

Metta Katarina Lassen b. Süder Ballig, Hadersleben, Schleswig-Holstein, 16 Mar 1863; dau. of Thomas Lassen and Margarethe Schmidt; bp. 18 Jan 1931; conf. 18 Jan 1931; m. 12 May 1895, Hans Lorenzen; d. heart attack 27 Feb 1942 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 982)

Erich Richard Lehmann b. Cottbus, Cottbus, Brandenburg, 1 Dec 1913; son of Friedrich Wilhelm Lehmann and Marie Konzack; m. Hamburg 19 Oct 1940, Charlotte or Liselotte Holert; d. 15 Jul 1944 (IGI)

Ernst Günther Meyer b. Westerland, Schleswig-Holstein, 27 Oct 1910; son of Tony Elfrieda Kayser or Kaiser; bp. 16 Apr 1920; conf. 16 Apr 1920; d. Hamburg 4 August 1941 (CHL 10603, 118; FHL microfilm 245232, 1930 and 1935 censuses; FS)

Heinrich Friedrich Peter Hermann Palm b. Ochtmissen, Lüneburg, Hannover, 24 Dec 1874; son of Karl Friedrich Gotthard Palm and Catharine Dorothee Margarethe Albers; bp. 23 Aug 1928; ord. teacher; d. 20 or 21 Jan 1943 (FHL microfilm 245250, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI, FS, CHL MS 10603, 81)

Sophie Marie Sellmann b. Stassfurt, Neuendorf, Kloster, Sachsen, 10 Aug 1861; dau. of Gottfried Martin Peter Sellmann and Wilhelmine Henriette Balzer; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; m. Neuendorf, Magdeburg, Sachsen, 22 Jul 1883, Carl Eduard Schulze; bur. Altona, Hamburg, 1941 or 1942 or 1943 (FHL microfilm 245260, 1935 census; CHL MS 10603, 114; FS)

Anna Franziska Schlüter b. Neumünster, Schleswig-Holstein, 11 Nov 1867; dau. of Karsten Schlueter and Elise Behrens; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; m. Altona, Schleswig-Holstein, 29 Aug 1891, Karl Friedrich Ferdinand Sennewald Bornholdt; d. Altona 25 May 1942; bur. 29 May 1942 (CHL MS 10603, 54; FS)

Kurt Fritz Wegener b. Hamburg 11 Mar 1918; son of Carl Friedrich Wegener and Amanda Dohrn; bp. 28 Jan 1930; conf. 28 Jan 1930; ord. deacon 4 Jan 1932; k. in battle 16 Aug 1942 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 898)

NOTES

1. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
3. Altona Branch manuscript history, CHL LR 10603, 2.
4. Ibid.
5. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2998 240.
6. Ibid., CHL A 2999 56.
7. Ibid., CHL A 2999 92–93
8. Altona Branch general minutes, 96, CHL LR 10603, 11.
9. Ibid., 113–21.
10. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2999 103.

11. Ibid., A 2999 113, 115.
12. Altona Branch Relief Society minutes, CHL LR 10603, 14.
13. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2999 124.
14. Ibid., 132.
15. Ibid., 133.

BARMBEK BRANCH

The metropolis of Hamburg was Germany's second-largest city in 1939 with 1,711,877 people. The northeastern districts of the harbor city comprised the Barmbek Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (one of three LDS branches in that city). With 178 total members (twenty-six of whom held the priesthood), this was a solid branch.

As the war approached in the late summer of 1939, the Barmbek Branch was under the leadership of Alfred Schmidt, a worker in a cigarette factory in Barmbek. His counselors were Friedrich Mahler and Jonni Schacht. All leadership positions in the branch were filled at the time, with the exception of the Primary organization. Sunday School took place at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The Relief Society met on Mondays at 7:30 p.m. and the MIA on Wednesdays at the same time.¹

The meetings of the Barmbek Branch were held in rented rooms at Dehnhaide 141. That street was located near the southwest border of the branch territory, toward the center of Hamburg. Waltraud (Wally) Möhrke (born 1919) recalled this about the meeting rooms: "We had a small Hinterhaus behind a carpentry shop. There was a large room for sacrament meetings and smaller rooms for the various classes."²

Irmgard Schmidt (born 1923) described the church rooms in these words:

We had to walk up steps at the side of the carpentry shop. When we were there during the week, we could hear the woodworking machines running. At the top of the stairs, you were looking straight into the main meeting room where there

were benches for about one hundred people. To the right were two or three classrooms. Then there were more stairs up to another floor where there was a large empty room that we used for activities. . . . I remember that there were really big windows on the right side [of the hall]. The room had a big stove, and somebody had to go early to get the rooms heated.³

Herta Schmidt (born 1925) added a few details to this description: “At the top of the stairs there was a foyer with a cloak room and a restroom. There was a platform at the end of the hall for the branch presidency; it was two steps up, and we had both a piano and a pump organ.”⁴

Barmbek Branch⁵	1939
Elders	9
Priests	4
Teachers	5
Deacons	8
Other Adult Males	25
Adult Females	108
Male Children	11
Female Children	8
<i>Total</i>	178

President Schmidt’s family lived at Volksdorferstrasse 223 in the suburb of Wandsbek, and it took them about an hour to walk to church. According to Irmgard, “Sometimes our mother gave us money for the streetcar, but we would rather walk home and use the money for candy. There was a vending machine on the way home, and we did that lots of times. [Anyway] I never thought that it was a long way to walk.” Herta remembered that several branch members came from even farther to the northwest.

