

NOTES

1. Bühl Branch general minutes, 144, CHL LR 1180 11.
2. Kurt Schneider, *Imagining Success* (Salt Lake City: Schneider, 1977), 276.
3. Bühl Branch general minutes, 150.
4. No reports have been found regarding the branch in Mülhausen.
5. Charlotte Bodon Schneider, diary (unpublished); used with permission.
6. *Ibid.*
7. *Ibid.*
8. See the details of his sixteen days as a prisoner of the French in the Strasbourg Branch chapter.

BÜHL BRANCH

At the onset of World War II, the Bühl Branch was part of the Karlsruhe District. Located twenty-four miles southwest of Karlsruhe in the Rhine River Valley, Bühl was about the same distance from Strasbourg on the west side of the River. When the Strasbourg District was established in late 1943, the Bühl Branch and the Freiburg group of the Karlsruhe District were included under the leadership of Kurt Schneider of Strasbourg.

Bühl Branch ¹	1939
Elders	3
Priests	2
Teachers	0
Deacons	1
Other Adult Males	0
Adult Females	5
Male Children	0
Female Children	1
<i>Total</i>	12

The city of Bühl had about six thousand inhabitants in 1939. Only twelve of those were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

A very rare characteristic of this branch was the fact that three (one-fourth) of those members were elders (Karl Josef Fetsch, August Friedrich Flad, and August Friedrich Haug) and three more (their sons) were holders of the Aaronic Priesthood. As it turned out, this branch enjoyed fine leadership and unity during the difficult years of the war.

The only other leader listed in the branch directory in the summer before the war began was Frieda Fetsch, president of the Relief Society.² The meetings were held in rented rooms at Grabenstrasse 5. Priesthood meeting began at 9:30 a.m., followed by Sunday School at 10:00. Sacrament meeting was scheduled for 7:00 p.m. The only other gatherings were MIA on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m., Relief Society on Thursdays at 5:00 p.m., and a genealogical class on the first Wednesday of the month at 7:30 p.m.

Franz and Frieda Mussler lived in the spa city of Baden-Baden, just six miles from Bühl. Their children, Ursula (born 1929) and Hans Karl (born 1934), both recalled making the trip to Bühl on Sunday mornings to attend church. According to Ursula,

The branch met at Grabenstrasse 5. The rooms were part of a one-family house. The Church rented five or six rooms. First, we held Sunday School in two separate groups—the adults and the children. Sacrament meeting followed. There weren't many of us in attendance (maybe twenty-five) but it was still enjoyable.³

Hans Karl Mussler described how they took the streetcar to the railroad station at Oos, then the train to Bühl, after which they took a short walk to the home of the Fetsch family. Simple chairs were the only seating, but a pump organ lent an air of formality to the setting. Hans Karl recalled a very small group of people meeting in the Fetsch home, “because there wouldn't have been enough room for very many people in their living room.”⁴

This was an excellent example of a tiny branch functioning in all aspects of the gospel with only rare interruptions during the war. Karl Josef Fetsch

was the branch president. In the absence of a branch clerk, he kept meticulous records of meetings, including contents of talks given. Those records show that most of the branch members gave a talk in one of the meetings each week. The minutes suggest that this was a close-knit group of Latter-day Saints.

On February 24, 1940, the letter sent to all branches in the West German Mission by Thomas E. McKay was read aloud in the Bühl sacrament meeting. The members knew that the mission leadership had been transferred to local Saints and that communications with Church leadership in the United States would be difficult if possible at all. Nevertheless, it is clear from the records that Karl Josef Fetsch was determined to sustain all of the programs of the Church in Bühl.

The minutes for the sacrament meeting on January 26, 1941, are typical of the years from 1939 to 1945:

The branch president presided over the meeting which was conducted by his first counselor. The invocation was given by Brother August Friedrich Haug and the benediction by Sister Annamarie Haug. The sacrament was blessed by Brother August Friedrich Flad and passed by Brother Günther Flad. Speakers were as follows: 1 August Friedrich Flad and 2 Karl Josef Fetsch. Four priests and four members attended.⁵

Minutes were likewise kept for Relief Society meetings and genealogical classes (both were usually held monthly), as well as for special gatherings such as baptisms, weddings, funerals, or when members sought healing blessings. For example, on August 17, 1940, Irmgard Bühler of Biberach was baptized in the city swimming pool. Alice Fetsch was baptized by her father at the same location on August 3, 1941.

