
BRESLAU DISTRICT

East German Mission



In 1939, the Breslau District was the third largest in the East German Mission. The district territory extended from the modern German-Polish border east and south to the 1939 border of Germany. The city of Breslau (now Wrocław, Poland) is about 225 miles from Berlin. In 1939, the city was the home to three branches of Latter-day Saints: Breslau Center, Breslau South, and Breslau West. Three other cities also hosted branches in the district: Liegnitz, Schweidnitz, and Schlegel.

Breslau District ¹	1939	1940	1941	1942
Elders	50	49		
Priests	31	35		
Teachers	25	24		
Deacons	63	61		
Other Adult Males	106	109		
Adult Females	428	435		
Male Children	53	55		
Female Children	52	56		
<i>Total</i>	808	824	824	830

Before and during most of World War II, Martin Hoppe was the president of the Breslau District. According to the history of the East German Mission, President Hoppe held a special meeting with the presidencies of the three Breslau branches on January 24, 1939. In that



Fig. 1. The branches of the Breslau District in the province of Silesia.

meeting they discussed ways and means of improving the genealogical work in the district.² On March 5, 1939, Herbert Gulla of the Breslau West Branch was appointed first counselor to President Hoppe and Fritz Michael of the Breslau Center Branch became the second counselor.³

Martin Hoppe had served as a full-time missionary in the German-Austrian Mission.

He was drafted shortly after the war began and is seen in uniform in nearly all photographs taken during district and mission conferences through 1942. Somehow he found time to translate into German portions of the book *Jesus the Christ* by James E. Talmage. His translation was printed in 1943 by the East German Mission and sent to each LDS soldier in the field as a Christmas present.⁴

"My father spoke several foreign languages," explained Werner Hoppe years later. "He spoke fluent English, French, Russian, and several other languages. His occupation was business—specifically accounting. In the army, he worked as a translator at a prisoner of war camp with British soldiers." Brother Hoppe was stationed not far from Breslau, which made it possible for him to come home often on weekends. His son recalled that he sat on the rostrum with branch leaders and was usually in uniform.⁵

President Hoppe was transferred to the Eastern Front in 1942, still working as a translator. In October 1943, Martin Hoppe was wounded—shot through the lung while attempting to rescue a comrade. He wrote to his wife from a field hospital of his condition, and she wrote back to him on October 24:

My dear Martin,
Yesterday I received your letter from the field hospital and was very shocked. Please write again and tell us how you are doing. I hope that you will be sent back to Germany as soon as you are well enough to travel. It is odd that you had to flee.⁶ You will have to tell us all about that later. Please take care of yourself so that you can recover fully.

Gertrud Hoppe could not have known that her husband had died the day before she wrote her letter. One month later, she received a long letter from Herbert Klopfer, supervisor of the East German Mission and a former missionary companion of Martin. His message reflected

Breslau, den 24.10.43

Mein lieber Martin!

Bestenfalls ist Deinen Brief aus dem
Kriegsgefangenen. War ja sehr erschrocken. Seit
Du schreibst uns doch bitte bald news wie
es Dir ergeht. Hast Du hoffentlich ins Brief
verlegt werden wenn Du zum Transportieren
bist. Ist ja allerhand, dass Du mehr oder
weniger müdest. Hast Du mir noch
etwas geschrieben. Habe ich mir noch dass
alles wieder gut wird. Hast Du noch Dein
Klein einen Traum. Ich soll Dich auf Urlaub
kommen nur über der Hand einen Monat
Längen und ich dachte noch dabei so kommt es
Vater auf Urlaub. Ich fragte Dich ob Du über Wien
nehmen bleiben kannst etc. sagtest Du nein
bist bis zum 8. und da war es vorbei. Ich
steckt im Kasten Dein Brief. Erinnere Dich
kam aus Bremen an. Kind nicht schlafen.
Ich habe Brod. Ranzlitz und Alfred genossen

Lieber Vater alles Liebe für Dich in Deutschland
sind wir so viel bei Dir. Wir wünschen Dir als
vielmals Deine Gertrud.