The Schmidt family included eleven children, and they were well known in their neighborhood. According to daughters Irmgard and Herta, the family had visitors every Sunday. Before the war,

those visitors were often American missionaries. During the war, the Schmidt teenagers and their friends often sang hymns and other songs for hours. With the windows open, the sounds of their piano and their voices could carry for great distances down the street. Neighbors often gathered on the sidewalk in front of the house to listen to the impromptu concerts. “The neighbors thought that we were a little weird,” explained Irmgard.

Wally Möhrke explained that there was a sign by the door to the branch rooms announcing “Jews are not welcome here” (*Juden unerwünscht*). “I didn’t understand why we had to have that sign there. We had a young Jewish man named Salomon Schwarz who loved to attend [our meetings]. And the other young men were really wonderful to him.” Tragically, Salomon was arrested and later died in a concentration camp.⁶ He had been one of the very few Jewish Latter-day Saints in all of Germany when the war began.

“As the branch president, my father never acted openly against the Nazis. He felt that it was wiser to be silent, to not fight openly against them,” recalled Irmgard Schmidt. When the war began, Irmgard had finished her public schooling and was working for a baker’s family. She lived with the family in the suburb of Rahlstedt and did the household work of the baker’s wife, who was helping out in the business. Irmgard worked for the family for several years until she married.

Wally Möhrke served as the secretary of the Sunday School as a teenager before the war. She recalled her duties:

I think there were about 100 members who attended the meeting regularly. . . . I sat at a small table in the front of the room next to the branch presidency. I counted the attendance and wrote it in a small book. Then, I compared the numbers to the Sunday before and the Sunday a year before. I had to read the report out loud every Sunday.

Rita Fischer (born 1925) and her twin sister, Gisela, had joined the government’s Jungvolk

organization with great enthusiasm in 1936. “We learned a lot of old songs which my mother especially enjoyed. On some Saturdays we had fun going on singing nature hikes. . . . We [went] from door to door in our neighborhood to collect donations [for government programs]. [They] put some pocket change in our tin cans with a slit on top.”⁷ Another government program that Rita liked was the one that paid for the twins to spend “six wonderful weeks” at a health spa in Heiligendamm on the Baltic Sea coast in 1938. The Fischer family also won a ten-day vacation in the Harz Mountains in 1939. Life for the Fischer family was excellent as war clouds gathered over Europe.

Another inductee into the Jungvolk from the Barmbek Branch was Werner Schmidt (born 1927). Initially rejected because he was too small, he nevertheless wanted to be part of the movement and devised a way to look older: he used electrical tape to simulate a beard, a mustache, and sideburns. When his schoolmates mocked his appearance, he removed the tape but did not realize that the black glue was still stuck to his face. Once he confessed to the ruse, he was asked by the leader whether his father supported Werner. The boy answered honestly in the negative, which could have put his father in a very difficult situation. Fortunately, nothing happened to Werner’s father, the president of the Barmbek Branch.⁸

Once in the Jungvolk organization, Werner lost his fascination for the movement and began to disobey orders: “Seven times in all I was sent home for not following orders—orders like ‘Lay down!’ when there was good mud to lay into.” He objected to what he called “the silly reasons” for obeying his leaders. “I loved my freedom too much.” As it turned out, the leaders always begged Werner to come back, because the loss of a boy looked bad in the records.⁹

The outbreak of war in September 1939 was shocking and upsetting to Wally Möhrke and her sister Marianne. “We didn’t know what a war would be like, could only trust that everything would be all right.” The sisters had both finished school and were

gainfully employed, and they lived alone after their father, a widower, moved to Berlin. Within weeks, the basement of their apartment building had been shored up to withstand bombs when enemy air raids were anticipated. According to Wally, “They moved some beds and chairs and installed metal doors. They also broke holes through the walls into the neighboring buildings, providing us an escape underground. . . . They also tried out the alarms, and we had to learn the meaning of each siren.”¹⁰

“Finding my mother sitting in her bed crying was an impression I cannot forget,” wrote Werner Schmidt. He was twelve, and the war had just broken out. “She knew that her boys would have to go to war. Within days my two older brothers were drafted, and later the third one had to go.”¹¹ Werner could not have imagined at the time that the war would last long enough for him to receive a call to the Wehrmacht as well.

Elsa Anna Kopp lost her husband to the army shortly after the war began. Her children, Edeltraud (born 1930) and Werner (born 1933), grew up essentially without their father, as Edeltraud recalled: “Because Father was gone right when the war started, we got used to just being the threesome that we were—mother, Werner, and I. We didn’t really have a father.”¹² Sister Kopp worked the graveyard shift in a shoe factory that was so close that she was able to get home in time to feed the children their breakfast and send them off to school.

