Source 1 -

Kristallnacht at the Dinslaken Orphanage

Reminiscences  
By  
Yitzhak S. Herz

At 7 A.M., the morning service in the synagogue of the institution was scheduled to commence. Some people from the town usually participated, but this time nobody turned up. About 7:30 A.M. I ordered 46 people - among them 32 children - into the dining hall of the institution and told them the following in a simple and brief address:

As you know, last night a Herr vom Rath, a member of the German Embassy in Paris, was assassinated. The Jews are held responsible for this murder. The high tension in the political field is now being directed against the Jews, and during the next few hours there will certainly be antisemitic excesses. This will happen even in our town. It is my feeling and my impression that we German Jews have never experienced such calamities since the Middle Ages. Be strong! Trust in God! I am sure we will withstand even these hard times. Nobody will remain in the rooms of the upper floor of the building. The exit door to the street will be opened only by myself! From this moment on everyone is to heed my orders only!

At 9:30 A.M. the bell at the main gate rang persistently. I opened the door: about 50 men stormed into the house, many of them with their coat or jacket collars turned up. At first they rushed into the dining room, which fortunately was empty, and there they began their work of destruction, which was carried out with the utmost precision. The frightened and fearful cries of the children resounded through the building. In a stentorian voice I shouted: "Children go out into the street immediately!" This advice was certainly contrary to the order of the Gestapo. I thought, however, that in the street, in a public place, we might be in less danger than inside the house. The children immediately ran down a small staircase at the back, most of them without hat or coat - despite the cold and wet weather. We tried to reach the next street crossing, which was close to Dinslaken's Town Hall, where I intended to ask for police protection. About ten policemen were stationed here, reason enough for a sensation-seeking mob to await the next development. This was not very long in coming; the senior police officer, Freihahn, shouted at us: "Jews do not get protection from us! Vacate the area together with your children as quickly as possible! Freihahn then chased us back to a side street in the direction of the backyard of the orphanage. As I was unable to hand over the key to the back gate, the policeman drew his bayonet and forced open the door. I then said to Freihahn: "The best thing is to kill me and the children, then our ordeal will be over quickly!" My officer responded to my "suggestion" merely with cynical laughter. Freihahn then drove all of us to the wet lawn of the orphanage garden. He gave us strict orders not to leave the place under any circumstances.

Facing the back of the building, we were able to watch how everything in the house was being systematically destroyed under the supervision of the men of law and order - the police. At short intervals we could hear the crunching of glass or the hammering against wood as windows and doors were broken. Books, chairs, beds, tables, linen, chests, parts of a piano, a radiogram, and maps were thrown through apertures in the wall, which, a short while ago, had been windows or doors.

In the meantime, the mob standing around the building had grown to several hundred. Among these people I recognized some familiar faces, suppliers of the orphanage or tradespeople, who, only a day or a week earlier had been happy to deal with us as customers. This time they were passive, watching the destruction without much emotion.

At 10:15 A.M. we heard the wailing of sirens! We noticed a heavy cloud of smoke billowing upward. It was obvious from the direction it was coming from that the Nazis had set the synagogue on fire. Very soon we saw smoke clouds rising up, mixed with sparks of fire. Later I noticed that some Jewish houses, close to the synagogue, had also been set alight under the expert guidance of the fire brigade. Its presence was a necessity, since the firemen had to save the homes of the non-Jewish neighborhood.

Source 2 -

**PERSONAL MEMOIR OF "KRISTALLNACHT"**

**"A wave of destruction, looting, and incendiarism unparalleled in Germany since the Thirty Years War (1618-1648,ed.) and in Europe generally since the Bolshevist Revolution swept over Great Germany today as National Socialist cohorts took vengeance on Jewish shops, offices and synagogues for the murder by a young Polish Jew of Ernst vom Rath, third secretary of the German Embassy in Paris..."**

Thus started the article on page 1 of the New York Times of November 11, 1938, reporting the events which were to become known as the November pogrom or „Kristallnacht". I recently reread this article with very deep emotions almost 60 years after witnessing a small part of this wave of hate and violence as a teenager in Berlin.

Thursday, November 10, 1938, started like any other day, I left our apartment on Kaiserdamm in the Westend section of Berlin at around 7:20 for the nearest rapid transit (the so-called S-Bahn) station, a half-mile walk past apartment buildings and one-family villas. There were no signs of any unusual activities. From there I took the train for a 15-minute ride to the Tiergarten Station in central Berlin near the high school of the orthodox congregation Adass Yisroel where I arrived a few minutes before the beginning of the school day at 8 o’clock.

