

**The Service: The Memoirs
of General Reinhard
Gehlen by Reinhard
Gehlen. Book review by
Anonymous**

CIA HISTORICAL REVIEW PROGRAM
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THE SERVICE: THE MEMOIRS OF GENERAL REINHARD GEHLENT. By *Reinhard Gehlen*. (World Publishers, New York, 1972. 386 pages.)

THE GENERAL WAS A SPY: THE TRUTH ABOUT GENERAL GEHLEN AND HIS SPY RING. By *Heinz Hoehne* and *Herman Zolling*. (Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, New York, 1972. 347 pages.)

GEHLEN, SPY OF THE CENTURY. By E. H. *Cookridge*. (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1971. 402 pages.)

NICHT LAENGER GEHEIM: ENTWICKLUNG, SYSTEM UND ARBEITSWEISE DES IMPERIALISTISCHEN DEUTSCHEN GEHIEIMDIENSTES. By *Albrecht Charisius* and *Julius Mader*. (Secret No Longer: Development, Organization and Methods of the Imperialistic German Secret Service. Deutscher Militaerverlag, [East] Berlin, 1969. 632 pages.)

In April 1968, after some 22 years as chief of the West German intelligence service and 48 years altogether of public service, Lieutenant General Reinhard Gehlen retired as President of the Federal Intelligence Service (BND).^{*} He was accurately described as the doyen of western intelligence chiefs. Whatever was thought of Gehlen – and he had many enemies – he was by this time quite well known throughout the world, so it is not surprising that his retirement has occasioned no less than four books.

The first to appear, in May 1969, was the East German effort *Nicht Laenger Geheim*. The other three were published in their German editions within a few weeks of each other during the fall of 1971. *Nicht Laenger Geheim* and *The General Was a Spy* are tendentious and inaccurate; the Cookridge book is inaccurate; none of them is worth reading. Gehlen's book *The Service* has many faults, a lot of which are inherent in such a book, but for any officer assigned to Germany it is worthwhile reading, and for anyone assigned to liaison duties with the BND it is a must.

While I approached Gehlen's book, *The Service*, with the keenest interest, I had not expected too much of it. For one thing, I was afraid that it would be written in field manual style. Secondly, intelligence chiefs may not, and do not, tell all; therefore many of the most interesting points are

missing, and the picture which emerges is of necessity incomplete and distorted. I was wrong on the first point and right on the second. So far as style goes, the book reads easily. My overall rating of the book is a gentleman's C plus. The reader should not expect too much in the way of excitement. And this word excitement brings up a point which must be discussed. There is a segment of opinion in German public life and in the ranks of CIA where the people seem unable to talk about Gehlen — they simply splutter. I have experienced this phenomenon in the ranks of CIA on many occasions during the past 15 years or more, and some of the articles and reviews on the book which appeared in the German press bear out the point about the Germans.

We know, incidentally, that the book was not reviewed by anyone in the BND prior to publication.

The Service opens its American edition with Gehlen on board a flight to the United States to begin his cooperation with us, then turns back to his earlier career. The German original was more chronologically arranged in three parts. One deals with Gehlen's experiences as chief of Foreign Armies East (Russian Theater G-2) from early 1942 until the end of the war. The second part deals with the postwar Gehlen Organization, first under U.S. Army and later CIA trusteeship, then accepted by Bonn as the BND. This second part also discusses the successes and failures from 1946 to 1968, the types of persons who worked for the BND, relationships with other services — in other words, the whole gamut of intelligence activities. The third part consists of three chapters on Soviet ideology, Soviet tactics, and the outlook for the world in the face of Soviet imperialism.

It should be borne in mind, particularly when reading the last part but also for the book as a whole, that Gehlen is a Cold Warrior. He always was and always will be; he makes no bones about it, he says that history will be the judge, and he has no doubts about that judgment. Of course, during most of Gehlen's years, the US Government and CIA in particular were heavily oriented in that direction too. Gehlen's attitude almost certainly does not sit well with some of the present political leaders in Bonn who are pursuing *Ostpolitik* (no criticism intended), but in light of Czechoslovakia in 1968 and the Brezhnev Doctrine he certainly feels he has a point.

