Himmler, Heinrich, 1900-1945

German Nazi leader. In 1929, he became head of the SS. After the Nazis came to power in 1933, Himmler assumed control of the German Gestapo and of the concentration camps. Captured by the British in 1945, he committed suicide before the Nuremberg Trials.

Himmler, Heinrich (hīn'rĭkh hĭm'ĭr), 1900–1945, German Nazi leader. An early member of the National Socialist German Workers' (Nazi) party, Himmler took part in Adolf Hitler's “beer-hall putsch” of 1923, and in 1929 Hitler appointed him head of the SS, or Schutzstaffel, the party's black-shirted elite corps. When Hitler came to power he made Himmler head of police in Munich and then chief of the political police throughout Bavaria. After the party purge of June, 1934, which eliminated Ernst Roehm, head of the SA, or Nazi militia, Himmler's SS became the major police organ of the state. In 1936, Himmler was named chief of the German police; this brought him formal control over the Gestapo, the secret police that had been set up in 1933 by Hermann Goering. From his preeminent position Himmler terrorized his own party hierarchy as well as all German-held Europe, establishing and overseeing concentration camps and ordering incarceration and death for millions, particularly after the beginning of World War II. A superb bureaucrat and one of the most cold-blooded of the Nazi leaders, he was a fanatic racist. In Aug., 1943, he became minister of the interior, and after putting down the conspiracy against Hitler in July, 1944, he was the virtual dictator of German domestic policy. In Apr., 1945, just before Germany's defeat in World War II, Himmler secretly attempted to negotiate German surrender, hoping to save himself. Upon hearing of this, Hitler expelled him from the party. Himmler attempted to escape, but was arrested by British troops in May, 1945, and committed suicide by swallowing poison.

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