
CONCLUSION



To say that the German and Austrian members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints experienced difficult times during World War II would be an understatement. I have presented the first-person stories of more than 240 eyewitnesses. The episodes included represent what I consider to be the most significant among the thousands of incidents recounted by those eyewitnesses. Many survivors had experiences that could be presented sufficiently only in book-length format. I leave that daunting task to other authors.

The experiences of these Saints are unique in the history of the Church since the era of Joseph Smith. To be sure, other groups of Saints have suffered harrowing trials, including those who lived in the countries attacked, conquered, and occupied by the German Wehrmacht during World War II. Their stories, too, remain to be told and will likely mirror in many respects the accounts on the foregoing pages.

Without any attempt to present the Latter-day Saints in the West German Mission exclusively as martyrs or victims of the war, I offer below some observations about their experiences in general.

GERMAN LATTER-DAY SAINTS AS OUTSIDERS

The German citizenry during World War II belonged principally to the Catholic and Protestant

churches. Latter-day Saints represented one of the tiniest religious groups in the nation. Several eyewitnesses admitted being somewhat ashamed to tell friends and relatives that the local branch met not in a large and beautiful church but in a Hinterhaus, often a former restaurant or office building or a backstreet factory. Unlike their neighbors of other faiths, the Saints attended church services twice on Sunday and met for activities as often as four times during the week.

Latter-day Saint youth were often left out of religious instruction in school because they did not fit either the Catholic or the Protestant mold. To serve a mission (usually within the borders of their native land), they separated themselves from their non-LDS friends and appeared to be fanatics. When it came time to marry, LDS young adults looked to distant branches for partners or chose non-LDS spouses, hoping for a subsequent conversion. Many longed for the day when they could enter the temple in Salt Lake City (the closest one to Germany at the time) to be married in Church ordinances valid for all time.¹ No Saints residing in the West German Mission when the war began are known to have participated in temple ordinances.

Just as the Saints could not point to ostentatious meetinghouses, neither could they identify members of the Church in the higher socioeconomic

strata. This investigation has not yielded evidence of Latter-day Saints as doctors, lawyers, or teachers; university graduates were extremely rare. The men of the Church in the West German Mission were primarily laborers and craftsmen. A few owned shops. Several were supervisors in local factories, but there is no evidence of Church members who sat on boards of directors or owned industries and department stores. As the war escalated, many of the men in the Church who were not drafted were required to increase their work weeks to sixty hours or more, and many were compelled to work on Sundays.

LATTER-DAY SAINTS AND THE GERMAN EXPERIENCE IN WORLD WAR II

As mentioned, the population of Germany in 1939 was approximately eighty million. Just over 13,500 of the inhabitants of the Reich were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It appears that they shared nearly all of the experiences of their neighbors—the average citizens and families in Germany. Just as their non-Mormon countrymen, Latter-day Saints attended schools, worked in factories, lived in huge apartment complexes in large cities, bought their food in small specialty shops, participated in local harvest festivals, and swam in city lakes. They dreamed of owning their own home or an automobile or of enjoying the convenience of a telephone in the home.

Most Latter-day Saints attended parades and watched Hitler and his troops pass in review. Some raised their arms in the Nazi salute and greeted friends and strangers alike with the obligatory “Heil Hitler!” They sang the national anthem in movie theaters with their neighbors and in schools with their classmates. Some believed that Hitler’s plans to regain German territory from neighboring countries (especially from Poland and Czechoslovakia) were justified and his methods appropriate.

A few members of the Church belonged to the Nazi Party, but most avoided political involvement and seldom spoke of Hitler at home. Most

Latter-day Saint boys and girls wore the uniforms of various branches of the Hitler Youth for a year or longer. Young men and young women answered the call to serve in government labor programs such as *Pflichtjahr* and *Reichsarbeitsdienst*. Most recalled enjoying their term of service and believed it to be an important contribution to their nation, though it usually meant a delay in their occupational progress. Declining to serve in Hitler’s Germany was not an option.

Under the universal conscription laws passed in Germany in 1935, Latter-day Saint men served in the German army, navy, and air force, as well as in elite combat forces such as Heinrich Himmler’s *Waffen-SS* and as paratroopers. They were there when Germany mounted offensives against Poland, France, and the Soviet Union, and were still there when the Allies struck back and invaded the fatherland. Just as their Catholic and Protestant comrades, Latter-day Saint German soldiers were buried where they fell. Some lost limbs and returned home as invalids, while others suffered for years from wounds unseen. They died as prisoners of war thousands of miles from home. The final resting places of many LDS soldiers remain unknown.