The section on Foreign Armies East is perhaps the best part of the book, although it is of interest primarily to military historians. From all

accounts, Gehlen did an excellent job as chief of an Order-of-Battle analysis organization. All commentators — from the U.S. Army (in a 1946 study) to Zolling and Hoehne in 1971 — agree on this. It was during the latter part of this period, i.e., during 1943, that Gehlen decided to keep his people and files together and turn his organization over to the Americans. *The Service* does not tell us much that we did not already know about this period, but Gehlen's description of the spring and summer of 194-5 Ymakes interesting reading. There are some fascinating anecdotes.

The *Bundespost* (the mail service), the *Bundesbahn* (the railroads, formerly called the Reichsbahn), and the German intelligence service are the only three national German organizations which carried on with a pause of only a few weeks when the war ended. Gehlen for his part, although betrayal to the Nazis of his post-defeat-plans would have meant death, was most concerned to legalize his position as much as possible. Therefore in April 1945 (before the end of the war) he disclosed his intentions to General Winter, Chief of the Operations Section of the Armed Forces High Command and received his "sanction." I imagine that was about as high an authority as Gehlen dared to go at the time. Then, several weeks later in June 1945, after VE Day, Gehlen met Admiral Karl Doenitz, who had been appointed by Hitler as his successor during the last days of the Third Reich. Gehlen and the Admiral were now in a U.S. Army VIP prison camp in Wiesbaden; Gehlen sought and received approval from Doenitz too!

It is in May and June 1945 that the Americans first appear in this book and here I must say that neither the Americans in general, nor CIA in particular, have any reason to complain about what Gehlen has to say about us. He mentions very few personalities and for most of these he uses an alias or a similar device. A well-known figure such as Brigadier General Edwin L. Sibert, then G-2 of the European Theater, is mentioned by name, and in a very favorable way. The other Army officers are either given aliases or are referred to as Colonel D., Colonel L., or Colonel Rusty (a nickname).

The only CIA personality mentioned by true name is Allen Dulles, whom he describes as being, along with the Admiral Canaris, the best of the intelligence chiefs he met. The only other CIA personality is "Herr M," (the first Chief of Pullach Base, who was Gehlen's opposite number for nearly eight years); Herr M gets only brief mention, but in the most favorable terms. CIA is at one point gently chided for being overly bureaucratic;

there is a heavily disguised reference to one of our OPC flaps; but that is about as far as the criticism goes. He discloses nothing which should not be disclosed and washes none of our dirty linen in public. Heaven knows there were some first class rows and hard feelings between Gehlen and us, and while he was often at fault, there was one time in particular when, largely through bureaucratic inertia, we were definitely the culprits, and where Gehlen on both official and personal grounds had every reason to be aggrieved and angry (he was, but only in private). The book shows him to be both a decent man and a big enough one to forgive, if not forget, these slights from the past. It is an old-fashioned way of putting it, but Gehlen is a gentleman and behaves like one.

There are many faults in this book, but before discussing them let us look at his towering achievement, the biggest item on the credit side of his ledger. The idea of the BND was Gehlen's. Whether he envisaged such an organization in 1943 is doubtful and unimportant, but by 1946 he was definitely thinking in terms of a national intelligence organization. He showed political skill of the highest order in pushing through his concept in the face of considerable opposition from other embryonic services in Bonn, various German politicians, allied intelligence services, and hostile services. He describes this process with modesty. The BND has today the most powerful and broadest charter of any western service. When one considers the duplication which abounds in other western intelligence communities, the position of the BND is both desirable and enviable. This does not mean to say that the BND is a first class intelligence service; it is not (more on this later), but it is in a position to become one.

Now for the debit side of the ledger. Here the reviewer must read carefully. I am writing a classified review and can say things which Gehlen, in his book, obviously could not say. Tempered criticism is in order, however. In the first place, Gehlen was never a good clandestine operator, nor was he a particularly- good administrator. And therein lay his failures. The Gehlen Organization/ BND always had a good record in the collection of military and economic intelligence on East Germany and the Soviet forces there. But this information, for the most part, came from observation and not from clandestine penetration. As far as we know (and we know a great deal) the Germans never had a good political penetration in East Germany or anywhere else in the Soviet Bloc. Thus Gehlen's descriptions of most of his so-called successes in the political intelligence field are, in my opinion, either wishful thinking or self-delusion. While one might have expected the German service to be

