

Switzerland sends Nazi collaborator Maurice Papon back to France

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Nazi collaborator Maurice Papon, arrested in Switzerland Thursday night, was sent back to France on Friday to begin serving a ten-year prison term for crimes against humanity. Papon, a senior member of the French wartime Vichy administration, aided the Nazis in the deportation of over 1,500 Jews to the concentration camps, including Auschwitz, where most perished.

The 89-year-old Papon, convicted last year by a court in Bordeaux, was arrested during the night at a luxury hotel in the Swiss ski resort of Gstaad. Switzerland expelled him without the formality of an official extradition procedure.

Papon fled France last week ahead of Thursday's Supreme Court hearing on his appeal. The judges ruled that Papon had forfeited his right to appeal through his absence, and confirmed the sentence of the lower court.

The announcement of the verdict was met with cries of jubilation and applause in the courtroom, particularly from the survivors and their relatives who were civilian parties to the trial against him. The lawyer Gérard Boulanger, their spokesman for the last 18 years, said, "I do not have much to say. He has created enough victims."

In 1931 Papon joined the staff of Jacques Dumsnil, Minister of Aviation in the government of Pierre Laval. In 1935 he moved to the Interior Ministry. Papon was briefly a member of the Radical-Socialist Youth, and edited the party newspaper *le Jacobin*. But he soon changed his political allegiance and joined the Gaullists.

After a spell at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, he returned in 1938 to the Interior Ministry under Robert Sabatier. Papon was called up for military service in August 1939.

From March to October 1940 he was confined to the

military post at Ra's al-Ayn in Syria. When he returned to France on October 25, 1940, Sabatier, who had joined the Vichy administration of Marshall Pétain, offered him a position back at the Interior Ministry. Papon accepted and soon took charge of the Gironde prefecture, Bordeaux.

In 1942 his special responsibilities for Jewish affairs brought him into regular contact with the SS. On Papon's direct orders, between July 1942 and June 1944 nearly 1,600 Jews, including 130 children under 13-years-old, were rounded up and sent to the detention camps at Drancy, near Paris. These were the staging posts for deportation to the Nazi concentration camps. Only a handful of those ordered detained by Papon survived their ordeal.

In 1944, when it became clear that the tide of the war was turning against Germany, Papon began to pass information about the Nazis to the Resistance.

After the war, he was decorated by General de Gaulle with the "Carte d'Ancien Combattant de la Resistance", and resumed his work as a "public servant". He was Paris Prefect of Police under de Gaulle until 1968 and in 1970 he served as Budget Minister for President Valéry Giscard d'Estaing.

In 1981 documents were uncovered in Bordeaux town hall implicating Papon. The newly surfaced papers included deportation orders personally signed by him.

From the start, the French establishment did everything possible to prevent a trial, fearing that it would further expose the mercenary relations that many of those in the ruling elite had enjoyed with the Nazi forces occupying France. Socialist Party leader François Mitterand, who defeated Giscard d'Estaing to become President in 1981, had also served under Vichy. Although Papon was forced out of public office following the revelations, and was first charged in

1983, the evidence against him was thrown out of court on a legal technicality in 1987. It took until 1997 to finally bring him to trial.

At the start of the trial in October 1997, the Bordeaux court took the unusual decision, given the seriousness of the charges and the likelihood that he might abscond, of allowing Papon to remain at liberty throughout the proceedings and subsequently, pending any appeal. They did not even require him to surrender his passport or register regularly with the police.

He was found guilty on April 2, 1998 of ordering the deportation of Jews from occupied France to Nazi Germany, but not of complicity in their murder. He is the most senior Vichy official to stand trial for crimes against humanity. At the trial, Papon's defence was that he was “only following orders”, and that he tried to save the deportees from the camps.



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