

and functioning at the end of the war. The four branches outside of the city were substantially weakened but were all holding meetings again by the end of the summer of 1945.



Fig. 4. Fritz Fischer was the president of the Berlin District throughout World War II. (Instructor)

NOTES

1. Cornelius Ryan, *The Last Battle: The Classic History of the Battle of Berlin* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 26.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
3. Fritz Fischer was known as *Käsefischer* (the Fischer who deals in cheese), while a man named Karl Fischer in the Berlin East Branch was known as *Mistfischer* (the Fischer who deals in manure). Both terms were used affectionately among the members.
4. Helmut Fischer, interview by the author in German, Leipzig, Germany, June 2, 2007; summarized in English by the author.
5. Karl A. Keller, "Enthusiasm Is His Motto," *Instructor*, April 1956, 100–101. See also the chapter on the Selbongen Branch in this history.
6. Richard Ranglack, autobiography (unpublished); private collection.
7. Horst Schwermer, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, December 8, 2006.
8. Ryan, *Last Battle*, 520.
9. Felix Escher, *Luftbildplan Berlin, 1945* (Berlin: Bien & Giersch Projektagentur GmbH, 2004), 6–7.

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BERLIN CENTER  
BRANCH

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The heart of Germany's capital city of Berlin was the district called Mitte (Center). This part of town featured the majority of the city's governmental, historical, and cultural sites. The most famous street, Unter den Linden, ran from Brandenburg Gate east to the Spree River, where the palace of Germany's former emperors stood. All of this territory was included in the Berlin

Center Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as were the suburbs Prenzlauer Berg, Friedrichshain, and Weissensee.

Berlin Center Branch <sup>1</sup>	1939
Elders	10
Priests	5
Teachers	11
Deacons	12
Other Adult Males	49
Adult Females	154
Male Children	15
Female Children	11
<i>Total</i>	267

The Center Branch met in rooms on Hufelandstrasse, several blocks east of Alexanderplatz. Helmut Fischer recalled the rooms that were in the second Hinterhaus (a row of houses behind buildings lining the street):

Our church rooms were in a factory building in the Hufelandstrasse 45, second Hinterhaus. We had a sign on the street with the Church's name. You went through two buildings, then upstairs [to the third floor]. There was a long corridor with the restrooms on the right, two classrooms, then a door, then the main meeting room. "The Glory of God Is Intelligence" was embroidered on the pulpit; then [there were] the usual pictures of Jesus.<sup>2</sup>

Helmut estimated the Sunday attendance at perhaps one hundred persons. With priesthood and auxiliary meetings held on various afternoons or evenings in the week, "we were constantly going to church," he recalled.

The Fischer family lived in the Weissensee suburb of Berlin and had to walk about a half hour to church. Helmut's father was Fritz Fischer, the president of the Berlin District throughout the war years. He was known as the Käsefischer (cheese Fischer) because of his employment at a company where cheese and other milk products were manufactured.<sup>3</sup> Brother Fischer used the public transportation



Fig. 1. Elder Cannon and Brother Alden with a picture of Adolf Hitler in 1938. (H. Kupitz)

system nearly every Sunday to visit one of the ten branches in the district.

When Helmut was ten years old, the German army attacked Poland:

We were on school vacation when the war began, at our grandmother's place in the country. . . . I can remember hearing about it from the radio. It did not affect us that much at the time. . . . My parents talked very little about politics. We were trained to accept that stuff [National Socialism, etc.]. We kept the laws of God, so we had no problems with the laws of the land. . . . I don't remember anybody speaking about Hitler in church or praying for him.

The Fischer family had lived in an apartment house on Gustav-Adolf-Strasse since 1935. In an air raid in 1943, the upper floors of the building were hit, and a fire began. Brother Fischer saw the fire from the roof of the factory where he worked a few blocks away and quickly mobilized his colleagues to hurry to the home. While they removed some of the family's furniture from the building, others fought the fires upstairs. According to Helmut, "The neighbors lost their stuff and were angry that we had help getting our stuff out." The Fischer family found a new apartment just around the corner, where they lived until long after the war.