When I entered my classroom, some of my classmates were telling horror stories of what they had seen on their way to school like smashed store windows of Jewish-owned shops, looting mobs, and even burning synagogues. A fair number of students was absent. The 8 o’clock bell rang signaling the beginning of classes, but no teachers were in sight either in our class or in any of the other classes along our corridor. That had never happened before. I don’t remember anymore how long it took for the teachers to emerge from the teacher’s conference room finally opened and the teachers streamed out to their various class rooms, they all looked extremely grim.

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| fasan-38.jpg (33812 Byte) | Synagoge Fasanenstraße Innenraum nach dem Pogrom  im November 1938 |

When our teacher Dr. Wollheim entered the room and closed the door, all talking stopped instantly, and there was complete silence in the class. That too was unique, for in general we were a fairly undisciplined bunch, and it usually took several admonitions until some quiet was established.

In a tense voice Dr. Wollheim announced that school was being dismissed because our safety could not be guaranteed. This was followed by a number of instructions which he urged us to follow in every detail. Number one, we should go home directly and as fast as possible without lingering anywhere or visiting friends so that our parents would know that we are safe. Number two, we should not walk in large groups because that would attract attention and possible violence by hostile crowds. He concluded by saying that there would be no school for the foreseeable future and that we would be notified when school would reopen again.

I quickly walked back to the Tiergarten Station and decided to look out the window when the elevated train would pass the Synagogue Fasanenstrasse where I had become Bar Mitzvah. It was a beautiful structure built in Moorish style with three large cupolas. I literally felt my heart fall into my stomach when I saw a thick column of smoke rising out of the center cupola. There was no wind, and the column seemed to stand motionless reaching into the heavens. At that moment all rationality left me. I got off the train at the next stop and raced back the few blocks as if pulled by an irresistible force. I did not think of Dr. Wollheim’s instruction nor of any possible danger to myself. Police barricades kept a crowd of onlookers on the opposite sidewalk. Firefighter were hosing down adjacent buildings. The air was filled with the acrid smell of smoke. I was wedged in the middle of a hostile crows which was in an ugly mood shouting antisemitic slogans. I was completely hypnotized by the burning synagogue and was totally oblivious to any possible danger. I thought of the many times I had attended services there and listened to the sermons all of which had fortified my soul during the difficult years of persecution. Even almost six years of Nazi rule had not prepared me for such an experience.

Suddenly someone shouted that a Jewish family was living on the ground floor of the apartment building across the street from the synagogue. Watching the fire, the crowd was backed against the building. Someone else shouted: „Let’s get them!" Everyone turned around. Those closest surged through the building entrance. I could hear heavy blows against the apartment door. In my imagination I pictured a frightened family hiding in a room as far as possible from the entrance door - hoping and praying that the door would withstand, and I prayed with them. I vividly remember the crashing violent noise of splintering wood followed by deadly silence, then suddenly wild cries of triumph. An elderly bald-headed man was brutally pushed through the crowd while fists rained down on him from all sides accompanied by antisemitic epithets. His face was bloodied. One single man in the crowd shouted: „How cowardly! So many against one!"

He was immediately attacked by others. After the elderly Jew had been pushed to the curb, a police car appeared mysteriously; he was put in and driven off. I left this scene of horror completely drained, incredulous, in a trance and went home.

Decades later i came across an article in the Berliner Tageblatt of August 26, 1912, describing the dedication ceremony of the synagogue on Fasanen Strasse. In the light of the destruction of that synagogue which I witnessed 26 years, 2 months, and 15 days later on November 10, 1938, this dedication ceremony represents a bitter irony on several planes. I think it is historically significant enough to quote some excerpts from this article here: „The festive dedication of the new synagogue on Fasanenstrasse took place at midday today in the presence of the highest representatives of government, the military, and the city ... At 12 o’clock sharp the personal representative of the Kaiser, his military adjutant Colonel General Excellency von Kessel arrived. He was seated on a seat of honor on the bimah. Next to him sat the Undersecretary in the Ministry of the Interior Holtz.

In the first row one could see the representative of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, Director von Chappius ... and for the High Command of the Armed Forces Colonel von Brauchitsch. The city of Berlin was represented by Lord Mayor Wermuth, ... The Chief of Police von Jagow in the uniform of a cavalry colonel, and his deputy, Councilor Friedheim. In addition many representatives of the Protestant and Catholic clergy were present as well as all of the rabbis of the Berlin Jewish community...

The ceremony started with a festive procession of the Torah scrolls through the synagogue accompanied by songs by a choir and organ music after which the scrolls were placed into the arc. After a singing by the congregation led by the cantor, Rabbi Bergmann carried out the beautiful ceremony at the lighting of the eternal light. In his address he said that just as the light of this lamp so the love of fatherland of this community will never extinguish."