Herta Schmidt finished her public school the year the war started, then began an apprenticeship as an office worker. After her initial training in that field, she was hired as a typist and stenographer by the company of Bauer und Schauerte. She recalled, “As an apprentice I earned \$15 per month. At sixteen, I was a full-time employee, and I still lived at home.”

Regarding her association in the League of German Girls (BDM), Herta explained that she did not often go to the meetings, particularly the ones held on Sundays. When her leaders asked about her Sunday absence, she simply explained that she was in church, and she was not punished. Because the

family funds did not extend to such items as the BDM uniform, the jacket was provided for Herta. “It was a nice jacket, and I liked it,” she recalled. However, she was not interested in marching in parades and was not even impressed when she saw Hitler from only about one hundred feet away at a prewar event. “He was just there. Who cares?”

Wally Möhrke was engaged soon after the war began. Wilhelm (Willi) Sperling was not a member of the LDS Church but a fine man who regularly went to church with Wally. He was drafted in 1940, but the two had already planned to marry; they expedited those plans and married later that year. The official ceremony took place at city hall, as required by law, and then a church ceremony was held in the branch meeting hall. It was there that they exchanged rings. “We knew what the word ‘temple’ meant, but that seemed to be a concept for [Saints in] America,” Wally explained.¹³

With Hamburg under attack by the British Royal Air Force, Wally Möhrke Sperling left the city to spend the winter of 1940–41 in eastern Germany (Silesia). From there she went to Stuttgart to live with her sister-in-law for a few months and then returned to Hamburg. Conditions there had become more dangerous, as she wrote: “Our suitcases with the most important papers and other necessities were always at the ready. Whenever the alarms went off, those were the first things we grabbed.”¹⁴

In the spring of 1940, Rita Fischer graduated from public school, and her parents allowed her and Gisela to participate in the Lutheran Church confirmation ritual with their friends. As Rita wrote, “It gave our [relatives] who were not of the LDS faith the satisfaction that we were Christians.”¹⁵ Soon after this event, the twins found assignments on neighboring farms near the town of Ochsenwerder (six miles south of Hamburg), where they could fulfill the requirements of the national Pflichtjahr program. As Rita wrote:

We could go home every other weekend. The standard salary was only \$15 per month with room and board. From our salary Gisela and I

spent half of it for the train fares, etc., and the rest we saved for college. The year went by fast. I learned to appreciate my parents and our home with the “bathtub,” etc. I never realized that the job of farming was hard work. I am glad I fulfilled my part in having served my Vaterland.

Perhaps the first member of the Barmbek Branch to lose his life in the war was Karl Friedrich Seemann, who was killed in Poland in 1941. His daughter, Ursula Betty Stein (born 1924) had little time to mourn for him; her country needed her. She first served in the Pflichtjahr program on a farm near Posen (Posnan, Poland). Although far from home, she enjoyed the work: “I always had wonderful girls around me, and we did our best to have a good time and help each other out.”¹⁶ Regarding the sacrifice of her time to her country, she said: “I didn’t question the requirement to leave home. I knew I didn’t have much choice. Besides, if I stayed home, maybe something even worse would happen to me.”

Herta Schmidt recalled the blackout regulations with which every family had to comply during the war. “We had to darken the rooms every night using a blanket or a sheet or something similar. The warden would come around with a warning if he could see any light [from our windows].”

The Schmidt family lived a considerable distance from downtown Hamburg, and very few bombs fell in their vicinity. “We didn’t have a real bomb shelter [nearby],” explained Irmgard Schmidt. “We lived on the ground floor, and our shelter was in the basement. Sometimes when the sirens went off, we just stayed in bed. It was cold in the winter [in the basement], and my bed was warm. We thought, ‘We won’t get hit.’ But you could get fined for doing that.”¹⁷ Herta recalled being reluctant to leave their beds: “My father tried to get us out of bed, but it was hard for him.” Finally, they gave in and headed downstairs.

While the bombs fell and the anti-aircraft guns pounded away, they sat in the basement hoping that nothing would hit their house. “We just sat there, leaning over just in case something came down on

top of us,” explained Irmgard. “If so, it would hit us on the back. I knew it wouldn’t happen, but we sat there in that position anyway.” “There was nothing to do. We just sat there and waited,” Herta recalled. Werner took the matter somewhat less seriously and appeared in the basement on several occasions in the costume of a fireman or some other odd character. He wrote, “This brought some laughter for us and the other six families from our apartment [building].”¹⁸

The Fischer twins graduated from the Dankers Business College in April 1942 and were both hired by their father’s employer, the Nova Insurance Company. Initially assigned to a position she did not like, Rita was transferred to a different division in the company and was very happy. She recalled that as the war escalated, more and more Hamburg citizens and her fellow employees experienced personal losses: “At work we all got very close to each other. We shared our sorrows of losing our homes, family, and friends.” At home, Rita and her family spent many nights in their basement shelter listening to enemy planes roaring overhead and bombs falling upon the city:

The explosions lifted up the building, and your head and body went down forward almost to the floor. You just hoped the ceiling and walls would hold and you would not be buried under the bricks and rubble. When the lights went out, I was afraid and prayed that the gas and water lines would not break.

