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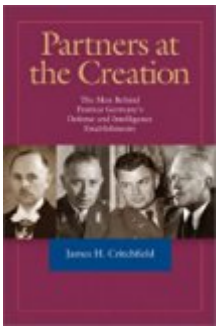

James H. Critchfield. *Partners at Creation: The Men Behind Postwar Germany's Defense and Intelligence Establishments.* Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2003. x + 243 pp. $32.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-59114-136-5.

Reviewed by Katrin Paehler

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In 1951, Reinhard Gehlen and Heinz Herre, formerly of Fremde Heere Ost, Hitler's army's intelligence department at the Eastern front and in 1951 leading members of Organisation Gehlen, the future Federal Intelligence Service (***Bundesnachrichtendienst***, BND) of the Federal Republic of Germany, toured the United States. One evening found the Germans and their American hosts, James Critchfield of the CIA and John Boker--who, while with the U.S. army, had located Gehlen at the Wiesbaden interrogation center in 1945--in a New York nightclub. A photograph, reproduced in James H. Critchfield's autobiographical account of the foundation of West Germany's postwar intelligence and defense establishments (to use the author's apt and descriptive subtitle) depicts the men and the wives of their American hosts smiling brightly into a camera. Above their heads the banner that provided this review with its title floats.[1]

CIA official James H. Critchfield, who passed away in 2003, had more than a first-class seat in the drama and the tedium that was the establishment of West Germany's postwar intelligence and defense structures in the context of the Western alliance. As the main CIA overseer of the Gehlen Organization at its compound at Pullach, where the BND still resides, Critchfield was also involved in shaping it. For eight crucial years between 1948 and 1956, Critchfield and his staff were the main interface between the United States and Hitler's former and allegedly reformed generals working and plotting at Pullach.

One stands to surmise that various reasons led Critchfield to commence writing this account when he was well into his eighties. It is a memoir of sorts, intertwining two narrative strands. One is that of a young man from Hunter, North Dakota, who came to fight in World War II, was recognized for his bravery and gallantry in action and was later tapped by the CIA for a complicated and unusual assignment. The other narrative concerns this particular assignment, which was to vet whether former enemies would make good allies, and oversee their metamorphosis. In the latter sense, then, the book is a pre-institutional history of the BND and the West German military, the Bundeswehr, and it derives much of its originality

from the author's prominent place in the development and inside information and knowledge available to him. Only one James H. Critchfield was present at Pullach and that fact alone makes this book a worthwhile read for historians and those interested in intelligence history alike.

Lastly (and maybe most importantly in Critchfield's mind), this book is clearly a defense of policies that were contested in the immediate postwar era and have come under scrutiny again: the American decision to rely on some of the military leaders of the Third Reich in postwar military and defense designs in and for West Germany. In Critchfield's view, all's well that ends well, and he leaves little doubt that the decisions taken were the right ones, especially in view of the geopolitical designs of the Soviet Union. Anti-communism was at the core of Critchfield's political belief system, a notion he certainly shared with many of Hitler's generals. Presumably, having a common enemy and a common worldview in one key issue alone made cooperation easier. It must have also made it easier for Critchfield and others to swallow doubts about their German collaborators and refrain from asking overly probing questions.

Critchfield's seventeen chapters move back and forth between the two main narrative strands with his implicit defense of the American policies providing the overarching framework. The personal narrative is much less prominent than the political one, and I certainly regretted this imbalance. Interestingly enough, one learns most about Critchfield and his own impressions of defeated Germany when he writes about the time before he became a member of the CIA and was still in the employ of the army.

This judgment should not be interpreted as a call for a "kiss-and-tell-account" of the postwar German-American intelligence collaboration, but Critchfield's account, unfailingly polite and respectful, and often sympathetic and warm, could have been more candid and less distant. What was it like to live in Pullach as a CIA official and recently widowed father of two young children? How did it feel? How did his children live? How did he (and they) experience life in the compound? Critchfield could have added an interesting and worthwhile historical perspective here, but unfortunately, he chose not to do so.

Obviously, anyone has the right to privacy, but there seems to be a bigger issue at stake, and it relates to the overarching argument of Critchfield's memoir. He does report get-togethers with German colleagues, frequently in form of hiking or skiing expeditions in the nearby Alps. He mentions discussions about work during those outings, but it appears that those discussions were always restricted to the present or the future. It does not appear that Critchfield ever became close enough to any German colleague to ask, let alone press for answers about decisions during the National Socialist era, and have a decent hope of receiving an answer that would have been even an inch removed from the "party line." Consequently, Critchfield's conviction that he was dealing with the reasonably good guys could never been shaken, as it is seems that all the relationships he built with German counterparts were, much like the tone of his book, polite and respectful, sometimes sympathetic and warm, but always distant.