Roswitha Würscher was born in 1940. Her earliest memories were of the constant



Fig. 2. Adolf Hitler greets a crowd of well-wishers from the balcony of the Chancellery Building in downtown Berlin. (H. Kupitz)

air raids. On several occasions, she saw the "Christmas trees" (illumination flares dropped by lead planes to mark the target) in the sky. "I really didn't know what they meant," she admitted. The family used their own basement as the air-raid shelter: "The door to the basement was under a carpet, and then we put a table on top of that. We went down there when the raids came."<sup>4</sup>

The fact that little children did not understand the full significance of war, air raids, and death is evident from this story told by Roswitha:

I remember seeing something black lying on the street. I had no idea what it was, so while my mother was not paying attention to me, I ran over there to stare at it. It was the body of a person who burned to death. Then my mother saw me and pulled me quickly away.

As a schoolboy, Helmut Fischer had gone with his classmates to see the exterior of the concentration camp at Sachsenhausen near Oranienburg (just north of Berlin): "They were trying to educate us. It was interesting to see those places from the outside. The prisoners were POWs or criminals. We were really not told what was going on there."<sup>5</sup>

The meeting rooms of the Berlin East Branch at Frankfurter Allee were destroyed early in the war, and the branch moved around several times. By 1944, the branch members could no longer find rooms for their meetings, and it was decided that they should meet with the Center Branch. By that time, several members of both branches had lost their lives in the war or had moved away from the catastrophic conditions in Berlin.

The church rooms on Hufelandstrasse were eventually damaged in an air raid and much of the furnishings and branch property were lost. A school nearby served as the next meeting place until some rooms in a factory near the Friedrichshain Park became available.

On the ground floor, below the defunct church meeting rooms at the Hufelandstrasse address, the swimming pool and spa facility had survived the air raids. The last convert baptisms into the Church during World War II took place there. According to observer Heinz Kupitz, "My Aunt Elisabeth Tirsche and Anita, Gisela, and Wolfgang Kelm were baptized, and we stood around holding candles." In the words of Wolfgang Kelm (born 1932), who was twelve at the time:

It was decided to forgo the customary permission from the father and husband of baptismal candidates and baptize [my family] before the world came to an end. At this time the Russian armies stood at the gates of Berlin, awaiting the order for the final assault on the capital of the crumbling Third Reich. So on February 25, 1945, in the little pool in that factory building in Berlin, my mother, my sister, and myself were

baptized by one Friedrich Wernick. The water was 7 degrees Celsius [44 degrees Fahrenheit]. Even though I was young, I did not like the cold water much.<sup>6</sup>

Since 1942, Helmut Fischer had been an apprentice in a dental technology program. Due to his very small stature, he was not a favorite of his supervisor, "a 150 percent National Socialist who didn't like little guys." Barely sixteen years old, Helmut was still in that laboratory in March 1945 when his Hitler Youth company was mustered into service to man antiaircraft batteries with women and girls. When he reported for duty on April 20, Hitler's birthday, the Soviet Army was at the outskirts of Berlin. The night before the city surrendered (April 30–May 1), the commander of Helmut's unit told them to make their way to their homes as best they could. From their location by the Victory Column in the middle of the Tiergarten Park, Helmut needed to cross rivers and canals where the bridges had been destroyed.

Helmut was captured by the invaders before he had a chance to reach home or to exchange his Hitler Youth uniform for civilian clothing. Because of his military appearance, he was classified as a soldier and marched through several towns toward the east. On the way toward Landsberg, about seventy-five miles east of Berlin, he ran into a member of the Spandau Branch, a Brother Nöske:

I recognized him from different meetings, so I went up and told him who I was. He had Church books with him, so we talked about that in the evening. Then they [their Soviet captors] took his books and threw them into a big pile [to burn them].