Edeltraud Kopp recalled greeting her teacher with “Heil Hitler!” “We used to stand in the school yard and sing the national anthem, too,” she recalled. Her brother, Werner, was also taught the Nazi way of life through the Jungvolk program, as he recollected: “I had a uniform and went to the meetings. It was like the Boy Scouts in America. We learned how to shoot. We didn’t go camping often because that cost too much money.”

“We could never have imagined what awaited us in 1943,” wrote Wally Möhrke Sperling. She compared the shaking of the walls when bombs landed

nearby to an earthquake. “We never knew what to expect when we went back to our apartment after an alarm.” After the worst attacks in July 1943, when entire Hamburg city blocks were on fire, the smoke was so heavy that “we couldn’t see the sun. It was day but still dark. . . . About this time [the government] recommended that all expectant mothers leave the city.” Wally was awaiting the arrival of her first child, and she found a place to stay with her sister in the town of Eyendorf on the Lüneburg Heath (about thirty miles south of Hamburg). While there, she was informed that the city of Hamburg planned to confiscate her apartment. On a quick trip back to the city, she prevented that action. On September 5, 1943, her son Horst-Dieter was born in Salzhausen.¹⁹

The terror of July 1943 was shared by Rita Fischer, whose parents were on vacation when Hamburg was subjected to attack after attack. After bombs damaged the adjacent apartment buildings, Rita left home with Gisela and their grandmother. “I took a last look around the home—the windows were all broken—no gas, water, or electricity. It was so windy outside like a firestorm, and Oma was holding on to our bikes. We were walking with the refugees towards the woods.”²⁰ After a night in the forest near Poppenbüttel, Rita and Gisela went back into the city against the flow of refugees heading out. She later wrote:

The closer we came [to our home] the stronger the firestorm got. . . . We had to pass a railroad underpass and a military hospital where many wounded soldiers and people were laying, moaning in pain. It was just terrible. . . . When we arrived at our house only half of the front lower [level] was standing. . . . A lady gave us a piece of paper and nail, and we wrote: “Gisela, Rita, Oma fine in Poppenbüttel.” It was dark, like midnight and the sun was like a red ball in the sky—but it was noon and very windy. Our Oma was convinced our Savior, Jesus Christ, will come—so we were not afraid.

From a local railroad station, the three took the train east to Schneidemühl. The next day, they

continued on south and east to Liegnitz in Silesia, where they were met by their cousin Gerda. Four days later, their parents found them there. Having heard about the catastrophe in Hamburg, they had traveled immediately in that direction, were prevented from continuing, then turned east toward Berlin, and eventually contacted a relative to whom the twins had written a card before leaving Hamburg. "The good Lord really watched over us," concluded Rita. Brother Fischer decided that the family should return to Hamburg without delay, and soon the father and his twin daughters were back at work in the insurance company.

The Kopp family apartment suffered slight damage in early air raids but remained quite inhabitable. Young Edeltraud recalled how several of their windows were broken by the air pressure released by bombs not far away; the openings were covered by cardboard or plastic of some kind. Their apartment house was too old to have a safe basement, so the family went around the corner to a different building, where their chances for survival from bombs were greater. By the time of the firebombings of July 1943, Sister Kopp had taken her children to a town east of Berlin, where the war did not promise imminent danger.

President Schmidt's employment in a cigarette factory did not represent any conflict with his religious health standards. On the contrary, the items he helped produce served the family in a very significant way: each employee was given a specific amount of cigarettes in addition to his wages, and the Schmidts used those cigarettes to barter for additional food items. Herta said, "My father received 200 cigarettes weekly, and they were a different brand made especially for the employees. There were some delicatessen store owners who really liked those cigarettes. We never had to go hungry thanks to those cigarettes." Irmgard explained that her father could trade eight cigarettes for one loaf of bread and often gave the bread to needy members of the branch.

Ursula Stein was again away from home while Hamburg suffered in the firebombings; she was in

Berlin serving in another civilian function. "I didn't have contact with the Church very much if at all, but I kept my testimony in my heart and didn't lose it." Later, she was stationed with an antiaircraft unit on the outskirts of Bremen, where her assignment was to shoot down enemy aircraft attacking that city. She never felt that her life was in jeopardy there, "because the bombs fell on the downtown."

