

Best, Werner

(b. 1903), Nazi official; a senior member of the SS and Sicherheitspolizei (Security Police), and German plenipotentiary in occupied Denmark from 1942 to 1945. Born in Darmstadt to a family of officials, Best studied law and in 1929 was appointed *Gerichtsassessor* (judge) in the Hessian Department of Justice. He entered the Nazi party in 1930 and the SS in 1931. In 1933, very soon after the Nazi seizure of power, he was appointed state commissioner for the Hessian police force and police president for the province.

He progressed rapidly in subsequent years, becoming legal adviser to the Gestapo and deputy to Reinhard Heydrich and Heinrich Himmler. From 1935 to 1940 he was bureau chief in the head office of the SD (*Sicherheitsdienst*; Security Service) in Berlin. From September 1939 to June 1940 Best headed Section II of the *Reichssicherheitshauptamt* (Reich Security Main Office; RSHA); it was for service in this capacity that he was later accused of complicity in the murder of Jews and members of the Polish intelligentsia in occupied Poland. He then served for two years (June 1940 to August 1942) as *Ministerialdirektor* of the military administration attached to the High Command in occupied France. His tasks included the suppression of the French Resistance and the "de-Juda-izing" of France. From November 1942 until 1945, Best served as German plenipotentiary in occupied Denmark. There is evidence that he tried to avert the impact of the "Final Solution" on the Danish Jews, almost all of whom escaped to Sweden.

In 1949 Best was sentenced to death by a Danish court, but this was commuted to twelve years' imprisonment. He was in fact released in 1951, whereupon he returned to Germany and became legal adviser to the Stinnes group of firms. A Berlin denazification court fined him 70,000 marks in 1958 as punishment for his role in the leadership of the SS. In 1969 he was arrested on charges of mass murder in Poland, but he was released on grounds of health in 1972. The charges were not formally withdrawn.