Helga Meiszus Birth (born 1920) of the Tilsit Branch had been serving as a missionary since October 1944. She was assigned to the mission office, which was housed in the apartment building where the family of Paul

Langheinrich (second counselor to the mission supervisor) lived. Sister Birth, a war widow, kept a detailed journal during the last month of the war and recorded these remarks on Sunday, April 22, 1945:

I decided to visit the Center Branch with Brother Langheinrich and Brother Patermann. . . . It took more than an hour to get to the meetinghouse. We did not find anybody there. A direct hit by an artillery shell had made a hole in the wall of the main meeting room and the damage to the room's contents was extensive. One of the members had already tried to clean up the mess but was interrupted in the attempt. That part of town was under such heavy artillery bombardment that the members could not get to the meetings.<sup>7</sup>

Roswitha Würscher remembered the end of the war on May 8, 1945: "I heard on the radio, 'The war is over!' and my first thought

was 'Can I go out and play now?' Of course I could not because the Russians were all over. The word went around that the Russians were good to children, so my brother and I went out [to look for food]."

From one day to the next, the population of Berlin began a hand-to-mouth existence, and Roswitha Würscher learned various tricks of procuring food (such as appearing to be very ill or sneaking onto unguarded supply trucks). While the branch members hungered and tried to keep out of the way of their Soviet oppressors, they found time to gather for Church meetings, often in the homes of members.

Young Helmut Fischer had been moved by train (in a cattle car, as was the prevailing mode of transportation for prisoners of war) as far east as Stargard in Pomerania. Fortunately, he was never sent to the Soviet Union. Due to



Fig. 3. The Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church in downtown Berlin in about 1940. Zoologischer Garten is Berlin's famous zoo. The church was destroyed in the same attack that hit the mission home. (H. Kupitz)

his small stature, he was classified by a German doctor as “category four: undernourished” and released from captivity, “Refugees were everywhere. I found a spot on top of a train back to Berlin. On July 18, the day after my father’s birthday, I was home, and they were thrilled. My mother was so scared for me. They had no idea where I was.”

The Fischer family had been fortunate to survive the invasion of the Red Army. While enemy soldiers ransacked the Fischer apartment, the family hid in the basement and were thus spared vandalism and assault. Brother Fischer’s business was needed by the conquerors, so his employment was secure. With the war over, the Fischers joined other survivors of the Berlin Center Branch and met to continue their worship services. In general, the war had extracted a heavy toll from the Berlin Center Branch.

#### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Friedrich Wilhelm Barthel** b. Prossmarke, Sachsen, Preußen 8 Mar 1870; son of Friedrich Barthel and Friederike Schulze; bp. 23 Oct 1939; conf. 23 Oct 1939; d. stomach cancer 16 May 1943 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 2, no. 59; IGI)

**Gloschard** (husband) k. in battle (Würscher-Bartsch)

**Wilhelmina Göring** b. Gross Dombrowa, Woischnik, Schlesien, Preußen 22 May 1852; dau. of Matheus Göring and Rosina Bahn; bp. 10 Jun 1910; conf. 10 Jun 1910; d. 9 Aug 1942 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 64; IGI)

**Anna Hedwig Gretzbach** b. Berlin, Brandenburg, Preußen 19 Apr 1885; dau. of Erdmann Johann Gretzbach and Marie Lier; bp. 22 Aug 1899; conf. 22 Aug 1899; m. 11 Mar 1912, Max Jätsch; d. 3 Jun 1941 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 95; IGI)

**Heinrich Carl Haberland** b. Zeipen, Breslau, Schlesien, Preußen 16 Mar 1881; son of Carl Haberland and Johanna Sohn; bp. 28 Jun 1913; conf. 28 Jun 1913; m. 12 Oct 1903, Olga Kaliebe; d. 10 Jan 1941 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 72; IGI)

**Helene Hallas** b. Lorensdorf, Landsberg/Warthe, Brandenburg, Preußen 29 Ma 1909; dau. of Walentin

Hallas and Franziska Kupeler; bp. 14 Apr 1924; conf. 14 Apr 1924; d. 30 May 1942 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 77; IGI)

**Günter Heinz Rudi Hirsekorn** b. Berlin, Brandenburg, Preußen 6 Aug 1919; son of Heinrich Albert Wilhelm Hirsekorn and Bertha Auguste Dorothea Kähler; bp. 6 Jun 1933; conf. 6 Jun 1933; ord. deacon 4 Feb 1934; k. in battle 9 Sep 1942 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 341; IGI)

