

6. Report of Initial Contacts with General Gehlen's  
Organization by John R. Boker, Jr., 1 May 1952

REPORT OF INITIAL CONTACTS WITH GENERAL GEHLEN'S ORGANIZATION

BY JOHN R. BOKER, JR.

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PART I.

I believe that a brief indication of the background that I developed prior to my meeting with General Gehlen early in June 1945 is essential to an understanding of the events which followed that meeting.

The interrogations which I made of several high ranking German Officers who had commanded units on the Eastern Fronts and interrogations which were made at CSDIC (UK) had undoubtedly awakened what was already a more than latent antipathy toward the Soviets. Early in 1945, I had also had occasion to learn what had happened to many Russian Nationals who had fought with the German Army, been captured by us in the Normandy Campaign, been returned to Russia, been re-employed by the Russians in punishment battalions against the Germans and had been captured by the Germans and reliberated by American Forces. It was also clear to me by April 1945 that the military and political situation would not only give the Russians control over all of Eastern Europe and the Balkans but that as a result of that situation, we would have an indefinite period of military occupation and a frontier contiguous with them. It was with that vague general background that while at 6824 DICMIS in Ravin, I found myself assigned to the interrogation of the German Air Forces Interrogation Center commanded by Oberstleutnant Holters, a unit in which the moving spirit and most efficient member was an Oberleutnant Idol. This unit, together with all its files, had surrendered to the American Cavalry Group "Metz" in Czechoslovakia and had been sent in two 2-ton trucks to 6824 to 6824 DICMIS in Ravin. In order to determine the real value and scope of knowledge of this unit, and in order to maintain general security, I organized this group of some twenty-two officers and men,

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setting them up independently in a small hunting lodge somewhat removed from Ravin proper. This physical removal was suggested not only in the interests of efficiency but because I felt it desirable to keep a unit of this kind away from the Prisoner Compound proper, where, because of an apparent priority from Washington, ROA personnel was constantly passing through.

In a short time, the Holters Group had produced a catalogue of their documents which was very extensive, together with reports which they submitted on briefs I had given them to show the scope of their work as well as to indicate the discovery I had made that, while much of their intelligence was sound, the group was making many efforts to propagandize in their reports against the Russians. This propagandizing I felt somewhat obscured their real intelligence value which was, however, very great.

As a result of the attention which was given to these reports which we produced, and because it involved Air Force Personnel, we received instructions to send five of the key personnel of this unit, together with all their documents, to the Joint British American Air Force Interrogation Center in England. Because of the fact that I had discovered that many of the secondary personnel of this unit had real intelligence training vis-a-vis the Soviets, I protested this breakup of this unit to the Commanding Officer of 6824 DICMIS and, through him, to General Betts. I suggested that rather than be broken up in this manner, the group be shipped intact together with their documents to Washington so that we could maintain control of them. I also indicated that much of the value of the documents would in my opinion, be lost without a thorough interrogation of the secondary personnel who had produced these documents and who were being left behind. Unfortunately, the following day - without any decision "yes" or "no" having been given to me - two Air Force Officers had arrived at Ravin with competent orders to take the five selected per-

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sonnel to England.

During this same period, 6824 was being split up, having apparently failed in its effort to stay out from under 12th Army Group control, and remain directly under SHAEF - a matter of army politics of only passing interest as influencing the breakup of the Holters Interrogation Group. Some of the personnel of 6824 went to "Ashcan" in Luxembourg, and I went with the advance party to Wiesbaden to be incorporated with the incoming FDIC teams passing to 12th Army Group Interrogation Center Control. At Wiesbaden, we came under command of Colonel W. R. Philp who had been designated by General Sibert to command the planned USFET Intelligence Center at Oberursel. After a few days in Wiesbaden, I discovered that the seventeen remaining members of the Holters Interrogation Group were in the Wiesbaden jail being held for CIC interrogation. This appeared to me to be a dangerous security breach because of the fact that it was believed by me that several of the CIC personnel were, to say the least, pro-Soviet in their inclinations and that also some ROA Officers seemed to have the run of the jail. I informed Colonel Philp of what I believed to be the dangers inherent in this situation and told him that I felt that the Holters remnants had better be taken out of PW channels altogether to prevent the Soviets learning that we had already through the Holters documents and gained a vast fund of information of the Soviet Air Forces together with Aerial Photographs covering most of the Russian Industrial complex within the range of German reconnaissance planes beyond the lines of farthest German advance into Russia. Colonel Philp agreed and sent me with his blessing to talk to General Betts in Frankfurt.