Latter-day Saint men too old to be drafted were pressed into service as local auxiliary police (e.g., Eugen Hechtle of the Mannheim Branch, Karlsruhe District) and saw combat anyway. Others were assigned to the *Volkssturm* (home guard) as the Third Reich experienced its last painful hours. For most of them, this was something to be avoided, and some were able to do so (thanks to the confusion that reigned in the final months of the war). Women, too, were compelled to serve in soup kitchens, refugee shelters, and in other critical war capacities. Many had to leave the home and replace men as full-time employees in factories and offices. Some were pressed into temporary service in hospitals or in constructing fortifications around the cities.

Some female Church members were honored by the government with the *Mutterkreuz* for giving birth to five or more children (but there is no

evidence that LDS women gave birth to children specifically for their country). They bore children without the attendance of their husbands and raised those children for years in the absence of the fathers. LDS women contributed to relief programs with donations of money, goods, or labor. To provide for their families they stood in long lines to purchase food on ration coupons and made do with less and less as the war drew to a close.

When Germany came under attack from the air, Latter-day Saint civilians huddled in air raid shelters, praying for heavenly protection. They endured more than two hundred attacks in such cities as Cologne and Hanover alone. They were also numbered among the thousands of their countrymen who were killed in those raids—some as family groups such as the Lang family of the Darmstadt Branch. Other Saints were killed in artillery barrages or by invading soldiers just hours before the war ended. Many Latter-day Saints witnessed the horrific firebombings of Hamburg, Darmstadt, Pforzheim, and Heilbronn and several disappeared forever in those attacks.

Hundreds of Church members in western Germany lost their homes and property in the first two years of the war and moved to different homes and in some cases even to different cities. Many changed local addresses several times, trying to stay away from or at least a step ahead of the incessant attacks from above. Where possible, they repaired damaged apartments, but building materials were generally not to be found and broken panes of glass were usually replaced only by cardboard. The lack of fuel to heat an apartment was of little consequence when the apartment had no roof or was missing an exterior wall.

Like their neighbors, German and Austrian Latter-day Saints often endured without medical and dental services for long periods of time. Illnesses that in most modern countries were rare or even unknown became challenges again. Poor sanitation conditions caused by destruction of housing and utilities gave rise to disease and contagion. Taking

a drink of water or walking down the street amid ruins became challenging, hazardous, and even life-threatening activities. Rich and poor, old and young alike suffered as they eked out their existence among the ruins of their once-picturesque cities.

The relief felt by the survivors when they realized that the war was truly over was often quickly forgotten when they were confronted by conquerors in their streets and in their apartments. Even in peacetime, wounds and injuries caused by military devices were supplanted by wounds and injuries caused by individuals armed only with thoughts of conquest or revenge. Many Allied soldiers enjoyed for the first time the power and opportunity to exercise control over others and to inflict harm on persons and property at will. Several Latter-day Saint women—both young and old—suffered physical abuse at the hands of their conquerors, resulting in mental scars that in some cases never disappeared.

Latter-day Saints assisted in fighting fires and rescuing neighbors after air raids and from other life-threatening calamities. They carried children, old folks, and valuable furniture out of burning buildings and recovered and buried the bodies of fellow Saints and longtime neighbors. They suffered together when loved ones departed for distant battlefields and wept together after official letters and Nazi Party representatives appeared at the door with the news of the dead and the missing.

Probably three-quarters of the members of the Church in the West German Mission lost the homes they inhabited in 1939. Many more lost personal property—in some cases their most cherished possessions. They lost pets, farm animals, photographs, heirlooms, genealogical documents, personal scriptures, the money in their savings accounts, silverware—everything but the clothes on their backs. Most of the buildings in which they held their meetings were destroyed or confiscated. Membership records, hymnals, pump organs, chairs, and pulpits vanished and usually could not be replaced for years.

German citizens who were not of “Aryan” (Caucasian) ancestry were subjected to the same poor treatment as Jews all over the country, as is evident in the experience of Salomon Schwarz in the Barmbek Branch of the Hamburg District and the Weiss family of the Vienna Austria Branch. Citizens who criticized Hitler’s government were subject to incarceration in jails and concentration camps, as was the case of the three youths of the St. Georg Branch of the Hamburg District. Thousands of mentally or physically infirm persons became victims of government sterilization and euthanasia programs; at least three young Saints of the West German Mission were among the mentally impaired taken from their homes and families for “treatment” in hospitals in remote locations. In each case, a terse message informed the family of the death of the inmate under suspicious circumstances.²

In short, nearly everything experienced by the general populace in Hitler’s Third Reich was experienced by one or more members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the West German Mission.

