

**Ernestine Wilhelmine Marie Werner** b. Ramka, Riga, Latvia 6 Aug 1890; dau. of Johann Friedrich Werner and Ernestine Wilhelmine Schreiber; bp. 21 Jun 1924; m. Berlin, Brandenburg, Preußen 20 Jul 1920, Hermann Julius Rudolf Otto; 2 children; k. air raid Berlin 16 Dec 1943 (IGI)

**Kaethe Elisabeth Westphal** b. Tilsit, Ostpreußen, Preußen 15 Jan 1909; dau. of Friedrich Westphal and Johanne Mansch; m. ——— Knobloch; d. liver operation 1941 (CHL CR 375 8 #2458, 726–27)

## NOTES

1. East German Mission, notes, September 1, 1938, LR 2428 2, Church History Library.
2. Armin Langheinrich, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, December 15, 2006.
3. Presiding Bishopric, “Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955,” CR 4 12, 257.
4. William Werner, *The Trail of a Common Man: William Werner’s Story*.
5. Sigurd Sadowski, interview by the author, Sandy, Utah, November 21, 2006.
6. Sigurd Sadowski, autobiography (unpublished), 4; private collection.
7. Ibid., 9.
8. Ibid., 10.
9. Werner, *Trail of a Common Man*, 50.
10. Ibid., 55–59.
11. Rüdiger Lehnardt, interview by Erin C. Collins and Jennifer Heckmann, Orem, Utah, June 9, 2006.
12. Mathilde Petersohn Lehnardt, “My History” (unpublished personal history, 1977), 25–26; private collection.
13. Maria Langheinrich Wagner, interview by the author, Sandy, Utah, April 14, 2006.
14. Allied authorities attempted to destroy the tower in 1947 but failed. It is open for tours today.
15. Germans who married during those years joke that they displayed *Mein Kampf* on the coffee table, but never read it, because it was considered to be a very boring book.
16. Werner, *Trail of a Common Man*, 66, 71.
17. Ibid., 80.
18. Lehnardt, “My History,” 27. A family with five children in Germany at the time was by no means a rarity. However, children too young to care for themselves under wartime conditions represented a particular challenge to parents—mothers often cared for their children alone while the fathers were away at war.
19. Lehnardt, “My History,” 30–31.
20. Sadowski, autobiography, 15.
21. Lehnardt, “My History,” 33.
22. Werner, *Trail of a Common Man*, 81. Claus Graf Schenk von Stauffenberg, a trusted army officer, had placed a briefcase

containing a bomb underneath the table in a conference room at the army headquarters near Rastenburg, East Prussia. Somehow Hitler suffered only superficial injuries. Von Stauffenberg and thousands of suspected accomplices were executed for treason during the next few months.

23. Renate Berger Rudolph, “Survival 1945” (unpublished manuscript); private collection.
24. Sadowski, autobiography, 5.
25. Ibid., 20.
26. See the East German Mission chapter.
27. This probably occurred on May 1, the day after Hitler committed suicide in Berlin.
28. The Hitler salute (right arm lifted straight forward and upward, with the palm down) was instituted in the German armed forces following the abortive attempt on Hitler’s life at Rastenburg, East Prussia on July 20, 1944. This was a measure designed to promote greater loyalty to Hitler on the part of the soldiers.
29. Lehnardt, “My History,” 35–36.
30. Helga Meisus Birth Meyer, diary (unpublished), 2; private collection; trans. by Renate Berger Rudolph.
31. Renate Berger Rudolph, diary (unpublished); private collection.
32. German military authorities surrendered the city of Berlin on May 2, but the war did not end until May 8.
33. Lehnardt, “My History,” 38–39.
34. Detlef Lehnardt, interview by the author, Provo, Utah, April 24, 2008.
35. Werner, *Trail of a Common Man*, 87.
36. Ibid., 91, 96.
37. Ibid., 103.
38. Ibid., 105.

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## BERLIN NEUKÖLLN BRANCH

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The last Sunday of August, as we came out of sacrament meeting, we were met by an unusual sight. Marching down the middle of the street was a group of German soldiers, not in any parade uniform, but in combat clothes, singing as they went. People on both sides of the street went berserk. They waved, threw kisses, laughed, and sang with the soldiers. A current of excitement filled the air, making my own heart pound faster. . . . Everywhere I looked, happy faces beamed—until I looked at my mother. She gathered [my sister] Esther and me close to her, as if trying to protect us from the scene. “Here they are going to war, joyful and laughing. When they come home there will be nothing but misery.”<sup>1</sup>

Such was the recollection of Karola Hilbert regarding the beginning of World War II in Berlin. She was nine years old on the Sunday in question—August 27, 1939—the day after the last American missionaries had departed the East German Mission for Copenhagen, Denmark. The Paul and Maria Hilbert family were members of the Berlin Neukölln Branch.

