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The Evacuation of Missionaries at the Outbreak of World War II ^[1]

David F. Boone

During the latter half of 1938, Europe seemed to be rushing headlong into another continental conflict. At the outbreak of World War I, some of the Latter-day Saint missionaries were moved out of harm’s way, and the Church avoided sending its missionaries near other conflicts. When the dark clouds of war gathered in Germany in 1938, Church leaders in Salt Lake City were understandably concerned again.

The “Fire Drill Evacuation” of 1938

In the summer of 1938 President J. Reuben Clark Jr., a counselor in the First Presidency and a former U.S. ambassador to Mexico, was touring the European missions. He was aware of the unstable international conditions in Europe, and when he met with the mission presidents in their annual conference, he found few items of more importance on their minds.

A plan was therefore adopted that would move missionary personnel from their missions to neutral countries as quickly as possible if hostilities erupted. By moving the missionaries across international borders into countries that maintained friendly relations with the United States, the Church believed its missionaries could be protected from harm. The countries chosen for their geographical location and political neutrality were Holland, Switzerland, and Denmark.

Two months later, as conditions continued to deteriorate, the First Presidency determined it was time to implement the plan devised earlier. Missionaries in the West German Mission were instructed to proceed to Holland if in the west, to Denmark if in the north, and to Switzerland if in the south. Missionaries from the East German Mission and the Czechoslovakian Mission were to go to Denmark. Mission presidents Franklin J. Murdock in the Netherlands, Mark B. Garff in Denmark, and Thomas E. McKay in Switzerland were instructed to provide food and lodging for the evacuees upon their arrival.

The missionaries were, for the most part, able to exit quickly, safely, and with minimal confusion. After approximately two weeks, when international tensions were eased, the displaced missionaries were allowed to return to their previous areas. President Alfred C. Reese of the East German Mission used the term “fire drill evacuation” to describe this significant event.

The 1939 Evacuation from Europe

Following Hitler’s takeover of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, missionaries began mobilizing for their anticipated evacuation. Although the Czech missionaries were the first to begin the evacuation process, they were among the last of the northern European

countries to leave their mission. ^[2]

Tensions in Europe were again aroused when Hitler sent German troops into Poland and western Allies declared war on Germany on 3 September 1939. In the midst of these developments, missionaries followed the procedures of their previous experience to evacuate to safety. This time, however, their evacuation was complicated by additional variables not experienced earlier: mobilization of thousands of troops, militarization of transportation and communication systems, declaration of martial law, and the actual outbreak of war. Furthermore, several neighboring countries wishing to remain neutral and not wanting the responsibility for the numerous refugees closed their borders to outsiders.

The evacuation of the West German missionaries under the presidency of M. Douglas Wood was made difficult when the Dutch border unexpectedly closed to outsiders. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, who was touring the European missions during the summer of 1939, was appointed by the First Presidency to supervise the evacuation of missionaries. He went to Dutch Mission headquarters in The Hague, but when he learned that missionaries were unable to enter that

country and were going to Denmark instead, he made arrangements to go there as well. ^[3] Elder Smith and his wife, Jessie Ella Evans Smith, were among the last Church personnel to make it through before the Dutch border closed.

President M. Douglas Wood assigned Elder Norman George Seibold to go look for thirty-one lost or stranded missionaries. Miraculously he was able to locate several lost missionaries and others were able to find their way out of West Germany on their own. The exciting, harrowing, and inspiring stories surrounding the evacuation of the West German and Czechoslovakia missionaries and the role of Elder Norman George Seibold have been recounted elsewhere.^[4]

Elder Seibold later commented: “It was a wonderful time, and anything . . . I have said . . . [that] might indicate . . . I had a whole lot to do with it needs to be qualified. The things that happened on this trip were not my doing. It was strictly the hand and the guidance of the Lord. I feel it, and I know it as well as anything. I’m not smart enough to comprehend or to foresee some of these things.”^[5]

The Role of President Garff in Denmark

In Denmark, Mark B. Garff, president of the Danish Mission, recorded: “Things are beginning to pop again down in Germany. . . . [Received a] telegram from the First Presidency to prepare to take care of any missionaries that might have to come to Denmark.”^[6] The missionaries of the East German Mission were able to get to Copenhagen, Denmark, within a few days and in most cases in a matter of hours; this was in stark contrast to the experience of the West German and Czechoslovakian missionaries.

With the exception of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, who supervised the entire evacuation, President Garff played the most central role in the European and Scandinavian evacuations. As a result, his mission records, his report to the First Presidency, and particularly his personal journals became indispensable sources for reconstructing the events of the evacuation of the missionaries from Europe. In late August 1939, as a result of the resurgence of unrest in Europe, President Garff’s expanded duties included housing, feeding, entertaining, and ultimately arranging transportation for not only his own missionaries but also for the majority of the American missionaries when it was time for them to return home after serving in Germany, Czechoslovakia, and Scandinavia.

President Garff had noted in his journal during the “fire drill evacuation” on 5 September 1938 that he did not believe that the Church’s missionaries would remain in Europe for another year. His prediction was correct as it related to their service in their assigned missions but fell a week or two short of their departure from the continent. President Garff further made predictions about the outcome of the entire war when it erupted: “I was shown in a dream, that I would be helping the missionaries again, but I thought it would be sooner than this. . . . I don’t know [when] war will break [out] but I do know that when it does, Germany will not enjoy victory in the end.”^[7] The latter prediction of Germany’s defeat would be vindicated six years later after all of the missionaries had long since departed.