I was able to convince General Betts of my point of view and he told me to write out whatever orders I required. I wrote out one order authorizing the discharge from PW status of the Holters personnel and wrote another order authorizing me to use such transportation as was necessary to transport these men to their homes. He signed both

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orders and on the following day I had the men processed and arranged to have Lt. Werner Daniels deliver these men to their homes.

From this experience, it became clear to me that:

1. Now was the ideal time to gain intelligence of the Soviets if we were ever going to get it;
2. Various American quarters would be opposed to gaining the intelligence;
3. Security measures against U.S. personnel were necessary in this activity, and
4. It was ridiculous to attempt to gain intelligence efficiently if the documents and the men who had produced these documents were separated.

PART II.

After clearing up the Holters affair, I had nothing to do for a few days in Wiesbaden. The only then apparent result of the incident had been that my slight activity in the field of gaining Soviet intelligence had made me the Russian Expert of the Intelligence Group. Consequently, when I - early in June 1945 - stopped to see what PW's at the Interrogation Center they might want me to interrogate, I was given the names of Major Luetgendorf, the G-2 of the German VIII Corps, Colonel Stephanus, G-2 of Army Group "MITTE" and General Gehlen, Chief of Ic/Fremde Heere Ost. All of these men were in what was called the "Generals' House" (the Pagenstecher and von Bergen Houses on the Bodenstedtstrasse in Wiesbaden). As an indication of the variety of the personnel that had been passed through to what was then regarded as the top Interrogation Center, were Governor Frank of Poland, Pastor Neimueller (whose confinement there I am sure had a real influence on his anti-American feeling), Skorozny, Marschall von Rundstedt and Admiral Horthy.

Because I was quite interested in the Vlassov Army Complex (by virtue of earlier

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interrogations in Ravin of some ROA personnel as well as discussions with General-leutnant Aschenbrenner whom I drove down to Paris to be shipped to the States), I first talked to Colonel Stephanus, (whose brief had indicated him to be knowledgeable on the subject). I did not find this to be the case and on the following day, went up to the von Bergen House right after lunch, to talk to General Gehlen.

Because of their rank and the arrangement of the two houses, none of the men were under any special guard and the American in charge, upon my inquiring for General Gehlen, informed me that he was someplace upstairs in the von Bergen House. I went upstairs and found him asleep in one of the bedrooms. One of his roommates awakened him and I told General Gehlen I was sorry to disturb him because he was partially undressed and when he had time to fix up, would he meet me on the terrace.

He came down and we sat together at a small table by ourselves in a corner of the terrace somewhat removed from the House.

I told him that I was interested in talking to him about the Soviets because I understood that he had been the head of the German Military Intelligence Service dealing with them; that I did not know very much about the Russians, but that because of certain prior experience I had had, I was supposed to be the expert on the subject. He indicated that he was very anxious to cooperate with the Americans in this connection and I then had a general discussion as to the probable future line-up of the West against the East. I requested him to give me a brief outline of his organization and the scope of its work and was amazed at its size and ramifications.

As the conversation developed, he indicated that he had - long prior to the end of the war - seen its inevitable conclusion and that he had discussed with some key members of his organization not only the preservation of his files - with the ultimate object in mind of turning them over to us - but that he had also arranged with some of his key personnel to attempt to contact them for the purpose of securing

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their cooperation with him in presenting us with as clear a picture of the Soviets as possible. These key members of his organization had been charged with the safeguarding of the files by concealing them in various places in Southern Germany for ultimate recovery. I told him that I was convinced of the value of this work and believed that the personnel and files should be reconstituted as rapidly as possible, but that at the same time, I imparted to him my belief that first we would have to convince higher American authorities that his work was really professional and extensive and that also there existed in many American quarters a terrific opposition to gathering any information concerning our Soviet Allies. I told him I would be back the following day and talk with him further.