**Johanna Luise Ernestine Hoffmann** b. Thiergarten, Wohlan, Schlesien, Preußen 8 Nov 1865; dau. of Wilhelm Friedrich Hoffmann and Johanna Vierveg; bp. 8 Sep 1928; conf. 8 Sep 1928; m. Berlin, Brandenburg, Preußen 12 Jan 1910, Heinrich Beck; d. heart ailment Berlin 12 Jun 1943 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 14; IGI)

**Helmut Gustav Hustadt** b. Wuppertal, Elberfeld, Rheinland, Preußen 28 Jun 1910; son of August Hustadt and Louise Hause; bp. 27 Jun 1931; conf. 27 Jun 1931; ord. deacon 3 Sep 1933; d. wounds 20 Aug 1942 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 318; IGI)

**Marie Betti Helene Kowalewski** b. Stettin, Stettin, Pommern, Preußen 26 Apr 1898; dau. of Friedrich Kowalewski and Selma Schroeder; m. — Radtke; d. old age 1943 (CHL CR 375 8 #2458, 1378–79)

**Hans Joachim Krickhuhn** b. Demmin, Pommern, Preußen 25 Oct 1922; son of Hermann Johann Joachim Krickhuhn and Margarete Zerull; bp. 9 Oct 1932; conf. 9 Oct 1932; ord. deacon 31 Oct 1937; non-commissioned officer; k. in battle Marlaz, Reval, Estonia 19 Feb 1943; bur. Tallinn-Maarjamäe, Estonia (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 2, no. 53; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Hermann Wilhelm Krickhuhn** b. Demmin, Pommern, Preußen 25 Oct 1922; son of Hermann Johann Joachim Krickhuhn and Margarethe Zerull (IGI); bp. 28 Aug 1937; conf. 28 Aug 1937; ord. deacon 26 Apr 1942; seaman; k. in battle 7 or 8 Apr 1945; bur. Leese Military Cemetery, Germany (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 2, no. 56, IGI; AF; PRF; www.volksbund.de)

**Werner Alwin Franz Pegelow** b. Berlin, Brandenburg, Preußen 24 Dec 1912; son of Hermann Pegelow and Auguste Becker; bp. 12 Apr 1924; conf. 13 Apr 1924; m. 5 Sep 1934, Gertrud Marie Otto; private; k. in battle Ilino-Wjasma, Russia 10 Oct 1941; bur. Ilino-Wjasma (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 2, no. 35; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Max Otto Stoerhaas** b. Schwedenhöhe, Bromberg, Posen, Preußen 11 Feb 1911; son of Wilhelm Stoerhaas and Meta Arehan; k. in battle 1943/44 (CHL Microfilm no. 2458, form 42 FP, Pt. 37, 726–27; IGI)

**Pauline Traugott** b. Oberlauterbach, Sachsen 11 Sep 1856; dau. of Christian Traugott and Margarethe Sperl; bp. 19 Jul 1921; conf. 24 Jul 1921;

m. — Goldmann; d. old age 1941 or 1945 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 62)

**Heinz Johannes Samuel Vielstich** b. Kreuz, Pommern, Preußen 5 Dec 1923; son of Karl Friedrich Vielstich and Frieda Margarete Hildegard Quolke; bp. 11 May 1932; lance corporal; d. Greece 8 Jul 1943; bur. Dionyssos-Rapendoza, Greece (IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Jared Nephi Friedrich Vielstich** b. Kreuz, Pommern, Preußen 29 Oct 1925; son of Karl Friedrich Vielstich and Frieda Margarete Hildegard Quolke; bp. 29 Oct 1933; private; d. 6 km south of Włodawa, Bug, Poland 22 Jul 1944; bur. Pulawy Military Cemetery, Poland (IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Kurt Herbert Erwin Vielstich** b. Kreuz, Pommern, Preußen 1 Oct 1915; son of Karl Friedrich Vielstich and Frieda Margarete Hildegard Quolke; bp. 5 Apr 1927; lance corporal; d. Braye, Chemin-des-Dames, France 5 Jun 1940; bur. Fort-de-Malmaison, France (FHL Microfilm 245291; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Luise Marie Völlmer** b. Frankfurt/Oder, Brandenburg, Preußen 25 Feb 1896; dau. of Marie Völlmer; bp. 12 Jul 1916; conf. 12 Jul 1916; m. Berlin, Preußen 12 Nov 1921, Erich Franz Will; 2 children; d. Berlin 21 Mar 1943 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 273; IGI)

