

From the time the Nazis came to power in 1933 they began isolating Jews in Germany, and passed many laws to that effect. In the first half of 1938, additional laws were passed in Germany restricting Jewish economic activity and occupational opportunities. In July 1938, a law was passed requiring all Jews to carry identification cards. Later that year, 17,000 Jews of Polish citizenship, many of whom had been living in Germany for decades, were arrested and relocated across the Polish border. The Polish government refused to admit them so they were interned in “relocation camps” on the Polish frontier.

Among the deportees was Zindel Grynszpan, who had been born in western Poland and had moved to Hanover, Germany, where he established a small store, in 1911. On the night of October 27, Grynszpan and his family were forced out of their home by German police. His store and the family’s possessions were confiscated and they were forced to move over the Polish border.

Grynszpan’s seventeen-year-old son, Herschel, was living with an uncle in Paris. When he received news of his family’s expulsion, he went to the German embassy in Paris on November 7, intending to assassinate the German Ambassador to France. Upon discovering that the Ambassador was not in the embassy, he shot a low-ranking diplomat, Third Secretary Ernst vom Rath. Rath was critically wounded and died two days later, on November 9.

Grynszpan’s attack was interpreted by Joseph Goebbels, Hitler’s Chief of Propaganda, as a direct attack against the Reich and used as an excuse to launch a *pogrom* against Jews. The Nazis euphemistically called this *pogrom* *Kristallnacht*, “Night of the Broken Glass”; the harmless sound of the name disguised the terror and devastation of the *pogrom* and the demoralization faced by Jews across Germany, Austria, and in areas of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia.

On the nights of November 9 and 10, rampaging mobs throughout Germany and the newly acquired territories of Austria and Sudetenland freely attacked Jews in the street, in their homes, and at their places of work and worship. Almost 100 Jews were killed and hundreds more injured; approximately 7,000 Jewish businesses and homes were damaged and looted; 1,400 synagogues were burned; cemeteries and schools were vandalized; and 30,000 Jews were arrested and sent to concentration camps.