The day after he learned that the East German missionaries were en route to Denmark, President Garff further noted a visit by a Danish government representative who requested permission to use, if needed, the Copenhagen Chapel for a bomb shelter. The mission president recognized the sensitivity of the request since more than 700 individuals could fit into that facility alone. More importantly, a part of the Church building was underground, an important consideration for a bomb shelter.^[8]

The first group of evacuating East German missionaries to go to Copenhagen arrived on the morning of Saturday, 26 August 1939. The second group went that same evening. Also arriving on 26 August was Sister Martha Toronto, wife of Czech mission president Wallace F. Toronto. Her husband and his missionaries would not arrive for another several days. In the interim several small groups of missionaries arrived in Copenhagen from the German missions. In the absence of Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, who had not yet arrived from Holland, President Garff noted that “there are still some missionaries not accounted for [in Germany].”^[9]

For the next several days and in some instances several times a day, President Garff was in contact with Elder Smith and other mission presidents by phone. By the end of August, however, all telephone service was terminated between what would become the Allied countries, and communication had to be conducted via telegram. Several of the missing German missionaries were reported by the Swiss Mission president, Thomas E. McKay, to have arrived safely in Switzerland. Others managed to get into Holland before the border was closed, or were able to get money, tickets, or both, which allowed

them to travel through the country and into a nearby country, typically Great Britain. By Monday, 28 August, President Garff recorded, “Now we have all missionaries accounted for [from] both the West and East German missions. The bulk of both groups are here in Copenhagen.”^[10]

Not yet accounted for were the missionaries from the Czechoslovakian Mission. The Czech missionaries along with their president arrived in Denmark only hours before the war began with Germany’s invasion of Poland but did not arrive in Copenhagen until later in the day on Friday, 1 September 1939.

The missionaries, along with their president, Wallace Toronto, were delayed; their safe arrival was a great relief to Church leaders in Europe and in the United States, as well as to the missionaries and their own families. No one was more relieved than Sister Toronto. She and their children had been in Copenhagen for a week and had expected that the president and the missionaries would be following right behind them. When they did not come she began to worry, and with each passing day without word, her anxiety increased. Sister Toronto remembered:

In a few days I was so worried and upset. We were watching all these things [the political situations which led to the outbreak of the war] come in over the wires and these bulletins that would go up in the square in Copenhagen, and I would come home and say, “Brother Smith, What am I going to do?” He would put his arm around me and say, “Sister Toronto, this war will not start until Brother Toronto and those missionaries [are safely out of Czechoslovakia and get on Danish soil].”^[11]

Sister Evelyn Wood, wife of West German Mission president M. Douglas Wood, also heard the conversation and corroborated the Toronto account. She added her memory of the occasion:

Being rather naive, I said to Joseph Fielding Smith, “Do you mean to say that they would hold the whole war up? All of the negotiations [that] are being made while we get those missionaries out of there?”. . . He turned right to me, and said [directly], “The war will not start until those . . . men are out of the country.”^[12]

Sister Toronto recorded that although it was very close, all of the missionaries had left Prague and were out of Czechoslovakia and in Denmark before the German offensive against Poland began 1 September 1939, thus fulfilling the prophecy. She noted, “The relief and happiness felt in the mission home and among the 350 missionaries was like a dark cloud lifting to reveal sunshine. . . . Indeed, the war hadn’t started, as President Smith had been inspired to predict, until President Toronto and his elders were on Danish soil.”^[13]

Elder Smith was likewise responsible for at least two other prophecies in Denmark during the time of impending war. As a result of the Danish government’s generosity in allowing the missionaries within her borders when so many of the other countries closed their borders against them, Elder Smith prophesied that Denmark would be spared much of the devastation that war would pour out on other nations. Although occupied by German troops during much of the war, Denmark was spared much of the devastation, hunger, and other problems usually associated with a military occupation. Elder Frank Knutti offered this insight: “Just as the land of Holland suffered greatly under the Nazi invasion, the land of Denmark though it was conquered was not devastated, and I have always personally been convinced that it was because of the treatment we received at the hands of both of these governments. The Dutch turned us out; the Danish people took us in.”^[14]

Elder Orson West, a native Dane, was called to replace President Garff when the final American missionary personnel were withdrawn from the Scandinavian missions. He reported that “Denmark was protected in many ways as President Smith prophesied. He said that we [the Danes] would be blessed . . . and we have. Of course we couldn’t get everything.”^[15] Elder West further indicated that the Saints in Denmark did not want for food, fuel, or for the ability to move about the country as needed, including the opportunity for the Saints to meet together.^[16] On the other hand they were occupied for the majority of the war.

On another occasion, missionary Rheim M. Jones noted in his journal a prediction made by Elder Smith made in

one of their missionary meetings. Elder Jones noted, “Elder Smith said that we [the missionaries] would all be out of Europe by Christmas.”^[17] This prediction, like others that were made, was literally fulfilled.

Activities of Evacuated Missionaries

As the missionaries arrived in Copenhagen they were given rooms in the mission home, in local hotels, or with the Danish members. The mission paid the bill for their housing and their food. President Garff devoted the time of one of his full-time missionaries to the details of providing for the visiting missionaries. Typically, the elders were unable to proselyte effectively due to the differences in language, culture, and even lesson plans. Never was the intent of the evacuation to disrupt missionary activities in the host countries. Some structure was therefore needed among the missionaries until they were able to return to their previous assignments, be reassigned, or released.