capable of staff penetrations within the East German government, the extent of its greatest success seems to have been the recruitment of the boyfriend of a secretary (Elli B — Operation Gaensebluemchen, mentioned by Gehlen) in East German Prime Minister Otto Grotewohl's office; the boyfriend was able to debrief the unwitting Elli B on what went on in the office. The unfortunate woman paid for her indiscretion with her life. Similarly, when Gehlen states that he received "two reliable reports" in the 1950's that Martin Bormann was living in the USSR, I can only wonder and point out that he never informed us, although that case and others like it were discussed in great detail by CIA and the BND. Incidentally last year's uproar in Germany about Gehlen's Bormann revelation is unwarranted. That Gehlen and Canaris had a conversation about a Soviet penetration of Hitler's entourage, and that they considered Bormann the most likely candidate, is entirely credible. Furthermore, although there is no evidence one way or the other, I accept the possibility that an unprincipled villain such as Bormann would have been very receptive to a Soviet recruitment pitch by, say 1943, when all could see that the war was lost. Bormann's being a red-hot Nazi was no bar to such an alliance. Any real Nazi despised democracy and admired dictatorships.

To get back to Gehlen's descriptions of world events and his cases found in Chapters 5 and 9, I consider the picture to be too rosy, far too rosy.

Gehlen makes much of the struggle between his organization and the East German intelligence service under Ernst Wollweber. This ended with the dismissal of Wollweber and one infers that the West Germans "won" this one. Perhaps they did in a certain sense. But the very real and crushing defeat of the BND came at the hands of the KGB and is best personified by the Felfe case.* Again Gehlen is severely limited in what he may say, but the fact of the matter is that staff security, while a horrendously difficult problem in Germany in the early post-war years, was also the well-nigh fatal weakness of the German service. He could have dwelt on these very real difficulties, for there are at least ten reasons why West Germans were, in the early days at least, peculiarly susceptible to Communist blandishments. The West German government has been, and doubtless still is, thoroughly penetrated, and more frankness on Gehlen's part with respect to this problem would have been in order. His two and a half pages on Felfe make poor reading.

Gehlen's critics have made much of the ring of informants which he is said to have woven through West Germany. This question of domestic operations is a difficult subject to evaluate. Consider the following points: there was no national security organization in West Germany until 1950, and not much on the state level before then; Gehlen was, with justification, desperately concerned about Communist penetration and in running CI cases naturally became involved with West German citizens; West Germany swarmed with Communist spies, literally thousands; Gehlen operated a lobbying apparatus aimed at paving the way for his organization to become the BND; Gehlen did make some accusations about West German citizens, some of which were justified and some absurd; some West Germans genuinely thought they were being investigated by Gehlen's people — sometimes they were, sometimes they were not; Gehlen's many enemies were quick to turn any of his mistakes to their advantage. I do not consider that Gehlen's activities in this field, while sometimes ill-advised, were nearly as sinister as some of his critics make them out to be. Gehlen does not discuss this aspect in his book, but his reviewers do, so it is worth mentioning.

Gehlen is bedeviled by one of the problems which beset the intelligence business. The problem is that people will believe almost anything you tell them about it. As one senior CIA official put it: "Talking to people about intelligence is the same as talking to young people about sex. The more improbable you make it, the more they believe it." For years Gehlen was the Master Spy, the Man of Mystery, Spy of the Century. His whole career as a General Staff officer, then the secrecy of the U.S. Army and CIA trusteeship, the mystery surrounding the Pullach headquarters compound, and particularly, because of a genuine fear of Communist reprisals (such things frequently occurred during the Cold War days), the fact that he never allowed himself to be photographed — all this built up a legend far in excess of the reality. This comes out very clearly in *The General Was a Spy* and Cookridge's book. To those in the know, however, this legend, while harmless, was known for what it was, just a legend. But now his book provides his critics with a perfect peg on which to hang their criticism. A review in the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel* by a former highranking German security officer entitled "A Well-Deserved Self-Revelation" is a case in point; the theme is that Gehlen has at last revealed himself as a straw man. In point of fact, if you do not know the full inside story and accept Gehlen's book, he does not reveal himself as such. However the review has many excellent points (spoiled, let it be said, by the critic's intemperance) and viewed against the overblown legend, the denouement is quite shattering.