That evening I talked over the situation with my then roommate in the Konigsalle, Lt. Paul Comstock. He and I had been quite close before and he was my only confidante in the previous Holters affair. We decided that the same mistake should not be repeated and that if General Gehlen really did have the organization and the files which it appeared he had, we would have to proceed very cautiously. Lt. Comstock agreed to be my partner in this work and we discussed other Americans whom we believed to have the proper background and efficiency, choosing 2nd Lts. Ulrich E. Landauer and Franz Brotzen, both of whom I had known intimately at Camp Ritchie, we all having been on the teaching staff. We selected them not only because of their backgrounds and inclinations but also because they were fluent German speakers, an ability which Lt. Comstock at that time did not have.

In subsequent conversations with General Gehlen, he gave me the names of his key personnel, all of whom he believed were American prisoners of war; Oberstleutnant Wessel, and Majors Hiemenz, Hinrichs and Schoeller. We also located in Wiesbaden, Hauptmann Fuehner who had been dolmetscher on the Staff of Colonel Stephanus.

In order to preserve security, we secured Colonel Philp's permission to take

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over the Pagenstecher House ground floor for our offices and we four Americans moved into the upstairs. General Gehlen moved over with us and because of limitations of space, chose General der Infanterie Erfurt as his roommate, whom General Gehlen regarded as completely secure.

Partly because of their previous military positions, but partly also to keep them away from other American Interrogators, we joined Colonel Stephanus, Major Luetgendorf and Captain Fuehner to our unit.

I told General Gehlen that we would have a selling job to do all the way through and that I felt the first most impressive document that we would be able to produce would be a complete history and analysis of German Intelligence Methods in connection with Soviet Intelligence on the War Department, Army Group, Army, and Corps Level. While they were producing this report, I told him we would make an effort to secure his key staff members and documents.

Rather than attempt to secure these men through regular PW channels, I decided that it would be best to go out and get them, for various reasons. The first was that I had learned that the [ ] having been made aware that General Gehlen was in our custody, had sent out a request for him. This made me conscious of the fact that the system of reporting prisoners apparently had become more efficient and given wider distribution. I indicated to Colonel Philp that we should, if possible, remove General Gehlen's name from the distribution lists, upon which suggestion, I believe he took action. I also indicated that I wanted to go out and get the other members of General Gehlen's staff in the field so that formal requests would not be issued for them and it would appear that we were deliberately reconstituting this staff in Wiesbaden. To this he agreed and gave me authority to make the necessary trips.

I had another idea in my mind at the time. This was that the impression made

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upon these men if we were to rescue them directly from the PW camps at which they might be and were able to brief them at once that we were securing them at the request of their former commanding officer who desired them to continue working with him - would be much more favorable than if they were just "forwarded" to Wiesbaden, and that their cooperation would then be more fully assured.

In a period of about two weeks, and operating from the 3rd Army Headquarters at Bad Toelz, and the 3rd Army Intelligence Center at Freising, we were able to locate these men and through them the documents which they had concealed between floors of remote foresters' lodges, had buried or otherwise cached. Out of eight caches of documents, three had unfortunately previously been discovered. One unimportant batch consisting mostly of original Soviet newspaper clippings and personality photos had unfortunately been burned. One batch we were able to rescue from the XII Corps Documents Center before it was sent up to the Joint British American Documents Center at Hoechst. The third batch had been taken by the British unit and was at Hoechst.

Getting ahead of the story a little bit, we were also able to "steal" this last batch of documents from Hoechst by including it in a large group of other documents, comprising a complete Corps "G-Staffel" set-up which consisted of a printing press with Russian type, several hundred original pay books, and many genuine and forged Russian Army Documents and Stamps. In the subsequent weeks we also made an effort - having learned of the rarity of such material - to secure all Russian language books which we possible could. These we looked for and obtained from various documents centers and on the road, putting together a very representative library of several hundred books.

By the middle of July 1945, we had succeeded in reconstituting General Gehlen's key members and staff, all of his important documents and were very much aware of the goldmine that we had found.