Critchfield's relationship with Reinhard Gehlen, the head of Organization Gehlen and former chief of Hitler's Fremde Heere Ost, serves as an excellent illustration. Critchfield leaves no doubt that the two men worked well together and over the course of the book, he provides a fairly nuanced picture of Gehlen.[2] Yet their relationship remained distant, presumably also since Gehlen came to believe that Critchfield had been involved in U.S. army attempts to damage Organization Gehlen in the months before it was transformed into the BND. For many years after the end of Critchfield's appointment to Pullach, the main relationship existed not between the two men who had worked together so closely, but be-

tween the Critchfield family and Gehlen's wife and children. Only years later did the two men develop something resembling a friendship; Gehlen, having revised his judgment on Critchfield, made the first steps. Critchfield's pleasant surprise at this change in attitude is palpable, but there is no indication in the memoir that this new relationship improved the level of their personal exchanges.

Critchfield notes that Gehlen "seemed to have left no record of his view on National Socialism" (p. 109). It seems that nobody, including Critchfield himself, ever pressed him on this matter, which significantly assisted Gehlen in maintaining his sphinx-like aura. Conversely, the silence helped Critchfield not to cast any doubt on his German collaborators or the legitimacy of the CIA's approach, which he so wholeheartedly embraced.

The institutional narrative, the main focus of the book, is a very detailed one. It discusses the history of Fremde Heere Ost, the occupation of Germany, Critchfield's involvement with the initial evaluation of Gehlen, his colleagues and their plans, the establishment of the postwar German intelligence and defense system in the context of the changing geopolitical situation, the role of the Korean War and Chancellor Konrad Adenauer in these developments, the intelligence war in Germany, and the eventual acceptance of a sovereign West German state into the Western alliance. In particular, Critchfield is interested in the roles played by Gehlen and by Adolf Heusinger. In the case of the latter, chief of operations in the Nazi General Staff under Franz Halder and as such deeply involved in the military planning in preparation for the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union, Critchfield provides much interesting and largely unknown information. In particular, he focuses on the fact that the planning for the remilitarization of Western Germany began as early as 1948 and largely proceeded under the cover of the Gehlen Organization.

If one buys one basic premise, and Critchfield certainly did, the activities of the U.S. army and later the CIA in regards to the West German intelligence and defense structure (and the activities of Critchfield personally, who worked for both entities) make perfect sense. The premise is a very simple one: Gehlen and his consorts, most notably Heusinger, were honorable German military officers who had little to nothing to do with Hitler or the Nazis. Rather, they were either in contact with the German military resistance or completely aloof from any Nazi politics and ideology, realized early on (approximately 1943) that Germany could not and would not win the war, and then, towards the end of the war, propelled by their dislike for Hitler and their deeply felt anti-Bolshevism, decided to bring their knowledge and expertise to the Western allies. They did that out of the goodness of their hearts and due to the sincerity of their convictions; they never thought of their knowledge and expertise as bargaining chips for their personal survival and prolonged well-being.

Over the last sixty years, historical research has poked enormous holes into the narrative of the decent German military somehow finding itself fighting an indecent war that "the Nazis," the proverbial other, imposed on them. The literature is too vast to list, but the recent ruckus over the Wehrmacht exhibition mounted by the Hamburger Institut für Sozialgeschichte aptly illustrated the staying power of these myths.

The establishment of the Gehlen Organization and the rearmament of the Federal Republic of Germany owe much, if not all, to the above-mentioned myth. This is not to say that Gehlen and Heusinger or any other of the main players Critchfield identifies were untenable for the positions they took. What makes Critchfield's evaluation of these men, their roles in Nazi Germany, and their subsequent roles in the establishment of West Germany's intelligence and defense system a disappointment, however, is that he bought their

line of reasoning lock, stock, and barrel. And even almost sixty years after the fact, Critchfield does not take a more critical approach, be it by delving into new documents or at least acknowledging that the dichotomy between the "good soldier" and "evil Nazi" is a myth that has been profoundly pierced by historical research. Rather, Critchfield chose to rely on dated accounts celebrating these men. Everything else in this book flows out of this premise. If these men were trustworthy and their reading of the geopolitical situation--in layman's terms: the danger posed by the Soviet Union--was sound, then nothing can be said against the decision of the CIA to rely on them. If one doubts this premise, and be it only on the level that maybe former Nazi generals should not have been trusted to quite this extent, then the evaluations becomes less clear-cut.

