

Heydrich, Reinhard

(1904--1942), Nazi SS leader who was a key player in the planning and execution of the "Final Solution". Heydrich served as head of the Nazi Security Police (SIPO), the Security Service (SD), and the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA).

Heydrich was born in Halle, Germany to a family of musicians. He had a strict upbringing that included near-worship of state authority. He joined the German navy, but was dishonorably discharged in 1931 after being found guilty of misconduct with a female friend. That same year Heydrich became head of the Security Service (SD), the SS's espionage and intelligence organization (originally, he had viewed the SS with disdain, but relented after meeting Heinrich Himmler). At that point of his life, Heydrich gave himself over both to his new superiors and to his dark side: he was cruel, cynical, pitiless—and ambitious. This dangerous combination, along with his Aryan looks, allowed Heydrich to thrive in the Nazi hierarchy.

As chief of the SD, Heydrich reigned over the blackmail and information-getting that helped Himmler gain control over the *Gestapo*, the German secret police. In 1936 Heydrich himself became executive director of the *Gestapo*, while retaining control of the SD. These two posts gave him unlimited power to send "enemies of the Reich" such as Jews to concentration camps. He also pitted his two agencies against each other in a race to see who could better carry out Hitler's anti-Jewish policies.

By 1938 Heydrich began calling for the "forced emigration" of Jews as a solution to the "Jewish question." He was one of the main planners of the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 9--10, 1938, and presided over the arrests of thousands of Jews.

On January 24, 1939 Hermann Goering set up the Reich's Central Office for Jewish Emigration (*Zentralstelle fuer Juedische Auswanderung*) and appointed Heydrich's aide, Heinrich Mueller, as its head. This meant that the execution of the Germans' anti-Jewish policies would now be in the hands of Heydrich and the SS.

After the war broke out in 1939, Heydrich took charge of the *Einsatzgruppen*; on September 21 he ordered them to begin forcing Polish Jews into ghettos and establishing Jewish councils called *Judenraete*. He ordered the Jews to concentrate in the large towns near transportation, ready for the next step of the Final Solution. Heydrich then united the SD and the *Gestapo* into one agency, the RSHA. This allowed merciless SD members like Adolf Eichmann total authority over Germany's anti-Jewish activities.

In 1941 Germany invaded the Soviet Union. Before the invasion, Heydrich ordered *Einsatzgruppen* in Russia to carry out the immediate annihilation of Soviet Jews and officials in the areas about to be occupied.

On July 31, 1941 Goering set Heydrich to the task of coming up with the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish question" of all the Jews in Europe. To successfully coordinate this, Heydrich needed the cooperation of all the government's ministries. Thus, he convened the Wannsee Conference in Berlin on January 20, 1942, to discuss and further organize the mass extermination of all European Jewry.

Later that year Heydrich was appointed acting governor of the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia (see also Bohemia and Moravia, Protectorate of). This was apparently a reward for his "excellence" in anti-Jewish terror and the extermination campaign. Less than a year later, Heydrich was attacked by Czech resistance fighters in an ambush near Prague. He died of his wounds on June 4, 1942. Five days later, the Germans retaliated by burning the Czech village of Lidice to the ground and killing all of its men. *Aktion Reinhard*, which was the operation for the mass murder of the Jews of Poland, was named for Heydrich.