A least a part of that structure came from their newly adopted mission president, President Garff, and especially from Elder Smith. Each morning that the missionaries were in Denmark, they were called together for a general meeting. Elder Smith presided, but others, including the missionaries themselves, often participated. These meetings were held in the Copenhagen Chapel adjacent to the Mission Offices and the home of the president of the Danish

Mission. The meetings convened, typically at 9:00 A.M.,^[18] and often lasted one and a half hours or more. For many of the missionaries these general meetings, in the presence of an Apostle, were the most memorable aspect of their temporary experience in Denmark.

The meetings began with a devotional and then continued with announcements and missionary business that needed to be conducted. Each morning the missionaries were updated on details of war conditions, news from their and other missions, and information on the progress of the missionaries who had not yet arrived, if it was known. Mail and news from home or of the Church were also an anticipated part of the business. Sometimes an hour or more of this meeting was devoted to a question and answer session. Missionary Rheim M. Jones remembered this as a once in a lifetime opportunity to hear the gospel taught by a General Authority who illuminated the scriptures and was able to draw often from the history of the Church. Elder Jones, living in the mission home, would ask questions of the Apostle at every opportunity and was motivated to study more in order to gather questions to ask Elder Smith, even if it meant staying up late into the night to do so.^[19] Sister Smith observed, “[The missionaries] sure enjoy it, because

[Elder Smith] can clear many things up in their minds. They . . . take every advantage to ask him questions.”^[20] President Garff remembered, “Elder Smith answers [the missionaries] in a masterful way and it is a revelation to us all to hear him unfold the scriptures.”^[21] President Garff believed that Elder Smith was the greatest scriptorian in the Church.^[22]

After the missionaries had an opportunity to question Elder Smith, he divided them into groups, furnished the topic of discussion, and then wandered among the groups listening to their discussion, adding insights and direction.

Following the general missionary meeting each morning, the missionaries were dismissed to eat their midday meal. After dinner they were free to participate in other appropriate activities. The elders were reminded to conduct themselves as missionaries and always remain with a companion, but they had a full spectrum of activities to participate in. The missionaries reported going on extended site seeing excursions, visiting museums and historical sites, attending cultural activities, and so forth. Others went to movies, concerts, visited parks, or lounged around their rooms studying, writing letters, visiting, or sleeping.^[23]

Occasionally, other organized activities were also planned. One day the two German missions met each other in a much publicized softball game (at least publicized among the missionaries). There was nothing at stake except mission and individual pride, but the game was characterized by strong competition and good feelings despite the rivalry. The contest ended with the East German missionaries triumphant by a score of 6—3.^[24]

On another occasion, at the conclusion of their morning meeting, the East German missionaries put on a theatrical performance. President Garff remarked only that it was very well done but he did not record the content or

subject or that any subsequent productions were attempted. Some of the visiting missionaries tried, for the most part unsuccessfully, to participate with their Danish counterparts in regular proselyting activities. It appears that they were welcome to participate but were usually not successful, principally due to the differences in language. Later, Church leaders attempted to send some of the younger missionaries for reassignment into the Scandinavian countries. These transfers were not allowed due to immigration laws, and that plan was short lived at best. During the time that the missionaries were in Denmark, except for the exception noted above, the visiting missionaries were largely kept separate from those assigned to that country. The Danish missionaries continued their labors unabated, and many knew little about the visitors from the other missions.

Ultimate Reassignment of the Evacuated Missionaries

During one of the daily meetings with the evacuated missionaries a telegram arrived for Elder Smith, which he read to the assembled elders. President Garff recorded:

[Our] missionary meeting this morning was interrupted by a telegram from the First Presidency to Joseph Fielding Smith asking that all missionaries [with service] over two years in disturbed areas be released and sent home, and all others except those who are very young [in time of service] be sent to the USA. The very young ones could remain [for the time being] in one of the Northern [European] countries. [\[26\]](#)

With the arrival of these instructions, the missionaries finally had some direction about where they were going and what they would be doing. Mission leaders, under Elder Smith's supervision, kept busy compiling reports and information on each missionary that would be sent to the First Presidency. A copy of a part of this report, along with confidential information, was likewise sent to New York, where the president of the Eastern States Mission, John W. Taylor, was poised to reassign the missionaries with less than two years of service. Elder Smith was also directed to have the other European mission presidents—Franklin J. Murdock in Holland, Joseph E. Evans of the French Mission, Thomas E. McKay in Switzerland, and Hugh B. Brown from Great Britain—compile similar reports for their missionaries who would likewise be affected by the evacuation orders. President John A. Israelson from the Norwegian Mission, Elder Eugene R. Krantz, acting president over the Swedish Mission, and President Garff in the Danish Mission would also have the same responsibility in time, but up to that time were not personally affected by the evacuation order.

