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# BIELEFELD DISTRICT

*West German Mission*

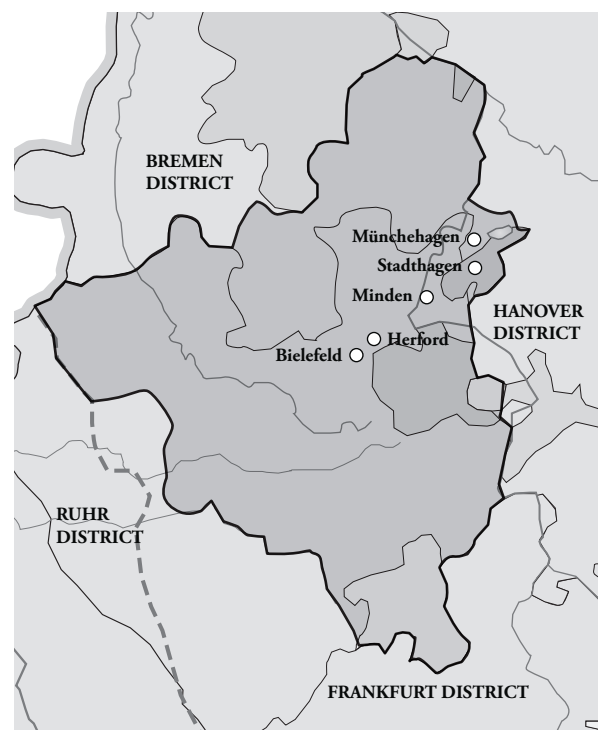


Of the fourteen districts of the West German Mission, the district centered in Bielefeld, Westphalia, was the eighth largest, with a total of 326 members. Exactly 50 percent of the Saints in the district were females twelve years of age and older. This reflects a trend throughout The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in both German missions. At the same time, only fifty-six men in Bielefeld District's five branches—less than one-half of those over twelve years old—held the priesthood.

<b>Bielefeld District<sup>1</sup></b>	<b>1939</b>
Elders	17
Priests	13
Teachers	9
Deacons	17
Other Adult Males	63
Adult Females	163
Male Children	23
Female Children	21
<i>Total</i>	326

The city of Bielefeld was located near the center of the district territory. The remaining four branches

were situated to the north and east of Bielefeld: Herford (eight miles), Minden (twenty miles), Stadthagen (thirty miles), and Müncheshagen (thirty-five miles). With the exception of Müncheshagen, all of those cities enjoyed excellent railroad connections, which enabled leaders and members to travel to meetings in various locations.



*Fig. 1. The territory of the Bielefeld District in northwest Germany.*



Fig. 2. Attendees at a district conference in Bielefeld in the early war years. (E. Schmitz Michaelis)

At the onset of World War II, the district was under the leadership of Alfred Hegemeister, who lived in Stadthagen. He had no counselors but was assisted by a secretary, Heinrich Rahde of Heuerssen (Stadthagen Branch). According to the mission directory, more than one-half of the district leadership positions were not filled in August 1939. Members from just two branches filled the remaining district callings. Representing the Bielefeld Branch were Sunday School president Heinrich Recksiek, YMMIA president Martha Klöpper, Primary president Luise Bokermann, and Relief Society president Anna Recksiek. YMMIA president Friedrich Möller belonged to the Stadthagen Branch. All served without secretaries, but there is no reason to believe that the programs of the Church were not in full operation in the Bielefeld District.

The last district conference held before the war took place in the city of Bielefeld on February 26 and 27, 1939. The theme was from John 8: "Know the truth and the truth shall make you free."<sup>2</sup> The

history of the Bielefeld Branch described the event in these words: "More than 800 persons participated in the spring conference of the Bielefeld District, including mission president M. Douglas Wood. For the first time, two-color printed invitations were distributed among members and friends."<sup>3</sup>

Werner Niebuhr (born 1916) of the Bielefeld Branch enjoyed only six days with his new bride after their wedding in 1940, while Werner was on leave from his Wehrmacht unit. When he returned to duty, he prayed earnestly for an opportunity to attend the next district conference. But how could he possibly get leave again so soon? One day, his company commander invited him for a drink, but Werner declined, based on his health standards. The officer insisted, but Werner turned him down repeatedly and was surprised to be given three days' leave for his integrity. The leave allowed him to attend district conference, where he was asked by mission supervisor Friedrich Biehl to speak on Sunday afternoon. "I told them how thankful I was



Fig. 3. Surviving members of the Bielefeld District in 1946. (H. Recksiek)

for my testimony of the gospel and how the gospel had helped me so far in my life to understand and do the will of our Father in Heaven,” Werner said. After his nearly one-half hour talk, Werner hurried off to catch the train back to his unit. After the war, a Brother Kapp of the Herford Branch thanked Werner for giving that talk, during which Kapp had gained a testimony and decided to join the Church. Werner wrote these words: “I am very thankful that I refused to drink with my captain and he gave me the furlough that I could attend this conference and bear my testimony and bring one brother into the Church.”<sup>4</sup>

As was common in the German missions in those years, President Hegemeister not only presided over his own district conferences but also attended conferences in other districts. For example, he was present at the conference of the Ruhr District in 1939.

The records of the West German Mission office in Frankfurt do not include reports from the Bielefeld District for the war years, but it can be presumed that the district president made every

effort to visit branches and hold district conferences whenever practicable. According to Bielefeld Branch member Heinz Recksiek, a large meeting hall at the factory where his father, branch president Heinrich Recksiek, lived and worked was made available to the Church for district conferences early in the war.<sup>5</sup>

When World War II came to an end on May 8, 1945, all of the branches in the Bielefeld District were still in existence and holding meetings on at least a sporadic basis.

## NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, “Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955,” 257, CHL CR 4 12.
2. West German Mission quarterly report, 1939, no. 10, CHL LR 10045 2.
3. *Chronik der Gemeinde Bielefeld, 1896–1996* (Bielefeld: Bielefeld LDS Ward, 1996), 49.
4. Werner Niebuhr, autobiography, 1985, 17–18, CHL MS 19617.
5. Heinz Recksiek, interview by Marion Wolfert in German, Salt Lake City, March 22, 2006; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.

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## BIELEFELD BRANCH

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One of the largest branches in the West German Mission in 1939, the Bielefeld Branch numbered 144 members, fully one-sixth of whom were priesthood holders. The city of Bielefeld, located in the northeast corner of the state of Westphalia, had a population of 126,711 at the time.<sup>1</sup>

The president of the Bielefeld Branch from 1938 until after the war was Heinrich Recksiek.<sup>2</sup> He lived with his family on the grounds of the Ross & Kahn clothing factory at Friedenstrasse 32, where he worked as a mechanic and custodian. Anna Recksiek was the branch Relief Society president during the war and was not employed. Their son, Heinz (born 1924), recalled that both branch and district conferences were held in the meeting hall of the clothing factory on several occasions during the first years of the war.<sup>3</sup> This was an important benefit of the branch president's employment, as was the use of the company automobile.

<b>Bielefeld Branch<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>1939</b>
Elders	7
Priests	4
Teachers	3
Deacons	10
Other Adult Males	25
Adult Females	80
Male Children	4
Female Children	11
<i>Total</i>	144

According to the 1939 directory of the West German Mission, the Bielefeld Branch met in rooms at Ravensbergerstrasse 45. Elfriede Recksiek (born 1925) described the rooms rented in that building:

There was one large room, and two smaller ones of which we used one as the cloak room. We also had restrooms in the building. The rooms were on the main floor of the building. I also remember seeing a sign of our church in the front of the building that indicated that we met there. We had chairs in our rooms, not benches, but that allowed us to move them around. There was also a raised platform in the front of the room. A choir sang sometimes, and we also had a piano and an organ that we could use to accompany. I would say that we had an attendance of about 50–60 people there on Sunday. I can remember having pictures of Jesus Christ on the wall.<sup>5</sup>

The branch observed the usual meeting schedule, holding Sunday school at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. Each organization had a full complement of leaders. The MIA and the Primary met on Tuesday evening, and the priesthood meeting was held on Thursday evening. As of July 1939, an English class took place on Wednesdays at 8:30 p.m. and a teacher training class on the first Sunday of each month after sacrament meeting.<sup>6</sup> There was certainly no lack of activities in this branch when the war began. Heinz had this to say about the young people in the branch: "The branch was quite large with many children. We had good relationships and interactions among the young people. Whenever we got together, we had a wonderful and fun time. . . . We had many outings with the MIA."

Elfriede recalled the following about the routine of going to church:

It took us about twenty to thirty minutes to reach the meeting rooms when we walked. My mother always said that if there are no bombs, we could walk. We walked there in the morning, came back for lunch, and went back for sacrament meeting, which started at 7:00 p.m. Especially in the winter, it was dark and there were hardly any streetlights left [due to the blackout]. But it was safe for us. We also wore a fluorescent button on our jackets so that we would be seen in the dark.

