

The 1948 Decision of CIA To Assume Responsibility For The Army's German Intelligence Operation

It was entirely in response to the initiative of Reinhard Gehlen that the senior US G-2 in Europe in the summer of 1945 took action to preserve the experts and files of Fremde Heere Ost, the intelligence staff of the Army General Staff on the Eastern Front. Largely because this action did not correspond to the US policies and rhetoric on the demilitarization of Germany, the operation remained a matter of growing controversy within the US intelligence community. G-2 efforts to transfer the operation to CIG in 1947 led to the recommendation by Admiral Hillenkoetter to liquidate the operation – an action seen as too drastic by the Army G-2. Hillenkoetter took the position that the risk of reviving any element of the General Staff outweighed the potential value of intelligence. In 1948, just a year after creation of CIA, Admiral Hillenkoetter agreed to take another look at the German operation, which in December 1947 had moved to Pullach. The Chief of Station in Germany was instructed to identify a station officer to conduct a new investigation of the German operation. As a new officer in CIA, I had just arrived in Germany tasked with developing CIA Soviet operations out of Munich; I did not anticipate any role in German operations. But it became apparent to me that there was a solid consensus in the German Station against any involvement in the Pullach operation; the obviously qualified station officers, mainly OSS veterans, were avoiding the assignment. One senior OSS veteran proposed that, since I was in Munich I could work an investigation into my schedule along with my other tasks. This idea resonated in a divided CIA in Washington. On 27 October I received a cable in Munich from the DCI in Washington directing that I investigate the G-2 operation and, at the end of four weeks recommend whether the operation should be liquidated or should continue to receive US support and whether, if the latter, CIA should assume responsibility. To my surprise, both CIA and the Army G-2 in Heidelberg avoided providing me with a normal background briefing; also, I was told nothing of past relations of G-2 with CIG and OSS on the operation. I concluded that there was a lot about my mission to Pullach that I did not know. In these circumstances, I thought it to my advantage to go to Pullach unbriefed and without any guidance from either CIA or the Army G-2 on what each hoped to get out of this oddly structured “investigation.”

I had just completed a decade in conventional command and staff assignments as a Regular Army officer including wartime service in North Africa, Italy, Germany and Austria. I knew little about CIA and less about OSS. But in the three years after the war, I had become immersed in the Occupation in Europe. This had included Army G-2 assignments in the US Occupation Forces in Germany and Austria. But the existence of the German operation at Oberursel had been to me no more than a rumor.

At the end of four weeks, I sent Washington a cabled report recommending in unambiguous terms that the operation be preserved, that CIA assume responsibility and defer any long-term decisions until we knew a great deal more about “the Gehlen Organization” and the strategic standoff developing around the Berlin Blockade. The German Station supported my report. Washington, only days later, approved my recommendations and assigned me to a CIA office established in Pullach to carry out my own recommendation. General Clay, deeply involved in the Berlin crisis, delayed the planned date of the CIA takeover from 1 January to 1 July 1949.

It was my impression that Gehlen, while the dominant personality, was surrounded by a circle of former Army General Staff officers; they were of the younger generation born after 1900 who had entered the General Staff in the time of Ludwig Beck and accompanied Franz Halder to the Eastern Front. I found in the organization no member of the older generation of officers that the Tribunal at Nuremberg described as the "General Staff and High Command".

My focus in 1948 was on the political character and intelligence potential of the organization. But after discovering the presence of Adolf Heusinger and the formidable think tank that had developed around the Evaluation Staff, I attached growing importance to the broader influence that Pullach seemed destined to have in the transition of Germany from any enemy to an ally of my own country and the NATO Alliance. Starting at the beginning of 1948, the trio of Heusinger, Speidel and Foertsch were systematically thinking through the changing geopolitical circumstances surrounding Europe.

Between 1948 and 1956, I remained the CIA officer responsible for our activities in Pullach. The first two years were difficult ones for both Gehlen and me; but after the outbreak of the war in Korea and Chancellor Adenauer's initiative in establishing contact with Gehlen and Heusinger, our efforts were more focused on our shared objectives. The growth of the Organization into a bona fide intelligence service continued. With the creation of the BND on 1 April 1956, my mission in Pullach was at an end. In July, I returned to CIA Headquarters to assume new duties.

With the benefit of more than a half-century to reflect upon the remarkable "Pullach Story", I am satisfied that we who shared it served the interests of the United States, Germany, the NATO Alliance and peace.

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