Lest the impression be made that the war years meant nothing but death and suffering for the Saints of western Germany and Austria, it should be clearly stated that they enjoyed good times as well. Eyewitnesses often told of joyous occasions in the home or with other church members—visits by soldier fathers and brothers on leave, Christmas holidays, wedding celebrations, the births of sons and daughters, and baptismal ceremonies for member children and converts. One of the most frequently and fondly mentioned church events was the district conference that usually lasted two days and to which members traveled substantial distances. Those from out of town were commonly housed in the homes of local members, and friendships were born and cultivated. Such events were especially meaningful for young adults. Life for the Saints in many locations in Germany did not involve personal daily suffering until the final stages of the war.

Like their neighbors, the German and Austrian Latter-day Saints cultivated hobbies, developed talents, courted and married, pursued educational goals, started businesses, saved money for nice furniture, looked for larger apartments or garden plots to rent, and in general were determined to enjoy life as best they could under the circumstances. One of the finest ways for Latter-day Saints to preserve life and lifestyle was to sustain the local branch by holding regular meetings. Eyewitness accounts make it clear that the Saints in Germany and Austria achieved that goal.

FINAL COMMENTS

One of the goals of this research was to ascertain how members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the West German Mission fared during the years 1939 to 1945. It would be interesting to know how they interacted with the Nazi Party. Another goal was to determine the losses they suffered as individuals, families, and branches. In this regard, I offer the following conclusions based on the testimonies of eyewitnesses and the examination of surviving documents.

THE NATIONAL SOCIALIST PARTY AND THE LATTER-DAY SAINTS OF THE WEST GERMAN MISSION

A few adult Latter-day Saints joined the National Socialist Party. Others were asked to do so but found ways to quietly decline the invitation or avoid the issue altogether. Some were pressured to join but declined and suffered penalties for their opposition. Of those who joined, some did so only because it was required of them as employees of the government. Based on the statements of eyewitnesses, it appears that less than 3 percent of the Latter-day Saints in the West German Mission joined the Nazi Party. Douglas F. Tobler, a professor of German history, estimated that “only about five percent of Mormon adults either joined the party or its various

organizations. . . . The overwhelming majority of German Mormons remained apolitical and quiescent.”³ There is no indication that any Latter-day Saint had a significant leadership position within the Party. Reports of Party members making overt political statements in branch meeting facilities are too infrequent to suggest a pattern. Even rarer than Nazi Party members in Church were the Saints who belonged to other political parties.⁴

Eyewitnesses are in agreement that some of those Saints who were known to be members of the Nazi Party were enthusiastic about Adolf Hitler’s leadership in the early years and were convinced that the Führer had the answers to Germany’s problems, but those individuals did not often promote their political views in Church meetings.⁵ Only in rare instances was a portrait of Adolf Hitler seen in a Church facility and never on a lasting basis. Only two references to the person of Adolf Hitler have been found in Church meeting records (see the Kassel and Vienna Branch sections).

Photographs of Latter-day Saint homes (interior and exterior) rarely show pictures of Adolf Hitler or the German swastika flag.⁶ However, to avoid flying the flag on specific occasions meant to risk incurring the wrath of a fanatical neighbor (and there was often one living close by). Eyewitnesses told of parents who did their best to simply keep out of sight rather than to openly oppose the government. Survivors also recalled hearing infrequent criticism of Hitler or the Party from their parents, but understood that they dare not repeat such criticism outside of the home.

While it could be suggested that Latter-day Saints should have opposed the rise of Hitler in the 1930s through political activism, historians generally agree that such opposition could only have led to personal and collective suffering for the dissidents and their families (and possibly for the Church).⁷ Any overt or violent resistance after 1933 could have merited capital punishment, as is evident from the deaths of thousands of alleged revolutionaries in Germany, especially after the abortive plot

to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944. Some have suggested that the average German (and by extension the average LDS German) should have risen up in rebellion against the evil German government. If they should have (and I do not agree with the premise) and did not, they certainly paid a high price for their inaction: their nation was destroyed, and millions of Germans died.

On the other hand, civil disobedience comes in various forms. Several eyewitnesses have admitted that one or more of their parents listened to broadcasts of BBC London. Such actions were, of course, illegal under National Socialism, but there is no record of any Latter-day Saint being charged with that crime (with the exception of St. Georg Branch youths). In all other cases, it was believed that information received through this medium was never transmitted to persons outside of the immediate family—even to trusted friends at church.

In many ways, it appears that the leaders of the mission, the districts, the branches, and the families increased their efforts to safeguard the Saints and support the branches during the war years. They could neither stop nor (as they learned later) win the war, but they could care for the members, maintain Church worship services and programs and in general keep the Church alive until the war ended. In this regard, they were immensely successful.

