



Himmler, Heinrich

(1900 - 1945), Leader of the SS and Chief of German Police, an architect of the “Final Solution”, and one of Hitler’s main advisors. Next to Hitler, Himmler emerged as the most powerful man in Nazi Germany.

Himmler was born in Munich to a middle-class Catholic family. His father was a strict authoritarian. At the age of 17 Himmler joined the army, but never saw action in World War I. He attended the Munich School of Technology, where he studied agriculture and economics. During the 1920s he worked as a salesman and a chicken farmer. At that time, Himmler also became involved with the newly formed Nazi Party.

In 1923 Himmler participated in Hitler's unsuccessful attempt at taking over the Bavarian government. Subsequently, he joined a terrorist organization, led by Hitler's ally Ernst Rohm. Himmler enlisted in the SS in 1925. At that stage the SS constituted 200 men who acted as Hitler's bodyguards. By 1929 Himmler took control of the organization; and thus, the SS became the dominating element of the Nazi empire, chiefly responsible for the murder of European Jewry.

After Hitler rose to power in January 1933, Himmler was appointed police president in Munich and head of the political police throughout Bavaria. This gave him the authority to enlarge SS membership, organize the Security Service (SD) under the leadership of his protege, Reinhard Heydrich, and ultimately subdue the Storm Troopers (SA), a rival Nazi group. Additionally in 1933, Himmler established Dachau, the first concentration camp. Within a few years Himmler was made commander of the entire police force throughout the Reich; he was given the titles *Reichsfuehrer-SS* and Chief of the German Police. In 1938 Himmler orchestrated the *Kristallnacht* pogrom of November 9--10.

In October 1939, soon after the outbreak of World War II, Himmler was appointed Reich Commissar for the “Strengthening of German Nationhood,” and was given control of newly occupied Poland. This responsibility included replacing Poles and Jews with ethnic Germans. By 1941, Himmler was in



charge of the Polish concentration and extermination camps, the entire police force, intelligence, political administration in occupied areas, and the extensive *Waffen-SS* armed formations. In 1943, when he became Minister of the Interior, he also gained authority over the courts and civil service.

Himmler used his powers, efficient nature, and total lack of morals to pursue his fantastic aspirations for the racial purity of Europe. He believed that the Aryans belonged to a superior race that was destined to rule inferior races and was threatened with contamination by the Jews. Thus, the Jews needed to be annihilated. As a means to this end; he established concentration and extermination camps, ordered that medical experiments be performed on Jews and other camp inmates, brutally used inmates as forced laborers and encouraged special marriage laws and coupling institutions for the creation of perfect Aryans.

As the war drew to a close, Himmler realized that the Germans would be defeated. He attempted to charm the Allies, while simultaneously continuing the war in the east. He concealed evidence of mass murder, and allowed several hundred camp inmates to be transferred to Sweden. He attempted peace negotiations through Count Folke Bernadotte, head of the Swedish Red Cross, and even suggested surrendering to United States General Dwight D. Eisenhower. This enraged Hitler, who took away all of Himmler's authority.

After the Germans surrendered, Himmler tried to escape Germany, but was caught by British soldiers. He committed suicide on May 23, 1945, before he could be brought to trial as a war criminal.