Eleonore Schmitz (born 1936) recalled that as a little girl, she and her younger sister Rosemary sang duets:





Fig. 1. Bielefeld Branch members in the main meeting room in about 1939. (E. Schmitz Michaelis)

My aunt taught us some hymns, and we had to sing them standing next to the pump organ. Rosemary must have been six, and I was seven. We did it more than once. In one of the hymns, we started singing faster, and the sister who was playing the organ had a hard time keeping up with us.<sup>7</sup>

The history of the Bielefeld Branch reports some of the difficulties experienced by the Saints in that city very early on:

During the war years, attendance at branch meetings decreased significantly. For this reason, we had to rent smaller rooms on Friedrichstrasse and until November 23, 1941 we rented rooms from Mr. Schlüter on Ravensbergerstrasse. Under those difficult circumstances we moved into other rooms at Am Sparrenberg 8 as of November 30, 1941. At that location we used a large meeting hall and a separate room in the back.<sup>8</sup>

Heinz Recksiek recalled the news of war with Poland in September 1939:

At that time, I was only fifteen years old and a member of the Hitler Youth. We were more or less obligated to join the Hitler Youth. I remember being told that the Polish people were persecuting the German families who still lived in that [Polish] corridor, which was given back to Poland after World War I. And I remember Hitler saying that we were now justified in attacking Poland. As young men only fifteen years of age, we believed that.

One of the first young men of the Bielefeld Branch to wear the uniform of the Wehrmacht was Werner Niebuhr (born 1916). In June 1941, he found himself among the soldiers invading the Soviet Union. He had expected to experience terrible things in combat, but what he saw in Russia was shocking. He recalled:

As we tried to shoot at the bunkers we found out that [the enemy] had women and children bound with rope in front of the bunkers so we would not shoot at the bunkers. . . . Something



Fig. 2. Heinz Recksiek (in light shirt) with members of his Hitler Youth unit in about 1938. (H. Recksiek)

else that the Russians had done that I have never seen before . . . was [the enemy] had put their own soldiers in foxholes, buried them with dirt to the chest, put in front of them pile of ammunition and a rifle so that they could shoot at us and could not retreat when we came. I have never seen anything so inhumane as this before.<sup>9</sup>

Werner's unit moved to many locations along the southern reaches of the Russian Front, including the Crimea, where a belated message from home reached him in February 1942. His wife, Hilda, had given birth to their first child the previous October, but the child was stillborn. Under a new Wehrmacht regulation, Werner was allowed a short leave due to this death in the family.

Shortly after his return to Russia in March 1942, Werner ran into another member of the Bielefeld Branch, Walter Recksiek (born 1919). Walter had volunteered for service in the Waffen-SS, where he had been promised better conditions, equipment,

transportation, etc. However, he had found out that service with the Waffen-SS was not all pleasant. Werner recalled Walter's words in Russia: "If I knew then what I know now, I would never have joined the Waffen-SS." It is very possible that Walter's unit had been in the area behind the lines where political prisoners and Jews were being sought out for *Sonderbehandlung* ("special treatment," a euphemism for murder).<sup>10</sup>

Just a few months later, the Recksiek family received the letter feared by every German family in those years: "It is my sad duty to inform you that your son, Walter Recksiek, gave his life for his country near Terekbogen on the morning of September 26, 1942." Unlike many German families, the Recksieks at least were fortunate enough to receive a photograph of their son's grave.

When the war began, Elfrieda Recksiek was in the League of German Girls. "We mostly sang and had to march. We camped outside and cooked together.

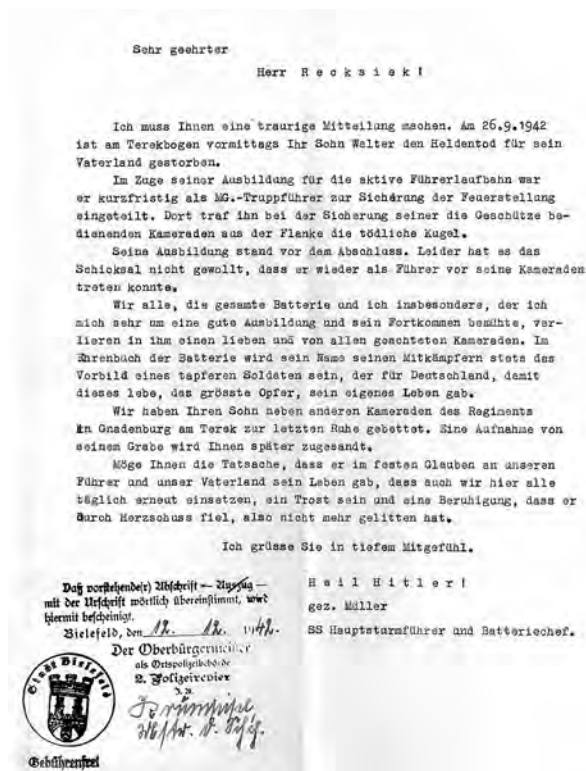


Fig. 3. This letter announced the death of Walter Recksiek in 1942. (H. Recksiek)



Fig. 4. The grave of Walter Recksiek (far left) in the Soviet Union. (H. Recksiek)

I had a lot of fun, and I think the other girls did too. We also had a uniform." When she finished public school at fourteen, she began training as a nanny.

Heinz Recksiek had been drafted just weeks before Walter's death and was in boot camp in

Cologne to train as a combat engineer. "My parents visited me, and I wondered why they would come to visit me. Then I realized that they wanted to tell me in person [about Walter]. I admired and adored my older brother, and my parents knew that. He was a wonderful example of a member of the Church."

Regarding his response to the draft notice, Heinz recalled, "The Church always told us that we should serve our country, so that is what I did. My father never agreed with that. At one point, he was close to being put into a concentration camp. He had made a remark about the government to somebody at his work. He had to talk his way out of it."



Fig. 5. Heinz Recksiek as a Wehrmacht soldier. (H. Recksiek)

During the year 1942, Werner Niebuhr was constantly in and out of combat. Although he was not trained as a medic, he often found himself caring for wounded comrades, and it was this kind of service that merited him the Iron Cross Second Class during one engagement. Under challenging conditions, he first developed diphtheria, then typhus, in consecutive months. These illnesses necessitated time away from the front, but this turned out to be a blessing. By the time he returned to his unit, 60 percent of the men had been killed or wounded—all of the men attached to the same mobile artillery piece. Because he continued to be ill, he was sent home for a longer leave. By March 1943, he was back in the Soviet Union.<sup>11</sup>

After eighteen months of training as a nanny, Elfriede Recksiek left Bielefeld to assist the family of Kurt Schneider. Brother Schneider was the president of the new Strasbourg District in southwest Germany, and Elfriede's parents were pleased to have their daughter serve in the home of another



LDS family. The Schneiders had one son and were expecting a second child. It was 1943, and Bielefeld was becoming a dangerous place to live.



*Fig. 6. Branch president Heinrich Recksiek with his family before the war. (H. Recksiek)*



*Fig. 7. Bielefeld Hitler Youth marching in a parade. (H. Recksiek)*

In the Soviet Union in 1943, Werner Niebuhr was in perilous situations on several occasions. Once, he worked his way deep into and out of a minefield in order to retrieve the body of a fallen sergeant. On another occasion, he was running between foxholes when three shells landed within fifteen feet of him in quick succession. Each shell was a dud. He recalled, "Each one could have killed me if it had exploded. I cannot be thankful enough that our Father in Heaven saved me on different occasions."<sup>12</sup>

Heinz Recksiek's unit was stationed along the northern flank of the Eastern Front. As a member of the 16th Engineer Battalion, he was soon a corporal and was awarded the Iron Cross for heroism in battle. However, he came very close to being killed there in late 1943:

There was a grenade that you cannot hear until it is already going off. This one I did not see or hear, so it went off close to where I was standing. Just before it went off, I put my head down, and that was a good thing because I was wearing my helmet. The shrapnel would have hit me right in the chest and head. I was taken to the field hospital, and they operated right there. They found out that something had penetrated my lung. It was quite serious. A day later, they transported me by train to Finland. I stayed there over Christmas, but I was able to send a little note to my parents telling them that I was recuperating. Six weeks later, I was sent to the Harz mountain region [in Germany].