In general, German Latter-day Saints found it possible to live their lives as good German citizens who had no valid reason to rebel against the government, even if it meant leaving their homes, loved ones and church callings to fight and die in distant lands. According to eyewitnesses, most adult Saints did not like Adolf Hitler in 1939, because they saw in his overt militarism the prospect of another devastating war. Regarding military service, they often quoted the LDS twelfth Article of Faith (“We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates . . .”) to justify serving Hitler’s government. Latter-day Saint soldiers often expressed a hope for two things: that they would not be compelled to hurt their fellow

man and that they might return to their families in good health. For many, the first wish was fulfilled, for most the second as well.

THE LATTER-DAY SAINT FAMILY UNDER FIRE

As Hitler and his cronies gained power in the nation, the family came under increasing pressure. National Socialist philosophy emphasized the importance of the Party over that of the family and the Church. Organizations such as the Hitler Youth served in part to take young Germans from their homes and place them into a setting where they could be schooled carefully in the Nazi concept of patriotism and the philosophies of the Party. Children were raised to serve *Führer, Volk und Vaterland* rather than God, church, and family. Fortunately, it seems that in many cases, the goal was not achieved among Latter-day Saint youths.

It is evident that many parents in the Church understood that while some aspects of the Hitler Youth program were positive, others were sinister. In some cases, the parents of eyewitnesses forbade their children to join the Hitlerjugend or the Bund Deutscher Mädels at age fourteen, insisting that the programs of the Church would provide the necessary education, training, and entertainment. Although such noncompliance was not tolerated under the law, many Latter-day Saint parents got away with it. According to eyewitnesses, punishments for noncooperation were rare and seldom had any lasting effect.

Another method used by the Party to weaken the influence of parents in the lives of their children was the program under which children were moved as school classes to rural settings. Under the auspices of protecting the children from harm through air raids by Allied forces, teachers (required by law to be members of the Party) and Party leaders often used the setting to indoctrinate the children. The program was called Kinderlandverschickung, and in the case of nearly every eyewitness interviewed,

this absence from home prevented any contact with the Church.⁸ When Latter-day Saint mothers independently took their children away from the big cities, they rarely had the opportunity to attend Church services. The absence from Church was perceived as a very negative aspect of life during the war. The corresponding decline in member populations also had a negative effect on the programs of the local branches.

The national labor service required of teenage boys and girls (under programs called Reichsarbeitsdienst and Pflichtjahr/Landjahr) also separated family members. For as much as a year at a time, Latter-day Saint youth lived too far from home to visit their families and were totally subject to the leadership of Party officials. Few of the eyewitnesses reported ever having had the opportunity to attend church during this period of their lives and few were able to take along and study the holy scriptures.

Any time a country goes to war, fathers are removed from their homes. When a lengthy war is fought and lost, many fathers do not return to their families. When German Saints were away at the front, their wives and children survived without the presence of patriarchal and priesthood leadership in the home—in some instances for as long as eight to ten years. The eyewitnesses expressed universal sadness regarding this aspect of their lives. Furloughs granted Latter-day Saint soldiers were rare and brief—sometimes just long enough to produce another child who was then brought into the world and raised by a mother without a father. Several children of Latter-day Saint soldiers from Germany and Austria never knew their fathers.

THE WEST GERMAN MISSION IN ISOLATION

After the United States and Germany declared war upon each other in December 1941, communications between the office of the East German Mission in Berlin and the headquarters of the

Church in Salt Lake City were interrupted. This state of isolation persisted until the summer of 1945 (forty-two months), when attempts were made to reestablish the connection. President Max Zimmer of the Swiss Mission traveled into Germany to inquire regarding the status of both German missions and their leaders.⁹ Several American soldiers who had served in the German missions before the war were allowed to travel to Frankfurt and Berlin to ascertain the fate of the members.¹⁰ Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles arrived in Europe in the fall of 1945 to establish a system through which welfare supplies could be distributed to the surviving Latter-day Saints in Germany and other war-torn nations.¹¹

It was learned in 1945 that the German Saints had maintained meeting schedules and branch activities as consistently as possible since 1939—at times under challenging conditions. There is no evidence that Church procedures or practices were altered or allowed to deviate from the established norms. Tithing funds were paid, collected, and transferred to the mission office carefully until the final months of the war, when the postal system began to break down. Church literature was produced and distributed faithfully until paper shortages or government regulations hindered the effort.