Fig. 2. By the time Gertrud Hoppe's letter arrived at the field hospital in Russia, Martin had already died. (L. Hoppe)

the sadness that must have been felt throughout the Breslau District and the mission. Some extracts of his letter dated November 29, 1943, are as follows:

Dear Sister Hoppe,

Two weeks ago, I came home on leave and learned from your sister-in-law in Zwickau that your husband had been wounded. While the news saddened me, I was all the more grieved to read that your husband, my brother, one of my best friends and fellow worker in the Church, had died of his wounds. . . . The dearest person God has given you on this earth has been taken from you and your children. But the Almighty who gave Brother Hoppe such a faithful and brave wife and mother of his children knows why He allowed your husband to die in this war. . . . My dear Sister Hoppe, I wish you and your children and your relatives in Breslau God's blessings and comfort. I wish you good

health and the assistance of the good people
there during your time of grief. . . .
Your brother in the gospel
Herbert Klopfer

Martin Hoppe's successor as district president was Fritz Nestripke. It is clear from reports sent to the mission office that all programs of the Church were functioning well in the Breslau District at the time World War II broke out. Brother Nestripke apparently carried on in good faith as well. Richard Rangelack, first counselor to the mission leader, wrote that a district conference was held in Breslau twice each year through 1944.⁷

In January 1945, Adolf Hitler declared that all major cities in eastern Germany were to be turned into "fortresses" that would be defended to the last man. Women and children were to be evacuated, and all males ages fourteen (Hitler Youth) to seventy (Volkssturm) were to be impressed into service to halt the advance of the Red Army.



Breslau 5, den 8.3.44.
Schweidnitzer Stadtgraben 1
(Ellerkasern)

Frau
Gertrud Hoppe
Breslau, Lützowstr. 78.

Das Wehrbezirks-Kommando Breslau I überreicht mit dem
Ausdruck aufrichtiger Anteilnahme den Wehrpaß Ihres *Herrmanns*,
des Wehrgeführten Martin Hoppe,
geb. am 10.10.06; am f. Verwundung gestorben am 23.10.43,
der sein Leben für Groß-Deutschland gab.

Gemäß Anordnung des Obersten Befehlshabers der Wehr-
macht ist Ihnen der Wehrpaß zur Erinnerung und als Ausweis
für Versorgungsansprüche auszuhandigen.

I. A.

Frost
Major

Fig. 3. This letter was sent to Gertrud Hoppe by the Wehrmacht office in Breslau, along with Martin's military service book. (L. Hoppe)

On March 8, 1945, General Hermann Niehoff took over as the commander of "Fortress Breslau" and issued instructions that included phrases typical among fanatic Nazi Party leaders as the war drew to a close:

I expect that every soldier within this fortress is fully aware of our situation and will fulfill his duty to the utmost. . . . You are not only fighting for yourselves and your wives and your children, but for Breslau, the heart of Silesia, the strongest bulwark of the Reich against the red flood from the east.⁸

Despite a lack of equipment and supplies, the German defenders did indeed keep the Red Army out of Breslau until May 6, 1945. Later that year, the Soviets withdrew; the Allied nations had transferred the entire region to Poland.

Although many LDS families and individuals had fled the province of Silesia during the war, significant numbers were still in Breslau a full year after the war ended. Elder Ezra Taft