Berlin Neukölln Branch <sup>2</sup>	1939
Elders	10
Priests	3
Teachers	3
Deacons	6
Other Adult Males	9
Adult Females	79
Male Children	2
Female Children	4
<i>Total</i>	116

Paul Hilbert's employment with the government had required that he move his family from Leipzig to Berlin in 1938. He was pleased to be at work again, having spent five years without employment. As an artist working in oil and water colors, he had refused to join the Nazi Party in 1933, declaring boldly, "I have chosen whom I will serve, and his name is not Adolf Hitler but Jesus Christ."<sup>3</sup> Brother Hilbert had been the branch president in Leipzig for five years and the same calling awaited him in 1938 in the Neukölln Branch in Berlin.

The Neukölln suburb of Berlin was about three miles southeast of the center of the city and directly east of the main airport at Tempelhof. The Neukölln Branch territory extended due south and southeast to the edge of the metropolis, as well as through the suburb of Köpenick to the east. The meeting rooms in late 1938 were located at Hasenheide 119 (near Hermannplatz) in the first Hinterhaus. In early 1939, the branch moved to the Thomasstrasse. Karola Hilbert recalled the rooms in detail:

The first apartment house door you went through from the corner. The corner was a music store. At the first apartment house we went into the courtyard, and across from the courtyard, there was a building that was like a music hall. They used it for concerts and stuff, and they taught the students in the music store, but they had all kinds of instruments, and it was just perfect for us. The entrance to it was on the side of the big hall. You went right, and there was a stand big enough to put chairs on it and have a place where they could talk to the people, and then it was [a] long way to go to the back where we had the folding stairs set up. In the very back, as you look at it, to the right side there was a stair going down into two rooms. The first room was used as a classroom and cloakroom. Then in the next room we had the heating arrangements. There was kind of a heating oven that you had to put coal into and add water. It was a kind of radiator.<sup>4</sup>

The average attendance at meetings may have been seventy-five persons. The branch observed the usual meeting schedule, i.e., Sunday School at 10:00 A.M. and sacrament meeting in the evening. Priesthood and auxiliary meetings were held on Tuesday and Thursday evenings.<sup>5</sup>

Searching for an apartment for his family in 1938, Paul Hilbert was given three addresses to check out. He felt directed to select the apartment at Oppelnerstrasse 6. The inspiration helped save his family because the other two apartments were destroyed during the war.<sup>6</sup>

Paul Hilbert's daughter, Ursula (born 1923), was chosen as one of seven pupils of the eighth grade who were to receive special recognition. However, the school's principal, a member of the Nazi Party, dropped her name from the list because she was not a member of the Bund Deutscher Mädel.<sup>7</sup> At the age of ten, she had not joined the movement, explaining to the principal that she already belonged to a youth group, the Primary organization of her church.

The oldest Hilbert son, Arno, was already in the German army when the war began in September 1939. The second son, Horst (born

1919), was in the Reichsarbeitsdienst in service on the Island of Usedom when war was declared, and his unit was immediately drafted into the army. He spent the rest of the year constructing fortifications on the Baltic Sea coast but was given leave to return to Berlin for Christmas. It was there that he met and became engaged to Irene Buchta.<sup>8</sup>

Maria Hilbert was summoned to her daughter's school one day, where the principal explained to her that the name of her daughter, Esther, "is not suitable and brings a bad reputation to her. Is it possible for you to change the name 'Esther' to another one?" Sister Hilbert was not ashamed of having chosen a Jewish name from the Old Testament and simply requested that her daughter be addressed by her family name—Hilbert. The suggestion was accepted.<sup>9</sup>

Sister Hilbert was a staunch defender of the LDS faith and of her family. A few years earlier, she had been awarded the Nazi Party's Mutterkreuz, a medal given to mothers of five children or more. She was not a member of the Nazi Frauenbund (mothers' league) and never wore the medal.<sup>10</sup>

Sophie Wiesenhütter (born 1922) was a teenager when the war began. She recalled:

We originally attended the Berlin East Branch, but then we moved to Köpenick, Frau-Hollestrasse 9 and became part of the Neukölln Branch. My mother was a faithful member. We had the Book of Mormon in our home, so she read to me and taught me how to pray. My father wasn't a member, but he didn't object to us attending church.<sup>11</sup>

Sophie and her mother needed ninety minutes to get to church; they walked to an S-Bahn station, rode for a while, transferred to another S-Bahn train, then walked a final stretch to the meetings in the Thomasstrasse.

Elisabeth Leupold had moved in 1939 with her non-LDS husband and her children to Köpenick in the Neukölln Branch territory.

Her daughter, Mary-Elizabeth (born 1932), was baptized in 1940 at Grünau in southeast Berlin, where the Dahme River flows into the Spree. Soon after that, she began a gypsylike existence that would last until after the war. Because of the danger of air raids over Berlin, Mary-Elizabeth was first sent by her parents to the eastern German province of Silesia, where she stayed for eight or ten weeks ("The people were cruel to me and beat me," she recalled). Then she went to Schweidnitz, Silesia, to live with two aunts and a grandmother, but things did not work out there either, and she returned to Berlin.<sup>12</sup>

In 1941, at age nine, Mary-Elizabeth Leupold was on the road again. This time she was sent to live with a family in Stroebe in Silesia. Again, the situation was not a good one, and she returned to Berlin. Stroebe was a Catholic community, which may have been a contributing factor in the failure of that experience.