Werner Niebuhr was fortunate to be home for Christmas in 1943, when he saw his infant son, Roland, for the first time. Because he was an elder and had maintained the Church's standards of worthiness, he was able to give a blessing to a Sister Wächter, who was expecting a child and had been told that there were serious complications. He promised her that all would be well, and so it was: the physician's negative prediction was not fulfilled, and the baby was born entirely normal and healthy.<sup>13</sup>

Following the disastrous defeat at Stalingrad in February 1943, the German army began a slow





Fig.8. Members of the Bielefeld Branch on an outing in the early war years. (E. Schmitz Michaelis)

and agonizing retreat westward toward Germany. Werner's unit was shifted many times during the last two years of the war and eventually traveled south to Bucharest, Romania; west to Vienna, Austria; north to Prague, Czechoslovakia; and then northwest to Poland. From there, they went south again to Romania and west into Hungary. In action again, Werner pondered about how he "had been saved so many times where my life had been spared when it could have gone the other way. Every day my prayer was that my life would be saved that I could go home."<sup>14</sup>

With time, the Allied air campaign against cities in western Germany intensified. The branch history provides this picture of meetings in 1943:

Only one meeting was being held each Sunday. We held Sunday school and sacrament meeting on alternate Sundays, always ending before 4:00 p.m. so that the members would have time to get home again before the anticipated air raid sirens sounded. In those days, we usually had thirty to forty people in attendance.<sup>15</sup>

Anna Carolina Schmitz instructed her children carefully about the sirens that announced impending danger. In the early years of the war, they simply went down into the basement when the sirens sounded, but on one occasion they had a very close call, according to Eleonore: "Next door to us in the same building was a lady, she was not LDS, but she was pregnant and had just had a baby. So my mother was helping her into the bomb shelter one day, and just as my mother got in, a bomb hit right outside in the street. The air pressure slammed the door into her back, but didn't hurt her very much." After that, Sister Schmitz took her children down the street to a bona fide bunker that was located very close to the rooms where they met for church. They were sitting inside that bunker one day when their apartment house was hit and burned to the ground.

By the summer of 1944, Heinz Recksiek had recovered from his wounds and was part of a reserve unit in western Germany. Again he had a close brush with death:

We were stationed right next to an Autobahn bridge. We saw the [Allied] planes flying over us right into the heart of Germany. I had a strange feeling and the air was literally vibrating. . . . We went down to seek shelter. . . . A door led to a room in which all of the cables of the bridge were anchored. We were just halfway down the stairway when we heard the bombs falling. Then I heard the voice people had been talking about in Church all the time. It pierced my soul and told me to go back upstairs. That is what I did. Back on top again, I crouched down on the ground and put my arms over my head. When it was over, I uncovered my face and saw that the bridge had ripped out all the cables that were anchored in that room down below. I would have been killed. My buddy had stayed in that chamber. When I looked around, I seemed to be the only man alive.

The Schneiders in Strasbourg had two sons. With the American Army approaching the city in the fall of 1944, Kurt Schneider took his family and their nanny, Elfriede Recksiek, east across the Rhine River to the town of Schönwald in Baden's Black Forest. Elfriede was soon assigned by the government to work in a division of the steel factory where Brother Schneider was employed.

One day in 1944, Werner Niebuhr was shot in the leg and left by comrades during a hasty retreat before a Red Army attack on the Eastern Front. Werner tried to stop the bleeding and walk away from the fight but kept falling. Some resistance was overpowering him. While praying for help, he heard a voice as clear and loud as his own saying, "For you the war is over, and you never have to bear arms again; you will go home." However, resistance was strong as he tried to drag himself away from the enemy. "I heard a voice saying, 'You are a holder of the Melchizedek Priesthood; you can command Satan to leave.' . . . So I commanded Satan to leave up from my body so I could go home and do the things my heart desired." Werner made it back to his friends and was transported away from the fighting, but for several days there was no physician in the area to treat his wound. Several times, he loosened the tourniquet to allow some flow of

blood into his leg, fearing that if he did not, his leg would have to be amputated. Eventually, he was treated and had some feeling in his leg, but he could not walk. One month later, he was in a hospital in St. Pölten, Austria, still unable to walk without support.<sup>16</sup>

With her home destroyed and her husband in Russia, Anna Carolina Schmitz moved into a small cabin in a refugee colony recently constructed in the Bielefeld suburb of Brackwede. As Eleonore recalled, they were nearly destitute: "We had a sofa that was being repaired. That was the only thing we saved because it was not in the apartment when the building burned. And we had two suitcases that my oldest sister had taken to the bomb shelter, and they contained my father's clothing. Otherwise, we had nothing." Sister Schmitz spent a great deal of time gathering food from local farmers and forests during the final months of the war, when the food distribution system that had worked so well began to break down. The older children were also constantly on the lookout for food from all possible sources. It was a time of survival that would only become more challenging when the war ended.

On September 30, 1944, Allied bombs totally destroyed the rooms in which the branch was holding meetings. Fortunately, much of the branch property was not destroyed, because it had been distributed among members for safekeeping. Beginning on October 15, 1944, meetings were held in the home of the Wächter family at Lange Strasse 47.<sup>17</sup>

By January 1945, Werner Niebuhr had recovered sufficiently to be sent home for a month. He arrived in January 1945 and found that Hilda and Roland were living out in the country with his aunt. Little Roland did not know his father and at one point asked him to leave. His furlough was doubled when he was surprised to receive a letter granting him another twenty-four days of leave due to bravery under fire. Therefore, he was in Bielefeld until March 1945, when, as he recalled, "practically no German soldier was home." Upon leaving, he sensed his wife's fears and promised her, "Nothing

will have happened to me if you don't get a letter [from me] in the next 3 months."<sup>18</sup>

Werner's odyssey took him from Bielefeld to Hanover to Vienna, where complications with his leg led him to another hospital. He was then sent west to Krems and Linz in Austria, where he was told simply to go home. Near Halberstadt in north-central Germany, he was captured by American soldiers. He was first put in a former concentration camp, then moved to Merseburg and Naumburg, where he was released and told to get to the British Occupation Zone in three days. He went to Sangerhausen, then Nordhausen, Hameln, and Bielefeld. He arrived there on Sunday, June 24, 1945—three months and two days after leaving his wife. "How great was our togetherness that I could be home again after this long and terrible time."<sup>19</sup> The following Sunday, Werner joined the surviving members of the Bielefeld Branch meeting in the home of Sister Wächter.<sup>20</sup>

In early 1945, Elfriede Recksiek was allowed to leave the Schneider family and her employment in Schönwald and return to Bielefeld. She found that her home town had been extensively destroyed. The church rooms, too, had fallen victim to Allied bombs, and meetings were being held in the apartments of branch members. Her parents' home had been destroyed, and they had moved in with Elfriede's grandparents just outside of town. The Recksieks did not have a chance to participate in branch meetings again until after the war. For the remainder of the war, Elfriede worked in an office of the German army and lived in Bielefeld with the Schabberhardt family, who were members of the branch.

Heinz Recksiek's unit retreated toward Bielefeld in the spring of 1945, and he was not far from his home town when the group decided to become civilians to avoid capture by the invaders. Up to that point, he had carried the holy scriptures with him, but this was not possible when he discarded his uniform. While he thought he could pass himself off as a civilian, he was undone by a photograph of his brother, Walter. The two boys looked so much alike

that the British soldiers who caught up with Heinz on April 20, 1945, thought that he was the one in the photograph and treated him like a soldier. A few days later, he was turned over to the Americans, who put him in a POW camp in southern Germany. He was fortunate to be released just three months later.

On April 4, 1945, the American army entered Bielefeld, and the city surrendered without a fight. No meetings were held the next Sunday, but LDS services continued one week later with the permission of the military occupation authorities. Approximately thirty persons attended.<sup>21</sup>



*Fig. 9. Brother Heinrich Recksiek conducted the funeral of Wilhelmine Bokermann, who was killed in a streetcar accident in 1941. (E. Schmitz Michaelis)*

Engelbert Schmitz had worked as a tailor in the employ of the city for the first few war years, but eventually the Wehrmacht came for him, and

he spent the remainder of the war on the Eastern Front. He was wounded in the arm, and the bullet was never removed. But no real damage was done, and he finally came home to his family in the spring of 1945. Eleonore recalled how her father let his children feel the bullet in his arm. The Schmitz family had been isolated from the Saints in Bielefeld and did not establish contact again until they were given a small attic apartment in town in about December 1945. However, they were together again. Herr Schmitz had been given his former job with the city, and conditions slowly began to improve.

The city of Bielefeld had been attacked from the air twenty-three times; 40 percent of the city was destroyed, and at least 1,349 people had been killed.<sup>22</sup> Ten or more of those were Church members, and the branch history also lists ten soldiers who were killed or were missing in action by the end of the war. Several Saints died of other causes, and the Bielefeld Branch suffered more than any other branch in the West German Mission. Fortunately, those losses did not prevent the branch from prospering during the next few years as the city of Bielefeld gradually came back to life.

#### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Ludwig August Karl von Behren** b. Gellershagen, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 5 May or Jun 1911; son of August von Behren and Wilhelmine Marie Macke; bp. 19 Jun 1920; MIA near Moscow, Russia, 18 Dec 1941 (IGI; CR Bielefeld Branch)

**Wilhelm Friedrich von Behren** b. Gellershagen, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 5 Mar 1913; son of August von Behren and Wilhelmine Marie Macke; bp. 7 May 1923; conf. 7 May 1923; k. in battle Russia 3 Aug 1943 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 189; IGI)

**Henry Albert Bock** b. London, England, 27 May 1911; son of Heinrich Friedrich Karl Martin Bock and Annie Jane Price; bp. 8 Aug 1924; conf. 8 Aug 1924; lance corporal; k. in battle Gorodischtsche, near Bolchow, Russia, 22 Feb 1943 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 220; www.volksbund.de)

**Hermann Karl Eberhard Bokermann** b. Overberge, Hamm, Westfalen, 26 Mar 1920; son of Karl Wilhelm H. Bokermann and Marie Luise Grappendorf; bp. 8 Sep 1928; d. 5 Oct 1944 (IGI)



Fig. 10. Hermann Bokermann (middle) was killed in 1944. (E. Schmitz Michaelis)

**Wilhelmine Margarethe Johanna Bokermann** b. Overberge, Hamm, Westfalen, 18 Oct 1924; dau. of Karl Wilhelm H. Bokermann and Marie Luise Grappendorf; bp. 17 Jun 1933; conf. 17 Jun 1933; k. streetcar accident 3 Oct 1941 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 230; IGI)

**Erich Ditt** b. Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 21 Dec 1913; son of Heinrich Kraemer and Elisa Ditt; bp. 30 Nov 1930; conf. 30 Nov 1930; ord. deacon 6 Dec 1931; corporal; d. in military hospital 2/571 in Roslawl, Russia, 8 Mar 1942 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 305; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

**Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Dröschner** b. Heuerßen, Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 10 Nov 1901; son of Johann Heinrich F. Dröschner and Engel Marie Karoline Heu; bp. 11 Aug 1928; conf. 11 Aug 1928; ord. deacon 24 Mar 1929; ord. teacher 9 Mar 1930; ord. priest 7 Sep 1930; m. Heuerßen 20 Jun 1925, Engel Marie Sophie Karoline Kirchhöfer; k. air raid Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 30 Sep 1944 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 84; IGI)

**Margarethe Charlotte Galts** b. Wittmund, Ostfriesland, Hanover, 22 Mar 1867; dau. of Bernhard Galts and Elisabeth Margarethe Ihnen; bp. 7 May 1923; conf. 7 May 1923; m. 16 Apr 1898, Wilhelm Meier; k. air raid Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 30 Sep 1944 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 157; CHL microfilm 2458, 346–47)

**Engel Marie Karoline Sophie Kirchhöfer** b. Reinsen-Remeringhausen, Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 23 Mar 1903; dau. of Friedrich Johann Wilhelm



Ludwig Kirchhöfer and Engel Marie Sophie Oltrogge; bp. 11 Aug 1928; conf. 11 Aug 1928; m. Heuerßen, Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 20 Jun 1925, Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Dröscher; k. air raid Bielefeld 30 Sep 1944 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 85)

**Erhardt Kirchhoff** b. Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 15 Aug 1924; son of Wilhelm Kirchhoff and Anna Luise Tosberg; bp. 27 Aug 1932 (CR Bielefeld Branch; IGI)

**Lina Luise Christine Marowsky** b. Todtenhausen, Minden, Westfalen, 13 Dec 1877; dau. of Christian Marowsky and Lina Mearhoff; bp. 7 Nov 1910; conf. 7 Nov 1910; m. 9 Dec 1911, Karl Bockermann; d. cardiac insufficiency 11 Jul 1941 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 142)

**Franziska Emma Kätchen Mothes** b. Hamburg 12 Jun 1880; dau. of Edward Mothes and Marie Johanna M. Friedrichsen; bp. 7 Sep 1928; conf. 7 Sep 1928; d. 13 Jun 1943 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 98)

**Friedrich Heinrich Walter Recksiek** b. Schild-

esche, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 28 Aug 1919; son of Karl Heinrich Recksiek and Anna Katharine Johanna Milsman; bp. 17 Dec 1927; conf. 20 Dec 1927; ord. deacon 6 Dec 1931; ord. teacher 10 Jan 1928; ord. priest 2 Apr 1939; corporal; k. in battle Nishni-Kurp, Kaukasus, Russia, 26 Sep 1942 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 207; FHL microfilm no. 271400, 1925 and 1935 censuses; IGI, AF, PRF; www.volksbund.de)

**Marie Katharine Reick** b. Warburg, Paderborn, Westfalen, 12 Jun 1903; dau. of Wilhelm Reick and Helene Schmidt; bp. 16 Jan 1926; conf. 17 Jan 1926; m. 14 Apr 1925, Alfred Passon (div.); d. surgery 9 Jan 1940 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 232)

**Johann Friedrich Heinz Schroeder** b. Bielefeld 12 May 1919; son of — Schroeder and Anna Wegener; k. in battle 1943 (*Chronik der Gemeinde Bielefeld*, FHL microfilm 245258, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

**Pauline Simon** b. Orchowo, Mogilno, Posen, 25 Jan 1903; dau. of Phillip Simon and Katharine Gruber; bp. 21 Oct 1923; conf. 21 Oct 1923; m. Wilhelm Uibel; d. lung ailment 17 Sep 1944 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 182)



Fig. 11. Walter Recksiek.  
(H. Recksiek)

**Hellmut Heinz Steinkühler** b. Theesen, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 14 Aug 1927; son of Gustav Adolf Steinkühler and Karoline Sophie Auguste Obermeier; bp. 26 Oct 1935; conf. 27 Oct 1935; ord. deacon 3 May 1942; d. battlefield wounds 6 Apr 1945 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 252; IGI)

**Nephi Uibel** b. Bielefeld, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 28 Jul 1925; son of Wilhelm Uibel and Pauline Simon; bp. 19 Aug 1933; conf. 19 Aug 1933; ord. deacon 2 Apr 1939; sapper; k. in battle Normandy, France, 10 Aug 1944; bur. La Cambe, France (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 238; www.volksbund.de)

**Karoline Friederike Weber** b. Münchehagen, Stolzenau, Hanover, 7 Mar 1884; dau. of Friedrich Weber and Karoline Rode; bp. 2 Aug 1929; conf. 2 Aug 1929; m. — Koppelmeyer; d. Russia 2 Feb 1942 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 277)

**Friedrich Wind** b. Detmold, Lippe, 2 Jun 1864; son of Heinrich Wind and Louise Nolte; bp. 26 Oct 1910; conf. 26 Oct 1910; ord. deacon 21 Jun 1914; ord. elder 16 Sep 1914; m. Minna Luise Wind (div.); d. senility 7 Mar 1941 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 194)

## NOTES

1. Bielefeld city archive.
2. *Chronik der Gemeinde Bielefeld, 1896–1996* (Bielefeld, Germany: Bielefeld LDS Ward, 1996), 132. This source lists Brother Recksiek as the branch president as of September 14, 1938, the date on which the American missionaries were evacuated from Germany the first time. However, the directory of the West German Mission shows Elder Dean Griner of the United States in that leadership position as late as July 20, 1939. Whichever record is correct, it is certain that Heinrich Recksiek was the branch president after Elder Griner left Germany on August 25, 1939.
3. Heinz Recksiek, interview by Marion Wolfert in German, Salt Lake City, March 22, 2006; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
4. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
5. Elfriede Recksiek Doermann, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, May 4, 2009.
6. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 10045 2.
7. Eleonore Schmitz Michaelis, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, February 6, 2009.
8. *Chronik der Gemeinde Bielefeld*, 49.
9. Werner Niebuhr, autobiography, 1985, CHL MS 19617, 19.
10. Niebuhr, autobiography, 22.
11. Niebuhr, autobiography, 26–27.
12. Niebuhr, autobiography, 31.
13. Niebuhr, autobiography, 35.
14. Niebuhr, autobiography, 44–45.

15. *Chronik der Gemeinde Bielefeld*, 50.
16. Niebuhr, autobiography, 46–49.
17. *Chronik der Gemeinde Bielefeld*, 50.
18. Niebuhr, autobiography, 53–54.
19. Niebuhr, autobiography, 54–62.
20. Niebuhr, autobiography, 62.
21. *Chronik der Gemeinde Bielefeld*, 51.
22. Bielefeld City Archive.

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## HERFORD BRANCH

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The Latter-day Saint branch in the city of Herford, Westphalia, had sixty-four members when World War II began, but with only five priesthood holders, it was not very robust in a city of 42,339 inhabitants. According to the directory of the West German Mission in June 1939, Elder Ferryle B. McOmber of the United States was the branch president and was serving at the time without counselors.<sup>1</sup> Most of the branch leadership positions were not filled at the time, but there was a Sunday School president, a Primary president, and a YWMIA president.

