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(U) HISTORY TODAY- November 2, 2015

FROM: CCH

Run Date(s): 11/02/2015

(U) A look back: German SIGINT during World War II



(U) General Erich Fellgiebel, who had been head of the German Army's Cipher Center in World War II, became simultaneously commander of the Army's Signal Corps and Armed Forces Communication. As such, he was responsible for both the intercept units and the cryptanalytic organization. He was highly respected for organizational and leadership abilities, but he had a fatal trait: he disliked Hitler. He was believed, correctly, to have protected signal personnel whose loyalties were suspect.

(U) Fellgiebel participated in the July 1944 plot to assassinate Hitler in which a bomb was to be placed in his field headquarters. Fellgiebel failed to carry out his assignment; he was supposed to stop all communications from the headquarters, isolating it until the conspirators could grasp key offices following Hitler's death. He failed to do this; his part in the plot was discovered, and he was executed.



(U) Historical photo:
General Erich Fellgiebel.

(U) He was succeeded on November 1 by General Albert Praun. Praun was a highly capable signal officer with wide experience, and, best of all, from the Army's point of view, "a good National Socialist." Quickly, he moved to arrange that no more Army signal personnel would be arrested in the purges that followed the bomb plot.

(U) Fellgiebel had built up intercept units throughout the Army and taken action to bring them into coordination; he concentrated on tactical intercept. Praun continued this effort, appointing a "general of communications reconnaissance" to improve coordination, particularly at the highest levels.

(U) Building on his predecessor's work, Praun made German signals intelligence as effective as it could be.

(U) Arrested by the Allies at the end of the war and held in a series of prison camps, Praun was interrogated thoroughly, and provided a wealth of detail about high-level German signals and SIGINT organization.

(U) After his release by the Allied powers, Praun lived in retirement, and wrote an autobiography. He died in March 1975.

(U) For information on how COMINT reacted to the July bomb plot, see [this History Today](#) article from August 24, 2005.

(U) To discuss historical topics with interesting folks, visit the Center for Cryptologic History's blog, [History Rocks](#) ("go history rocks").

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Doc ID: 6660667

Information Owner [redacted]
Page Publisher [redacted]
Last Modified: October 28, 2015
Last Reviewed: October 28, 2015

~~DERIVED FROM: NSA/CSSM 1-52, DATED: 20180110, DECLASSIFY ON: 20430110~~
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(b) (3) - P.L. 86-36