

Zbaszyn

Polish border town used, between November 1938 and August 1939, as a Refugee camp for thousands of Jews who had been expelled from Germany.

On October 27, 1938 the Germans began arresting Jews with Polish citizenship who had been living in Germany, with the intention of kicking them out of the country. Their pretext was a decree made by the Polish Ministry of the Interior earlier that month, which declared that Polish citizens living abroad needed to get their passports checked and re-stamped. Those who had not done so by October 29 would no longer be allowed to return to Poland. Germany used this as an excuse to deport thousands of Jews who had been living on German soil.

Most often, only the head of the family was banished, but in some cases the whole family was sent off. A son in one of these families, Herschel Grynszpan, was outraged by their Deportation, so he shot a German diplomat in PARIS, inciting the *Kristallnacht* pogrom. The Polish authorities had not been forewarned about the thousands of refugees being sent into their country. Thus, they placed them in the border town of Zbaszyn, and forbade them from leaving in the hope that the large number of Jews near the border would pressure the Germans into beginning negotiations to allow them back into Germany.

For the first few days, the Polish citizens of Zbaszyn heeded the call of their authorities and gave the Jewish refugees food and warm water. By October 30, the Warsaw-based Joint Distribution Committee sent Emanuel Ringelblum and Yitzhak Gitterman to organize an aid committee for the refugees, which provided for their basic needs.

As negotiations lingered on, the Polish authorities let the refugees leave the town. Many were taken in by friends and family in Poland, and were aided by Polish Jewish communities. Others managed to leave the country. Negotiations finally ended on January 24, 1939. The Germans allowed the deportees to return to Germany to wind up their affairs, while the Poles agreed to absorb the deportees and their families. The arrangements lasted until the summer of 1939.