Herford Branch <sup>2</sup>	1939
Elders	2
Priests	1
Teachers	2
Deacons	0
Other Adult Males	17
Adult Females	28
Male Children	9
Female Children	5
<i>Total</i>	64

On August 25, 1939, all American missionaries serving in Germany were evacuated from the country and Elder McOmber left with them. His instructions were to designate a local priesthood holder to guide

the branch, but there is no record that he informed the mission office in Frankfurt of his choice.

Branch meetings were held in rented rooms at Elverdisserstrasse 13. The branch observed the traditional schedule of holding Sunday school at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. Relief Society, Primary and Mutual meetings were all held on Tuesday. Choir practice took place at 8:00 p.m. on Sunday.

As of this writing, no eyewitness accounts by members of the Herford Branch can be located.

### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Louisa Adolphine Hermine Borgstädt** b. Herford, Westfalen, 2 Apr 1870; dau. of Hermann Borgstädt and Auguste Wistinghausen; bp. 21 Aug 1927; conf. 21 Aug 1927; m. 3 Oct 1890, Wilhelm Brinkmann; d. gout and rheumatism 12 Mar 1943 (FHL microfilm 68796, no. 1; CHL CR 275 8, no. 1)

**Albert Heinrich Gustav Buchtmann** b. Herford, Westfalen, 3 Nov 1922; son of Wilhelm Albert Georg Buchtmann and Paula Kleimann; bp. 27 Aug 1932; conf. 27 Aug 1932; d. pneumonia 21 Jun 1945; bur. Schierke, Wernigerode, Sachsen (FHL microfilm 68796, no. 4; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Hans Karl Hermann Albert Buchtmann** b. Herford, Westfalen, 18 Mar 1921; son of Wilhelm Albert Georg Buchtmann and Paula Kleimann; bp. 5 Aug 1929; conf. 5 Aug 1929; k. in battle Budarki, Caucasus, Russia, 4 Jan 1943 (FHL microfilm 68796, no. 3; IGI)

**August Wilhelm Burkhardt** b. Milse, Bielefeld, Westfalen, 4 Feb 1913; son of Karl Friedrich Burkhardt and Karoline Nebel; bp. 21 Jun 1936; conf. 28 Jun 1936; ord. deacon 7 Mar 1937; ord. teacher 19 Nov 1939; m. Herford, Westfalen, 18 Oct 1935, Maria Anna Luise Moll; lance corporal; d. in POW camp at Iwanowo, Russia, 6 Nov 1945 (FHL microfilm 68796, no. 54; www.volksbund.de; PRF)

**Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Danielmeyer** b. Schweicheln, Herford, Westfalen, 9 Apr 1918; son of Hermann Danielmeyer and Ida Rosa Graue; bp. 21 Aug 1927; conf. 21 Aug 1927; lance corporal; k. in battle Fela, Krolowez, Russia, 10 Sep or Nov 1941; bur. Kiev, Ukraine (FHL microfilm 68796, no. 10; www.volksbund.de; CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, 346–47; IGI; AF; PRF)

**Marie Florentine Friederike Echternkamp** b. Herford, Westfalen, 17 or 18 Dec 1873; dau. of Friedrich Wilhelm Echternkamp and Juliane Friederike Brinkmann; bp. 8 Sep 1928; conf. 8 Sep 1928; m. Apr 1898, Friedrich Kassing; d. heart failure 30 Nov 1945 (FHL microfilm 68796, no. 16; IGI)

**Maria Wilhelmine Anna Elisabeth Münstermann** b. Windheim, Minden, Westfalen, 22 Jul 1864; dau. of Adolf Münstermann and Wilhelmine Rolf; bp. 14 May 1927; conf. 14 May 1927; m. 11 Jun 1910, Theodor Johann Schiersch; 2m. Bünde, Herford, Westfalen, 6 Oct 1882, Caspar Heinrich Kammann; d. 17 Jan 1945 (FHL microfilm 68796, no. 29; IGI)

**Friederike Louise Nagel** b. Herford, Westfalen, 30 or 31 May 1883; dau. of Ernst Heinrich Nagel and Anna Margarethe Ilsabein Berger; bp. 18 Apr 1937; conf. 18 Apr 1937; m.; d. 1 or 2 Jul (IGI; AF)

## NOTES

1. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 10045 2.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.

## MINDEN BRANCH

Minden, a large city of historical and industrial importance located on the Weser River, has been called "the gateway to Westphalia." The city lies twenty miles northeast of Bielefeld and thirty-five miles west of Hanover and had a population of 28,389 people in 1939.<sup>1</sup> According to LDS Church records, the branch consisted of thirty-seven members at the time, nearly one-half of whom were females over the age of twelve. Only four brethren age twelve years or older held the priesthood. The address of the meeting rooms of the Minden Branch at the time is not known.

Hans Otto Deppe (born 1937) recalled holding meetings in the homes of the member families during the war, with the group gathering in his apartment about once each month.<sup>2</sup> Brother Sommer was always available to render priesthood services because he was classified as disabled and thus not

fit for military service. Attendance at meetings held in member homes may have been a dozen persons. According to Hans Otto, there was no reason for the Saints in Minden to fear persecution; nevertheless, they kept their windows shut while singing to avoid bothering the neighbors.

Minden Branch <sup>3</sup>	1939
Elders	1
Priests	0
Teachers	0
Deacons	3
Other Adult Males	9
Adult Females	17
Male Children	5
Female Children	2
<i>Total</i>	37

Hans Otto was the youngest of six children. His father worked as a waiter at times and also did odd jobs around town. While most Latter-day Saints in the West German Mission were not enthusiastic about Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party, some were more vocal than others. Hans Otto's father was perhaps one of them:

My father was drafted into the military but did not want to go. I remember that we talked about politics quite often in our home. My father was a unionist and we knew that. We also listened to BBC broadcasts and my parents trusted that we would not talk about that outside of our home. My parents did not like the Führer and often told us that.

Hans Otto's father was drafted in 1943 and sent to the Netherlands, where he served only on guard duty. A veteran of both the Western and Russian Fronts in World War I, he had hoped to be spared military service as an older man. Back at home, the Deppe family moved into rooms in the local army barracks along with perhaps one hundred



*Fig. 1. In 1931, the LDS branch in Minden was relatively strong, as evidenced by this photograph taken during an outing in a local forest. (H. O. Deppe)*

other families short on means. The children were allowed to play in the courtyard that had previously served as the soldiers' training grounds. Hans Otto recalled this fondly: they climbed the trees and even spent time on the meadows along the Weser River. "We could always go swimming or play at the railroad station." Despite the war, little children were still able to enjoy life.

During the air raids that took place over Minden, Sister Deppe and her children joined other occupants in the basement of the massive army post quarters. According to Hans Otto, "The basement had very thick walls with a big iron door. Even our apartments had those doors in front of them. . . . When we sat in the basement, the walls were shaking, and some of the plaster fell down on us. We always took an emergency suitcase with us, and we did not have to walk far to the shelter."

The city of Minden was important for industry and transportation and thus attracted the interest of the British Royal Air Force with increasing intensity as the war neared its conclusion. Hans Otto recalled observing the aftermath of an attack on the Mittelland Canal that runs along the north edge of the city; many boats and small ships had been destroyed. Although points of military significance appeared to be the primary targets, extensive destruction in the city's center also resulted.

Hans Otto recalled having power outages more frequently during the first months of 1945. Although his mother was able to find enough food for the family, there was never more than just enough, and ration cards often did not guarantee the availability of food. There was no water in the apartment, but the children fetched it easily from a well in the courtyard outside.



The war in Minden ended with the arrival of the British Army on April 6, 1945. Apparently, the Deppe family and several others were not quick enough to hang out white flags as a sign of surrender, and a few short artillery bursts were issued by the invaders as warnings. “As soon as we hung out our white sheet, it was quiet,” recalled Hans Otto. The British were kind to the people of Minden; most homes were not searched, and the conquerors did what they could to provide employment for local workers. Sister Deppe and her children spent much of their time doing outdoor cleanup and janitorial work.

The city of Minden lost at least 448 civilians during the war and more than 1,300 soldiers. Of the homes in the city limits, 36 percent were damaged or totally destroyed.<sup>4</sup>



*Fig. 2. Members of the Minden Branch and friends gathered for this photograph in 1937. (H. O. Deppe)*

In 1946, the Deppe family was blessed by the return of their father from a POW camp in Canada. They had known for some time that he had survived the war because he was allowed to send several cards home. However, tragedy struck this family in the death of Victor, a son of Sister Deppe from her first marriage and a half-brother of Hans Otto. Victor had been a soldier in the Wehrmacht and was captured at the end of the war. The family was later informed that while attempting to escape from a Polish POW camp in order to reach home for Christmas 1945, he was captured and punished by beheading.