In the early days of the war, young LDS men and women would get together in a southeastern Berlin neighborhood known as Grünau. As Sophie Wiesenhütter and Heinz Kupitz recalled, "Those were informal weekend get-togethers. We just went there and others showed up. You could always count on somebody being there. Activities at Grünau included picnics and walks." With the increasing distractions of the war, the Grünau outings ceased to take place.<sup>13</sup>

As the attacks on Berlin from the air increased in frequency, the Hilbert family developed procedures for reacting to the warning sirens. As Karola recalled:

My suitcase and those of my sisters were packed and waiting by our bedsides. They contained extra clothes, genealogy, identification, ration cards, personal necessities—everything we could think of that might be required should

our home be demolished and we need time to resettle somewhere else.<sup>14</sup>

One day in about 1941, President Hilbert found an older sister in the branch hanging a picture of Adolf Hitler in the meeting room. In his kind manner, he explained, "Sister, this man has no place in our Heavenly Father's house, unless he repents and is baptized." The sister quietly took the picture down. Paul Hilbert, an artist, later painted a sign and hung it on that same spot. It bore the text of Doctrine and Covenants 88:119: "Establish a house, even a house of prayer, a house of fasting, a house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God."<sup>15</sup>

The German army attacked the Soviet Union in June 1941. President Hilbert, whose family had already suffered because of his lack of support of Hitler, was visibly upset. "That fool Sergeant [*sic*] Hitler is fighting the whole world! We've won a few battles, and the [enemy] will win the war. No country can survive battling on all her fronts."<sup>16</sup> According to Latter-day Saint eyewitnesses, many Church members in Germany were of the same mind as this branch president.

On the morning of January 6, 1942, Maria Hilbert awoke at 4:00 A.M. and was inspired to pray intensely for her son, Horst, who was in the Soviet Union. After two hours of fervent prayer for his safety, she awakened her daughters and told them what had happened and asked them to remember that day and time until they heard from him. Two weeks later, a letter arrived from Horst with this story:

Two weeks ago I was in a horrifying situation. With another comrade I was assigned to an outpost early in the morning between 4:00 and 6:00, when the enemy opened fire. We both could not leave or hide ourselves, and the shooting got more and more intense. At that moment, facing any second death, with tears in my eyes, I turned to my comrade and said to him, "I think my mother is praying for me." At

that very moment, while I turned, a bullet hit at stomach height a nearby pole. I followed the direction and found out that if I had not turned to speak with my comrade, the bullet would have hit and killed me.<sup>17</sup>

In 1942, Mary-Elizabeth Leupold's parents sent her away from Berlin again, this time in connection with the *Kinderlandverschickung* (the children's evacuation program that was organized through the schools).<sup>18</sup> She had recently been accepted into a college-preparatory school, and her entire class was evacuated. The first trip took Mary-Elizabeth and her classmates to Bautzen in Silesia and the second trip (also in 1942) to Bansin on the Baltic Sea. The latter experience turned out to be memorably positive: "We swam in the [Baltic Sea] the whole summer and had a wonderful time."<sup>19</sup>



*Fig. 1. The family of Paul and Maria Hilbert in Leipzig in 1936—shortly before they moved to Berlin. (Roper and Reece)*



Unfortunately, she had no contact with the Church while she was away from her family.

In 1943 Mary-Elizabeth Leupold was again on the way to a town far from the terror of Berlin. This time, her class was sent to Glebce, Poland, in the Carpathian Mountains. While there, she had a medical emergency and was sent back alone to Berlin. When the crisis was over, her mother put the eleven-year-old on the night train to return to Poland. Mary-Elizabeth recalled the confusing trip:

The train was filled with soldiers, and I was supposed to go to Warsaw and transfer [there] into another train and then transfer to another train and [finally] get to where I was supposed to go. After four hours the train stopped and everybody had to get off except military. . . . So I was standing there at 2:00 A.M. with my little suitcase, not knowing where to go. Finally, I found a conductor. He said, "Quick, get on the train on track 4!" I jumped onto the moving train and . . . eventually arrived where I was supposed to be.

After about twelve more hours, Mary-Elizabeth reached her destination. During the last leg of the trip, she had fallen asleep, fallen over, and gotten a sizable bruise on her head. Fortunately, even little children could travel alone in safety on the German railway system in those days.

Still another trip away from home awaited young Mary-Elizabeth Leupold a year later. She was again sent away from Berlin with her classmates, this time to Taus in Czechoslovakia. It was by then the summer of 1944. With the Red Army approaching from the east a few months later, transportation became very disorganized, so the teachers decided to take the pupils back to Berlin. What should have been a trip of eight hours became an excursion of four days. Every train carrying military personnel or supplies had priority, and the train carrying the school children was constantly pushed onto a siding track to wait. They arrived home in November.

The first of two tragedies experienced by the Wiesenhütter family occurred in the summer of 1942. Their son, Heinz Alfred, had been serving on the Eastern Front. One day, the parents received a letter from his company commander stating that he had been sent on a mission to take supplies to another unit and had never returned.

