

Best, Werner

(1903--1989), Nazi official who was a senior member of the SS and served as the representative (plenipotentiary) of the German government in Denmark from 1942 to 1945.

Trained as a lawyer, Best became a judge in 1929. In 1930 he joined the Nazi Party and enlisted in the SS in 1931. Soon after the Nazis rose to national power in 1933, Best was named both state commissioner for the police force and police president in the German province of Hesse. Over the next few years, Best advanced quickly through the Nazi hierarchy. He served as the Gestapo's legal advisor, and deputy to both Reinhard Heydrich and SS chief Heinrich Himmler. From 1935 to 1940 Best worked as a bureau chief in the headquarters of the SS's Security Service (SD) in Berlin. From September 1939 to June 1940 he also headed a section in the Reich Security Main Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*, RSHA). In this post, he was involved in the mass murder in Poland of Jews and Polish intellectuals. From June 1940 to August 1942 Best was the head of the military administration in German-occupied France. In that position, he helped exclude Jews from French life and tried to put down the French Resistance.

In November 1942 Best was transferred to German-occupied Denmark, where he served as German plenipotentiary until 1945. Some experts believe that Best tried to lighten the persecution of Jews in Denmark, almost all of whom survived the "Final Solution" by escaping to Sweden.

In 1949 a Danish court sentenced Best to death; however, the sentence was then changed to 12 years in prison. Despite the fact that he had several years left of his sentence, Best was released in 1951. He then returned to Germany and resumed a normal civilian job. In 1958 he was fined 70,000 marks as punishment for his service as an SS leader; in 1969 he was re-arrested for his involvement in the mass murders in Poland. However, he was released in 1972 for health reasons—and then went on to live for many more years.