Gehlen might have made more of one aspect of his service which is generally rated quite high. I refer to his intelligence analysis department, which from its beginnings had turned out a lot of sound work. But Gehlen, although not an operator, loved operations for operations' sake, and tended to see the success or failure of his organization in these.

As I said, an intelligence chief should not write a book on his own organization; the forbidden subjects are too numerous and too restraining, and a stunted picture is bound to emerge. But for better or worse Gehlen wrote one, and it makes interesting reading, at least for the specialist. I have thought of raising that C plus to a B minus, but I think I'll leave it as it is.

The General Was a Spy, while a poor book, has an interesting background. Both Zolling* and Hoehne were staff writers for *Der Spiegel* and the book first appeared in serial form in that magazine in the summer of 1971. *Spiegel* tends to be quite nihilistic, particularly when it comes to anything to do with the state, the establishment, the U.S., and so on. As Conrad Ahlers, one of the Bonn Government Press Secretaries said, on the occasion of the start of this serialization, "Spiegel is singing its old song: alles ist Mist was der Staat macht." And Ahlers is quite right. But at the same time the "line" of the book zigs and zags. The first part has a powerful attack on General Wessel, Gehlen's successor; then the part which describes Gehlen's G-2 career in the German Army is very laudatory; then the description of the Gehlen Organization's battle with the East German service under Wollweber is laudatory (it has to be since it is based squarely on a cover story on Gehlen which *Spiegel* had published in 1954); then it turns anti-Gehlen. Granted that the 1950's were Gehlen's salad days and the 1960's his time of troubles, it is quite obvious that *Spiegel* attacks him and Wessel as part of a calculated policy.

One of the most flagrant examples of anti-BND writing by the *Spiegel* occurs in Chapter 9 which has the title "The Hunt for Enemies of the State." This deals with Gehlen's domestic operations, mentioned earlier. After setting forth pages of lurid "facts" to make their point, the authors conclude: "In the backrooms of Bonn and Pullach something was created which still haunts the BND: the unholy alliance between secret service and state party (Staatspartei)." This is utter nonsense, and it is ironic that one of Gehlen's low points came in 1962 when Chancellor Adenauer suspected him of having tipped off to the *Spiegel* editors a

proposed government raid against their offices, permitting them to destroy documents the government was seeking in a security leak.

Another basic fault of *The General Was a Spy* is that so much of it is sheer garbage. Many of its facts are incorrect. For example:

- a. Neither CIA nor any U.S. government agency made Gehlen a gift — of DM 250,010 or of any amount — to purchase his home in Berg. (Incidentally, Cookridge makes the same error.)
- b. The first annual budget (presumably for FY 1947, although this is not stated) of the Gehlen Organization was not \$3.4 million, but much less than a half of that.
- c. Gehlen did not meet Chancellor Adenauer for the first time in September 1949, but on 20 September 1950.
- d. Lieutenant Colonel Siegfried Dombrowski, the chief of administration of the East German military intelligence service, was not recruited by CIA and turned over to the BND for handling prior to his defection in 1958; he was a walk-in to CIA, and the BND was brought in when he was surfaced and then resettled, months later.

There are many more such errors, and the above are only a few which this writer was able to identify from memory. There is probably not one book about intelligence operations written by an outsider which is not full of such errors, but this does not make *The General Was a Spy* a good book. It is plausibly and quite dramatically written, but is tendentious, and although some parts seem to be quite accurate (Gehlen as theater G-2, the Felfe case, as far as the description goes), it has far too many errors. I give it a D plus.

Cookridge's book is in many ways similar to the *The General Was a Spy*. It is written in a quite racy style (I guess most spy stories are, The Service being a notable exception) and it is chock full of errors. This is not surprising, since it is obvious that Cookridge based whole sections of his book on *The General Was a Spy*. Its reproductions of the illustrations from *The General Was a Spy* are extremely poor. Cookridge's line is quite interesting. One would expect "Spy of the Century" to be a panegyric, but it is not. Cookridge obviously does not like the Americans, CIA, and Allen Dulles very much, and makes Gehlen look quite good in

comparison. But the sum total of the book is rather negative toward Gehlen; either that, or the rest of the twentieth century spies were a pretty poor lot.