The work of the priesthood was carried on faithfully and correctly throughout the war. Babies were blessed, children and converts were baptized, blessings of healing and comfort were given, and miracles were performed. The priesthood was conferred upon worthy brethren all over the mission. Priesthood leaders who were absent or killed were replaced via the standard processes. Meetings were conducted and presided over by the proper authorities. In cases where no priesthood holders were present to preside over the ordinance of the sacrament, there simply was no such ordinance. In the absence of priesthood leadership, women did not usurp authority or stewardship but simply held study groups, Primary classes,

and choir rehearsals in an attempt to maintain the community of the Saints.¹²

Eyewitnesses attested to the dedication of the Saints to the branches and programs of the Church. In cases where the branch organization broke down totally, individual members prayed, read the scriptures, fasted, and taught their families the gospel. Many eyewitnesses told of their attempts to find a branch of the Church wherever they might be. For them, life was not complete without regular interaction with the Saints.

A short explanation regarding priesthood ordinations in those days is warranted. Ordinations were not done primarily on the basis of age but rather on the basis of need in the branch. Whereas some young men were ordained deacons soon after turning twelve, advancement within the Aaronic Priesthood followed no regular pattern thereafter. Almost exactly one-half of the male members over twelve years of age in 1939 were not holders of the priesthood, though some were quite active in the branch.

Ordination to the Melchizedek Priesthood took place when the man was needed as a branch leader. Many men became elders after the age of thirty or forty. Because there was no stake of Zion in Germany or Austria until 1961, there were no bishops, high priests, or patriarchs in those countries during the war.

THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT AND THE WEST GERMAN MISSION

From the testimony of eyewitnesses and the surviving records of the West German Mission, it is evident that the government of Germany made no attempt during the Hitler era to shut down The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in that nation. The only substantiated intervention by the government came when the Berlin police instructed leaders of the East German Mission to have the members avoid singing hymns containing words associated with the Jewish culture, such as *Zion* and *Israel*.¹³ In fact, with the exception of

rare and short-lived episodes of police inquiries and the occasional private harassment of individual Saints by local Nazi Party leaders, members of the Church and the branches to which they belonged in the West German Mission were never at risk of extinction. The government either had no intention at the time of eradicating the Church or did not consider the 13,500 members of the Church in Germany worthy of special attention.

Investigations by the secret state police (Gestapo) involved the following leaders of the Church in the West German Mission: Christian Heck (mission office, 1942), Otto Berndt (Hamburg District, 1942), Anton Huck (mission office, 1943) and Ilse Brünger Förster (mission office, 1943). The details of those investigations are provided in the corresponding chapters of this book. The tragic case of the Helmut Hübener group of the St. Georg Branch is summarized in the Hamburg District chapter.

Several eyewitnesses told of seeing official observers in church meetings across the mission. Such observers always entered without fanfare, were recognizable as “strangers,” inevitably sat on the back row, and avoided any kind of participation. Not one account of an interruption of meetings by such officials was proffered.¹⁴

CHANGES IN THE MISSION, THE DISTRICTS, AND THE BRANCHES DURING WORLD WAR II

As can be seen in previous chapters, the West German Mission leadership continued to function with dedication and efficiency throughout the war. Despite the fact that mission supervisors Friedrich Ludwig Biehl and Christian Heck had to be released when called into active duty in the German army, mission leaders were true to their stewardship.¹⁵ Following the departure of foreign (principally American) missionaries in August 1939, only female German Saints were called as full-time missionaries in the West German Mission. By 1940, all male missionaries had been released, and there were only

a few women left in these callings. According to eyewitnesses and available documents, those young women performed admirably.

The number of Church districts actually increased from thirteen in 1939 to fourteen in 1943 with the formation of the Strasbourg District (including territory in German-occupied France). Surviving mission records allow the assumption that all districts were holding semiannual conferences as late as 1944 and some even in the spring of 1945. All fourteen districts were under the direction of faithful presidents—four of whom were called into active duty and had to be replaced: Alwin Brey (Hamburg), Willi Wille (Hanover), Eugen Hechtle (Karlsruhe) and Robert Salopiata (Schleswig-Holstein). All former district presidents survived the war. Many eyewitnesses reported seeing members of district presidencies visiting the weaker branches to offer priesthood support and the branch meeting minutes confirm such reports. Conditions during the war sometimes required district leaders to travel to outlying branches via bicycle.

Nearly every branch in the West German Mission (sixty-nine in number when the war broke out in 1939) was still holding meetings in 1943. By that time, several already had lost their meeting facilities (through destruction or confiscation) but had found other rooms. By the end of the war, at least three-quarters of the branches had lost their meeting places (and some interim locations) and could hold services only in the homes of members and on an irregular basis. Branches without priesthood leadership often held only Sunday School meetings. With few exceptions, meetings were still held across the mission as late as April 1945, and in a few cases, there were no interruptions at all.

THE EFFECTS OF THE WAR ON THE PROGRAMS OF THE CHURCH

As previously mentioned, sacrament and Sunday School meetings survived the war in most branches, but this is not true with other meetings.

