

Memorial of Kurt von Gehlen 1927–1995

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Kurt von Gehlen, professor of ore petrology and geochemistry at the University of Frankfurt, Main, Germany, died after a long-lasting and serious heart disease on May 17th, 1995. He was born on February 9th, 1927 at Kiel in North Germany, where he got the typical imprint of a person who does not like to talk at great length. The larger part of his life he lived at the frontier between North and South Germany.

He heard his first professional lectures in the prisoner of war camp and later attended the Munich, Goettingen, and Freiburg universities. His graduate studies were supervised by Hans Schneiderhöhn, who introduced ore microscopy into earth science during his World War I isolation in southwestern Africa, now Namibia. Kurt von Gehlen investigated the structural relations of galena- and sphalerite-containing fluorite veins in the southwestern Black Forest on which his thesis was based.

The pre-electron microprobe identification of ore minerals was an art and von Gehlen became accepted as a junior artist by masters such as Ramdohr and Schneiderhöhn. His respective studies centered on a characterization of copper, iron, and chromium minerals. From 1953 to 1966 he continued his career at the university of Erlangen-Nuernberg as a research assistant and assistant professor. Now living close to the Bavarian part of the Bohemian Mountains, von Gehlen had to split his geologic interest between the Black Forest and Upper Palatinate, both of which are windows into the Moldanubian belt of the Variscan orogeny.

Not satisfied with descriptive mineralogy, he became interested in ore fabrics. Von Gehlen received the Goldschmidt-Prize of the German Mineralogical Society in 1960 for developing X-ray methods to study ore fabrics. In 1962-1963 he investigated with Gunnar Kullerud at the Geophysical Laboratory of Washington the solubility of Cu in the pyrrhotite structure and reported about the low-temperature properties of this mineral. In the pioneer period of stable isotope geochemistry, he studied the sulfur isotope fractionation in ore deposits of the Black Forest, Silesia, the Rhine valley (Wiesloch), Pallabora (South Africa), and the Gamsberg area of Namibia for conclusions on the conditions of ore deposition. In 1970 he published with Schiller and Nielsen early results on sulfur isotope fractionation in experimentally coprecipitated galena and sphalerite.

Von Gehlen was highly engaged in the organization of numerous national earth science projects and acted as an editor of several of the respective reports for more than 20 years. These research programs covered subjects as mineral raw materials, the Afar Depression of Ethiopia, stratified sulfide deposits, the Rhenish Massif, and the continental deep drilling in Bavaria. In 1980 he served as consultant for the United Nations State of Environment Report in the section Mineral Resources. Many

people understand the sense of sharing and responsibility needed to make wise but often unpopular decisions, which keep research open for innovations and progress with a minimum level of bureaucracy. Von Gehlen provided his experiences in a remarkable selflessness and courtesy. He never used his position in a committee to demonstrate influence and even accepted stressing obligations when he already suffered from the heart disease. It is important to remember such qualities.

From 1984 to 1986 Kurt von Gehlen acted as president of the German Mineralogical Society. In this position he addressed the participants of the 1986 annual meeting at Mainz with a status report about the genesis of Pb-Zn-F-Ba mineralizations in southwestern Germany, a return to the objects of his early research. In 1993 he formally retired from his professorship at Frankfurt. There was not much time left to reflect, under the care of Gabriele von Gehlen and their three sons, the experiences of his life.

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¹For a copy of the complete bibliography of K. von Gehlen, request Document AM-97-652 from the Business Office, MSA, 1015 Eighteenth St., NW, #601, Washington, D.C. 20036, U.S.A.

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