

French Charge Ex-Vichy Officials With War Crimes

Associated Press

PARIS, July 6—Two Frenchmen who held top posts in the World War II Vichy government have been charged with crimes against humanity for persecuting Jews, judicial officials said today.

Rene Bousquet, head of the national police during the Nazi occupation, and Maurice Papon, the top police official in Bordeaux, were charged last week, the officials said, confirming a magazine report.

Bousquet and Papon, both 82, are charged with helping arrest and deport thousands of Jews, including children, to Nazi death camps from

1943 to 1944. Cases against both men had been pending for more than a decade. If tried, they would be the highest-ranking French officials ever brought to justice for crimes against humanity.

Klaus Barbie, who headed the Gestapo in Lyon, was convicted of crimes against humanity in 1987. A German, he died in prison last year.

After the war, Bousquet had a successful career in banking and the luxury-goods industry. Papon was Paris police chief during the May 1968 riots and later became budget minister under President Valery Giscard d'Estaing.

The charges against Bousquet and Papon follow a controversial court ruling in April dismissing a similar case against former militia chief Paul Touvier. That ruling, now under appeal, sparked a national furor and raised questions about France's willingness to face its wartime collaboration.

"This is very important," said Nazi hunter Serge Klarsfeld, a lawyer who represents some families said to be victims of the pair. "If they're put on the stand, there's a good chance they'll be convicted."

The Bourdeaux court must now decide whether enough evidence exists to go to trial.