Elder Smith and President Garff and the mission staff expended a huge investment of time in finding passage for the missionaries who were being sent to the United States. The problem facing the Church representatives was to find suitable passage aboard neutral steamships whose companies were besieged by many thousands of other refugees attempting to do the same thing for the same reasons. While there were certainly standards of what would be acceptable, Church leaders were also realistic and would have likely taken (within reason) any available accommodations. Several instances are recorded of Church representatives going on board the scheduled sailing ships to inspect the accommodations before the missionaries were allowed to board. There is no indication, however, anyone ever turned down any of the accommodations, but at least they were aware of the conditions into which the missionaries were being placed. President Garff recorded on 2 September 1939:

Every ship line is taken up, we can't get booking anywhere until after the 20th of September. However, there is a possibility of sending some [missionaries] with the American-Scantic Lines on freighters. . . . Mr Miller has just phoned that the American-Scantic [Company] will take 75 of our missionaries home on their boats. However, they must take what accommodations we can get—they are going to put them up on deck and down in the hole or any place to get them home. [\[27\]](#)

Other mission presidents would face the same problems in getting passage for their missionaries. Apparently other missions from which missionaries sailed had nearly identical problems. President Murdock in the Netherlands Mission and President Brown in the British Mission each had their own dilemmas in finding sufficient and timely passage for the missionaries. Thousands of Americans desirous to return home and thousands more Europeans who were seeking to emigrate put enormous pressure on the shipping companies. Some of the potential passengers were offering to pay as much as two thousand dollars per person for standing room on any of the ships (passenger or freight) going to America. Tickets were selling for about two hundred dollars each. Many of these travelers offered to provide

their own food and sleep on the deck, if necessary, but would give the two thousand dollars for the opportunity to do so.

Many of the steamship companies had reservations as far ahead as February 1940.^[28]

In a British port people also clamored for space. The usual capacity, for example, of berths aboard the SS *Washington* out of Southampton, England, was 1,200 passengers. On the September 1939 trip there were over 1,800 passengers, including American sport, theater, movie and political celebrities. As a result of the crowded conditions on the ship, “every available space was used for accommodations. Even the swimming pool was drained and beds were put in it. The movie theater was also used, as were lounges, hallways, and spare deck space.”^[29]

On 5 and 6 September, President Garff was able to arrange for additional passage. “I was fortunate enough to get passage for sixteen more missionaries [and] we sent forty-one missionaries on the Moore-McCormick freight lines this evening.”^[30]

On another occasion, President Garff reported that while he was busy arranging for additional transportation for missionaries to go home, “Mr Miller from the U.S. Lines called and is willing to take ten more [missionaries] on [the] *Scanyork*. We finally put sixty missionaries on the *Scanyork* and they sailed at 5:00 P.M. Was glad to see them get off.”^[31] He was even willing to let missionaries become crew members in order to get the necessary space to send them home. He wrote: “Got jobs for three missionaries to work their way across the water as watchmen. They are sailing on a new boat and a good one except that it is a freight boat. All of our missionaries are together in one large room, and I

think they will all be comfortable and should have a good voyage.”^[32]

These missionaries were able to work their way across the ocean, which not only gave them passage but also responsibility and eventually an added respectability for the Church. The American Consul questioned the missionaries’ ability to work and thought that preference should be given to others who were also trying to sail to America. President Garff recorded, “Our Elders surpassed others who had made application for the work in looks, stature, cleanliness and appearance. . . . When the ship officials saw our Elders they literally demanded of the American Consul that our Elders be signed on. The ship company knew our Elders, the Church’s standards, and we have been given preference in all cases.”^[33]

Despite the preference, he recorded no other instances of missionaries being hired. By Thursday, 14 September, President Garff and Elder Smith had made a sufficient number of reservations to take all of the displaced missionaries in Denmark home. He noted, “This takes care of all missionaries that have come to Denmark under the present war crisis.”^[34] With this departure, the earliest phase of the missionary evacuation from Europe had been concluded. The next phase was to send home the Scandinavian missionaries, the presidents of several of the evacuated missions, and any missionaries that had thus far been allowed to remain in Europe for various reasons. The trip home for many of the European missionaries was an experience never to be forgotten.

The Trip Home

Many of the missionaries that were interviewed had as vivid memories of the trip home as any other part of the evacuation process. In one sense they were relieved to be on the way home because of the safety the United States offered. On the other hand they felt anxiety of the unknown and fear of the dangers inherent to ocean travel, especially in wartime.

News reports of hostile German actions against passenger ships heightened concerns of the departing missionaries. President Garff noted on 4 September 1939:

A German sub[marine] had torpedoed an English passenger ship [the *Athenia*] and there were 1240 [passengers] on board—250 [were] Americans. A Dutch ship was picking up passengers and had taken about 1,000 on board. They [the Germans, English, and others] are laying mines all over the ocean, and two Danish fishing boats were blown up today.^[35]

Missionaries recorded several instances when their ships were stopped by patrol boats representing the various opposing nations.

The haste in which transportation had to be arranged caused part of the problem of shipping the missionaries to the United States. This should not be construed to suggest that the ships reserved were unsafe.

The accommodations on the several reserved boats ranged from cabin berths to partitioned compartments. The partitioned areas were typically in the hold or freight compartment of the ship and were retrofitted for passengers by wiring bunk beds to the sides of the ship beneath the deck. There was little privacy in these compartments other than blankets strung up between sections. All of the passengers had free and equal access to the main deck, but that was less desirable in the event of bad weather. Some of the elders preferred to be up on the decks rather than staying below in the compartments, especially as the trip progressed.