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We had, by now, added a typist to our staff, Master Sergeant Benjamin Greenwald, who had been the head of the typing section of the German Section at Ritchie.

The problem now became one of convincing higher American authority as to the value of the enterprise and of deciding whether or not it was possible to set up to develop current intelligence or whether we were engaged in a purely historical research project.

Our thinking was influenced by the fact that we at that time appeared to have the opportunity for re-establishing contacts with the Romanian Intelligence Group which had been operating successfully as we learned from Major Leutendorf in the higher Romanian Army Staff and of weaving a tenuous thread to the Hungarian Intelligence Service.

Most important, however, was the fact that General Gehlen had indicated to us that he was able to establish contact with Oberstleutnant Hermann Baun, the former director of and contact man to the German Agent Network.

(Wally I): General Gehlen had taken over Wally I (gathering) from Canaris when the SD tried to take over the Abwehr field agencies. Wally III (Schmalachuegen) was also taken over (Not II - Scorzen).

General Gehlen, Lt. Comstock and I decided that, if possible, we would try to keep FHO going as an active unit serving the Theatre G-2. In view of the length of time it took to produce the extensive historical report at which we were working - as indicated above - we asked General Gehlen to produce individual studies on the basis of the files which we had now acquired on such subjects as Soviet Tank Production, Strength of the Soviet Army, Soviet Manpower Study, Estimate of Probable Soviet Demobilization Policy, etc. These shorter reports we furnished to General Sibert's office and they were found to be quite interesting. It was also arranged for Colonel Philp to come over to spend a social evening over some bottles of wine with the Gehlen Group, in preparation for which, because Colonel Philp had been an Artillery Officer, we had prepared a general briefing on Soviet Artillery Tactics.

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Colonel Philp was very favorably impressed with the men and with their intelligence capabilities. He agreed that they would be a desirable unit working for General Sibert as Theatre G-2 and thenceforth supported the project to the fullest.

In order to keep up the morale of the Gehlen Group, we arranged that those who were within a day's visit of their family should visit their homes. In the case of those who were further removed, I arranged to have Lt. Landauer make a round trip, taking letters and a few items of American stores to their families.

Late in July, Colonel Philp arranged for me to have a conference with General Sibert, at which conference I submitted a memorandum outlining our general plan in which General Sibert concurred. Colonel Fritzsche, however, felt that we should make no effort to contact any of the Field Organizations. I therefore discussed this matter with Gehlen and we decided that we would attempt to keep Colonel Baum "on ice" for a few more weeks until the situation was clarified.

Just at that time, a representative of G-2 Washington, Lt. Colonel Gronich had become aware of the existence of this group and called me to a conference in Frankfurt where he told me that he was recommending to Washington that they send the documents of this group back to the States. I protested strongly against this and indicated that General Sibert wanted the men and the documents kept together, and that General Sibert had agreed with my recommendation that we attempt to reconstitute the group insofar as possible. I further said that it would take at least two to three more months to accomplish this and that the sending of the documents to Washington would destroy most of the usefulness of the men. Lt. Comstock and I prepared for this meeting, of the purpose of which we had had some inkling, and we agreed to indicate to Lt. Col. Gronich that Lt. Comstock had important connections in the U.S. to whom we were prepared to report the details, in the event that the usefulness of the group was destroyed and if anything went wrong with their full exploitation.

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Lt. Comstock had close connections to then Senator Thomas of Oklahoma and he had agreed to permit me to rely on these connections. This attitude on our part stymied Colonel Gronich for a while. I immediately had a conference with General Gehlen and told him of the fact that we were prepared to use Lt. Comstock's political connections and rely as fully as we could upon General Sibert's stated support in keeping his unit together with their documents and that we would do our utmost insofar as we could - operating as we did from a very low level - to re-establish FHO as an intelligence unit working for the Americans. General Gehlen and I further agreed that we would keep Baun and his contact to the Field Organization quiet until I felt that it would be desirable to establish contact. The reason for this decision was to have a further selling point in the event that Gronich's ideas prevailed. Gronich was unaware of Baun's existence and any of the details of the organization.