The second tragedy suffered by the Wiesenhütter family occurred on December 9, 1943. In the words of daughter Sophie:

We sat in the living room and talked until all of a sudden my mother cried out and fell to the floor. . . . A metal piece had come through the roof, through the ceiling, and hit her. I was sitting next to her in our living room when she was hit. It cut her arm and the leg too; it just hit her in the side. . . . She bled horribly, and we took her to the hospital and she lived just a couple of days. . . . She was conscious through this. She was just moaning and moaning. It was a terrible shock. Then my dad and I were alone.

The Wiesenhütters had chosen not to go to the basement that evening because the illumination flares had been dropped over a neighborhood miles away in northern Berlin, and the sound of the bombs was likewise quite distant. What hit Sister Wiesenhütter was likely a piece of metal torn from a British airplane by antiaircraft fire.

In September 1942, after avoiding death in several combat situations near Stalingrad, Russia, Horst Hilbert was finally granted leave to return to Berlin for three weeks. While there, he married his sweetheart, Irene Buchta, on September 19. An unofficial ceremony was held at church under the direction of Friedrich Fischer, the president of the Berlin District. As Horst later recalled, "It was a wonderful time, having been so close to death, being so close to the beloved wife, and my family. Only too soon, on October 2, 1942, I had to return to the Eastern Front. It was heartbreaking."<sup>20</sup>

In 1943, branch president Paul Hilbert's place of work was moved south to Thuringia, and he bade a sad farewell to his family, promising them that they would be safe if they stayed in their home. He was not released as branch president; in his absence, first counselor Peter Garg directed the affairs of the Neukölln Branch. Although most of the younger men were away from home in military service, there were enough priesthood holders to officiate in the branch. As Ursula Hilbert later recalled:

We had one man blessing the sacrament who was ninety-two years old. We really respected and loved and honored him. Because there were no young men there, we girls helped him clean up, washing, drying, and putting away the little glasses. That's what we did with "Brother Erdmann," and he came every week and blessed the sacrament.

On August 14, 1943, Horst Hilbert must have thought that his good luck at avoiding death and injury at the Eastern Front had come to an end:

I was standing at a somewhat elevated railway track, talking with a friend, Otto Becker. Suddenly I saw a big flame to my right, maybe 10 feet away. Then I felt like having evil smoke pressed into my mouth and felt a hard blow on my right side. When I tried to assess my situation, I found myself lying on the ground with a terrible pain, all at the same time, in my head, right arm, shoulder, breast, stomach, and hind part. And blood was streaming all over me. I had been hit by a mortar shell. Otto Becker got one piece of metal in his neck and was killed instantly. I got about 30 pieces, and I was luckier.<sup>21</sup>

The Germans were in retreat, but fortunately two comrades picked Horst up and carried him back to an aid station. He was eventually transported to Erfurt, Germany, where he recovered from his wounds in about six weeks. He spent the next year as a howitzer instructor, far from the front.

Maria Hilbert and her daughters tried to keep their home in Berlin functioning as war-time conditions became more challenging. "We girls had our bath every Saturday night because we wanted to be clean for church on Sunday," recalled Ursula Hilbert. The cast-iron tub was in the bathroom, and hot water was added as they took turns. The routine was complicated because their home teacher always visited on Saturday nights. The girls did not want him to know what they were doing in the adjacent room as each went through the bathing process, so they had to be especially quiet. "We always wished that he would come on Friday night instead," Ursula explained.

By late 1943, the war was beginning to affect attendance at the meetings of the Neukölln Branch. Men went off to war, families who were bombed out left to find other housing, and mothers with small children sought safety in rural settings. Sophie Wiesenhütter remembered other reasons for declining attendance:

There were quite a few people who stayed away during Hitler's time because they were afraid that they could die. They wanted to have their names stricken from the record. I remember we had a duplicating machine [at church], and a kind of newsletter was printed out and sent to the ward [branch] members. And one Sister Odin wrote some letter [back] because she didn't want them sent to her.

At some point during the air war against the city of Berlin, the Leupold home in Köpenick received a direct hit from an incendiary bomb. It penetrated the roof and came to rest in the baby's crib. The family was in the basement shelter at the time, but Mr. Leupold was able to locate the bomb and remove it before it could start a major fire. As the attacks increased in frequency, the Leupold children had ample opportunities to collect pieces of shrapnel from the streets. As Mary-Elizabeth explained, "We had a little cigar case, so we

took them to school and we traded them; you know kids. It actually is amazing when I think about how you adjust to your environment, to what's going on." As has been seen, it was a rare occasion when the little girl was in Berlin.

