

## Hoess, Rudolf (Hoss)

(1900--1947), Camp commandant of Auschwitz.

Hoess was born in Baden-Baden, Germany. He volunteered for the army during World War I even though he was underage. In November 1922 Hoess joined the Nazi Party. In 1928 he got involved with the Artamanen Society, a nationalist group which encouraged work on the land and resettlement on Polish territory. He joined the SS in June 1934, on the advice of SS commander Heinrich Himmler, one of the leaders of the Artamanen society.

From 1934--1938 Hoess learned how to run a concentration camp at Dachau, where he trained under camp commandant Theodor Eicke. In May 1940 Hoess was transferred to the site of Auschwitz, and made commandant of the new concentration camp there. Hoess played a large role in organizing and setting up the camp to his liking. In May 1941 Himmler ordered Hoess to establish a new camp right near Auschwitz; this became Birkenau, or Auschwitz II. By the summer, Hoess began preparing the camp as a mass extermination site. At that point, Himmler advised Hoess that Hitler had ordered the "Final Solution" to the "Jewish question," and that the SS was responsible to carry out that assignment. Auschwitz was chosen as the major site of the Final Solution—the mass extermination of all of European Jewry—because it was conveniently located, with respect to transportation and concealment from the outside world.

From summer 1941 to November 1943 Hoess presided over the murder of Jews from Germany, the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, Poland, France, Netherlands, Bulgaria, Slovakia, Belgium, Austria, Yugoslavia, Italy, Norway, and Greece. He was the one who had made the decision to use Zyklon B gas for that purpose. He left Auschwitz at the end of 1943, but returned to head the extermination of Hungarian Jewry in "Aktion Hoess." In all, he was responsible for the deaths of more than one million people.

After the war, Hoess escaped and assumed a false identity. In March 1946 he was found and arrested. The Supreme Court in Warsaw sentenced him to death; he was hanged in Auschwitz on April 16, 1947.

