



Colonel Reinhard Gehlen (1902-1979)

Chief of Foreign Armies East (1942-45)

Chief of Federal Intelligence Service (1956-68)

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1920: Joins the Reichwehr

1933-35: Attends the Staff College. Promoted to captain and posted to the Army General Staff.

1939: Promoted to major.

May 1940: Liaison officer to Army Commander-in-Chief [Field Marshal Walther von Brauchitsch](#) and to [General Guderian's](#) panzer group.

June 1940: Later adjutant to Army Chief of Staff [General Franz Halder](#).

July 1941: Promoted to lieutenant-colonel.

The Conspiracy

Winter of 1941-42: Visit from [Colonel Henning von Tresckow](#). Gehlen and Tresckow discuss the war situation and agree that Hitler must be removed. Although not an active member of the conspiracy, Gehlen develops close ties with Tresckow and fellow German conspirators [Colonel Claus von Stauffenberg](#), [General Helmuth Stieff](#), [Colonel Wessel von Loringhoven](#), [General Adolf Heusinger](#), and Colonel Alexis von Roenne. Heusinger brings Gehlen into the plot while Stieff and Gehlen discuss "actual tactics" of the planned coup d'etat.

1942: Promoted to colonel and appointed head of Foreign Armies East. In that capacity becomes responsible for presiding over army intelligence operations on the eastern front. Horrified at atrocities committed against Russian prisoners of war and civilians. Recruits over 100,000 former Soviet prisoners of war into the Russian Liberation Army. [see photo at top of page: Gehlen reviewing RLA troops].

July 17, 1944: Colonel von Loringhoven informs Gehlen that Stauffenberg plans to assassinate Hitler at the next scheduled Fuehrer briefing. Successfully eludes the Nazi regime's suspicion throughout the witch hunt trials that follow Stauffenberg's July 20th uprising.

December 1944: Promoted to brigadier-general.

April 1945: Falling out with Hitler. Dismissed as Head of Foreign Armies East.

Surrender

March: Gehlen and his agents microfilm all of their documents on the Soviet Union and hide them in steel drums throughout the Austrian Alps.

May: Gehlen surrenders with fellow intelligence colleagues to U.S. forces. At that time, the United States has little if any intelligence information on the Soviets.

August: Flown to the United States and debriefed by the OSS.

The Gehlen Organization

July 1946: Discharged as prisoner-of-war. Creates the Gehlen Organization (under OSS-CIA control) staffed by 350 former German army intelligence agents who later help the CIA track down Communist officials and organizations throughout western Europe. The Gehlen Organization soon becomes the CIA's eyes and ears in Eastern Europe and the USSR.

The Gehlen Organization goes on to recruit more than 4,000 former German army and SS intelligence officers and moves its headquarters into a 25-acre compound near Munich assuming the innocuous title of [South German Industrial Development Organization](#).

Among the more spectacular feats of the Gehlen Organization is its ability as early as 1946 to recruit and train more than 5,000 anti-communist East European and Russian agents who perform a variety of covert operations behind the Iron Curtain including espionage, sabotage, and providing aid to Ukrainian insurgents who continued to hamper Soviet control until 1956. The Gehlen Organization also supplies the CIA with accurate ground reports that exposes the U.S.-Soviet "missile gap".

In the 1950s however, the Gehlen Organization, like MI-6, is also penetrated by Soviet KGB double agents who betray ["dozens of operations, hundreds of agents, and thousands of innocent civilians"](#) who are later executed.

April 1956: The Gehlen organization is transferred to the West German government. Birth of the *Bundesnachrichtendienst* (BND) [**Federal Intelligence Service**]. Gehlen is promoted to lieutenant-general (Res.) in the Bundeswehr and becomes President of the BND. Attains final rank of major general.

April 1968: Resigns from the BND after sting operation uncovers that a top BND official, Heinz Felfe, is a KGB double-agent.

Despite the Felfe scandal, Gehlen remains a legend in the intelligence community until his death in 1979.

For more information, see the [FAS Intelligence Resource Program](#) page on Reinhard Gehlen.