The Minden Branch was weakened but alive and well when World War II came to an end in May 1945. The members there continued to meet in apartments for some time, and the future brought steady growth among the Saints in that city.

No members of the Minden Branch are known to have died during World War II.

## NOTES

1. Minden city archive.
2. Hans Otto Deppe, interview by the author in German, Dortmund, Germany, August 8, 2006; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
3. Presiding Bishopric, “Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955,” 257, CHL CR 4 12.
4. Minden city archive.

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## MÜNCHEHAGEN BRANCH

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The town of Münchehagen had only 1,596 residents in 1939, of whom barely a dozen were Latter-day Saints.<sup>1</sup> Located at the northeastern edge of the state of Westphalia, Münchehagen was seven miles directly north of its sister branch in Stadthagen and thirty-five miles northeast of the city of Bielefeld in the district of the same name.

No eyewitness stories of the Münchehagen Branch can be located as of this writing, but the directory of the West German Mission shows the name of Friedrich Möller as branch president with Ernst Wesemann as his first counselor. The only other name appearing in that directory is that of Ernst’s wife, Frieda, who was serving as the secretary of the Sunday School.<sup>2</sup> According to the statistical report of the branch filed just months after the German invasion of Poland, Möller and Wesemann were holders of the Aaronic Priesthood.

Branch meetings were held in the Wesemann home, with the address identified simply as

Münchehagen 268.<sup>3</sup> Sunday School took place at 2:00 p.m. and was followed by sacrament meeting at 3:30. No meetings were held during the week; the membership was too small to support auxiliary organizations.

The British army invaded the town without incident in April 1945. The only thing known about the fate of this branch is that Ernst Wesemann lost his life while serving in the Wehrmacht in Russia. It is very possible that the branch organization ceased to exist by 1945 and that the surviving members joined with the Saints in Stadthagen.

Münchhagen Branch <sup>4</sup>	1939
Elders	0
Priests	2
Teachers	2
Deacons	0
Other Adult Males	3
Adult Females	7
Male Children	0
Female Children	1
<i>Total</i>	15

#### IN MEMORIAM

At least one member of the Münchehagen Branch did not survive World War II:

**Fritz Ernst Wilhelm Wesemann** b. Münchehagen, Hannover, 18 May 1910; son of Heinrich Wesemann and Karoline Waltemath; bp. 2 Aug 1929; conf. 2 Aug 1929; ord. deacon 6 Apr 1930; lance corporal; d. in field hospital 6/542 at Ljuban 8 Feb 1942; bur. Sologubowka-St. Petersburg, Russia (FHL microfilm 68801 no. 9; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

#### NOTES

1. Münchehagen city archive.
2. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 10045 2.
3. Smaller towns in Germany had no street names in those days. Addresses consisted solely of house numbers.

4. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.

## STADTHAGEN BRANCH

Located twenty miles west of the major city of Hanover, the town of Stadthagen had been home to a strong branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since the early twentieth century. When World War II began, there were sixty-six members in the branch, including nineteen holders of the priesthood, in a town with a population of 28,389.<sup>1</sup> Several leaders in the Bielefeld District called this branch their home, principally district president Alfred Hegemeister.

Stadthagen Branch <sup>2</sup>	1939
Elders	7
Priests	6
Teachers	2
Deacons	4
Other Adult Males	9
Adult Females	31
Male Children	5
Female Children	2
<i>Total</i>	66

According to the directory of the West German Mission in Frankfurt, the president of the Stadthagen Branch in the fall of 1939 was Karl Borcharding Sr. of nearby Ottensen.<sup>3</sup> Heinrich Rahde and Wilhelm Tegmeier Sr. were his counselors. There were at that time leaders and secretaries for all organizations and programs with the exception of the Primary, possibly because only seven children were on the branch rolls.

Church meetings were held in rented rooms on Niedernstrasse 25 as the war approached. Sunday



Fig. 1. The first house on the right is Niederstrasse no. 25 as it appeared in the 1940s. (K. Borchering)

school began at 9:30 a.m., and sacrament meeting followed at 11:00. All Sunday meetings were held consecutively. The mission office directory indicates that Priesthood and Relief Society meetings were held after the close of sacrament meeting. At that time, no branch meetings were held during the week.

Young Fred Wehrhahn (born 1937) recalled the setting of the meeting rooms:

The first building was an old horse stable. The people who owned that old farmhouse had had horses at one point. I remember that we always had to enter the rooms through the actual farmhouse—through the *Diele* (hallway). The horse stable had been converted to our meeting rooms. They had cleaned it out and had done some remodeling so we could have more classrooms. . . . It was on the ground floor. I recall that we always had a picture on the wall of the Prophet Joseph Smith. My father would always take the time to tell us about the Prophet Joseph and his visitation by the Father and the Son. We had a pump organ for our music.<sup>4</sup>

According to the official branch minutes, worship services and other branch activities carried on without interruption during the first years of the war. For example, on February 18, 1940, seven members of the Stadthagen Branch traveled to Bielefeld to attend the district conference.<sup>5</sup> In June, all Sunday meetings were moved to the morning hours. By October, when Sunday School was changed to 1:00 p.m. and followed by sacrament meeting, the average attendance had declined from twenty to thirteen.<sup>6</sup>

The branch Christmas party of 1941 was attended by forty persons. By the summer of the next year, Sunday meetings were again held in the forenoon, but only ten persons were still coming faithfully. In October, the meetings were again moved to the afternoon. There are no explanations given for the schedule changes.<sup>7</sup>

Attached to the Stadthagen Branch but too far away to attend very often were perhaps a dozen

Latter-day Saints living in the town of Alverdissen, about twenty miles south. Werner Jacobi (born 1928) recalled the following about the group there:

In Alverdissen, we sometimes had up to twelve people. We would meet in members' homes. I remember the Franzheimer family and lady who we called Tante Minna. . . . We had [musical instruments] to sing with. We attended district conferences now and then in Bielefeld or Stadthagen. My parents had all scriptures in our home—I knew of the Book of Mormon, and we also made sure that we read in it regularly.<sup>8</sup>

Werner was a member of the Jungvolk and later the Hitler Youth. He enjoyed the activities of both organizations and was especially talented in sports. He believed there was a specific reason for his athletic prowess: “Because I kept the Word of Wisdom, I was always the best—best at the 100 meter dash and the long jump. Because of that, nobody made any fun of me or caused any trouble. I was simply the best in all those athletic activities.” Werner’s father objected to Hitler’s politics and complained about the Hitler Youth program but could not prevent his son from participating in the program.



*Fig. 2. The structure in which the branch met during the war stood behind house no. 25—almost exactly where the small, white building in this picture now stands. (K. Borchering)*

Several older members of the Stadthagen Branch passed away during the war, and their funerals were reported in the branch meeting minutes, but only once is a military death found, namely on February 15, 1942: “Fritz Bothe died of wounds at

the Russian Front.”<sup>9</sup> The minutes were apparently kept for the most part by Heinrich Rahde. Very complete, neat, and correct, the entries contain specific details on each meeting’s attendees by member category (priesthood holders, women, children, and friends). Brother Rahde was clearly dedicated to his calling as branch secretary.

Fred Wehrhahn’s parents were Karl and Alwine. The family lived in the town of Ehlen, about two miles southwest of Stadthagen. Brother Wehrhahn had worked as a miner but was then employed in a glass factory in Obernkirchen. Shortly after the war began, he was drafted into the Wehrmacht, and his wife and children moved into an apartment house in Obernkirchen.



*Fig. 3. The Wehrhahn family early in the war. (F. Wehrhahn)*

Even little children can have distinct memories, as was the case with Fred Wehrhahn: “My father was drafted in 1939. Even though I was only two years old, I can still remember that vividly. My father had gotten permission to come home because my mother



was ready to give birth to my little sister. I admired him for his uniform and for carrying a gun on his belt. That made an impression on my mind.”