The Primary organization was weakened or even discontinued in branches in cities where the Jungvolk units were very active. However, the resourcefulness of the members came into play when the Primary meetings no longer took place: the adults invested their energies in the education of the children in Sunday School classes. It should be noted, of course, that the small number of children shown in the membership tables explains the lack of any Primary organization in several branches.

The Mutual Improvement Association (*Gemeinschaftliche Fortbildungsvereinigung*) in German branches included essentially every unmarried member over the age of twelve. Many married members also participated in the activities of the MIA. As might be expected, the absence of young men who were serving in the military and young women performing their duties under the *Pflichtjahr* program weakened the branches' MIA groups considerably. As the privations of war increased, there were also few resources available to support the cultural activities of the MIA (typically musical and theatrical performances, outings, dances, and dinners). Only the largest few branches in the mission were still holding MIA meetings in 1945.

The Relief Society groups survived the war in nearly all branches. The sisters intensified their compassionate service during the first years of the war, but as they left the big cities with their children, lost their homes, became widows, or were otherwise distracted by the challenges of daily survival, their service to others did in many cases decline. In the last year of the war, even those sisters still carrying out their society duties had little to offer others in the way of welfare items and food. Eyewitness reports make it clear that most of those who still had the means to survive were willing to share whatever they had (see the Wuppertal Branch, Ruhr District). In the very least, they could meet to discuss important topics, as is seen in the case of the Michelstadt Branch of the Frankfurt District.

MILITARY LOSSES AMONG LATTER-DAY SAINTS OF THE WEST GERMAN MISSION

Prophets and Apostles of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints have never taught that members of the Church would be spared trials and sufferings in this life. Indeed, Church doctrine holds that negative experiences are an integral part of life. It can come as no surprise that hundreds of Saints of the West German Mission lost their lives during the war. In addition to the first two German mission supervisors, Friedrich Ludwig Biehl and Christian Heck, several branch presidents or their counselors perished under various circumstances.

It is probable that more than nine hundred members of the Church in the West German Mission served in the various branches of the German armed forces (*Wehrmacht*). Fewer than fifty were in the navy, approximately 130 in the *Luftwaffe* (mostly ground personnel), and the rest in the army. Several dozen served in various police assignments. An additional one to two hundred older male members of the Church were inducted into the *Volkssturm* after October 1944.

Of those German and Austrian Saints of the West German Mission in German military service, 155 died in wartime (by May 8, 1945) and 33 more died by the end of 1950.¹⁶ Available data suggest that more than 50 percent of those men had been ordained to the priesthood, the majority holding offices in the Aaronic Priesthood. For purposes of this discussion, all soldiers reported missing in action are assumed to have died by 1955, when the last German prisoners of war were officially released from incarceration in the Soviet Union.

Except for those whose wounds were debilitating, no Latter-day Saint men in uniform in 1943 were released before the end of the war. Many who were drafted as early as 1940 served for the duration; several were drafted before the war and did not come home until after the war. From eyewitness testimony, it is clear that only a few Latter-day Saint German soldiers escaped being taken prisoner

by war's end. Rare are the stories of soldiers who in May 1945 simply went home and became civilians again, as did Manfred Gellersen of the Stade Branch, Hamburg District. If all needed data were available to investigate this matter, we might see that at least 90 percent of the regular Wehrmacht soldiers in the Church spent time behind barbed wire. At least seven died while incarcerated. The majority of the Latter-day Saint POWs were held in camps in the Soviet Union, but significant numbers spent time in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, France, and Belgium. Very few returned as early as 1945, several in 1946, most in 1947, and many in 1948. The last Latter-day Saint POW is believed to have returned to Germany in 1950.

German and Austrian Latter-day Saints Who Died in Military Service in World War II	
Killed in battle or died of wounds	155
Missing in action*	26
Died as prisoners of war	7
<i>Total deaths</i>	188

*It is assumed that all soldiers missing in action were in fact killed in battle or died later.

Due to the confusion existing in German military units toward the end of the war and the lack of records in POW camps, it is very probable that several more LDS men died during their military service.

CIVILIAN LOSSES AMONG LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The primary cause of many deaths among Latter-day Saint civilians cannot be directly attributed to the war. However, as explained earlier in the Memorial Book, some nonviolent deaths among members of the Church would certainly not have happened in peacetime. Many Saints died due to what in German is called *Kriegseinwirkung* (enemy action). Among those whose deaths came through enemy action, the most common cause was the Allied

air war over their cities. The second most common cause of death through enemy action occurred when the American, British, and French armies invaded Germany from the west beginning in the fall of 1944. The third category of civilian losses includes those members who died while fleeing the invaders. In most such cases, the survivors were allowed to return to the town of their choice, but conditions prevented some from doing so for several years.