As the CIA overseer of the developments at Pullach, Critchfield (alias Marshall Kent, the name he used while working at Pullach) was in charge of ensuring that Nazis were not taking over operations. He assures the readers that this was never the case; however, some of his statements made in this context are quite fascinating. In October 1948, for example, Critchfield was assigned to review the Gehlen Organization in its earliest incarnation (while it was still under supervision of the U.S. Army) and evaluate whether the CIA should support and maintain the organization. Critchfield relates that he was particularly concerned about the potential presence of war criminals in the organization, but was assured by Gehlen that none would be tolerated. He declares, "during the visit I observed none [war criminals]. Nor did I find any immediately definable Nazis" (p. 84). This statement alone begs the question as to how Critchfield would define or recognize an "immediately definable Nazi."

Critchfield also engages in something one could deem "exculpation by association." Arguing that the military intelligence service under Admiral Canaris, the *Abwehr*, and the Army General Staff initially gathered under General Beck (who was ousted in 1938) had been at the "core of the military resistance effort within the Wehrmacht," Critchfield decided to give the people he was dealing with a free pass; they all "had come out of the war and the Nuremberg trials with reasonably clean slates" (p. 87). If the logic employed here is based on a substantial leap of faith, it is rather tortuous in other instances. Indeed, Critchfield suggests that the people he was dealing with were clean, since they "had been isolated on the eastern front throughout the duration of the war with the Soviet Union" (p. 87). In a stunning reversal of fact and decades of historical research, Critchfield thus declares Nazi Germany's eastern front an ideology-free zone. In that context, then, it does not surprise that he parrots the German military's party line about the "unfortunate" development in the Balkans in 1941, "where internal partisan warfare had played a large role in creating circumstance in which the Germans had resorted to harsh measures" (p. 100). It is then also not a surprise that this might well be the first book published after 1970 I have encountered that does not include information about Dr. Globke's line of work before he became West German chancellor Konrad Adenauer's right-hand man.

Critchfield reiterates his and ultimately the CIA's rationale for throwing in its lot with Gehlen and his staff. To use a very overused phrase: the Cold War was heating up, and the organization Gehlen had created under the oversight of the U.S. Army provided intelligence on the Soviet Union and the developments in the Soviet occupational zone of Germany. As a result, Critchfield suggested to his superiors in Washington that they should take Gehlen and his organization under the CIA's wing, yet with still limited funding and without any firm commitments as to the future role of his outfit. In fact, in his recommendation to the CIA, Critchfield coined the term "Gehlen Organization." Mr. Critchfield indicates his utter confi-

dence in his decision; "reason, common sense, and historical evidence were on my side" (p. 89).

This evaluation is rather doubtful. Gehlen certainly managed to persuade the CIA with his claims that under his oversight Fremde Heere Ost had been an immensely successful intelligence outfit. In comparison with its earlier incarnation under Eberhard Kinzel, Gehlen was certainly correct. However, as early as 1978, David Kahn likened Gehlen, who in the beginning of his tenure had increased the "volume in input and drama in output" of military intelligence to an "equivocating oracle" who, until December 31, 1944, believed that Nazi Germany could turn around the war on the Eastern Front.[3] It is also doubtful whether the activities of Fremde Heere Ost translated that easily into the postwar period; indeed, much of Gehlen's reporting had been based on the fact that Nazi Germany's military and the foreign armies in the intelligence outfit's name were engaged on the battlefield. After the war ended this was certainly no longer the case, and the collection of intelligence became more complicated.

In order to provide intelligence on the development in the Soviet occupational zone and institute counterintelligence measures, be it for the CIA or the nascent West German government, Gehlen began to cast a wide net for recruits. A good many of those would not have passed the "no-Nazi, no-war criminal, not part of Automatic Arrest Category" standards, which the CIA and Critchfield supposedly espoused. In fact, a good number of former SD members were initiated into the Gehlen Organization. To add insult to injury, some of these very men, most notably Heinz Felfe and Hans Clemens, were double agents in the employ of the Soviet Union. Critchfield readily admits that such employments went against Gehlen's professed hiring policies and damaged his reputation lastingly; however, Critchfield also stresses that Gehlen concealed his decision to hire some former SD members from his own senior staff and the CIA, a CIA that was also not too keen on the Gehlen Organization being involved in German counterintelligence matters in the first place. By placing the responsibility for these hires squarely and solely on Gehlen's shoulders, Critchfield clearly attempts to absolve himself and the CIA from the recruitments and the ensuing security breaches. Strictly speaking, though, even in 1950 when most of these hires took place, the Gehlen Organization was still under the oversight of the CIA in general as represented by Critchfield in particular. It is also worthwhile noting that the CIA was still footing the bill. In addition, one should ponder whether the CIA brought some of this confusion onto itself by casting in its lot with former Nazi generals not known as international team players.