All through the war, Ursula Hilbert prayed that her family would survive the conflict. Once, she felt inspired to begin genealogical research on her family. As she later recounted:

Every free minute I would write to different [parish offices] and then fill out family [group] sheets and pedigrees. When the alarm went off, I [would take] my package of genealogy with me [to] the basement. I believed having my ancestors' desires to be redeemed [would] protect me and my family from bombs and sudden death.<sup>22</sup>

The life of teenage girls such as the Hilberts in wartime Berlin was not one of parties, dates, and other entertainment. Many dance halls and movie theaters had been damaged or shut down as the citizens were encouraged to sacrifice for the *Endsieg* (final victory). Having young men as partners was very rare. In short, fun activities were not daily fare. At the office where Karola Hilbert worked, the atmosphere became more and more subdued. Concerned about Nazi spies in the area, she dared not discuss the war (and her hopes that Germany would lose). As she complained to herself,

This isn't right! I'm just becoming a young lady; I should be happy and eager to talk and make new friends. It's all wrong; it's all Hitler's fault. Hitler! The very name [makes] me feel as if someone [was pouring] icy water over my head during the middle of a hot day.<sup>23</sup>

One of the members of the Neukölln Branch was a rarity among German Latter-day Saints: she was a half-Jew, the wife of a Brother Heber. When he was drafted into the German army, she continued to attend church. As time passed, she expressed her concerns to branch leaders that if her husband were killed in battle, she could expect to be rounded up as

part of the Nazi program to rid Germany of all Jews. Certain trustworthy members of the Neukölln Branch then joined in an effort to provide food and housing for Frau Heber for about the last six months of the war.<sup>24</sup>

It was Christmas Eve 1944 in the Leupold home. Mary-Elizabeth's father brought home a Christmas tree, and the family decorated it as best they could. Just as they sat down to dinner, the sirens went off, and they heard bombs falling. With no time to reach the shelter ten minutes away, they went straight to the basement. Mary-Elizabeth described what happened next:

During the next few hours the walls of our basement shook; the floor underneath our feet rolled from the explosions in the air and the ground. At one point we felt that our house had been hit. My father went outside to check what was happening and reported that several houses in our neighborhood were burning. A crashing airplane had shaved off the chimney of our house.

When the family finally emerged from the basement, they found the windows broken and cold air rushing through the home. The dinner was cold and covered with dust and dirt that had fallen from the ceiling. At that moment of deep discouragement, a brother cried out, "Our Christmas tree! Come and look!" In the midst of the destruction, the Christmas tree had remained untouched. They lit the candles and sang "Silent Night, Holy Night." According to Mary-Elizabeth, "Hope swelled deep inside me. Suddenly I knew that somehow, sometime in the future, peace would again be restored to earth."

For some people, the terror and confusion of air raids was too much to bear. Such was the case with Sister Latschkowski, the mother of three little boys, after an air raid on February 3, 1945. Karola Hilbert and her elder sister, Esther, had worried about this mother whose husband was away in the army, so the sisters hurried to her apartment after bombs

landed in the neighborhood. Karola recalled the incident as follows:

What a chaotic scene met our eyes! The house around her was on fire, and the walls were so hot the light green paint was blistering; yet she sat on the bed in total bewilderment, shaking her head, her hands turned upward on her lap in a helpless gesture. "What shall I do? What shall I do?" she sobbed again and again.<sup>25</sup>

Karola and Esther found two of the Latschkowski boys, and their dazed mother finally mumbled that the third was in a hospital. With the building burning around them, the sisters got the family out. Joined by their sister, Ursula, they returned to the Latschkowski apartment and were able to fill several sheets with household items before the smoke drove them away and the building was gutted by fire.<sup>26</sup>

By early 1945, the British and the Americans were bombing Berlin several times a day. Under those conditions, it was very difficult to collect food from the various specialty shops. To expedite the procedure, Sister Leupold gave ration coupons to several of her children and left them in lines at different stores. She would then make the rounds and take over in line when it came time for her to make the purchase.

The date February 26, 1945, was etched in the memory of Ursula Hilbert for years. As air-raid sirens announced the approach of American bombers, she tried to join her sister Edith in her company's shelter but arrived too late. Everywhere she looked, the streets and businesses were empty, and she could see squadrons of airplanes "like tiny birds in groups." Desperate to find a shelter in a local building, she suddenly ran into a young man who yelled, "Miss, we have to find shelter at once; the airplanes are above us!" Seconds after the two had found a shelter, the bombs began to explode nearby. When somebody came looking for the man who had rescued

her, he was nowhere to be seen. Huddling in the packed air-raid shelter, Ursula offered what she thought would be her last prayer, asking forgiveness for her sins and saying good-bye to her parents and her siblings.<sup>27</sup> Regarding the mysterious young man, she stated, "I can tell you, this was one of the Three Nephites who came and took my hand—he had a fine, warm hand—and ran with me to a safe place."