I shall not bore the reader with another list of mistakes; one will suffice. When Gehlen was brought over here in 1945 to help G-2 write a handbook on the Soviet Army, he was not a very important person. He was a rather shabby POW in civilian clothes, and he was kept very much under wraps. German brigadier generals did not rate very highly in 1945, and so far as we know the highest ranking American he met was a colonel. He certainly did not sit across the conference table from Admiral William D. Leahy, then the equivalent of Chairman of the JCS. This book rates a D minus.

Now to *Nicht Laenger Geheim*. The trouble with Communist descriptions of current politics is that they are so tied to the party line and jargon that everything sounds like Pravda. "The Position of the West German Secret Service in the State-monopolistic Control and Power Apparatus" and "The Role of the Secret Service in the Counterrevolutionary Expansion Strategy of West German Imperialism" — these two headings will show what I mean. This book also has garbage coming out of its ears. It is inaccurate, tendentious, and brutally dull.

The interesting thing is that the East Germans could write a whale of a book about the BND if they wanted to. But somehow their Propdeptartment is unable to get together with the Intelligence Service. When this same Dr. Mader produced a book called *Who's Who in CIA*, consisting mostly of lists of names from the U.S. State Department Biographic Register, 99 percent of them were entirely innocent of any intelligence connection. Although the Felfe case was run by the KGB, the East Germans must have gotten a lot of his information. Yet Felfe is not even mentioned in *Nicht Laenger Geheim*, a rather strange omission.

Nicht Laenger Geheim is probably compulsory reading in East German intelligence schools and I'm awfully sorry for the students. But then, it probably is not any worse than their other political texts. It gets an F.

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Much has been made in American reviews of the Cookridge and Hoehne/Zolling books of the role Gehlen played in the Cold War. Thus:

"Reinhard Gehlen ... may have had more important influence on the course of the Cold War than any other man." And later "His ... rigid anti-Communism probably contributed to prolonging the most dangerous period of the Cold War and may have slowed the evolutionary political process in the USSR and Eastern Europe." These two quotations appeared recently in a well-known daily news paper. They are sheer and utter nonsense, picked up primarily from Cookridge.

The writers, Cookridge *et al*, as well as the reviewers, suffer from a terrible disadvantage (whatever their scholarly integrity may be) in that they seldom if ever get hold of any basic source material. None of the reviews I have read note that Cookridge cribbed most of his material from Hoehne/lolling, or that the latter, in discussing the period up to 1954, drew heavily on *Der Spiegel* cover story of that year, which itself was based largely on speculation, and contained a great deal of proven nonsense. So I am afraid that the dissemination of nonsense will continue ad infinitum, as each successive writer draws on his predecessor.

But all that is secondary to the main point of Gehlen's role in the Cold War. Without disclosing too many "house secrets" I think it is safe to say that his organization: (a) did not set up the Berlin Tunnel; (b) did not acquire Khrushchev's secret speech; and (c) did not play a role of any appreciable influence in the Cold War. Certainly major U.S. policy makers never saw his product; indeed had probably hardly heard of him. The U.S. leaders in the era from 1946 onwards needed no advice from Gehlen on the menace of Soviet imperialism. Besides, the political intelligence product of the German service left much to be desired. So far as the German government was concerned, Adenauer needed no pushing from Gehlen either, and from 1962 onward, due primarily to the Felfe and Spiegel affaires the influence of the BND on Bonn foreign policy was close to zero.

Footnotes

* From 1942 until 1945 Gehlen was theater G -2 for the Russian front. As the war ended, he assembled his people and his files and, after capture

by the U.S. Army, offered his organization to the U.S. Since the Army knew very little about the USSR and since the Cold War had begun, his offer was accepted. After some months of delay the Gehlen Organization, as it was called, was sponsored by the U.S. Army as an intelligence collection and evaluation organization against Communist targets, principally the Soviet forces in East Germany. The U.S. Army retained this trusteeship until 1949, when CIA assumed it. In 1956 the Bonn government took over and the Gehlen Organization became the BNII.

* Heinz Felfe, formerly a lieutenant in the intelligence arm of the SS (a fact which he concealed from the BND), was a member of the BND's CI staff. For the ten years of his employment by Gehlen, he was an agent of the KGB. He was arrested in 1961, sentenced to 14 years, and exchanged in 1969. He is now completing his Ph.D. studies at the Humboldt University in East Berlin. His field is criminology and he will be given a teaching position at Humboldt — how nice.

* Zolling died recently.

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