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# BERLIN DISTRICT

## *East German Mission*



The capital of Hitler's Germany was a metropolis of 4,321,000 people in 1939.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, Berlin was home to more members of the LDS Church than any other city in the Reich. There were six branches in the city, and four more outside of town completed the Berlin District of the East German Mission.

In the heart of the historic province of Brandenburg, the Berlin District stretched north to the border of Mecklenburg, northeast to Pomerania, southwest to Potsdam, and due west to Rathenow. From the center of the district, it took about ninety minutes to reach Eberswalde and Rathenow by train. There was also a group of Saints meeting in Leest, just six miles west of Potsdam.

Berlin District <sup>2</sup>	1939	1940	1941	1942
Elders	73	75		
Priests	30	31		
Teachers	38	41		
Deacons	61	56		
Other Adult Males	193	192		
Adult Females	776	775		
Male Children	62	62		
Female Children	36	42		
<i>Total</i>	1,269	1,274	1,186	1,291



Fig. 1. The Berlin District included ten units of the Church in and around the capital city.

The 1,270 members in the district constituted 17 percent of the entire mission population. Just prior to World War II, Richard Ranglack of the Berlin Moabit Branch was serving as district president. When he was called as first counselor to mission supervisor Herbert Klopfer after the evacuation of the American missionaries, he was replaced by Friedrich (Fritz) Fischer of the Berlin Center Branch.<sup>3</sup> “My father was very busy as the district president and had lots of Church work to do. . . . He traveled all over the mission on the train. The Church paid his tickets,” recalled his son Helmut.<sup>4</sup>



*Fig. 2. A district priesthood meeting held in 1941 in the Berlin Center Branch rooms in the Hufelandstrasse.*

Fritz Fischer was a remarkable missionary. In 1918, he had become acquainted with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints while living in Berlin. He took the message of the restored gospel back to his home town of Selbongen, East Prussia, where he was instrumental in bringing dozens of relatives and friends into the Church and establishing a new branch there.<sup>5</sup>

A district conference was held in Berlin every spring and fall through the end of 1944, according to Richard Ranglack.<sup>6</sup> Several members recall attending district conferences in the Lehrervereinshalle (teachers' union hall) in downtown Berlin.<sup>7</sup> From mission notes it is clear that all Church programs were being carried out in the district, including genealogical research and recreational activities.

As is told in the individual histories of the branches in the Berlin District, several meeting rooms were destroyed by 1945, and branch leaders were compelled to seek out new and

temporary meeting places. Most of the unmarried men and young fathers in the district were drafted into the military, and many of the mothers left the city with their children to find less dangerous places to live. Entire LDS families moved away after losing their homes or when offices and factories were moved to rural locations and employees were required to move with them.

By 1944, Berlin was under constant attack from the air—by the British by night and the Americans by day. By the time the city was conquered in May 1945, approximately 150,000 Berlin civilians had lost their lives, and more than one million had left the city.<sup>8</sup> At least half of the members of the LDS branches in Berlin were still there to witness the hopeless battle fought by the harried German defenders against the invading Red Army. When the dust settled, more than one-third of the dwellings of Berlin were no longer inhabitable.<sup>9</sup>



Fig. 3. Major Church locations in Berlin in 1939: 1 = mission office; 2 = Langheinrich home; 3 = Moabit Branch; 4 = Center Branch; 5 = East Branch; 6 = Neukölln Branch; 7 = Schöneberg Branch.

The Air War over Berlin, 1939–45	
Air-raid warnings	389
Air raids	approx. 300
Residential units destroyed	36%
Total structures destroyed	21% (West Berlin), 15% (East Berlin)
Rubble from destroyed structures	Estimated 98 million cubic yards (75 million cubic meters)
Public air-raid shelter space available	approx. 25%
“Battle of Berlin” (from the air) lasted from 21 November 1944 to 25 March 1945 (British Royal Air Force and American Army Air Corps)	33 air raids 9,100 airplanes in action 500 airplanes shot down 4,000 civilian deaths 340,000 homes destroyed 400,000 people homeless

Civilians killed 1939–1945	52,000
Civilians killed spring 1945	Estimated 100,000
German soldiers killed spring 1945	Estimated 50,000–75,000
Russian soldiers killed spring 1945	Estimated 100,000
Women raped spring 1945	20,000 to 100,000

The battle for Berlin ended at the Zoo Flak Towers (Schöneberg Branch territory), while the formal surrender of Berlin took place in an apartment in Karlshorst (Neukölln Branch territory), where field marshal Wilhelm Keitel signed for the German Army High Command. Despite the sufferings and destruction of the war, five LDS branches in the city were alive

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