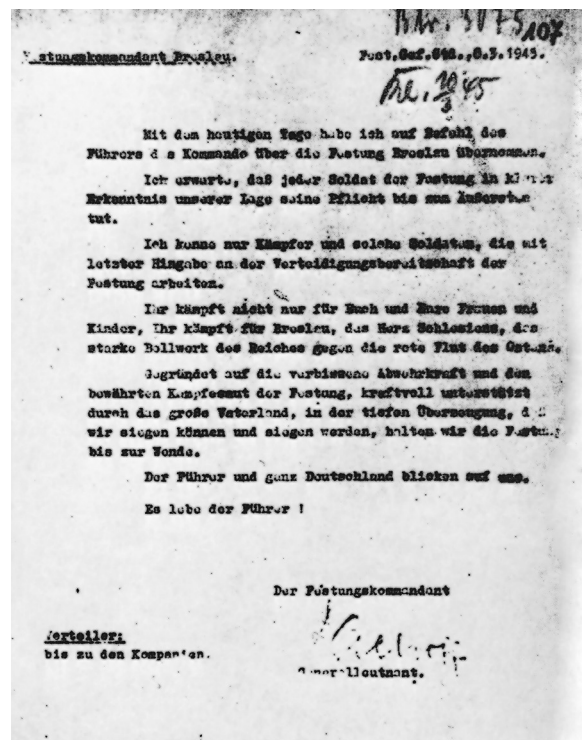


Fig. 4. General Herrmann Niehoff clarified the status of "Fortress Breslau" in this letter dated March 8, 1945.

Benson was touring Europe on a Church welfare mission and arrived in Breslau in 1946 to hold a conference with the surviving Saints. During the meeting, he was asked whether the Saints should leave the region. Heinz Koschnike was in attendance on that occasion and reported the following:

He told us that the gospel had to be preached in Poland as well. We stared at each other. We then told him that we wanted to live among Germans, to move to Germany. We didn't want to stay in Poland. He said that he would inquire of the Lord and that we would meet again tomorrow. The next day he said that he had an answer from the Lord. We were to leave, and he would go to Warsaw to arrange it all. We would go to Frankfurt am Main. We didn't want to go to the Russian Zone in Germany. Which other zone was not important.⁹

In the summer of 1946, several cattle cars were used to transport Latter-day Saints from Breslau to Germany by rail.¹⁰ By the fall of 1946, the Polish government had completed the forced evacuation of ethnic Germans westward to the Soviet occupation zone. The refugees were usually given one day's notice of the transfer and were allowed to take with them only what they could carry. Other property was simply to be left behind, including business interests and money in bank accounts. As far as The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was concerned, all branches of the Breslau District simply ceased to exist by the end of 1946.

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. East German Mission Quarterly Reports, 1939, no. 53, East German Mission History.
3. Ibid., no. 55, 58. The conference in question involved a planning meeting on February 19, to which 233 members and friends came.

4. Herbert Klopfer to Gertrud Hoppe, November 29, 1943; private collection; trans. the author.
5. Werner Hoppe, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann, June 10, 2008.
6. The German phrase used suggests that Martin had to get himself off the field of battle without assistance, rather than be carried off by medics. The letter is in the possession of Martin Hoppe's son, Lienhard.
7. Richard Ranglack, autobiography; private collection.
8. A copy of the letter is seen in Herbert Michaelis, "Die Endphase des 2. Weltkrieges und seine Folgen," in *Der 2. Weltkrieg: Bilder Daten Dokumente* (Gütersloh, Germany: Bertelsmann, 1968), 613.
9. Heinz Koschnike, interview by the author in German, Bischofswerda, Germany, June 7, 2007; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
10. As it turned out, the Breslau Saints were not taken to Frankfurt as planned. Officials in the Russian occupation zone in eastern Germany did not allow them to pass through that territory. They were resettled in the towns of Rammenau and Bischofswerda near the Czech border.

BRESLAU CENTER BRANCH

Four months after World War II began, the East German Mission records showed the Breslau Center Branch having a total of 168 members. Thus it was the smallest of the three branches in Breslau, the capital city of Silesia, where approximately 550,000 people lived in 1939. Although there were challenges living in a huge city dominated by Catholics (60 percent) and Protestants, Latter-day Saint eyewitnesses felt that the impersonal character of a German metropolis allowed for tiny religious groups to be overlooked. Consequently, they were not bothered.

The Center Branch met in rented rooms at Sternstrasse 40, a short distance northeast of downtown. The territory covered by the branch was essentially the section of Breslau north of the Oder River.

As was often the case in Germany, the branch met not in the main building on