During the war, two weddings were celebrated in the branch meeting rooms (in each case following the official ceremony in the presence of the civil registrar at city hall). On March 30, 1941, Georg Schröder of Schierstein by Wiesbaden married

Annamarie Haug. Eleven members and four friends attended the ceremony in the church. On September 15, 1942, Friedrich Heinrich Richard Haug (a sergeant in the Luftwaffe and only recently a Latter-day Saint) married Marianne Grüner (possibly from the nearby Strasbourg Branch). On the latter occasion, the church rooms were decorated. Anton Huck from the mission office in Frankfurt then ordained Brother Haug an elder. Alice Fetsch played the pump organ.

One of the highlights in the lives of these few members was the semiannual trip to Karlsruhe and other cities to participate in district conferences. For example, the 1940 fall conference was attended by “four priests and five members of our branch.” Ten branch members and one friend attended the spring conference of 1941.

Sunday, July 13, 1941, must have been a very important day in the Bühl Branch: mission leader Christian Heck came from Frankfurt accompanied by Richard Ranglack and Paul Langheinrich (counselors to East German Mission supervisor Herbert Klopfer). All three attended Sunday School and spoke. Elder Heck visited the branch again on February 22, 1942, with his counselor Anton Huck.

The small Bühl Branch could hardly afford to lose any members, but such was the case when Rosa Maria Flad passed away on March 3, 1942. Anton Huck came from Frankfurt to preside at the funeral. On the other end of life’s spectrum was the birth of a child in the Georg Jakob Schröder family in April 1942. Although the branch membership included only a few women, the Relief Society centennial was celebrated in 1942, as was the case all over the West German Mission.

Mission leaders in Frankfurt were aware of the small branch, as is clear from the meeting minutes. On September 9, 1942, Anton Huck presided over the baptism of Georg Jakob Schröder (a soldier) and Karl Fauth (of the Karlsruhe Branch) in Bühl. After the baptism, the participants “walked to a huge pear tree where Anton Huck gave a talk about baptism.” Other noteworthy events of the year 1942 include the

ordination of Karl Bühler of Biberach (in the Black Forest) to the office of elder. Christian Heck came to Bühl again on November 22 and sang a solo for the branch (“Noch Nicht Erfüllt”). The Christmas program that year was attended by six persons.

With the establishment of the Strasbourg District of the West German Mission in late 1943, interaction between the Saints in Alsace-Lorraine (German-occupied France) and Bühl increased in frequency. For example, an exchange outing took place on April 26, 1943, when eleven Saints from Bühl met with eight Saints from the Strasbourg branch at the Paul Kaiser family home in Grüneberg. When the Strasbourg Branch held a dedication of its meeting rooms on August 1, eleven members of the Bühl Branch made the short trip to Strasbourg. More than fifty persons came from other branches for that occasion, including Frankfurt, Saarbrücken, Karlsruhe, Mannheim, Pforzheim, and Freiburg.

The Bühl Branch minutes include the following entry dated March 15, 1944: “We travelled to Mülhausen [in Alsace-Lorraine] to meet with the new members there; they have no priesthood holders.” Two weeks later, branch members traveled to Biberach (thirty miles to the south) to hold a meeting in the home of Karl Bühler. It is apparent that Bühl’s location along the main north–south railway line (which connected Karlsruhe with Basel, Switzerland) was most advantageous to the Church.

Twelve members of the Bühl Branch attended the district conference in Karlsruhe on April 23, 1944. The branch minutes contain this comment: “All meetings were conducted in good order, but there was one interruption when an air raid siren (impending danger!) was sounded. All attendees were able to leave for their homes in time, filled with the spirit to continue the fight against sin.”

Due to his political attitudes, in late 1944 Karl Josef Fetsch attracted the attention of the police, was taken into what was euphemistically referred to as “protective custody,” and was removed from Bühl. According to the branch minutes, August Friedrich

Flad, his substitute as branch president, responded to a request of Frieda Fetsch to find her husband; he traveled to Mannheim and Ludwigshafen to inquire as to the whereabouts of Brother Fetsch. No further details are available, but Brother Fetsch was home again by September 13, apparently unharmed by the experience.