Latter-day Saint Civilians Who Died as a Result of World War II	
Killed in air raids and by invasion forces	85
Died from diseases or starvation	226
Died from other causes	145
Died in concentration camps or euthanasia facilities	5
Missing	64
<i>Total deaths</i>	525

As was the case among the soldiers, it is very likely that dozens more civilian deaths actually occurred among the general membership of the West German Mission.

While it comes as no surprise that members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Germany and Austria were not spared sacrifice, suffering, and death, there are hundreds of stories told by survivors who believe that they were shielded from harm on specific occasions—some of them more than once. Soldiers and civilians alike told of occasions when they “should have been killed” or at least when their survival or rescue defied human explanation. For example, a freak accident could easily have taken the life of little Vera Uhrhan of the Frankfurt/Main Branch. Some Saints later connected the moment of impending death to the moment when a family member at home was extending to God an extraordinary plea for the safety of a soldier son (such as happened to Walter Speidel of the Stuttgart Branch).

Deaths in the West German Mission	
Total LDS military deaths	188
Total LDS civilian deaths	525
Total LDS deaths	713

GERMAN LATTER-DAY SAINTS AND THE CRIMES OF NAZI GERMANY

Several eyewitnesses stated that they were aware before the war that Jewish neighbors and business acquaintances were being mistreated. The events of Reichkristallnacht (the Night of Broken Glass) on November 9–10, 1938, shocked Latter-day Saints as much as they did millions of Germans across the Reich. Saints saw some of the destruction of Jewish businesses as it happened. Others noticed that Jews they knew disappeared soon after that fateful night. The fact that some children in German schools were subjected to vicious anti-Semitic propaganda is confirmed by several eyewitnesses.

No members of the Church in the West German Mission are known to have served as guards in concentration or extermination camps during the Hitler era. None are known to have used the power of the military to wantonly or intentionally take the life of an innocent person. However, by the very nature of such crimes, it is highly unlikely that a man who committed such a crime would confess to it. While the debate over the awareness of the German citizenry of the crimes committed by Germany during the war may be diminishing in intensity, there are still many who do not believe the simple claim that typical Germans had no way of knowing that Jews, foreigners, prisoners of war, and persons of minority status were being mistreated and murdered under the swastika flag.

Several Latter-day Saints recalled seeing labor groups near camps or even in towns; in all cases, they noted that the prisoners appeared to be in poor health. In all cases, it was clear that passersby were not allowed to give the prisoners as much as

a crumb to eat and must not talk with them. Even young eyewitnesses concluded that something was amiss. Hans Pohlsander was eighteen when Jews on their way to the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp escaped from guarded trains during an air raid; he recalled how those Jews were hunted down in and around the city of Celle and some of them shot.

THE WEST GERMAN MISSION AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II

The territory of the West German Mission was intact when Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945. Of the seventy-one branches, more than sixty were still meeting at least monthly. Mission supervisor Anton Huck and his office staff continued in their administrative duties in the office at Schaumainkai 41 (though they were displaced by American soldiers during May and June). Most of the branches no longer had meeting rooms large enough to accommodate the active branch population. Many branches were led by aging priesthood holders, while a few branches held only Sunday school meetings (essentially study groups) maintained by the surviving women while they hoped and waited for their husbands to return.

In many surviving or newly-acquired meeting rooms, there were no glass windows left; the materials used to cover the openings were opaque, and the rooms were dark. At many such locations, there was also no functional supply of electricity, gas, or water. Meetings taking place in the late afternoon or evening often required the use of candlelight. These conditions may have given rise to the commonly held Latter-day Saint misconception that members of the Church in wartime or postwar Germany using candles on the sacrament table had adopted deviant practices and rituals during the time when the German missions were out of contact with Church leaders in Salt Lake City.¹⁷

The population of Saints in the West German Mission had been reduced from 5,795 in 1939 to approximately 5,100 by May 1945. Of the survivors,

at least 60 percent (and possibly as many as 70 percent) no longer had a home of their own. Most of those who had lost their homes were crowded into rooms provided by relatives or friends. Some found temporary quarters on farms (often in a barn) and in attics and basements where no utilities were available. Some lived in the ruins of large buildings (such as Seith family of the Karlsruhe Branch). Some were assigned housing by local government and were not welcomed by their hosts who resented the imposition.

Hundreds of LDS families subsisted without fathers (at least temporarily) in the summer of 1945. In those families, the mothers were usually gone during the day—working, looking for work, or searching for food and fuel. Many of the men who were fortunate to have come home from the war were busy with the same daily tasks. Most healthy LDS men had found employment by the end of that first postwar summer.