Wally Möhrke Sperling lost contact with the Barmbek Branch after the branch rooms at Dehnhaid were destroyed in 1943. Constantly away from the city, she traveled to the occupied French province of Alsace-Lorraine in 1944. While on the way there, the train was attacked by dive-bombers, and she survived another terrifying aspect of war. While living in the home of her maternal grandparents in the Lorraine town of Saverne, she heard the sounds of the approaching American army; it was time to return to Hamburg. When she arrived back at her apartment, she determined that the central heating system had been damaged and was inoperable, but she was able to procure a small coal stove that could be vented directly out the window. The electricity was turned on for only a few hours at a time. "But we were home again!"²¹

The Schmidts lived far enough from the Hamburg city center and the harbor that they had little to fear from bombs. However, the air pressure from miles away did break their windows several times, and the utilities were interrupted for days on end. As Irmgard recalled:

We often had no water for a day or two, and the water wagon would come down our street. The people all came around with their buckets to get water. Naturally we kids didn't bring the water home; we had to have water fights in the streets. That's how bad kids are. And when the stores had no food, the government came around with food baskets. We could go and say "Can I have a basket full of food?"

Regarding the problems with the gas lines, Irmgard recalled a common predicament after they had gone to all the effort of collecting ingredients

all day for something to bake. They would put the item in the oven, and the gas would be turned off during the baking. “Then you have no food.”

The attitudes of the Saints in Hamburg during the worst air raids of the war deeply impressed young Werner Schmidt, as he later wrote: “Many of the members lost their homes. In the first testimony meeting after that, people who had lost everything got up to say that they had their testimony and their scriptures, [and] genealogy records and that was the most important thing in their mind. The meetings at those times were very special.”²²

Soon after the catastrophic summer of 1943, many schoolchildren were sent away from Hamburg. Such was the case for Werner Schmidt and his classmates, who were transported to the village of Jochenstein on the Danube, where they were quartered in the abandoned barracks of border guards.²³ Among the approximately ninety boys there, Werner was recognized by leaders for his ability to organize and direct activities. He explained how he gained the confidence of his leaders: “I had much training in the Church. . . . [They] were impressed with my straightforwardness and honesty.” Although far from home, Werner recalled, “I had a really good time . . . and [was] well taken care of.”²⁴

After the Barmbek Branch meeting rooms were destroyed in 1943, the members were asked to go to the Altona Branch building and join there with the hosts and the survivors of the St. Georg Branch, who also had no place to meet. The journey from Barmbek to Altona was a sporadic walk and ride of about eight miles for most of the members. As more of the downtown was reduced to rubble and fewer streetcars were in operation, the journey became very difficult. Both Sunday meetings in Altona were held in the morning, but the Barmbek Saints still had to get up very early in the morning and did not return home until nearly evening.

Due to the difficulty caused by the long trek to Altona, many Barmbek Branch members chose to hold Sunday meetings in a home. President

Schmidt invited local members to join his family in their apartment. By this juncture in the war, many members were away in the service of their country, had been killed in the many air raids, or had left town in search of safer places to live.

Georg Nigbur was not a member of the LDS Church, but he was a handsome young man whom Irmgard Schmidt met at an army dance. He had lost a leg to a landmine in Russia but could already get around the dance floor quite well with his artificial leg.²⁵ Following an engagement that lasted nearly a year, the two were married on September 5, 1944. With the church rooms destroyed, the church wedding ceremony was conducted by Irmgard’s father in their home. There could be no honeymoon in those days, so the celebration consisted mainly of a very nice meal with family members and a few friends. “We had real food and small presents,” the bride recalled. The newlyweds were given a room in the Schmidt apartment, and Georg went to work for the government.

Toward the end of the war, the Altona building was damaged but still usable. Irmgard Schmidt recalled watching snow fall through a hole in the ceiling into the meeting room. It would have been difficult if not impossible to have any heat under such conditions. Her brother, Werner, described the hole as a skylight that had been shattered: “When it rained or snowed we had to sit on the sides [of the room] where it was dry. To keep warm we kept our coats on and the elderly could sit close to the coal-burning stove. . . . Sometimes the sacrament water was frozen by the time it was passed out. But the spirit was very much present.”²⁶

By 1944, it was Werner’s turn to serve the nation. At seventeen, he was drafted into the Reichsarbeitsdienst and sent to construct military facilities in Czechoslovakia. He was both amused and bored by what he felt were senseless drills and inspections, during which officers, disturbed by tiny infractions or items slightly out of order, would mess up the barracks and order that the procedure be repeated. According to Werner, such

practices were stupid: “Stupidity never turned me on, and many things we had to do were on that level.”²⁷

In January 1945, Werner made the transition from the national labor service to the army:

I was drafted into the regular army to be trained as a Tiger Tank driver. Most of the boys were 16 or 17 years old and the leaders—like my corporal—were broken-down soldiers from the eastern front. The rifles we had were from the French army, and tanks were not available—that is we had one to climb in and out of and play like we were driving it. . . . The German army wasn’t any more what it used to be, and I had no interest to fight for a lost cause and for an idea I didn’t believe in. . . . I didn’t put my heart and soul into being a soldier.²⁸

At about the time Wally Möhrke Sperling returned to Hamburg, her mail connection with her husband was interrupted for several weeks. She wrote, “I was very bothered by [not knowing his whereabouts]. How many times I prayed to my Father in Heaven for help.” As it turned out, Willi had been wounded and was temporarily lost, but he showed up at their apartment in Hamburg in early 1945, his uniform still spotted with blood. “I could hardly believe [that he was home]!” she wrote. “I was so very thankful!”²⁹

