



***Kristallnacht* Eye-witness accounts**

Eye-witness accounts held by the Wiener Library (<http://www.wienerlibrary.co.uk>) taken immediately following the state-sanctioned campaign of hatred against Jews in Nazi-occupied Europe on the 9th/10th November 1938 have been translated for the first time to mark the 70th anniversary of *Kristallnacht* (The Night of Broken Glass) and the launch of the theme for Holocaust Memorial Day 2009: Stand up to Hatred (<http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/item/195/>)

Extract from Account B8 - 16 November 1938

When we arrived at the camp, first of all our names were called and entered in a register, then we were made to line up in the courtyard from about 5 o'clock in the morning till about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Anyone who moved was kicked or punched in the face. Our requests to be allowed to relieve ourselves were denied, and the guards responded with the most coarse abuse. Finally at about midday a senior officer agreed that we could be taken together to the latrine. The first food was not distributed until 24 hours after our arrest. The food was good.

We had to hand over all our clothes, and received in return ragged concentration camp clothing, consisting of threadbare army uniforms, overalls and the like. Jews are completely forbidden to smoke in Oranienburg and are not allowed to cater for themselves, or buy anything in the canteen.

The next day we had to do drill. It was bearable for the younger ones, as many of us had been front-line soldiers. The older men collapsed, and were kicked, punched, slapped in the face and hit with rifle butts, always accompanied by the most vulgar and obscene insults. Among the prisoners in my section was H., a businessman from H., over 70 years old, and former lawyer J., also over 70. Both were mistreated in the manner described above. When people returned to the line after individual drill, they were kicked so that they fell flat on their faces, and then without provocation the guards trampled on their backs and buttocks with their hobnailed boots.

The camp Commandant inspected the ranks at roll-call. Sometimes he stopped and insulted one of the prisoners in a very coarse manner, which cannot be repeated. He said without provocation to a man next to me, "Now I've got to take my glove off especially for you, you filthy Jewish swine", and after he had calmly done this, he struck the unfortunate victim several times in the face and on the chin.

Extract from Account B30, 11 November 1938

Krakow, 11. November 1938

My dears!

At 5.30 on Friday morning, two officers came from the local police station and instructed me to accompany them at once – there was to be a passport inspection. You can imagine the apprehension we felt. I saw what was happening at the police station, and since I lived next door, I asked the Captain if he would fetch me a few things, as I had nothing; he flatly refused. I rang Papa at once, so that he could inform Netti. They hastily brought me some clothes and some food. We were taken together in goods lorries to A. Straße, and from there to the station; there were about 2,000 of us.

We left at about 2.30 or 3 o'clock, and at midnight we were at the border. No-one was allowed to go to the window or leave the train; everything was locked. If we went to the window, we were threatened with loaded rifles and pistols. The officials at the border post were greatly astonished, as they had not been notified of the transport; all at once the German police officers who had escorted us (about 200 men) had vanished. During the journey we were all treated like criminals; it is a disgrace that such a thing should be allowed to happen at all.

Until 3 o'clock in the morning our passports were examined and stamped. No-one had made any arrangements for accommodation. 2,000 people had to stay in 2 small rooms; we were at the border post from Friday to Monday. No-one can imagine what it was like there. A suffocating atmosphere; 4 people died in 2 days; it was a pity that no-one had a camera, so as to send pictures abroad.

We were all without money, and we had no food; we were obliged to take remedial action as quickly as possible, as people were becoming ill from exhaustion.

Extract from account B74 Undated

At about 3.30 in the morning on 10 November, I was warned by telephone not to stay in the flat, as my arrest was imminent. I immediately left the flat with my wife and son, and wandered around the streets. I first of all met the wife of a banker who lived locally; she too was wandering the streets, dressed in the shabbiest clothes. I then encountered a large number of Jews who were under police escort and had evidently been arrested. It was obvious where Jews lived from the lighted windows and the tinkling noises coming from the flats. In one house, inhabited only by Jews, all the windows were lit. Two police officers were standing in front of the house with their backs to the wall, completely unconcerned. Uniformed SA and SS men were everywhere. A senior officer of my acquaintance was woken by the disturbance and telephoned the riot squad asking them to send help, as people were evidently trespassing in his house and committing other offences. ***The riot squad replied that there was nothing they could do, as it had all been ordered by a higher authority.***

When we returned to our flat, nothing had been stolen, but everything had been vandalised and destroyed; paintings slashed, eiderdowns ripped to shreds, valuable antique chairs smashed and the cushions torn apart. After wandering around for hours, I was arrested at the station and was taken to the prison gym with about 100 other Jewish citizens. About 6 of these were injured; and an 80-year-old man had his head bandaged, as a bowl had been broken over it. There was also a rabbi aged about 60 among the prisoners, and another man of 77. I myself was released after 10 hours, because I had a visa for the States and am a front-line officer.