Nearly two thousand Latter-day Saints of the East German Mission were living within the borders of the West German Mission by the end of 1945. They had come as refugees trying to stay out of reach of the invading Red Army. Most arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs, but they usually sought out the Church as soon as they found a place to live. This led to the enlargement of several branches and the founding of a few dozen more in western Germany.

A unique part of this LDS migration history took place in the town of Langen, nine miles south of Frankfurt. The Moderegger family of the Tilsit Branch in distant East Prussia found work in a Langen landscaping company and moved there in the summer of 1945. Always on the lookout for ways to help their fellow Saints, the Modereggers located additional employment opportunities and invited other LDS refugees to join them in Langen. By 1950, more than three hundred Latter-day Saints from eastern Germany had crowded into the small town and the new branch became one of the largest in the West German Mission. By 1953, they had

constructed a nice building in which to conduct their meetings and other activities.

It seems that wherever they found themselves, the surviving Saints of the West German Mission began in May 1945 to pick up the pieces of their branches or to join and strengthen whichever branch was close at hand. By the fall of that year, several young men (most of them veteran soldiers) had been called as full-time missionaries—charged first and foremost with the task of helping Church members recover from the war. The Church was in good hands and conditions steadily improved.

According to the statements of eyewitnesses, the general state of mind of Church members in the West German mission in the summer of 1945 encompassed both sadness and relief. Hundreds of members were dead or still missing, men were in short supply, homes and meetinghouses had been destroyed or damaged, food was scarce, utilities were interrupted, and transportation was unreliable. Nevertheless, most Saints were alive and had maintained their testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ, or, as many survivors remembered, their testimonies had maintained them. World War II had weakened the Church in certain physical respects, but the faith of individuals was alive and well. Years would pass before some of the bad memories faded, but the work of the kingdom of heaven on the earth was carried forth with dedication by Saints who praised God for preserving their lives.

NOTES

1. Marriage ceremonies conducted for LDS Church members in church buildings or homes were purely symbolic in nature. No representatives of any church in Germany or Austria were allowed to conduct marriages after 1938 (in compliance with civil law).
2. See the stories of Harald Ludwig Adam of the Saarbrücken Branch (Karlsruhe District) and Herbert Eduard Fiedler of the Düsseldorf Branch (Ruhr District).
3. Douglas F. Tobler, "German Mormons as 'Righteous Gentiles': Trying to Save a Few Jewish Friends" (unpublished manuscript, 1995), 7; private collection.
4. After the Reichstag (parliament building) fire of 1933, Hitler had used the German government to legally outlaw the Communist Party and to severely repress other political parties.

- Activity in any but the Nazi Party was thus grounds for suspicion on the part of the state.
5. Several eyewitnesses stated emphatically that Anton Huck of the mission leadership and St. Georg Branch president Arthur Zander were members of the Party who wore the official lapel pin and openly discussed national political issues.
 6. See related photographs and stories in the chapters of the Munich and Essen Branches.
 7. The chapter on the Hamburg St. Georg Branch in the West German Mission provides the only known example of serious resistance to Hitler's regime by Latter-day Saints—the case of teenagers Helmut Hübener, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, and Rudi Wobbe.
 8. Exceptions are noted in the stories of the Essen, Göppingen, and Munich Branches, where determined (and homesick?) boys located and attended church meetings with Saints near the Kinderlandverschickung facility.
 9. See Roger P. Minert, "Succession in German Mission Leadership during World War II," in *A Firm Foundation: Church Organization and Administration* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2011), 552–571.
 10. J. Richard Barnes, a veteran of the West German Mission, was an officer with the US Army forces that entered Germany in 1945. Several of his reports on the status of the Church in Germany were published in the *Deseret News* in the summer of 1945.
 11. See Frederick W. Babbel, *On Wings of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1972).
 12. The calling of Karoline Müller of the Bad Homburg Branch, Frankfurt District, was perhaps unique in its scope.
 13. Roger P. Minert, *In Harm's Way: East German Latter-day Saints in World War II* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2009), 29.
 14. Indeed, the only interruptions described by eyewitnesses occurred after the war, principally under the occupation of the Russian army.
 15. See Roger P. Minert, "Succession in German Mission Leadership."
 16. See Roger P. Minert, "German and Austrian Latter-day Saints in World War II: An Analysis of Casualties and Losses," in *Mormon Historical Studies* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2010): 1–23.
 17. Eyewitness Ruth Schumann Hinton of the Chemnitz Schloss Branch (East German Mission) offered this explanation years later: "How were the brethren to read the sacrament prayers in those dark rooms without light? With the power out, we had to use candles." See Minert, *In Harm's Way*, 188.