Toward the end of 1944, Gisela Fischer (then eighteen) was drafted into the Luftwaffe, and Rita volunteered for duty in order to stay with her twin. The girls were assigned to the Leck Air Base near the Danish border. On one occasion in March 1945, they were outside sunbathing when enemy dive-bombers dropped out of the sky to attack the field, and Rita jumped into a foxhole. She described the situation in these words:

The motors from the airplanes got very loud, and above our heads the guns from the airplanes and our artillery gunmen were firing like crazy. The planes were so low that it seemed like I could reach them with my hands. I found myself deep in the hole so that a bullet could not hit me. I prayed very hard to my Heavenly Father and promised him that when I get out of

here I would always go to Relief Society. I always went to Church but not to Relief Society during the week.

By Christmas of 1944, Else Kopp and her children were living with relatives in Landsberg/Warthe, about two hours by train east of Berlin. They enjoyed attending church meetings with the Saints in that town, and it was there that her son, Werner, was baptized: “I remember that the people expected the water in the river to feel cold, but for me it didn’t. It felt just right.” Soldier Edmund Kopp missed this occasion, as he did many other important dates in the lives of his young children after 1939.

While in Landsberg, Jungvolk member Werner Kopp saw Adolf Hitler and shook his hand:

It was in Landsberg on the SA parade grounds. We all had to stand straight in a row when Hitler pulled up. Hitler came and shook my hand. For me, he wasn’t a hero—just an ordinary man like everybody else. Even though he was the leader of Germany, he was ordinary. So what? . . . But looking back, Hitler looked like an old man to me. But I was a young boy at the time. I recognized him immediately—he looked just like in all of his pictures.³⁰

Soon after this incident, Sister Kopp had to take her children and flee. She first burned Werner’s Jungvolk uniform in the heater, then hurried with her children to the railroad station. Edeltraud recalled hearing the Soviet artillery in the distance and seeing panic reign at the station:

When we got to the train station, all we could see were people and their belongings. Baby buggies and clothes were everywhere. Nobody



Fig. 1. Edmund Kopp spent nearly the entire war away from home. He was killed in 1945. (E. Kopp Biebau)

could take the luggage with them because the cattle cars were already full. The official told our mother that the train was full and couldn't take any more people, so she took Werner and shoved him into the train wagon. She did the same with me. She then told the officer, "Don't tell me what I can or can't do! I'm leaving!" and then she got on the train. We stood the entire trip.

The trip to Berlin should have taken two hours but lasted at least eight, according to Werner. Along the way, people got out and collected snow for water. There was no food to eat until they reached Berlin and were cared for by Red Cross volunteers. Eventually, they reached Hamburg and found a basement room to live in. Their apartment had been destroyed in the firebombing, along with all of their property.

With only five rounds of ammunition in his rifle, Werner Schmidt was sent with his comrades to oppose the advance of the British army in northern Germany. Although he had achieved excellent ratings as a marksman in what little training was available, he had no desire to shoot at the enemy or to be shot at by them. One day in April 1945, he was sitting on a haystack reading in his little New Testament when British soldiers fired in his direction. He was able to find a better hiding place and hit upon the idea of firing his five rounds into the air. The reaction was a surprise to him: "The thought to kill any of them never crossed my mind. But I never saw anyone fall faster to the ground, faster than I could run behind the barn, and then all hell broke loose. I was wondering how effective my five bullets would have been if I really would have started to fight against such firepower."³¹ Werner evaded the enemy for a few more hours, then became a prisoner of war. His life was never in jeopardy.

When the war ended on May 8, 1945, enemy units had not reached the northernmost part of Germany, where the Fischer twins were stationed. They decided to simply go home to Hamburg, a distance of nearly one hundred miles. They planned to travel by bicycle. They did not see the British soldiers moving in the opposite direction until they

crossed the Kiel Canal. Peddling straight ahead and avoiding eye contact with the soldiers, they moved on unhindered and reached Hamburg without incident. It took them about an hour to work their way from the outskirts of the city to their parents' apartment. The story continues:

We rang the bell from downstairs so we would not give our parents a heart attack. They were happy, and our father asked us how we got here. He was surprised when he heard our story. . . . An elderly lady came downstairs and offered Gisela and me her spare room. We were so grateful for it and thanked our Heavenly Father also for the safe arrival at home.

In the spring of 1945, Herta Schmidt was far from home in Saxony. She and a girlfriend had been transferred to a location near Chemnitz as employees in a war-critical industry. Only eighteen years old at the time, the two girls were in the area between the invading Soviets and the invading Americans. Not wanting to wait until the Soviets arrived (everybody had heard tales of their misdeeds), the girls left their work and began the long trip home—a distance of nearly 250 miles through territory invaded by the armies of three different enemy powers.