A few days later, a cable was received from the War Department ordering that all of Gehlen's unit and their documents be sent to Post Office Box 1142 in Washington. (P.O. Box 1142 was the detailed Interrogation Center operating under the G-2 War Department and was located at Ft. Washington Overlook, at Alexandria, Virginia). When Colonel Philp informed me of this order, I at once went to Frankfurt to see General Sibert. He was very much perturbed and felt that Colonel Gronich had "pulled a fast one", but that although he had recommended that my original plan be followed - in the face of a definite cable order, could do nothing further. He stated that he was happy at least that we had succeeded in not having men separated from the documents, since this was really the only basic change from Gronich's original plan. I then told General Sibert that in order not to lose contact with the Field Organization - to whom the only link was Colonel Baun - it would be important that one representative member of the Gehlen Group remain at Wiesbaden with Lt. Comstock and the other U.S. members. For this, General Sibert agreed to assume

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responsibility.

I talked this matter over with General Gehlen and told him that we were ordered back to Washington and that I could do nothing about it but that I had told General Sibert definitely about Baun and he agreed that the contact was too valuable to be lost. We decided to leave Wessel behind since he was in a position to make this contact and enjoyed Baun's full confidence. In order not to make a premature contact and in order to keep our European organization operating, I arranged with Lt. Comstock a series of code cables which I would send from Washington indicating how and when contact should be made with Baun.

In the middle of August, General Gehlen, Colonel Stephanus, Majors Hiemenz, Hinrichs, Luetgendorf, Schoeller, Captain Fuhrer, all the documents and I, left Frankfurt in General Smith's private plane for which Colonel Gronich had arranged. The flight was uneventful but very interesting for General Gehlen's group.

Upon our arrival at the National Airport in Washington, we were met by a Lt. and driver from 1142 who had come with a completely closed "Black Maria" to transport the Germans to 1142. Another truck took the documents which were in about twenty packing cases. I was told to report to Colonel Hopkins at the Pentagon, since he represented the Documents Section and was apparently only interested in the documents and not the men. I found that Colonel Gronich was the main field representative of the Documents Section and that he was solely interested in collecting the documents and that the men had been brought over only incidentally for interrogation at 1142. This upset me very much as it appeared that our whole plan for keeping the group together with the documents as a working unit for the future, had not seeped through to Washington and in any case did not fit in with their plans.

I found that Colonel Lovell was the man in charge of the G-2 Document and Interrogation Operation and that he was the one I would probably have to convince of

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the importance of the group and the correctness of our thinking. I found that he was willing to see me the following day.

That afternoon I went to 1142 on my own. I had been an interrogator there for some time prior to having gone to Europe in June 1944. It was, fortunately, a Sunday and I went directly to the "Old Building" prisoner compound. Much to my surprise, I found that the Gehlen group had all been put in solitary cells. Fortunately, I knew the Signal Sergeant in the Control Room, to whom the visits to prisoners had to be announced. He did not question my wanting to see Gehlen and I went through to visit him. I explained quite frankly to him the whole situation, that things were in a horrible mess and that I would do my best to straighten them out, but that I had practically nothing to say in Washington and was relying on my outside contacts to help us over the rough spots. I told him that I had gathered that I might be prevented from seeing them for some time but that in any case, I would be in contact with them through some of my friends in 1142, if not directly.

I had some inkling of the type of historical interrogation by which 1142 was trying to keep itself alive after the end of the war and I informed General Gehlen of this quite frankly. I also told him to refuse to let himself be interrogated in detail and to indicate that he was interested in talking to no one but me. I informed him that I would tell the other members of his group the same thing and that being acquainted with the "peculiar" type of interrogation that was conducted at 1142, we need have no scruples about such refusal.

Back in the Pentagon, my fears were realized when I was unable to see Colonel Lovell for another day. In view of the fact that the documents were of interest to the Eastern European O.B. Branch, however, I ended up there. This Branch consisted of primarily Lt. Colonel Shimkin, Major Kisevalter, Captains Platon and Zander and Lt. Waldmann. I decided to take the bull by the horns and had a heart to heart talk

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with Zander and Waldmann. They were both pretty well convinced of the value of the group as a group with their documents but did at that time manifest the feeling which I had sensed everywhere in the Pentagon that I had contacted - that there was considerable hostility to working with Germans in any way and the feeling that the Germans could be of no use to us in any current endeavor. Zander and Waldmann agreed however, that they come with me when I talked to Colonel Lovell.