On many occasions, the Hilbert girls had listened as their mother prayed that they would not be at home if their apartment house were ever struck by bombs. As an apparent answer to those prayers, Sister Hilbert and her daughters were in church on Sunday, March 18, 1945, when the neighborhood suffered extensive damage. Buildings all around were on fire, as were the apartments above theirs, but courageous neighbors put out the fire.<sup>28</sup>

In the spring of 1945, Horst Hilbert was again in a combat unit, closer to the invading American army than to the Soviets, whom every German soldier feared. He was eventually able to surrender to "three Yanks" in a jeep and for him, the war was over. He spent much of his prison time in a camp near Remagen on the Rhine River. Because of his ability to speak English, he was treated better than the average German soldier.<sup>29</sup>

When the Soviet armed forces approached Berlin, they announced to the public through leaflets dropped by airplanes that they were coming to liberate the German people from Hitler's dictatorship and from facism. It was soon painfully clear that the term *liberate* did not apply. According to Ursula Hilbert:

Those days of liberation of whom and what, I don't know which, brought every day new excitement. Liberated from Nazism, bombing, air raids, now starvation and horror, no food and water, living with enemies in town, broken homes physically and spiritually, this was overnight called the liberation.<sup>30</sup>



The Leupold family lived at the edge of the woods on the eastern boundary of the Köpenick suburb. Elisabeth Leupold and her children were some of the first Berliners to see the Red Army soldiers who fought their way into the area on April 21, 1945. Mr. Leupold was in the center of Berlin, serving as a soldier, and was away from home for twelve terrifying days. Huddling with her three children (ages five to eight) in a local bunker, Sister Leupold watched as enemy soldiers stole watches and other valuables from the neighbors. They then took the young women out to assault them, giving the other women and children a few moments to escape, which they did. As Sister Leupold later recalled:

In terror everyone pushed to get away from the bunker. We knew, once the officers were satisfied, the rest of the men would fall over us. Outside the bunker the battle was raging. Bombs were exploding around us. It was like hell, fires burning, bombs exploding. Many of the fleeing lost their life. I ran and ran holding on to my children trying to reach safety. . . . We stepped over dead bodies everywhere. We finally found a place to stay. Everyone opened their home to strangers.<sup>31</sup>

In her rush to escape the bunker, Sister Leupold lost sight of daughter Mary-Elisabeth, who was barely thirteen years old. She had fallen in with refugees heading west, away from the Soviet troops, and thus began yet another trip away from home. Her route took her to the south. "I walked for 18 days, 20 or 30 km a day. . . . I ended up at a little village at the lower Alpine mountains," Mary-Elisabeth explained. Finding refuge on a Bavarian farm, she became a common farmhand and worked there for six months. It was there that she encountered the American army and saw her first black man: "I saw his glistening teeth, and I was scared to death."

Next to killing or capturing German soldiers, the main objective of the Soviet conquerors seemed to be the abuse of German women

and girls. Karola Hilbert later recalled the mood in the Neukölln Branch:

I can remember the April fast meeting in 1945 in Thomasstrasse. It was the last fast meeting before the war ended, and we had a special fast as a [branch]. We had heard so much about Russian atrocities, and we were afraid—we didn't know how much was propaganda or truth—but we prayed and fasted that the girls and the women in the branch would be protected, that they would not be defiled. I remember for the closing song, Edith had chosen "The Spirit of God." And we girls knew and sang the cadence to it. When we sang, we were not singing alone; there were angels with us. And we were not the only ones that heard it; everyone heard it. That was the last fast meeting we had, and none of those that fasted were defiled.<sup>32</sup>

The concerns in the heart of a faithful Latter-day Saint mother would have been much like those of any other mother in Berlin in April 1945. Maria Hilbert prayed constantly for the safety of her four daughters, ages fifteen to twenty-three. She may have heard that several LDS women had already been victimized by the invading soldiers. In any case, she was prepared to give her life in defense of her daughters if need be. Paul Hilbert was still in Thuringia, a province far to the south. He had not been able to visit his family for a very long time. As the war drew to a conclusion, he had no way to call them or write to them.

On April 25, 1945, the first Soviet soldiers came down Oppelnerstrasse, where they encountered only slight resistance. Sister Hilbert and her daughters were hiding in the basement with other residents of the building. Suddenly, the Soviets stormed into the basement, searching for German defenders; they found none. The soldiers left, and the Hilberts congratulated themselves on their good fortune. However, several hours later an enemy soldier returned, approached the Hilberts in their basement hideout, and stared intently at Edith. He seemed bent on having his way



*Fig. 2. The ruins of the Anhalter railroad station. Most of Berlin's many railroad stations were destroyed by the end of the war. (R. Minert, 1973)*

with her. Maria Hilbert calmly instructed her daughters to leave the building with her. "I had never seen Mother so horrified," recalled Karola. "Her face was drained of any color. Her eyes were wild with fright. Her fragile frame moved with speed and skill as she ran ahead . . . trying to keep herself between Edith and the soldier." The situation became critical, as Karola related:

When the soldier managed to move between them, Mother forced herself in front of Edith again. At last, in frustrated anger, the soldier slammed his machine gun against Mother's chest. A short grunt escaped her, as if the gun had taken her breath away. He made wild angry gestures, babbling in Russian, but we all understood what he meant. If Mother moved again, he would pull the trigger without hesitation. . . . In this desperate situation, another soldier came into the courtyard. Black fear poured like tar into my chest as I realized that together they could accomplish their desire. But then I looked at the second soldier's face. His whole countenance shone as if he were a heavenly being, and in that moment I believe that he was.<sup>33</sup>