One of the problems experienced was the pitching and rolling of even a large ship upon the waves of the open sea. The movement of the boat had the unfortunate effect of making some of those on board seasick. As the trip progressed, many of the missionaries became sick and returned to their quarters. To accommodate those who were sick, the ships crew provided a large galvanized tub that was set in the middle of the compartment. Missionaries, in

retrospect, humorously referred to these compartments as “bear pits.”^[36] They suggested that as the trip progressed and the stench of the compartment increased, those missionaries who didn’t have to be down below avoided it, and those who were relegated to bed by motion sickness contributed to the problem. Elder Knutti, one of the sick missionaries, remembered, “The dining room steward came down [the steps] at first to call [us] for meals but eventually the stench became so bad he called from the top of the stairway.”^[37]

Those missionaries who were able played games up on the deck, ate heartily, and generally enjoyed the trip. There were people to meet, new areas on ship to explore, sites to enjoy, books to read, and letters to write. Overall, it was the adventure of a lifetime. The mood on board, however, was not altogether carefree. There were a few indications of war noted by the missionaries and their leaders that created problems for the travelers and reminded them that their peace was threatened. “A large British war ship spotted us about 5 P.M. and turned a powerful spotlight on us and came

alongside, but on finding who we were she soon left us alone.”^[38] Others experienced the same sense of panic of being attacked, especially when there had been reports of passenger ships being sunk by torpedo boats and submarines. Elder (and future Apostle) Joseph B. Wirthlin, who had been released only days before from the Swiss Mission, reported sailing aboard the SS *Washington* from England after traveling across the continent. Well aware that an English ship, the *Athenia*, had been torpedoed, he watched with apprehension as a German submarine followed his ship for several days.^[39]

A final example of hostilities noted by the evacuees during their departure from Europe came from Elder Joseph Fielding Smith. The Smiths sailed from Holland after completing their duties in Copenhagen and other areas of Europe. They boarded the *Zaandam* and within a day or two from port were stopped by a British warship. Elder Smith noted in his journal, “Held prisoners by the British, without reason or right,” for parts of two days. He recorded further, “We were held all day unrighteously by G[reat] B[ritain].”^[40] The British were apparently searching for contraband.^[41]

Needless to say, many were relieved when the missionaries landed safely in any one of several ports along the east coast of the United States. After experiencing uncertainties of sea travel, crowded conditions, seasickness, stops for unknown reasons, and general anxiety, many of the missionaries must have felt a huge sense of relief when they finally arrived in America. Elder Rheim Jones, for example, recorded that after his ordeal at sea, “Only one thing could ever get me to sea again—a call to serve the Lord!”^[42]

The missionaries were glad and relieved to be back in the United States. Many spent some time in New York City and other east coast sites before either being sent home or reassigned to complete their mission in North American missions. Despite his gratitude for being in the United States, Elder Jones recorded, “It’s good to be home, but New York isn’t my idea of America.”^[43]

Upon his own arrival in America, President Garff recorded some deeper feelings of gratitude:

We pulled into New York harbor this morning, and even though it was a cloudy day we were happy to see America. There was joy in the hearts of all aboard, and tears in the eyes of many, especially the refugees from Poland. . . . They could not understand that each towering building was not fortified with anti-aircraft guns. . . . There is a glorious feeling in being in America, and to have the feeling of spiritual security—there is even a greater feeling of consolation in knowing that God’s hand has given you protection. ^[44]

Departure of Scandinavian Missionaries

With the departure of the German and Czechoslovakian missionaries, the evacuation of the Scandinavian missionaries constituted a significant second phase of the evacuation of missionaries from Europe.

The evacuation of Church personnel in Sweden had begun even before the outbreak of European hostilities. Gustive O. Larson, president of the Swedish Mission, was scheduled to complete his mission and be succeeded with an unannounced replacement. President Larson was an employee of the Church Educational System and was scheduled in the fall of 1939 to fill a post in Cedar City, Utah. With the approval of general Church leaders, Larson and his family

were sent home despite growing political tensions in Europe. ^[45] Prior to his departure from Sweden, President Larson dictated instructions to his unknown successor to assist the mission in his absence. Dr. Larson heard of the German invasion of Poland when he arrived in New York and immediately wired the First Presidency indicating his willingness to return to Sweden to assist his missionaries as long as his services were needed. He was directed by the First Presidency to continue his trip west, as his replacement had been chosen but had not yet been called.

President Larson, also prior to his departure, appointed one of his missionaries, Elder Eugene R. Krantz, to act in his stead until the replacement president arrived. Elder Krantz was a member of Larson’s office staff and was referred to

as the missionary who “knew Swedish better than he knew English.” ^[46] Since Krantz’s parents were both Swedish, he had learned the language in his parents’ home and had an extraordinary command of the language. Further, he had been involved in mission affairs and because he had taken part in the decisions that predated his president’s release, he seemed to be a wise choice to preside on a temporary basis. What neither he nor his president could have known at the time of his selection was the role he would be required to play in getting the missionaries out of the country. It is likely that Larson’s replacement as president was not permitted into Sweden because of the deterioration of political conditions in Europe. This assumption is borne out by the experiences of other mission replacements and the restrictions imposed by immigration policy.

On 4 September, President M. Douglas Wood was reassigned by the First Presidency to preside over the mission in Sweden. ^[47] President Wood had only recently successfully completed the evacuation of the West German Mission, where he had lived with his family and more recently worked with the evacuated missionaries in Copenhagen. Yet when President Wood arrived in Sweden from Denmark, he was not allowed by the Swedish government to remain. During his short stay in Sweden, President Wood was largely ineffective because of his inability to speak the language. Despite his inability to communicate, President Wood remained at the post until he was required by the government to leave due to immigration restrictions. Apparently, the same restrictions that had earlier precluded missionaries from entering Holland and from being reassigned to the Scandinavian missions also disqualified President Wood.