Young Heinz Rahde (born 1927) recalled his midwar service in the Hitler Youth. Along with the obligatory political instruction, the boys were taught a strict code of conduct and were kept constantly busy:

We mainly learned about the life of Hitler, about his movement and his goal. The other time was devoted to sports, hiking, camping, reading maps and compasses. We took trips, roamed through the forests, learned first aid, all the things [American boys] learn in Scouting. . . . It kept us off the street. . . . Once a month we had Sunday morning meeting. They were always arranged at a time when church was held.<sup>10</sup>

Fortunately, Heinz rarely had to miss church meetings. He had been taught gospel principles by his parents and recognized some of the danger signs as he was called upon to serve his country at home and away. At the young age of sixteen, he was commuting about ten miles from his home in Heuerssen to the city of Wunstorf to attend a secondary school. In 1943, Heinz and his classmates were assigned as *Luftwaffenhelfer* (air force assistants) and trained to operate an antiaircraft battery. Under the command of one of their schoolteachers, they took up quarters on the outskirts of the huge city of Hanover. It was there that Heinz witnessed war at its most horrific on the evening of September 8, 1943. His account conveys the emotion of the experience of a young man trying in vain to defend his homeland:

[Illumination flares] were dropped. . . . [Enemy] planes were all over. We received orders to just shoot in any directions, wherever the noise came from. We rotated the guns continuously and fired as fast as we could. . . . The initial shock was hardly over when a fantastic firework appeared in the sky. Phosphorus bombs were [dropped]. They exploded high in the skies, and the burning tongues of flames danced down. . . . Wherever you looked, there were dancing little flames, dropping slowly down to earth. . . . We were

spellbound, standing in awe and fear and desperation, knowing that in minutes, every little inch of the ground would be engulfed in flames. It was a horrible spectacle.<sup>11</sup>

Tens of thousands of residents of Hanover perished in that attack. Heinz Rahde and his friends were compelled to see the aftermath of the bombing with their own eyes when they were transported into town to help rescue persons buried alive or to recover bodies. He would not soon forget the sight: “It was like landing on the moon.

Every building was destroyed. There was nothing left of a once proud city, no houses, no anything. . . . We didn’t find any people alive.”



Fig. 4. Heinz Rahde on leave at home in the uniform of the Reichsarbeitsdienst. (H. Rahde)



Fig. 5. Heinz Rahde’s young antiaircraft battery comrades. The boys were pupils of the Hölty School in Wunstorf. (H. Rahde)

Although not officially soldiers, members of Heinz Rahde’s antiaircraft unit were constantly in harm’s way, and several were killed during air raids. In addition to the physical dangers, men and boys in uniform were subjected to moral dangers as well. Heinz recalled many instances when girls with loose morals entertained the boys. Alcohol and

tobacco were in use all around him, but he clung to the teachings of the Church. He did not explain his health code and thus took some chiding from his comrades. On one occasion, his commanding officer complimented him in a rather surprising fashion. His account of the experience reads:

During a party in the mess hall, he commanded, "Rahde, stand up!" There I stood. I did not know what he wanted. He said, "Rahde is a Mormon. He does not drink, he does not smoke. If you tease him again, I will punish you." I was a bit ashamed of myself. . . . Then he said, "Rahde, from now on, it is your assignment to bring your friends back to the battery compounds, whenever they go out and have too much to drink." I did. I never had more friends since. They all wanted me to go with them.<sup>12</sup>

The Saints of the Stadthagen Branch were few in number but were not forgotten by the leaders of the West German Mission. On April 12, 1942, Anton Huck (first counselor to mission supervisor Christian Heck) attended meetings in Stadthagen and ordained Friedrich Behling an elder. One year later, both Elders Heck and Huck were in Stadthagen to hold a special meeting. By then, the average attendance had increased to about fifteen persons. On July 11, 1943, the Relief Society held a conference to which twenty-three members and friends came. The theme was "keeping the Sabbath day holy."<sup>13</sup>

"We had very many air raids in our area," according to Fred Wehrhahn. "It started in 1942 and got more severe as time went on. At first, we would always hear an 'attention getter' and the sirens would go off. As the planes came closer, the sirens would go off again. When we heard two long, loud sounds, it meant that we had to find a shelter somewhere. Three sounds meant that they were here."

Small deeds of compassion on the part of young Heinz Rahde would return blessings upon his head later on. As an air force assistant, he came into contact with Russian POWs. They were assigned to clean the mess kits of the German soldiers, and Heinz was in the habit of leaving portions of his meals for them, knowing that they were underfed.

On one occasion, his commanding officer noticed the clandestine act and asked Heinz, "What did you put in your mess kit?" "Food," answered Heinz. "They're hungry." The officer patted him on the shoulder and said, "Don't do that again. If I reported you, it could cost you your life." One Russian prisoner eventually wrote a note and gave it to Heinz with this comment: "When Germany loses and you need some help from the Russians, show them this little note."<sup>14</sup> Heinz preserved the note with care.

Karl Wehrhahn was among the Wehrmacht soldiers trying to stave off the Allied invasion of France in Normandy in June 1944 and was captured there by British soldiers. He later told his son, Fred, that while he and other German soldiers were being guarded by a nervous British soldier, the young man accidentally fired his weapon, inflicting a mortal wound on the soldier standing next to Karl, who had been praying that no such incident would occur.

Heinz Rahde was seventeen in 1944 when a call came to national service in the Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD). This duty was almost like a vacation when compared with the high-stress, no-rest duty he had rendered in ground-to-air combat. His RAD unit was stationed in the village of Münchhof, just fifty miles southeast of his home. A bright young man and a good student, Heinz became a trainer responsible for instructing boys fifteen and sixteen in the use of radar equipment. He enjoyed the assignment, the natural beauty of the setting, and the proximity to home.

An opportunity for advancement and prestige presented itself while Heinz was at Münchhof. His performance was so good that he was invited to join an officers' training program. However, he turned down repeated invitations. He later came to the conclusion that the Lord must have been with him in making that decision: "All of my friends left [to join the program]. They were sent to Russia, and over 80 percent of them died. . . . I could stay in Germany, training incoming recruits on our anti-aircraft instruments. I felt I was a good teacher."<sup>15</sup>

The year 1944 was one of slight growth for the Stadthagen Branch. On February 20, three members of the Kirchhöfer family (Edith, Ursula, and Heinz) were baptized in a ceremony held in connection with a district conference in Bielefeld. By this time, many members of the branch had left town to serve in the military or in other government assignments to the extent that the Thanksgiving program held on October 8 was attended by only eleven persons.<sup>16</sup>

Fred Wehrhahn recalled being treated differently because of his religion:

As soon as people at school found out that we were members of the Church, we were quite frankly treated as second-class citizens. They were careful about it, but even as a child, I realized that I was not treated the same as others were. Even the people in our neighborhood knew that we were [Latter-day Saints], especially because my dad always liked sharing the gospel with others. I still had friends in the neighborhood to play with, and it did not matter much to them. But I have to say that it was not the kind of persecution that made us suffer.

On November 26, the Sunday School had to be canceled due to air-raid alarms. On Christmas Day, district president Alfred Hegemeister from Stadthagen visited the branch meetings and guided a discussion about moving the meetings to Sunday morning, because the local Volkssturm (home guard) was conducting training on Sunday afternoons. The members of the branch voted to decline the suggestion.<sup>17</sup>

As the war drew to a close, the Saints in Stadthagen continued to hold their meetings as best they could. On March 18, 1945, a branch anniversary celebration was held, and nineteen persons attended. Three weeks later, the minutes note that no meetings could be held because American soldiers had conquered the surrounding county of Schaumburg-Lippe. British troops moved into the town on April 15, and again church meetings were canceled. The next entries are of postwar events, such as on May 20, when Sunday School

was scheduled for 9:30 a.m., to be followed by sacrament meeting. Although church services had been canceled on several occasions, the branch secretary continued to make his entries without interruption.<sup>18</sup>

Werner Jacobi had finished public school in 1943 and began an apprenticeship as a plumber and electrician. He rode his bike every day to Barntrup, a town three miles to the south. His services there were valuable because so many young men had left their masters' shops to serve in the military. Werner was still there when the war drew to a close, and he was drafted into the Volkssturm. Given some training with weapons, he was eventually sent with other citizen soldiers toward Berlin. "We were supposed to march to Berlin in order to defend Hitler. We only made it as far as Rinteln [twelve miles north of Alverdisen] because somebody had destroyed a bridge, and then we had to walk back home. After that, the British army came to our area. There was no fighting." At age seventeen, Werner was very fortunate to avoid dangerous military service.

In the spring of 1945, the Soviet army was driving toward Berlin, and an order came that Heinz Rahde's unit was to race to the German capital to join in the defense of the city. Heinz and two close friends, Günther Abeler and Ali Behrens, deliberated and decided that they were not going to Berlin—they were going home! They found civilian clothing, gathered a supply of food, and headed for the forest. Despite moving toward home with great caution and keeping out of the open, they suddenly found themselves staring down the cannon barrel of an American tank. After the initial terror of facing the enemy for the first time, the boys were interrogated and were about to be shipped off to a POW camp. When he saw several freed Russians sitting on the tank, Heinz recalled the note and displayed it with high hopes. The Americans were impressed and instructed him, "Go home to your mother."<sup>19</sup> He must have been very grateful for the training he had received in treating his fellowman properly.

