

The Gehlen Org

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By Mark Zepezauer

One of the most important of all CIA operations began before the agency was even born. Many Nazi leaders realized they were going to lose World War II and started negotiating with the US behind Hitler's back about a possible future war against the USSR. In 1943, future CIA Director Allen Dulles moved to Bern, Switzerland to begin back-channel talks with these influential Nazis.

Officially, Dulles was an agent of the OSS (the Overseas Secret Service, the CIA's predecessor) but he wasn't above pursuing his own agenda with the Nazis, many of whom he had worked with before the war. Indeed, as a prominent Wall Street lawyer, Dulles had a number of clients—Standard Oil, for one—who continued doing business with the Nazis during the war.

So it's not surprising that when Hitler's intelligence chief for the Eastern front, General Reinhard Gehlen (GAY-len), surrendered to the US, he expected a warm reception—especially since he had buried his extensive files in a secret spot and planned to use them as a negotiating chip.

General Gehlen was whisked to Fort Hunt, Virginia, where he soon succeeded in convincing his captors that the Soviet Union was about to attack the West. The US Army and Gehlen arrived at a "gentlemen's agreement."

According to the secret treaty, his spy organization—which came to be called the Gehlen Org—would work for, and be funded by, the US until a new German government came to power. In the meantime, should Gehlen find a conflict between the interests of Germany and the US, he was free to consider German interests first.

Gehlen even made sure he got approval for this arrangement from Hitler's appointed successor, Admiral Doenitz, who was in a cushy prisoner-of-war camp for Nazi VIPs in Wiesbaden, Germany.

For almost ten years, the Gehlen Org was virtually the CIA's only source of intelligence on Eastern Europe. Then, in 1955, it evolved into the BND (the German equivalent of the CIA) which, of course, continued to cooperate with the CIA.

Gehlen was far from the only Nazi war criminal employed by the CIA. Others included Klaus Barbie ("the Butcher of Lyon"), Otto von Bolschwing (the Holocaust mastermind who worked closely with Eichmann) and, SS Colonel Otto Skorzeny (a

great favorite of Hitler's). There's even evidence that Martin Bormann, Hitler's second-in-command at the end of the war, faked his own death and escaped to Latin America, where he worked with CIA-linked groups.