The second soldier spoke in low tones to the first, who slowly lowered the barrel of his weapon until it was pointing at the ground. Maria Hilbert and her daughters used the pause to race back into the basement. They had escaped a most terrifying situation. For the next few weeks they lived in their apartment

upstairs. Horst, the second son, had told them months before that invading soldiers were usually too tired to climb stairs to look for victims. This prediction turned out to be correct, and the women were safe from that point on. Of course, they almost never ventured outside of their apartment for the next month.<sup>34</sup>

When the invaders arrived in the Wiesenhütters' neighborhood in Köpenick in April 1945, Sophie was quick to find a hiding place:

I was down in the basement. We had a little pile of coal and some old sacks then, and it was dark since the electricity was out. I hid behind that pile of coal and covered myself with some old sacks. [The soldiers] went through the house, and my father was there. The first thing they always asked was, "Where is the woman?" He said, "There is none." If they had come near, they would have shot him. I was quiet. They came down and stood right next to me, but it was dark, and they didn't see me, and I certainly didn't make a noise. They knew we were still there. It was a miracle.

Five days after their escape from the bunker and marauding Red Army soldiers, Sister Leupold and her children returned to their home that had been vandalized and desecrated. Her eldest daughter, Mary-Elizabeth, was still missing. Sister Leupold recalled that the conquerors demanded a week later that she vacate her home:



*Fig. 3. Maria Hilbert faced the daunting challenge of protecting her four daughters from the conquerors of Berlin in the spring of 1945. (Roper and Reece)*

Immeasurable despair came over me. I decided that the Russians would find only corpses when they came in the morning. But God, whom I thought had forgotten me, showed his mercy. He sent me a young sister from the Church who stayed with me all night. Her mother had been killed by a bomb a few years earlier, and I had taken her under my wing. She was searching for me to find out if we had survived. Now she was there to save me and my children. She wept and assured me that God will help. The next morning came and with it a miracle. My husband came and also brought some food. . . . I am still ashamed that I lost my faith. My God had again saved me. I should have known that there is no need so great that God cannot heal.<sup>35</sup>

Sophie Wiesenhütter and her father were evicted from their home in Köpenick for three months while Soviet officers were quartered there. For a time, Sophie lived with the Leupold family and had to walk miles and miles to work. During the day, it was relatively safe, but this was not the case after dark:

I was almost home, maybe ten minutes [away], and there came a group of Russians soldiers, maybe eight or ten. And they surrounded me, and I stood in the middle, and they had a flashlight. It was dark; the streetlights didn't work. And I just stood there, and they looked me over, said something, and let me go, which was unheard of. So that was a second miracle. I had some more. We really, truly were protected.

The Hilberts and other members of the Neukölln Branch breathed a sigh of relief when they learned in June 1945 that their district was to be part of the American occupation sector in Berlin. The border of the Soviet sector was the Spree River—a mere three blocks east of the Hilberts' apartment on Oppelnerstrasse.

Eventually, Horst Hilbert was transferred by the American army to the British at Wickrath, Germany, and released in the fall of 1945. He returned home in time to witness the visit of Elder Ezra Taft Benson, who had come to Berlin as part of his welfare mission in 1945.<sup>36</sup>

Mary-Elizabeth Leupold was finally reunited with her family after the war. In reviewing the events of the end of the war, she came to this conclusion:

Looking back at that time, I find that I was taken away from the battlefield and the Soviet invasion in a very strange and mysterious way. . . . I was spared all this [suffering]. . . . For the next six months as a thirteen-year old girl I was completely unprotected. . . . There was nobody in charge of me; no one knew I existed except for the farmer and the people in this little village. If someone had killed or raped me, no one would have been held accountable for it. Yet nothing happened to me. . . . Why I was shielded from suffering real harm while so many others were not, I do not know. Yet the fact is that I was. A loving God had held his protective hand over me.

All of the Hilberts, the Leupolds, and most of their friends in the Neukölln Branch had survived the war. Ursula Hilbert later explained the best method of survival: "You had to stand on your own testimony when you stayed [in Berlin]. There was no other way of doing it. We had to stand together in our branches; we were all friends, and we had to strengthen each other."

#### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Sophie Anna Jasinski** b. Berlin, Brandenburg, Preußen 12 Dec 1897; dau. of Ludwig Jasinski and Auguste Wilhelmine Luise Bandelow; bp. Berlin 1 Dec 1923; m. Berlin 13 Oct 1917, Heinrich Hermann Alfred Wiesenhütter; 1 child; d. injuries suffered in air raid Köpenick, Berlin, Preußen 9 Dec 1943 (S. Wiesenhütter Ranglack; IGI)

**Egon Alfred Jepp** b. Schoenlanke, Pommern 7 Apr 1926; son of Emil Jepp and Marie Minna Emma Kaiser; MIA in Dec 1944 (CHL Microfilm no. 2458, form 42 FP, Pt. 37, 1949 list: 1382; FHL Microfilm 271369, 1930 Census)