It didn't seem that dangerous because there were people [refugees] from all over Germany going all different directions. In fact, we had packed a suitcase and it was really heavy. We finally just gave it away and walked home with what we were wearing. We had five pounds of sugar that we had gotten from ration coupons, and we gave it to people who let us stay overnight in their homes. . . . We always had to hide when enemy soldiers came by on patrols. It took us about a month to get home.

When Herta and her friend reached the river that had been established as the border between the Soviet and the British occupation zones, they showed the British guards their papers confirming their right to enter the zone and proceed home to Hamburg. The fact that they could make the long journey without tragic experiences is remarkable.

Willi Sperling was assigned home-guard duties, which enabled him to be with his family when the

war came to an end in Hamburg in April 1945. As his wife, Wally, later wrote, “Finally we didn’t need to worry about air raids anymore; finally there would be no more dangerous interruptions in the night; this we felt was a great blessing. . . . A new phase of our lives began on May 8, 1945.” Looking back on those difficult years, she wrote, “How often during the war did I consider the message of 1 Nephi 3:7. . . . This strengthened my testimony of the truth of the gospel. Without my knowledge I wouldn’t have been able to bear it. Despite all of the trials, I always had a sense of well-being deep inside.”³²

In September 1945, Werner Schmidt was released from a POW camp in Belgium and returned home to Hamburg. While a POW, he had lost his New Testament in a camp flood. “It was a great loss to me,” he said. He had been reminded also of the importance of keeping God’s commandments and standards of conduct. At seventeen, he knew little about the facts of life. The conversations of other POWs revealed a lack of respect for women and moral cleanliness that shocked him. In general, he found his peace and comfort in the Lord. He was thrilled to be in his parents’ home, but they were reluctant to celebrate while two of their sons were still missing. They eventually returned. The family of branch president Alfred Schmidt lost one son to the war but retained their home and were thus full of hope in postwar Germany.

“I think that the war just melted us [Latter-day Saints] together more than anything,” explained Herta Schmidt. “As members we cared for each other like a large family, a branch.” Another branch member, Ursula Seemann, echoed the thought: “The life in Church was the reason why we stayed strong and kept going. We were so excited to see each other whenever we had the chance.”

IN MEMORIAM

The following members of the Barmbek Branch did not survive World War II:

Peter August Claessens b. Hamburg 21 Nov 1862; son of Carl Kratzel and Johanna Catherina Claessens; bp.

25 Jun 1926; conf. 27 Jun 1926; ord. deacon 9 Oct 1927; d. old age 5 Aug 1943 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 452; FHL microfilm 25741, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

Waldemar Erwin Drachenberg b. Liebenow, Urnswalde, Brandenburg, 3 Aug 1923; son of Friedrich Drachenburg and Hulda Kopp; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; ord. deacon 1 Oct 1939; paratrooper; corporal; d. in training France, 12 Mar 1943; bur. Mont-de-Huisnes, France (E. Frank; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 959; FHL microfilm 25756, 1935 census; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

Mathias Hackner b. Großmehring, Ingolstadt, Bayern, 31 Dec 1856; son of Bartholomäus Hackner and Anna Maria Kaltenecker; bp. 25 Dec 1921; conf. 25 Dec 1921; m. Hamburg 21 Aug 1897, Maria Franziska Mundt; 2 children; d. old age Barmbek, Hamburg, 28 Dec 1942 (FHL microfilm 68783, no. 49; CHL CR 275 8, no. 620; IGI; FHL microfilm 162769, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Wilhelm Carl Ferdinand Hintz b. Aschersleben, Magdeburg, Sachsen, 4 Jun 1894; son of Wilhelm Carl Ferdinand Hintz and Emma Becker; bp. 7 Mar 1929; conf. 7 Mar 1929; ord. deacon 5 May 1935; d. tuberculosis 7 Oct 1943 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 141; IGI)

August Kannwischer b. Mücelin, Poland, 19 Sep 1855; son of Christian Kannwischer and Luise Geisler; bp. 5 Nov 1923; conf. 5 Nov 1923; ord. deacon 8 Mar 1925; ord. elder 8 Oct 1934; m. Pauline Krüger; d. old age 25 Jul 1944 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 963, FHL microfilm 271376, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Paul Fritz Isaak Koch b. Hamburg 20 Sep 1906; son of Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Koch and Auguste Caroline Sirstins; bp. 17 May 1923; conf. 17 May 1923; ord. deacon 14 Mar 1926; d. burns, POW camp, Caen, France, 9 Sep 1945 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 81; IGI)

Edmund Kopp b. Konojad, Strassburg, Westpreußen, 21 Jan 1905; son of Ludwig Kopp and Paulina Karoline Krueger; bp. 6 Nov 1924; conf. 6 Nov 1924; m. Landsberg/Warthe, Brandenburg, 2 Aug 1930, Else Anna Luckmann; 5 children; k. in battle Russia 1945 (E. K. Biebau; FHL microfilm no. 271381, 1925 and 1935 censuses; FS)