**What has remained and will forever remain in my memory is the image of the thick column of smoke standing on top of the center cupola of that beautiful synagogue and the bloodied bald head of an unknown Jew.**

**Ernest Günter Fontheim  
(Aufbau, No 26, December 18, 1998)**

Source 3 -

**Pogrom goes on till night – Looting mobs defy Goebbels**

**Jewish homes fired, women beaten**

Daily Express

England

November 11, 1938

Berlin, Thursday Night

All over Germany tonight the Jews are cowering in terror. Their shops are wrecked and looted, their synagogues are burning, their homes are at the mercy of gangs drunk with destruction. Not even the proclamation of Dr. Goebbels, the propaganda minister – broadcast this afternoon and again tonight – ordering the stoppage of pogroms could curb the madness of the mobs.

The wave of violence sweeping through the cities has moderated now only for lack of further damage to be done. So dangerous did the situation become in Berlin that at eight o’clock the entire police force were called out.

They were reinforced by hundreds of Black Guards. But the wrecking and pillaging went on until even Nazi gangs were exhausted by their orgy.

BEATEN UP –

Jews who had managed to elude their persecutors earlier in the day were hunted out and beaten up. Crouching fearful in corners, they anxiously await the next stroke of the Terror – the anti-Jewish decrees already threatened following on the assassination of von Rath, the Embassy official in Paris.

One of them, they believe, will empower the State to confiscate all their property. “Compensation,” fixed by the Nazis themselves, would take the form of shares in one of the nationalized industries, such as the Hermann Goering Ironworks.

The revival of ghettos is another thing they expect. Such a decree would force them out of their present homes. Their only alternative to being herded together in special areas would be flight form Germany.

‘GIVE US PERMITS” –

The confiscation law, it is reported, will affect all property valued at more than $250. Another decree is likely to order all foreign Jews to leave Germany.

All this afternoon they crowded foreign consulates, pleading for visas. In peril of being beaten up as they hurried along the streets they begged, prayed, the officials to grant them permits, particularly to Britain, her Dominions, or the U.S.A.

They filled the passages, stood round in huddled groups outside, waited with pitiful patience for their turn. “How much capital have you?” was the invariable question. “None.” Was often the answer, with a despairing shrug.

Others, with money, had to be turned away on other grounds. Only about five per cent were successful in their pleas.

Even these must now get Nazi permits to leave Germany. If they are lucky they may be allowed to take away with them twelve per cent of their own money; the rest must remain here.

GUARDING RUINS –

But their shops, their offices, their goods are gone. Late tonight, the work of destruction done, police and Black Guards are standing in front of their ruins to prevent further pillage. They are saying: “Pass on there.” “Pass on,” to the dense crowds of cheerful Aryans who have flocked on to the streets to gape at the wreckage, shuffling through the splintered debris, just as holidaymakers might stare at a fair-ground. The guards , their jackbooted feet among glass splinters, are exchanging jokes with them.

The unlighted fronts of the Jewish shops dotted among the others brilliantly lit look like gaps in a row of teeth. Many carry placards saying: “Legally taken by the Reich.”

Name:

Date:

**Kristallnacht at the Dinslaken Orphanage**

1. Who did the Geman government blame for the assassination?
2. Why did Yitzhak Herz order the children out into the street?
3. What did the police say to the orphans?
4. What might the Police take from these homes?
5. Why do you think the townspeople were unwilling to stop the destruction of the orphanage?
6. Why did the fire department go to the burning synagogue?
7. What would your reaction be if you saw this occurring?

**Personal Memoir of Kristallnacht**

1. What had other students seen on the way to school?
2. Why was school closed?
3. How would you react if you had to leave RCAA for the same reasons?
4. What were the instructions given to the students?
5. Describe Ernst Fontheim’s reaction to seeing the synagogue on fire.
6. What happened to the elderly Jewish man?   
     
     
     
   1. Why did this happen?
7. What happened to the person who tried to stand up for the elderly man?
8. What would you do if you saw these things happening in the street by a crowd of people?

**Pogrom Goes on till Night**

1. According to the article, what did Goebbels try to do?   
     
     
     
   1. Do you think this really took place?
2. Who was called out to stop the destruction?   
     
     
     
   1. Were they effective?
   2. Why do you think this might be the case?
3. What happened to the Jews who tried to hide?
4. What are the decrees the Jews are worried about passing?
5. What per cent of Jews were able to get visas?
6. How much money were they able to take with them?
7. How did the guards interact with the Aryans?
8. What do the signs on the destroyed Jewish shops tell us about the amount of support the Jews will receive from the government?