Extract from Account B78 - 27 November 1938

At exactly 3 o'clock in the morning the house in which I lived, in which there was a small Jewish business, started to shake. Both window-panes were shattered and the contents of the shop-windows ruined. Naturally I cannot tell whether this had happened the first time. I lived in the Kurfürstendamm district. As I am in the habit of sleeping with the window open, I heard the noise of breaking windows from this area. In the house where I lived, a second bombardment of the undamaged parts had been organised. From my window I saw a small car pass by; two men in civilian clothes got out and smashed the windows. Evidently it had all been carefully planned, because they got back into the car in order to repeat their action nearby. At about 6 o'clock in the morning another convoy arrived, who likewise destroyed anything that was left to be destroyed. At intervals during these three hours fire engines could be heard rushing through the streets, and the smoke from Fasanenstraße was an omen of what was likely to have occurred. In any case it was a planned action carried out by SA, SS and Hitler Youth in civilian clothes. In a barber's shop, one of those involved related in my presence that they had been drinking till three in the morning to prepare themselves for the action. The next morning a terrible sight was to be seen, and the smouldering synagogue in Fasanenstraße was like a signal. As far as I could observe, people looked at the devastation in silence, and perhaps with some inner emotion. Indeed, some people openly expressed indignation. While I was crossing the Kurfürstendamm in the morning, an old gentleman with snow-white hair addressed me impulsively and expressed his outrage, calling the event a crime against civilisation for which the Germans would one day have to atone.

Extract from Account B104 Undated

With reference to recent events in Germany, I would like to give the following account of what I experienced during the night of 9-10 November.

At about midnight my phone rang; it was a man from K. who asked me to take him in, as something terrible had happened, and he needed to come at once. Of course I agreed to this, and the man arrived, pale and terribly agitated, without a hat or coat, and told me what had happened:

He was sitting in a Jewish cafe, when a troop of young men in uniform with loaded revolvers came storming in and yelled "Revenge for Paris!" He heard a shot, and meanwhile the entire cafe was vandalised, and he managed to escape. I add that the owner of the cafe has subsequently died of his injuries. He said that it had been absolutely horrific to witness this. He had run to the Königsallee (main street of D.), where he saw people smashing the windows of a Jewish fashion salon. He heard people shouting "Hang the Jews from the trees!"

The man remained with me for a short time. Naturally, I invited him to stay the night in my flat, but he wanted to go home. I did not believe that the houses would also be attacked, but hardly had the man left when I heard a terrible banging and crashing from the house next door. I ran to the window, and heard a crowd of young men shouting, "Right, now let's get this house and these families!" I heard that they were intending to come to my flat too, so I hastily closed the door of the flat and the door to my bedroom, got my sleeping son out of his bed – we were alone in the flat – and locked myself in the bathroom.

Extract from Account B156 Undated

The mob can be seen everywhere, looking happy; after all, they have accomplished a great feat. Families have had their homes stolen. 16 people crammed into one small room, to live in that state for three days. Everything the Jews had in the way of money and jewellery was taken away. People did not shrink from taking the earrings from the ears of small children, or the last coin from women's handbags. Those of my acquaintances who managed to get released from the prison could not say enough about the suffering they had had to endure; although they had been front-line soldiers in the Great War, they unanimously agreed that they had never seen such horrors. In a cellar in which the Jews were imprisoned, the following took place:

Women aged between 50 -55 were made to strip naked and dance for the men imprisoned with them; the dance was demonstrated to them by the SA. Sick women were obliged to answer the call of nature in public, in front of men and children, as there was only one WC for 200 people. Children between the ages of one month to two years received nothing to eat for two days, as they were imprisoned with their parents.

I could continue this report for hours.

Extract from Account B243 - 15 December 1938

From a statement by a 17-year-old youth to the Children's Committee in Amsterdam.

15.12.1938

I would like to outline our situation to you very briefly: as a result of the events of recent weeks, we are completely impoverished. Neither my parents nor I nor any of my siblings have any prospect of earning a living – and we are a family of seven. Can you imagine how the future looks for us now? In spite of all this, there would be one thing that would make our desperate situation at least bearable – the hope of emigration; but there is not the slightest change even of that. The eviction notice from our flat takes effect on 31 January 1939. All our efforts to find a new flat have been unavailing – and just seven weeks to go to 31 January. But even that is not the worst.

My father was taken into preventive detention 5 weeks ago – but even that has not exhausted the cruelties of Fate. We were struck by yet another crushing blow: as a result of the recent disturbances, my mother has suffered a very severe nervous breakdown...if you wish, I can provide a medical certificate to prove this.