The Scandinavian countries would not accept refugees from Germany, which the evacuated missionaries technically were, but a new missionary from America could apparently remain indefinitely. President Garff explained to the First Presidency that in Denmark, had the missionaries and other personnel come directly from the United States they would have been allowed to stay, but since they had come from another European nation their status in Denmark was temporary, ^[48] and “the police refuse[d] to let them

stay over three months.” ^[49]

By the time President Wood was rejected for visa problems, however, it appears that it was a moot point because the First Presidency had made a decision to return all American mission personnel to the United States. Following President Wood’s departure, the mission leadership was given temporarily to the Norwegian Mission president John A. Israelson. Ultimately, President Israelson was also unable to enter Sweden and much of the work and decisions of the mission again fell to Elder Krantz.

Upon the recommendation of Elder Smith to the First Presidency, all American missionary personnel were to be evacuated from all European countries. In mid-September a telegram from the First Presidency to all remaining mission presidents in Europe directed, “to reduce missionary forces in all neutral countries to the smallest workable number.”^[50]

The implications for this move was that all Scandinavian missionaries, although they could have remained in their missions for the duration of their mission terms without any additional problems with visas, were all being called home. A possible impetus for this move may well have been the uncertainty for the safety of the American elders even in a friendly nation. This decision may have been motivated by any one or a combination of several acts of war in the Scandinavian Missions.

Already noted was the report of submarine attacks against Scandinavian ships; President Garff also reported a bombing in Denmark by a German warplane. Two bombs were dropped in Esbjerg, Denmark, and two Danes were killed and others wounded.^[51]

Two days later, when details were more complete, President Garff corrected his earlier entry and reported that the bombs were dropped by a British warplane; the public announcement was accompanied by an apology from the English government for the mistake. An additional concern may have been the difficulty or danger of removing the missionaries at a later date if the continental hostilities spread to the Scandinavian countries. This possibility became more of a reality when in late November 1939, Finland was invaded by Russia. As previously noted, during the course of World War II, all of the Scandinavian missions were occupied by hostile forces.

In keeping with the newest directive to evacuate, President Garff began again to make reservations for the Scandinavian missionaries to travel home. On 19 September he made arrangements for the sailing of fifteen Swedish missionaries, ten from the Norwegian Mission and twenty-seven from Denmark. Czech Mission president Wallace F. Toronto and family also boarded the SS *Scanpenn* en route to the United States. They made special arrangements with the Danish police for the Swedish missionaries to enter Denmark temporarily to board the *Scanpenn*. The Norwegian missionaries remained in their mission and then embarked on the same ship when it docked in Bergen, Norway.

Another group of twenty-five Swedish missionaries also departed on the same day from Gothenburg Harbor, Sweden, aboard the SS *Gripsholm*. The additional ship was undoubtedly used due to the inability of getting more berths aboard the same ship. The remaining Scandinavian missionaries awaited the next available sailing date.

The *Gripsholm* was the only ship taking missionaries that left directly from Sweden. All of the previous and subsequent sailings of missionaries originated from Copenhagen. We have no record why this one vessel was dispatched from Sweden or why subsequent ships were not. It is known that President Garff was arranging for all of the shipping and that at least early on he was taking whatever available spaces he could get. It may be that it was more convenient to sail from Copenhagen or that this was the only sailing of the *Gripsholm* from Norway.

On 23 September, another cable from the First Presidency effectively closed down all of the remaining European missions. It stated, “Send all [remaining] missionaries home.”^[52] From this announcement, several other mission presidents were also released. By the end of September 1939 only four of the ten mission presidents in Europe were allowed to remain in their missions. These included Presidents Hugh B. Brown, Great Britain; Thomas E. McKay, Switzerland; John A. Israelson, Norway; and Mark B. Garff, Denmark.

In response to the telegram, the next group of missionaries to leave the Scandinavian Mission departed on Sunday, 1 October 1939. Thirty-three missionaries from Sweden, six from Norway, and thirteen from Denmark

embarked aboard the *Scanmail*.^[53] On the same day twenty-six additional Norwegian missionaries sailed from Oslo,

Norway, aboard the *Kungsholm*.^[54] The day’s activity led President Garff to report, “Rather a quiet day after getting all

of our missionaries except [the] three [I] have left.”^[55] Only a minimal number remained in any of the missions by this late date, and they were kept only by special approval from the First Presidency. These missionaries were to complete mission reports, help turn over mission affairs to local leaders, and further assist the mission president in closing down the business of the mission.

A problem surfaced on the 1 October sailing that had not been experienced before. The problem originated in Norway when the missionaries went to board their ship. President Israelson phoned President Garff, who reported,

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“They [Norwegian Mission leadership] are having trouble getting their missionaries off on the Swedish Lines.” President Israelson was required to pay for tickets for the passage of the missionaries in Oslo before the elders were allowed to board the ship for home. President Garff was not happy: “We have all been under the opinion that the Church had given a guarantee [to the company’s office] in New York for any and all missionaries traveling home on the

Swedish lines.”^[57] It appears that the problem was caused by a misunderstanding between the Church’s travel services and the Scantic-American Lines. Upon investigating, President Garff learned that “the Copenhagen steamship line had neglected to send this confirmation on to their head office at Gothenberg, [Norway].”^[58] Without the authorization, the Oslo office had no alternative but to charge for the missionaries’ passage, and the only one in a position to pay out the amount of money for the number of missionaries was the mission president.