In my talk with Colonel Lovell, I indicated my strong belief in the value of the group and asked only for permission to prove it by taking them out of confinement which they were and setting them up to work on their documents as we had had them working in Wiesbaden. I indicated also that General Sibert was personally interested in the progress of this situation and that I had orders to report to him if anything went wrong. Colonel Lovell agreed to this and in the next few days, we set up in one of the empty barracks at 1142.

The extent and value of the information that Gehlen's group possessed became at once apparent to the Eastern European O.B. Group as well as the German O.B. Section. Zander, Waldman and Miss Louise Dickey became quite enthusiastic.

We decided that it would be necessary to start securing additional privileges for the group and to secure the commitment of some higher ranking personnel. Colonel <sup>Lovell</sup> was the logical man since he was in the policy making position and was also more oriented to the Germans than anyone else, having been Assistant Military Attache in Germany for some time and having commenced his O.B. enthusiasms there.

I visited Colonel Lovell at his home one afternoon and presented him with a handwritten analysis of the Finnish Military potential which had been written for me in Wiesbaden by General der Inf. Erfurt. Colonel Lovell was very pleased with this since he had known General Erfurt prior to the war and I felt that it was an

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opportune moment to suggest that he would be very much interested in meeting the group with us at 1142. He agreed to this and we arranged a dinner in the barracks where General Gehlen's group was working. Lt. Waldmann was a moving spirit in this. Meanwhile, I had long since secured access to the group - given officially - and spent a good portion of the days with them.

Sometime prior to this happy event, I had secured Colonel Lovell's permission to regard General Gehlen's group as a group working with their documents which was to be increased in extent if possible and this permission of his was utilized by me to send a cable to Comstock to have Wessel make the contact with Baun. Comstock, therefore, became responsible for gathering more of the group abroad, which he did very efficiently.

General Sibert had also meanwhile come to the Pentagon on a visit and I was fortunate enough to have a brief chat with him. He indicated that it was still his intention to utilize the group abroad and that he would proceed along these lines although the Pentagon was still in the ascendancy.

I had meanwhile talked the matter over with General Gehlen and told him that although there seemed to be a lot of political pulling between the Pentagon and USFET, the development seemed fairly clear since General Sibert remained firm in his opinion and since the basic goodwill of Colonel Lovell had been assured.

Under the "point" system, I had at that time - early in September - sufficient credits to be separated from the service. I told Gehlen that I had decided to ask for release from the Army - not because I was not vitally interested in securing the future of his work - but that because of my relatively low rank, I did not see how I could exercise any further decisive influence on its future while still in the Army. I felt, rather, that outside of the Army, as a civilian with a relatively important civilian background and the possibility of utilizing some important political

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connections, I would be in a better position than if I stayed in the military channel of command and received the promotion for which I had again been recommended - incidentally for the fourth time - but which had never materialized.

The political connections were somewhat nebulous, although Mrs. Comstock had been good enough to arrange for me a cocktail party where I met Senator Thomas, ex-Senator Gore, and several other, I presume, influential people, particularly from Oklahoma, so that I had at least a basis for later contact.

General Gehlen agreed that this was probably the wiser course since they were set up and operating quite well and he felt that my estimate of the future was the correct one.

With respect to taking care of their personal needs, Waldmann had been doing an outstanding job and it was merely a question of waiting for the logic of General Sibert's decision to prevail.

I gave General Gehlen my civilian address and asked him that in the event anything started to go wrong, he should arrange to contact me directly if he could, or through Lt. Waldmann with whom I had made arrangements. I also arranged for a channel with Captain Zander. In order that they could have the feeling of my continued interest and outside support, I returned to 1142 after I had been separated from the service and left a few of my firm's products as souvenirs.

That Christmas, I managed to provide them with a few Christmas presents, through Lt. Waldmann to assure them of the consistence of my position and their ability to contact me if necessary.

Fortunately, matters developed so that this was not necessary and that was the end of my initial contacts with General Gehlen and his Organization.

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