallets. In his long career as a double agent, Felfe sold the East to East Berlin or Moscow. Suggestively, Germans tens of thousands of secret documents (confirming one's suspicion that both Germanies know so much about each other that they are unable to make sense out of the mass of information, a common intelligence paradox). His trial in 1963, with its revelations of corruption and incompetence, and its suggestion that Pullach was a nature reserve for old Nazis, brought the whole liberal press down on Gehlen.

The Felfe affair was a terrible blow, from which Gehlen's reputation never recovered. While the BND continued to subvert Middle Eastern scientists, prepare "glowing pictures of Latin American military dictatorships," and send the government intelligence digests full of information that ministers had already seen in their morning papers, the decision was gradually taken that Gehlen must go. This itself turned into a long, dirty fight. Chancellor Erhard threw the BND men out of the Chancellery, where they had lodged themselves like bats in an attic. Chancellor Kiesinger ordered a full report into the BND, which revealed among other facts that Gehlen had given no fewer than sixteen of his relations posts in the service. The old man's intelligence career drew to an ignominious close. Ambitious to the end, he now runs a Protestant church mission in Catholic Bavaria.

But Gehlen can't be blamed for everything. Allied spooks, who after all put him at the head of the BND, have been almost equally hysterical about the Soviet menace and the *Ostpolitik*. Not long after Gehlen retired, the CIA asked Pullach for surveillance on Herbert Wehner, a senior Social Democrat minister whom the CIA supposed to be a KGB agent (the request was thrown into the shredder, which at least shows that the BND's sense of political realism is improving). And when the Social Democrats came to power in 1969, the Allied intelligence services temporarily stopped sharing information with the BND on the assumption that the new government would leak it that story appears in the proof copy of documents (confirming one's suspicion Hühne and Zolling's book, but has been removed from the bound copy.

Part of the trouble lay in the original deal with the Americans. They allowed an intelligence service to be headed by a professional who was politically illiterate. This did not matter, perhaps, while the CIA used Gehlen simply as a source of raw information. But when he became Adenauer's full-blown intelligence chief, this weakness was catastrophic. Much extraordinary information came to Gehlen in the postwar years, only to be evaluated by middle-aged, gentlemen whose outlook on the world had been formed in the service of the Third Reich. One of the saddest comments on the cold war is that such evaluations could seem reasonable to the leaders of the West. □