President Garff was incensed that after all the business that the Church had done with that shipping line that the elders would be held up unnecessarily and that the careless neglect of one person could threaten the *success* of an otherwise smoothly orchestrated evacuation process. President Israelson had to pay the cost for the missionaries, and once he did, the missionaries were on their way. Other than a brief delay, some frustration, and perhaps some damaged pride, there was little real harm done. Further, in the absence of imminent danger, the missionaries could afford a little inconvenience. With the departure of all but a bare skeleton staff in the mission office, it was only a matter of time before the remaining mission presidents were also called home. With the Russian invasion of Finland on Thursday, 30 November, it was just a matter of time before atrocities spread and the missionaries were directed to depart.

President Garff noted:

The Russians started in on Finland this morning. They have been bombing Helsingfors, the capitol of Finland, and other large towns. There has been no declaration of war, but Russia has started from the air, land and sea. It seems to be the fad now days for a large, strong nation to unmercifully punible the small, defenseless nations. . . . This is one of the dirtiest and dastardly offenses against a small defenseless nation that modern civilization has seen since Germany went into Belgium. . . . I am afraid it will be Sweden next.^[59]

For President Garff and to a large extent for President Israelson, the “handwriting was on the wall,” and they realized that it was only a matter of time before they, too, were called home. They did not have long to wait, because on 2 December,

A telegram came early this morning from the First Presidency, and I was not at all surprised because I have had the feeling that I WOULD BE GOING HOME WITH MY MISSIONARIES. The telegram reads as follows:

Referring to our cable of November 25, we wish you [to] return to America either with your missionaries or as soon after they leave as possible, having in mind [the] best arrangements feasible for taking care of mission interests and members.^[60]

Later that same day, Garff and Israelson made a preliminary investigation of shipping schedules and available passage for themselves and the few remaining elders. After several discussions between the presidents of the two missions, the ultimate decision was that the Danish leaders would travel to Norway to ship out of Oslo on 6 December. Apparently, several factors helped make the decision, but the bottom line was captured by President Garff when he noted, “We decided to travel with the Norwegian lines instead of the small American freighters.”^[61]

On 7 December, the two remaining mission presidents, their remaining family members, and the skeleton staff of full-time missionaries sailed aboard the MS *Oslofjord* at 12:15 A.M. After an exciting but largely uneventful trip, the group arrived in New York harbor on Saturday, 15 December 1939.^[62]

Conclusion

With the departure of this last contingent of missionaries on 7 December 1939, an era of missionary history ended. Not since United States troops marched against Latter-day settlements in Utah in 1857 were all American

missionaries called home. Unlike that earlier experience, in 1939 the Scandinavian and European missions continued unabated under local leadership. It was a difficult time in the various missions because of occupational troops, deprivations due to war, and restrictions on travel, yet despite these challenges local leaders noted Church progress during the war years.

Other positive effects were also manifested. The evacuation that began with the German invasion of Poland spread to the Scandinavian missions, then to all of Europe, and ultimately worldwide. Only the German and Czechoslovakian missions were evacuated under conditions caused by imminent war, but within the following months, missionaries were likewise withdrawn from the Middle East, Africa, and South America. During the following year in 1940 missionaries were likewise withdrawn from the Pacific Missions until, by the time the United States entered World War II on 7 December 1941, the only missionaries outside of the continental United States were in Hawaii.

The Church learned some valuable lessons in the process of moving the missionaries from potentially dangerous areas to safety. Initially, a transportation or travel office was established by the Church in the aftermath of the European evacuation. With valuable experience gained in arranging shipping for the fleeing American missionaries, Netherlands Mission president Franklin J. Murdock headed up the travel office for decades to follow.

In addition, as a result of its business with travel companies, the Church, its employees, and especially its missionary representatives have been given a priority for evacuation should American personnel be forced to flee an area in the face of natural calamity, war, or political unrest. Further, because a working relationship has been developed with such entities as the State Department, and federal law enforcement agencies, the Church has an early warning system in place that would help to prevent missionaries or other Church representatives from being trapped in a potentially volatile situation. Such a wide-scale evacuation of missionary personnel would be unlikely ever to occur again, though it may be comforting that many of the same problems experienced in Europe could be avoided in similar circumstances.

The missionary evacuation from Europe and from Scandinavian countries in the face of escalating military unrest stands as a singular event, unparalleled in Church history. Elder Joseph Fielding Smith reported at the conclusion of the evacuation from Europe:

There were in the European missions at the time [of the evacuation] 697 persons of whom 611 were young men and 63 young women missionaries; the other 23 were mission presidents, their wives and children. These missionaries returned in 23 ships, mostly freight boats which had been improvised to care for the numerous passengers returning to America. ^[63]

During the April 1940 general conference, President J. Reuben Clark Jr. noted:

The whole group [of missionaries and Church personnel] was moved from the disturbed areas in Europe to the United States, and thence either to their new fields of labor or to their homes without one accident or one case of [serious] sickness. The entire group was evacuated from Europe in three months, at a time when tens of thousands of Americans were besieging the ticket offices of the great steamship companies for passage, and the Elders had no reservations. Every time a group was ready to embark there was available the necessary space, even though efforts to reserve space a few hours before had failed. ^[64]

^[1] Brief excerpts from this manuscript were first presented in the KBYU-FM radio lecture on 21 October 1999 in the Museum of Art on the Brigham Young University campus. The complete script of that talk was not published, but a condensed version was published in the December 2001 *BYU Studies*.