Bühl was not a large or important city during the war, but every city in Germany was threatened by the Allies, who enjoyed superiority in the German skies during the final months of the conflict. It comes as no surprise when one reads that no church meetings could be held on October 4 and 10, 1944, due to air raid alarms. The same was reported on November 19 and December 6. The entry written on January 7, 1945, is interesting and reflects the fears of Church members as the invading Allied forces neared their city:

Following a recommendation made by Brother Karl Josef Fetsch, all attendees of our fast and testimony meeting desired to receive a special blessing from the elders for special protection against the attacks from the air and the approaching enemy. We wished the blessings of the Lord in health and strength, and that we might continue to enjoy the Lord’s continued blessings and have our lives and our property preserved. Friedrich August Haug blessed Karl Josef Fetsch, Klara Haug, and Gisela Hess; Karl Josef Fetsch blessed August Friedrich Flad, Friedrich August Haug, Frida Fetsch, and Alice Fetsch; August Friedrich Flad blessed Anna M. Haug, Emma Distelzwey, Rota Fauth, Erika Fauth, and Heinz Fauth.

The meetings were again interrupted by air raid alarms on February 11, 1945. Despite the many ways in which life was complicated in Bühl from 1939 to 1945, the attendance at branch meetings remained remarkably consistent. During the sporadic absences of branch president Karl Josef Fetsch, August Friedrich Flad functioned very dependably as the leader of this small group of faithful Saints.

The final entry of the war years in Bühl was written on April 15 and reads as follows:

On the day after the entry of the French army into Bühl, there was still a very great deal of unrest. The entire population was held in check as everybody wondered what the conquerors would do. We brethren therefore decided that each family should hold their own sacrament meeting in their apartment and to see that talks were given. This was possible because there was an elder in each family. In our branch we are all thankful to our Creator and our Redeemer that all of the members are still alive and have suffered relatively little property damage.⁶ Even Brother Günter Distelzwey has returned from military service in good health and is already back at his civilian employment. We members of the Bühl Branch have been so blessed that we can hardly consider ourselves worthy. We continue to hope for blessings if we can remain faithful, endure to the end, and use wisdom in all things.

The members of the Bühl Branch continued to hold church meetings as regularly as possible after the Third Reich collapsed. The following was written on June 20, 1945:

Because our branch president, Brother Karl Josef Fetsch, will now be in Bühl on a permanent basis, he today assumed the official leadership of the branch in all respects. He thereby relieves Brother August Friedrich Flad, who since 1941 has been his substitute, which he will remain.

These few Saints had performed their church duties with great dedication during the challenging years of World War II. With so few losses in life (and apparently none in property), the branch membership had grown through births, convert baptisms, and marriages, and the future looked bright in the summer of 1945.

IN MEMORIAM

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

Friedrich Heinrich Richard Haug b. Bühl, Karlsruhe, Baden, 24 Apr 1918; son of August Friedrich Haug and Klara Koch; bp. 8 Aug 1927; conf. 8 Aug 1927;

ord. deacon 4 Jan 1931; ord. teacher 18 Jun 1933; ord. priest 20 May 1934; ord. elder 15 Sep 1942; lance corporal; MIA 9 Jun 1943 (FHL microfilm 68785, no. 11; CHL CR 275 8 2441, no. 211; IGI)

Anna Maria Uber b. Freudenstadt, Schwarzwaldkreis, Württemberg, 17 Aug 1857; dau. of Lorenz Uber and Elisabeth Bohnet; bp. 17 Jul 1923; conf. 17 Jul 1923; m. Freudenstadt 11 Nov 1883, Jakob Friedrich Haug; 10 children; d. heart attack Bühl, Karlsruhe, Baden, 1 Oct 1942 (FHL microfilm 68785, no. 7; CHL CR 275 8 2441, no. 208; IGI; AF)

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 branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
3. Ursula Mussler Schmitt, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in German, March 31, 2009; German summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
4. Hans Karl Mussler, interview by the author, Preston, Idaho, November 22, 2008.
5. Bühl Branch general minutes, CHL LR 1180 11. All quotations from the branch history were taken from this source.
6. This statement does not reflect the fact that one elderly sister had passed away during the war and that soldier Friedrich Heinrich Richard Haug had been missing in action since June 1943 and would never return.

FREIBURG BRANCH

An LDS branch had existed in the city of Freiburg in southwestern Germany from time to time since 1927. Karl Becker and his wife had watched the branch thrive and decline several times by 1939. In his short history of the early years of the branch, he wrote that "from 1936 to 1938 I [branch president Becker] with my wife and my daughter, Rosemarie, were the only members in Freiburg. I used this time to collect data for the redemption of the dead in my family."¹

Even as the only LDS male in Freiburg, Karl Becker was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ. He spent a good deal of time with a Mr. Schuppiser, a printer who produced the Church's