In the context of Gehlen's dubious adventures in counterintelligence, Critchfield rather snidely remarks that the information was certainly well received "by a select clientele in Bonn, including the interior ministry and the chancellery" (p. 164). This statement points readers in another interesting direction: Gehlen's broader designs. Early in his account, Critchfield indicates that Gehlen meant to establish a unified postwar German intelligence service and was always intent on maintaining the "German character" of his service even when its operations were completely bankrolled by American taxpayers. Gehlen was astonishingly successful in this endeavor.

Critchfield's account clearly suggests that Gehlen and his collaborators gained more from their cooperation with the CIA then the other way around. The CIA provided protection to Gehlen and his nascent centralized intelligence service as a German entity "holding it in trust" until the "appropriate circumstances and time" at which West Germany felt comfortable taking over the organization (pp.157-158). In return, the CIA got a headache, only compounded by the U.S. Army's growing reluctance to rely on the Gehlen Organization (a reluctance that had little to do with the German intelligence outfit and a lot with the in-

ternal competition between G-2 and the CIA). And the close support the CIA afforded the Gehlen Organization did not even pay off in the long term; the relationship and the collaboration between the CIA and the BND was never particularly close and thus not especially productive, either.

The Gehlen Organization, and through it the CIA, also provided a "secure, politically protected, and administratively supported base" for West Germany's rearmament plans, which were percolating among some former generals associated with Gehlen (p. 112). Most prominent among these men was Heusinger, who came to be the first Inspector General of the Bundeswehr. Incidentally, Critchfield points out that the "disenfranchised German military" began its networking and planning for its future in the context of the Western alliance very early on (p. 116). It took the United States and the new Bonn government almost five years to catch up with Heusinger and his plans to rearm West Germany and integrate it into a broad Western alliance led by the United States. Ultimately, the Korean War served as the catalyst and first the Bonn government and then the Western allies embraced Heusinger's plans, even if it took a some time to hammer out the details. Heusinger and his colleagues were indeed so well prepared and their plans so persuasive that at one point High Commissioner McCloy commented that the Germans were "almost too well prepared" (p. 155). Reading Critchfield's account one is sometimes left to wonder whether this, as well as Gehlen's activities, should be considered as a case of high-level "wag the dog."

From a historian's perspective, Critchfield's memoirs suffer from a few problems, some of which afflict the genre in general and some of which are rather unique to this particular defense of CIA policies some fifty-five years ago and, to some extent, the defining years of Critchfield's own life. Thus, the account has to be approached with some caution, in particular as Critchfield's intention to defend CIA policies is very clearly etched onto every part of the narrative. In other words: this is not a critical evaluation of CIA policies and his own involvement into them carefully balanced against new research and recently declassified documents. There is not a footnote in sight and while the bibliography is rather extensive for a memoir, it appears dated.[4] Even if dry in places, however, Critchfield's book is a valuable addition to the growing literature on the earliest years of the BND and the CIA's involvement in it--despite some of its problems and sometimes because of it problems. It allows for an insight into a mindset that might be informing current policy as well.

Notes

[1]. The irony of the sign was seemingly not lost on Critchfield and his editors; the photo's caption draws the reader's attention to the banner.

[2]. For the most detailed yet still concise description of Gehlen's personality, see ***Partners***, pp. 109-111.

[3]. David Kahn, ***Hitler's Spies: German Military Intelligence in World War II*** (New York: Mcmillan, 1978; reprint, Cambridge, Da Capo Press, 2000), pp. 429-442. It is worth noting that this book does not appear in Critchfield's bibliography, although David Kahn's ***The Codebreakers*** (1967) does. It does appear, though, that ***Hitler's Spies*** would have been more to the point.

[4]. The bibliography also contains a few wicked spelling mistakes in German titles; an editor proficient in German could have done wonders here. The book also provides some rather unique translations: ***Denkschrift*** and ***Gedanken über*** are translated as "thinkpiece(s)." "Memorandum" and "deliberations about/regarding" come to mind as more elegant translations.

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