**Latschkowski, Infant** k. air raid (K. Hilbert Reece)

**Rosalie Emma Schöfer** b. Riegersdorf, Schlesien, Preußen 10 Dec 1901; dau. of Karl Schoefer and Anna Pauline Huhndt; bp. in Schweidnitz, Schlesien, Preußen 10 Dec 1925; epileptic; k. euthanasia 1942 (M. Leupold Fowler; IGI)

**Siegfried Wendt** b. 17 Dec 1916; son of Marie Martha Griesbach; ord. deacon; MIA at age 33 (CHL Microfilm no. 2458, form 42 FP, Pt. 37, 1949 list: 1382; FHL Microfilm 245296, 1935 Census)

**Walter Karl Emil Zietz** b. Berlin, Brandenburg, Preußen 6 Feb 1909; son of Emil Karl Zietz and Elfriede Johanna Clara Eckstein; bp. Berlin 26 Jun 1929; m. Schweidnitz, Schlesien, Preußen 4 September 1930, Wilhelmine Pauline Hundt; 2 children; k. in battle near Moscow, Russia 4 Dec 1941 (M. Leupold Fowler; IGI)

## NOTES

1. Patricia R. Roper and Karola H. Reece, *We Were Not Alone: How an LDS Family Survived World War II in Berlin* (Salt Lake City: Shadow Mountain, 2003), 12.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
3. Roper and Reece, *We Were Not Alone*, 2.
4. Karola Hilbert Reece, interview by the author, Payson, Utah, April 22, 2006.
5. Ursula Hilbert Wendel, interview by the author, Bountiful, Utah, April 7, 2006.
6. Ursula Hilbert Wendel, autobiography (unpublished manuscript, about 1970), 3; private collection
7. See the description of the Bund Deutscher Mädel program in the introduction.
8. Horst Kurt Hilbert, "It Is a Long Way to Freedom" (unpublished personal history), 2–3; private collection.
9. Wendel, autobiography, 7.
10. The Mutterkreuz had three varieties, designed for the recognition of mothers of five, seven, and nine children.
11. Sophie Wiesenhütter Ranglack, interview by the author, Murray, Utah, July 13, 2006.
12. Mary-Elizabeth Leupold Fowler to the author, June 29, 2006.
13. Heinz Kupitz, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, March 17, 2006.
14. Roper and Reece, *We Were Not Alone*, 56.
15. Ibid., 31–32.
16. Ibid., 33. Hitler (a native of Braunau, Austria) finished World War I at the rank of corporal. Thus he was often sarcastically referred to by his opponents as the Austrian corporal.
17. Ursula Hilbert Wendel, autobiography, 6; spelling errors have been corrected.
18. See the description of the Kinderlandverschickung program in the glossary.

19. Mary-Elizabeth Leupold Fowler, interview by the author, Provo, Utah, May 5, 2006.
20. Horst Kurt Hilbert, "It Is a Long Way to Freedom," 20.
21. Ibid., 13–14.
22. Ursula Hilbert Wendel, autobiography, 13.
23. Roper and Reece, *We Were Not Alone*, 51
24. Karola Hilbert Reece saw Mrs. Heber in a German store in Utah in 1957; her husband had also survived the war.
25. Roper and Reece, *We Were Not Alone*, 81.
26. Ibid., 80–83. Two weeks after the war ended, Sister Latschkowski showed up at the Hilbert apartment with her three sons. Again mentally confused, she showed them the baby in the carriage and said, "He might be dead." He was. Sister Hilbert and Brother Garg buried the child outside a church cemetery nearby.
27. Ursula Hilbert Wendel, autobiography, 11–12.
28. Ibid., 13.
29. Horst Kurt Hilbert, "It Is a Long Way to Freedom," 20–21. He stated that 220,000 prisoners were at the Remagen camp. He was most likely in the infamous Sinzig camp, just two miles south of Remagen. In that camp, prisoners were classified as "disarmed personnel" rather than prisoners-of-war and thus not treated in accordance with the Geneva Convention. Tens of thousands of prisoners (including women and children) died at Sinzig, where there were no structures to house the prisoners. See James Bacque, *Other Losses* (London: Macdonald, 1990).
30. Ursula Hilbert Wendel, autobiography, 17. The Soviets bragged about having "liberated" the people in East Germany. Soviet troops remained there until 1990.
31. Elisabeth Schoefer Leupold, autobiography (unpublished), 13–14; private collection.
32. Sophie Wiesenhütter Ranglack was also in church that Sunday and corroborated the story.
33. Roper and Reece, *We Were Not Alone*, 121.
34. Ibid., 122f.
35. Elisabeth Schoefer Leupold, autobiography, 14–15. The young woman was Sophie Wiesenhütter.
36. Horst Kurt Hilbert, "It Is a Long Way to Freedom," 22.

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## BERLIN SCHÖNEBERG BRANCH

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Covering most of the southwest portion of metropolitan Berlin, the Schöneberg Branch may have been the most expansive of the six branches in the capital city. On the north, it included the mission office at Händelallee 6 and the Tiergarten Park. At the southwest ex-