Can you now understand why we are desperately appealing for your help, in spite of your letter? Can you have any idea what emotions these bare facts are arousing in the souls of small, innocent children? Do you understand now that it is indeed a duty to help in this case? In the name of my parents, my brothers and sisters and myself I beseech you fervently for one thing – help us!!

Extract from Account P.II.d. 98 Undated

Concerned by reports of the destruction of religious objects, I arranged for the Torah scrolls and other religious objects to be removed from the synagogue on 9 November 1938, so they were safe when the synagogue was destroyed on 10 November, and we were able to assist other congregations who had lost their Torah scrolls. I do not know what happened to the scrolls after the congregation was deported during the war.
Pogrom Night

Two men forced their way into my flat between 2 and 3 in the morning on the night of 9-10 November. They broke down the door and threatened the Christian owners with guns; two men with guns "protected" me in a similar manner, and after enough had been stolen and destroyed (this was done by 11 men, one of whom was the ringleader), they took their leave of me with courteous bows, assuring me that they had been there to see that not a hair of my head was harmed.

The organisation of the theft was remarkable. Cash, typewriter, camera, jewellery, household silver, artworks were all packed into my briefcases and suitcases, valuable pictures and drawings were carefully cut from their frames. Nothing breakable in the flat was left intact.

Shortly after the vandals had left the house one of my cousins arrived to take me to his house. Meanwhile I learned from Christian friends that there was a plan to arrest all Jewish men. We agreed that my cousin should not go home; he succeeded in escaping and got to Holland, from where he emigrated to the USA.

The same night I drew up a list of the destroyed and stolen goods, in order to claim on the insurance against breaking and entering, and also to report the theft to the police. The missing items included 300 DM. belonging to the congregation, intended for payments of charitable support.

Extract from Account P. II d. 195 20 November 1938

Vienna, 20 November '38

My dear Otto,

You cannot imagine how things have been with us. Papa with a head-wound, bandaged, myself in bed with severe fits, everything devastated and destroyed. And the poor child had to look after us, cook, and run errands, although still in a state of serious exhaustion. It has already been nearly 14 days, and I still can't take it in. – I have already told you that we had a similar visit on Yom Kippur, and it had a similar bloody and tragic ending. At first I was just glad that we had survived, but when I realised that I had no dresses, no coat, and to cap it all not even a stitch of underwear any more, then I thought again that my heart would break. So that you don't think I'm exaggerating, let me tell you that when the doctor came to bandage Papa, Rosa and Herta, all three of them bleeding copiously from head wounds, we couldn't give him a towel or any piece of cloth to wipe the blood off his hands, so he had to leave. My poor heart had to take in the fact that the place was so full of fragments and splinters, because all the glasses, windows and mirrors had been smashed, that we didn't know where to turn. The day after, we were sent two shirts to put on, one for me and one for Papa. I can't tell you how many tears I shed, we are destitute, we don't even have the most basic clothing, we can't even go out into the street; in any case I have no desire to do so! But even that was not enough; two days later we were told that I had to make room at once and accommodate two more families in my flat; furthermore, I was to be ready within 3 hours. What could I do but get up and take everything from the bedroom into the dining room, and the two families, Frau Kramer with two children and Frau Ternier with one child and a sick mother, moved in with me, You cannot imagine what things look like here.

With lots of love,
Your unhappy Gisa.

Extract from Account P.II.d.751 10 November 1938

On the evening of 10 November we discussed the recent occurrences in Paris and decided to bring our son to safety as soon as possible.

The telephone rang at 2 o'clock in the morning, and my wife's sister, Frau Ilse Adler, told us in an agitated voice that a number of Nazis had been in her flat and had demanded to be told the whereabouts of her father (Wilhelm Adler). She said that she had told them that he was with us, she was afraid and wanted to warn us.

Indeed, an hour later, at about 3 o'clock in the morning, there was an insistent ringing on the bell. When I went to the main door, I heard several male voices cursing and yelling to us to open up at once. This was like a raid by burglars; we immediately ran onto one of our balconies and shouted for help. Then we discovered that a group of men had got into the garden, and they shouted at us to be quiet at once or they would shoot. Then we realised that it was a Nazi attack.

I immediately rang the police and asked for protection. The officer asked me if it was a Jewish house, and when I answered in the affirmative, he said, "We know about that", and abandoned us to the criminals. Meanwhile, they had begun to demolish the main door, in order to force an entry. We fled from one room to another and finally ended up in one of the consul's rooms, but the criminals also broke down the door to this room and we were at their mercy. In spite of his 70 years, my father-in-law was so terrified that he climbed over the balcony into the consul's ground-floor flat.