^[2] For more information on the evacuation of the Czechoslovakian Mission, see David F. Boone, "The Worldwide Evacuation of Latter-day Saint Missionaries at the Outbreak of World War II" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, 1981), 44–61.

^[3] Joseph Fielding Smith Jr. and John J. Stewart, *The Life of Joseph Fielding Smith: Tenth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1972), 271.

- [4] Detailed information on the European evacuation of Latter-day Saint missionaries can be found in *BYU Studies*, December 2001, 122—54; Terry Bohle Montague, *Mine Angels Round About* (Murray, Utah: Roylance, 1989); Boone, “The Worldwide Evacuation of Latter-day Saint Missionaries at the Outbreak of World War II”; and Richard Cowan, *The Latter-day Saint Century* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1999), 116–21.
- [5] Norman George Seibold Oral History, interview by David F. Boone in August 1978 in Rupert, Idaho. A transcribed copy is located in the James H. Moyle Oral History Collection, Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 11; hereafter Church Archives.
- [6] Mark B. Garff Journal, 24 August 1939, Church Archives.
- [7] Garff Journal, 25 August 1939.
- [8] Mark B. Garff, “My Daily Record,” 25 August 1939, 3.
- [9] *Ibid.*, 27 August 1939, 5.
- [10] Garff Journal, 28 August 1939.
- [11] Oral History with Martha Toronto Anderson, interview by David F. Boone, February 1978, Salt Lake City, 3.
- [12] Oral History with M. Douglas and Evelyn Wood, interview by David F. Boone, February 1978, Salt Lake City, 21.
- [13] Martha Toronto Anderson, *A Cherry Tree behind the Iron Curtain: The Autobiography of Martha Toronto Anderson* (Salt Lake City, n.p., 1977), 32.
- [14] Frank Knutti Reminiscence, no date, no page number, copy in author’s possession.
- [15] Orson B. West Oral History, interview by Richard L. Jensen, Salt Lake City, 17 October 1972, James H. Moyle Oral History Collection, Church Archives.
- [16] *Ibid.*
- [17] Rheim M. Jones Journal, 11 October 1939.
- [18] Jessie Ella Evans Smith Travel Journal, 29 August 1939.
- [19] Rheim M. Jones, Missionary Journal, 2 October-14 October 1939.
- [20] Jessie E. Smith Journal, 3 October [1939].
- [21] Garff, “Daily Record,” 30 August 1939, 7.
- [22] *Ibid.*, 13 October 1939, 34.
- [23] Knutti Reminiscence, no page, no date.
- [24] Albion Smith Journal, 1 September 1939.
- [25] Garff Journal, 30 August 1939.
- [26] *Ibid.*, 31 August 1939.

- [27] Ibid., 2 September 1939.
- [28] Oral History with President Franklin J. Murdock, interview by David F. Boone, 20 January 1981, Salt Lake City, 5–7.
- [29] Boone, *Worldwide Evacuation*, 112.
- [30] Garff Journal, 5 September 1939.
- [31] Ibid., 6 September 1939.
- [32] Ibid., 5 September 1939.
- [33] Garff, “Daily Record,” 5 September 1939, 14.
- [34] Ibid., 14 September 1939, 19.
- [35] Garff Journal, 4 September 1939.
- [36] Knutti Reminiscence, no date.
- [37] Ibid.
- [38] Rheim M. Jones Journal, 8 December 1939.
- [39] Joseph B. Wirthlin Papers, 3–4 September 1939, Church Archives.
- [40] Joseph Fielding Smith Journal, October 26–28, 1939.
- [41] Garff, “Daily Record,” 16–26 October 1939, 35.
- [42] Jones Journal, 8 December 1939.
- [43] Ibid., 16 December 1939.
- [44] Garff, “Daily Record,” 15 December 1939.
- [45] *Improvement Era*, October 1939, 607.
- [46] Oral Interview with President Gustive O. Larson, interview by David F. Boone, 28 February 1978, Provo, Utah, 6.
- [47] Garff, “Daily Record,” 4 September 1939, 13.
- [48] Garff Journal, 16 September 1939.
- [49] Garff, “Daily Record,” 15 September 1939, 20.
- [50] Ibid., 19 September 1939, 21.
- [51] Garff Journal, 4 September 1939.
- [52] Ibid., 23 September 1939.
- [53]

Garff, "Daily Record," 1 October 1939, 30.

[54] Mark B. Garff, "Summary of European Missionary Evacuation," 1 October 1939.

[55] Garff Journal, 2 October 1939.

[56] Ibid., 4 October 1939.

[57] Ibid.

[58] Garff, "Daily Record," 4 October 1939, 31.

[59] Garff **Journal**, 30 November 1939.

[60] Ibid., 2 December 1939, capitalization is as it appears in President Garff's journal.

[61] Ibid.

[62] Garff, "Daily Record," 7–15 December 1939, 44–47.

[63] Joseph Fielding Smith, *Essentials in Church History: A History of the Church from the Birth of Joseph Smith to the Present Time* (Salt Lake City: Deseret 1973), 526.

[64] J. Reuben Clark Jr., in Conference Report, April 1940, 20.