Franz Heinrich Köster b. 22 November 1910; son of Franz Friedrich Ernst Köster and Auguste Wilhelmine Abeling; bp. 17 May 1923; conf. 17 May 1923; corporal; d. POW Caen, France, 9 Sep 1946; bur. La Cambe, France (FHL 68783:76; FHL microfilm 271381, 1925 and 1935 censuses; FS; www.volksbund.de)

Gerd Luhmann b. Wandsbek, Schleswig-Holstein, 19 Nov 1925; son of Franz Wilhelm Luhmann and Carla Adele Schröder; bl. 7 Mar 1926; bp. 18 Sep 1933; conf. 24 Sep 1933; d. scarlet fever 11 Mar or Aug 1941 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 83; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 376; IGI)

Richard Friedrich Momburg b. Hamburg 26 Jun 1936; son of Alban Otto Momburg and Anna M. Koch; d. stroke 26 Mar 1942 (CHL CR 275 8, reel 2426, no. 99; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 325)

Richard Paul Otto Prüss b. Hamburg 25 Jun 1925; son of Richard Rudolf Ernst Prüss and Rosalie Erika Marta Mertens; bl. 6 Sep 1925; bp. 18 Sep 1933; conf. 24 Sep 1933; ord. deacon 1941; corporal; k. in battle Western Front 14 Aug 1944; bur. Champigny-St. Andre, France (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 182; www.volksbund.de; IGI)



Fig. 2. Richard Prüss. (H. Pruess Mueller)

Ernst August Schmidt b. Hamburg 26 Jul 1913; son of Alfred Schmidt and Anne Naujoks; bp. 25 Dec 1921; ord. elder; m. Wandsbek, Schleswig-Holstein, 3 Jul 1937, Helene Amanda Teichfischer; 1 child; rifleman; d. in field hospital 2/591 at Smolensk, Russia, 10 Feb 1942 (W. Schmidt autobiography; IGI, PRF; www.volksbund.de)

Johannes Carsten Friedrich Richard Sievers b. Neumünster, Schleswig-Holstein, 5 October 1855; d. Wandsbek, Hamburg, 5 June 1941 (FS)

Karl Friedrich Stein b. Hamm, Westfalen, 18 Oct 1902; son of Wilhelm Stein and Martha Auguste Böse; bp. 27 or 31 Oct 1923; conf. 27 or 31 Oct 1923; ord. deacon 11 Jul 1932; ord. teacher 11 Sep 1933; m. Hamburg 18 Oct 1923, Bertha Wilhelmina Maria Knopf; 1 child; soldier; k. in battle 10 Dec 1942 or Krakow, Poland, 3 Jun 1941 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 158; www.volksbund.de; CHL CR 275 8, no. 826; CHL 68783, no. 182)

NOTES

1. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
2. Wally Möhrke Sperling, interview by the author in German, Hamburg, Germany, August 15, 2006; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
3. Irmgard Schmidt Nigbur, interview by the author, Sandy, UT, February 20, 2009.
4. Herta Schmidt Wobbe, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, January 23, 2009.
5. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
6. Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, *The Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 33–34.
7. Rita Fischer Frampton, autobiography (unpublished).
8. Werner Schmidt, autobiography (unpublished), 3.
9. Ibid.
10. Wally Möhrke Sperling, autobiography (unpublished, 2006), 1.
11. Schmidt, autobiography, 4.
12. Edeltraud Kopp Biebau and Werner Kopp, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, May 3, 2009.
13. In fact, the closest LDS temple to Hamburg, Germany, at the time was in Salt Lake City. No members of the Church in the West German Mission are known to have married in the temple before World War II.
14. Sperling, autobiography, 2.
15. The Fischer children were by no means the only LDS teenagers to participate in the confirmation ceremonies of their Lutheran and Catholic friends in those days. The practice might compare with the tradition of the baccalaureate program associated with high school graduation in some communities in the United States.
16. Ursula Betty Seemann, telephone interview with Judith Sartowski in German, March 12, 2008.
17. Block wardens were responsible for seeing that everybody left their apartments and went down into the basements as soon as the alarms sounded.
18. Schmidt, autobiography, 4.
19. Sperling, autobiography, 4.
20. See the description of firestorms in the Hamburg District chapter. See also the Dresden Altstadt section in Roger P. Minert, *In Harm's Way: East German Latter-day Saints in World War II* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009).
21. Sperling, autobiography, 4.
22. Schmidt, autobiography, 4.
23. Since the annexation of Austria to Germany in 1938, the border was no longer international and thus not guarded during 1938–45.
24. Werner Schmidt, autobiography, 5.
25. Years later Georg would tease his wife about how she chased him and he could not run away fast enough. He joined the Church after the war.
26. Schmidt, autobiography, 4–5. In those days, LDS branches used small glass cups for the sacrament. Several eyewitnesses have reported breaking ice that had formed in those cups in order to drink the water.
27. Schmidt, autobiography, 6–7.
28. Ibid., 7.
29. Sperling, autobiography, 5.
30. By January 1945, Hitler took up residence in the chancellery in Berlin and was rarely seen in public again. He committed suicide there on April 30, 1945.
31. Schmidt, autobiography, 8–9.
32. Sperling, autobiography, 5.