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Nazi-era police chief indicted in France

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PARIS - Rene Bousquet, head of the French police during the Nazi occupation, has been indicted for crimes against humanity.

Now 81, Bousquet was the acting minister of police during the infamous round-ups of Jews in the Paris area in 1942 and 1943. In June 1944, right after the Normandy landing, he left France in the car of a leading SS officer and spent the rest of the war in a villa in Ober-Allmanhauser.

When captured by the Allies, he pretended to have been deported. Jailed from 1945 to 1948, Bousquet was brought to trial in 1949. He was given a symbolic sentence that was immediately lifted for "services rendered to the Resistance" - the "service" being his "deportation."

But Bousquet apparently lied, when he told the court he had "systematically refused to deal with the Jewish affairs ... I have always refused to treat these issues with the Germans."

Documents found later in the Nazi archives proved the opposite. In a telegram sent by Bousquet to his deputies throughout France in August 1942, he wrote: "The head of the government wants you to personally supervise the control of the measures decided against the foreign Jews. You should not hesitate to break any resistance encountered within the population and report the

officers who by their passivity, ill will or indiscretion have complicated your task".

Whitewashed, Bousquet started a new and fruitful career as a financier. Today, he is still on the board of a famous Baccarat crystal factory.

Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld and the Association of Sons and Daughters of Deported People reopened the case 10 years ago. They filed a suite against Bousquet, charging he was responsible for the deportation of hundreds of Jewish children who were killed in Nazi extermination camps.

A few months ago, sources close to French President Francois Mitterrand said that reopening the case could "prove harmful to the civil peace," a clear hint that the "high circles" were not interested in a squaring of accounts with the Vichy regime.

An infuriated Klarsfeld then wrote to Junior Minister of Justice Georges Kiejman, himself a Jew whose parents were deported, and requested that he resign. You cannot support this infamy, wrote Klarsfeld.

Several leading figures in the Jewish community also said it was time to stop prosecuting the surviving Nazi collaborators. They said the emphasis should now be put now on educating the younger generations.

The Paris Court of Appeals thought otherwise, and indicted Bousquet for crimes against humanity.