**Erich Otto Wiese** b. Berlin, Brandenburg, Preußen 20 May 1917; son of Emma Wiese; bp. 20 Jun 1925; conf. 21 Jun 1925; d. 9 Nov 1944 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 259; IGI)

**Erika Giesela Will** b. Berlin, Preußen 31 Aug 1923; dau. of Franz Erich Will and Marie Luise Völlmer; bp. 20 Jul 1932; conf. 20 Jul 1932; d. Berlin 22 Feb 1941 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 1, no. 275; *Sonntagsgruss*, no. 14, 6 Apr 1941, 56; IGI)

**Erich Alfred Winter** b. Stettin, Pommern, Preußen (IGI) 5 Jul 1895; son of Hermann Winter and Helene Pfahrkraft; bp. 25 Jun 1927; conf. 25 Jun 1927; m. 15 Apr 1922, Elisabeth Marie Daniel (div.); d. mental illness 1940 (FHL Microfilm 68809, book 2, no. 5; IGI)

**Dietmar Alexander Würscher** b. Berlin, Preußen 11 Nov 1941; son of Otto Karl Würscher and Kasimira Viktoria Cwiklinski; d. diphtheria 8 Jan 1945 (Würscher-Bartsch; IGI; FHL Microfilm 68809, book 2, no. 96)

**Gerhard Wilhelm Würscher** b. Berlin, Preußen 29 Sep 1921; son of Otto Karl Wuerscher and Kasmira Viktoria Cwiklinski; bp. 5 Aug 1930; k. in battle Iwan See, Naswa Fluss, Pakalowo, Tschernosem, Russia 22 or 24 Jun 1944 (Würscher-Bartsch; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Udo Joachim Würscher** b. Berlin, Preußen 6 Oct 1925; son of Otto Karl Wuerscher and Kasimira Viktoria Cwiklinski; bp. 15 Sep 1934; k. in battle 24 Jan

1945; bur. Wieszowa, Poland (Würscher-Bartsch; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

## NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. Helmut Fischer, interview by the author in German, Leipzig, Germany, June 2, 2007.
3. The term differentiated him from Karl Fischer in the East Branch, who was known as the Mistfischer ("manure Fischer"). He owned a company that collected and disposed of manure with a fleet of horse-drawn wagons and trucks.
4. Roswitha Würscher Bartsch, interview by the author in German, Berlin, Germany, August 21, 2006.
5. What was going on there was, of course, the official incarceration of Jews and other undesirable civilians (criminals). Many thousands would be put to death or die of various causes before the camp was liberated by the Russians in April 1945.
6. Wolfgang Kelm, autobiography (unpublished, 1997), 15; private collection. Wolfgang's father was in the German army at the time, and his whereabouts could not be determined.
7. Helga Meizsus Birth Meyer, diary (unpublished), April 22, 1945, 3; private collection; trans. the author.

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## BERLIN EAST BRANCH

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At the onset of World War II, the Berlin East Branch met at Frankfurter Allee 307. As Heinz Kupitz (born 1931) recalled, the rooms that the members had renovated were on the third floor of a four-story factory building. It was the first building next to the corner of Postkammerstrasse. There was a main meeting room, a classroom off to the side, and three more classrooms located in the main building on the street.<sup>1</sup> According to Hans Joachim Arndt (born 1933), there was an old pump organ in the main meeting room, and somebody initiated a campaign to replace it with a pipe organ if enough money could be donated.<sup>2</sup>