On the way home, Heinz and his friends traveled under cover of the forests until one day, when he felt inspired to go into the open. This seemed foolish to his friends, because they had watched from afar as enemy truck after truck transported German soldiers to POW camps. Nevertheless, Heinz wanted to leave the forest. Günther inquired, "Heinz, did you pray about it?" "Yes!" "Then I go with you." Moments later, they were invited by a local farmer to hide in a barn. While they did so, American soldiers searched the forest they had left and rounded up many German prisoners. Heinz recalled recognizing the hand of the Lord in this escape.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, the boys found themselves looking down the hill at Heinz's village of Heuerssen and were pleased that no damage had occurred. While sneaking into the backyard, Heinz set off a burglar alarm that sounded like a small bomb. Fortunately, only the family and the neighbors reacted and were thrilled to see Heinz. "What a joy that was! I was home. I cannot describe the feeling. Home, with mother, father and sister." His sister took food to his friends at the outskirts of town, after which they headed in different directions to their respective homes.<sup>21</sup>

There would be one more confrontation with the conquering Americans, but this one was quite harmless. A few days after arriving home, Heinz was still hiding, hoping to avoid being taken away to a POW camp. He had never officially belonged to the Wehrmacht, but in those days, any man in uniform could be considered a soldier and incarcerated. One day, some American soldiers in a tank showed up in front of the Rahde home and called for Heinz. It turned out that the town's mayor had identified him as the only one who could speak English. The soldiers were looking for a guide through the local forest to hunt deer. Heinz joined them, and they even gave him a gun. "For the first time I began to trust our enemy."<sup>22</sup>

Fred Wehrhahn was approaching his eighth birthday when World War II came to an end. He recalled the chaos and insecurity of the times:

I remember that soldiers often came to our home and asked for civilian clothing. They would leave all their uniforms with us. We were told to prepare ourselves for the Russians to come in when the war came to an end. We packed bare necessities to put on our little wagon, and we were just waiting to hear who would come. In the end, it was the Americans. Even as old as I was, I had already heard stories about the Russians and how ugly they were to people. We also heard some things about the Americans.

As it turned out, Fred and his family were not in danger when the conquerors arrived:

When the Americans then came in with their jeeps, they were loaded with clothing and would give it to us to use. I still remember how nice some of those soldiers were to us and how they smiled. They tried in their own way to communicate with us that they were our friends. I got some chocolate from them once, and I got really sick from it because my stomach was not used to it anymore. We were nothing but skin and bones. The Americans took over one of the homes and made it their communication center. I remember that we heard of what they did with the food when they were full and did not want it anymore—they buried it. But we dug it out and hid it underneath our shirts because we were so hungry. I got caught one time, but I wasn't punished. All my friends ran away, but the sergeant caught me by the neck. He looked at the can that we had found that they buried. He took me on his jeep and didn't take me home until late at night. I had to go on all his rounds with him.

When World War II ended, Heinz Rahde was only seventeen years old, but he had experienced the horrors of war. He emerged unscathed physically as well as spiritually. Having been perhaps in greater danger of losing his good standing in the Church than losing his very life, he had withstood all temptations and conducted himself as a worthy Latter-day Saint. He had been preserved by the hand of the Lord and was pleased to acknowledge that fact.

The small group of Saints in Alverdisen had survived the war. Their little town was untouched by the conflict, and the British conquerors did no harm as they came through in April 1945. Nevertheless,





1861; son of Christian Ludwig Kirchhöfer and Anne Sophie Karoline Oltrogge; bp. 6 Nov 1926; conf. 6 Nov 1926; ord. deacon 17 Jun 1928; ord. teacher 7 Apr 1929; ord. priest 25 Jan 1931; m. Heuerßen, Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 26 Apr 1891, Engel Marie Sophie Oltrogge; d. bronchitis and heart ailment 20 May 1940 (FHL microfilm 68805, no. 34; 1925 and 1930 censuses, no. 271379; IGI; AF)

**Friederike Karoline Charlotte Maier** b. Rolfshagen, Grafschaft Schaumburg, Hessen-Nassau, 12 Mar 1860; dau. of Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Maier and Karoline Justine Kinne; bp. 11 Oct 1924; conf. 11 Oct 1924; m. Obernkirchen, Grafschaft Schaumburg, Hesse-Nassau, 15 May 1880, Karl Heinrich Friedrich Tünnermann; 2m. 8 Apr 1908, Wilhelm Albes; d. old age Rolfshagen, 5 May 1943 (FHL microfilm 68805, no. 1; CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 28; FHL microfilm 25708, 1930 census; IGI)

**Engel Marie Sophie Oltrogge** b. Heuerßen, Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 19 Jun 1866; dau. of Johann Heinrich Konrad Oltrogge and Engel Marie Charlotte Hardekopf; bp. 7 May 1927; conf. 7 May 1927; m. Heuerßen, 26 Apr 1891, Johann Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig Kirchhöfer; d. stroke Reinsen, Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 17 Jun 1940 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 74; IGI)

**August Heinrich Friedrich Christian Römbke** b. Seelenfeld, Minden, Westfalen, 25 Apr 1859; son of Johann Konrad Dietrich Römbke and Sophie Schröder; bp. 14 Oct 1922; conf. 14 Oct 1922; ord. deacon 22 Jul 1923; ord. teacher 6 Jul 1926; ord. priest 20 Mar 1931; m. Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 8 Jan 1887 to Sophie Karoline Dorothee Schäfer; d. stroke 9 May 1941 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 11; FHL microfilm 68805, no. 46; IGI)

**Sophie Karoline Dorothee Schäfer** b. Lachem, Hameln, Hannover, 16 or 17 Aug 1867; dau. of — and Dorothee Rosine Schäfer; bp. 11 Sep 1921; conf. 11 Sep 1921; m. 11 Jan 1887, August Heinrich Friedrich Christian Römbke; d. lung disease, Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 4 May 1940 (FHL microfilm 68805, no. 47; CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 7)

**Friedrich Wilhelm Ludwig Scheper** b. Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 14 Nov 1885; son of Ernst Scheper and Gustine Thies; bp. 17 Dec 1926; conf. 17 Dec 1926; m. 2 Jan 1909, Anna Christine Nagel; d. pulmonary tuberculosis 19 May 1940 (CR Bielefeld Branch, record no. 50, FHL microfilm 68805)

**Karoline Sophie Vehling** b. Wendthagen, Stadthagen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 16 Nov 1867; dau. of Ludwig

Vehling and Auguste Runge; bp. 9 Feb 1929; conf. 9 Feb 1929; m. Heinrich Wilhelm Hartmann; d. senility 2 Feb 1944 (CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 109; IGI)

**August Friedrich Wehrhahn** b. Ostendorf, Rinteln, Hessen-Nassau, 24 May 1867; son of Heinrich Karl August Wehrhahn and Mathilde Henriette Schwoone; bp. 3 Jun 1933; conf. 3 Jun 1933; ord. deacon 28 Feb 1937; ord. priest 7 May 1939; m. 7 Apr 1888, Minna Antoinette Dorothee Tebbe; three children; m. 15 Dec 1894, Engel Wilhelmine Justine Schmidt; thirteen children; m. 24 Mar 1920, Luise Requardt; d. peritoneal cancer, Engern, Hessen-Nassau, 24 Dec 1939 (FHL microfilm 68805, no. 67; IGI)

**Anne Sophie Dorothee Wills** b. Beckedorf, Rinteln, Hessen, Nassau, Hessen-Nassau, 11 Jun 1855; dau. of Johann Heinrich Wilhelm Wills and Christine Sophie Charlotte Dühlmeier; bp. 11 Sep 1921; conf. 11 Sep 1921; m. Blyinghausen, Schaumburg-Lippe, 4 Nov 1880, Heinrich Friedrich Wilhelm Bredthauer; d. 1 Feb 194. (IGI; CR Bielefeld Branch, FHL microfilm 68784, no. 6; FHL microfilm 25728, 1925 census)

## NOTES

1. Stadthagen city archive.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
3. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 10045 2.
4. Fred Wehrhahn, telephone interview with the author, April 30, 2009.
5. Stadthagen Branch general minutes, 183, CHL LR 8676 11.
6. *Ibid.*, 193, 200.
7. *Ibid.*, 226, 234, 241.
8. Werner Jacobi, telephone interview with the author in German, April 13, 2009; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
9. Stadthagen Branch general minutes, 230.
10. Heinz Rahde, autobiography (unpublished), 19.
11. *Ibid.*, 20.
12. *Ibid.*, 22.
13. Stadthagen Branch general minutes, 232.
14. Rahde, autobiography, 25.
15. *Ibid.*, 24.
16. Stadthagen Branch general minutes.
17. *Ibid.*
18. *Ibid.*
19. Rahde, autobiography, 25.
20. *Ibid.*, 26.
21. *Ibid.*, 27.
22. *Ibid.*, 28.