
CONCLUSION



To say that the East German 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 three hundred eyewitnesses. The episodes included represent what I consider to be the most significant among the thousands of incidents recounted by these eyewitnesses. Many survivors had experiences that could be presented sufficiently only in book-length format. I leave that daunting task to other authors.

The collective 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 story, too, remains 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 East German Mission exclusively as martyrs or victims of the war, I offer below some observations about their experiences in general.

THE 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 confines of the East German Mission), 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). Only four

Saints in this mission are known to have been endowed in the temple, and only one couple was sealed there before the war.

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 East German Mission were primarily laborers and craftsmen. A few owned their own shops as carpenters or glazers. 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 (see the story of Anton Larisch of the Görlitz and Halberstadt Branches).

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

As mentioned above, the population of Germany in 1939 was approximately eighty million. Just over thirteen thousand 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 war-time 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 others 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 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 German soldiers remain unknown.

Latter-day Saint men too old to be drafted were pressed into service as local auxiliary police or in the Volkssturm (home guard). 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, hospitals, 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. However, most women were thinking more of their families and how they might later survive the Soviet invasion or escape to the West.

Some female Church members were honored by the government with the Mutterkreuz for giving birth to five or more children. (Eyewitness accounts support the assumption that no 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. Latter-day Saint women contributed to relief programs with donations of money, goods, or labor. To provide for their children, 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 died there in significant numbers—some as family groups (such as the Fischers of the Chemnitz Center Branch). Some members of the Church died in their basement shelters or in their apartments, were killed in artillery barrages or by invading soldiers as they ran through the streets for cover. Many witnessed and some died in the horrific firebombing of Dresden in February 1945. Church members died of disease or starvation during the long

trek to the west after being forced from their homes by the invaders or subsequent occupation forces. Several young women or members of the Relief Society suffered physical abuse at the hands of their conquerors, the mental scars of which, in some cases, never disappeared. Latter-day Saints assisted in fighting fires and rescuing neighbors after air raids and from other life-threatening calamities.

Approximately 60 percent of the members of the Church in the East German Mission lost their homes. Many more lost some or all of their 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. Many of the buildings in which they held their meetings were destroyed. Membership records, hymnals, chairs, and pulpits vanished and usually could not be replaced for years.

German citizens who were not of “Aryan” (Caucasian) ancestry or who criticized Hitler’s government were subject to incarceration in jails and concentration camps. Such was the fate of several Latter-day Saints (such as Elisabeth Jung Süß of the Chemnitz Center Branch). Thousands of mentally or physically infirm persons became victims of government sterilization and euthanasia programs; at least two members of the Church in the West German Mission were among the mentally impaired persons who were put to death in secret. Annalies Höhle of the Dresden Altstadt Branch (Dresden District) considered her son a potential victim but was able to protect him from such a fate.

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 East German Mission.

Lest the impression be made that the war years meant nothing but death and suffering for the Saints of the East German Mission, 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 mentioned Church events was the district conference that usually lasted two or three days and to which members often traveled substantial distances. Those from out of town were usually 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 suffering until the final stages of the war.

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 East German Mission fared during the years of 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:

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

A few adult Latter-day Saints joined the National Socialist Party. Others were asked to do so but found ways to 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, such as Max Hegewald (district president in Dresden and a bailiff in the Freiberg City Court). Based on the stories told and written by eyewitnesses, it appears that fewer than three percent of the Latter-day Saints in the East 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.”¹ 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 rare. Even rarer were Saints who belonged to other political parties.²

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 convinced that the Führer had the answers to Germany's problems, but those individuals did not promote their political views or agenda in Church meetings.³ Only in rare instances was a portrait of Adolf Hitler seen in a Church facility and never on a lasting basis (see Breslau South Branch chapter).

Photographs of Latter-day Saint homes (interior and exterior) rarely show pictures of Adolf Hitler or the German swastika flag (see Berlin East Branch chapter). 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, who

understood that they dare not voice 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).⁴ 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. If there is any question of guilt on the part of Latter-day Saints for tolerating an evil government (and in my mind there is not), they certainly paid a terrible price for their lack of action.

Several eyewitnesses have admitted that one or more of their parents listened to broadcasts of BBC London or Moscow. Such actions were, of course, illegal, but there is no record of any Latter-day Saint being charged with that crime. In all 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 and Church callings to fight and die in far-off 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 twelfth article of faith (“We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, and rulers”) 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 was 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 in an atmosphere 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 country. Fortunately, it seems that in many cases, the goal was not achieved among Latter-day Saint youth.

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 Mädel at age fourteen, insisting that the programs of the Church would provide the necessary education, training, and entertainment. Although such non-compliance was not tolerated under the law, most Latter-day Saint parents got away with it. According to eyewitnesses, pun-

ishments for non-cooperation 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 schoolchildren 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. 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 formal worship 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 branch.

The national labor service required of teenage boys and girls (under programs called Reichsarbeitsdienst and Pflichtjahr or 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. Again, none of the eyewitnesses reported ever having had the opportunity to attend church during this period of their lives and few were able to take or 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 German Latter-day Saint soldiers were rare and brief—sometimes just long enough to produce another child who was then brought into the world to be raised by a mother without a father. Several children of Latter-day Saint soldiers never knew their fathers.

THE EAST 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 re-establish the connection. President Max Zimmer of the Swiss Mission traveled into Germany to inquire regarding the status of both German missions and their leaders. Several American soldiers who had served in the German missions before the war were allowed to travel to Berlin and Frankfurt to ascertain the fate of the members.⁵ Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles arrived in the fall of 1945 to establish a system through which welfare supplies from Salt Lake City could be distributed to the surviving Latter-day Saints.⁶

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 throughout the war and after, as is evident from the accounts of eyewitnesses like Marie Jenschewski of the

Königsberg Branch. 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, 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 established means. 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.

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 whenever they found themselves away from home. 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 until 1961, there were no high priests in that country during the war.⁷

THE GERMAN GOVERNMENT AND THE EAST GERMAN MISSION

From the testimony of eyewitnesses and the surviving records of the East 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 mission to have the members avoid singing hymns featuring words associated with the Jewish culture, such as *Zion* and *Israel* (see the East German Mission chapter). 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 East 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 13,000 members of the Church in Germany worthy of special attention.

Several eyewitnesses told of seeing official observers in church meetings. Such observers always entered without fanfare, were recognized 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.⁸

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

As can be seen in previous chapters, the East German Mission leadership continued to function with dedication and efficiency throughout the war. Despite the total destruction of the mission office at Händelallee 6 in Berlin in November 1943 and the disappearance of mission supervisor Herbert Klopfer in 1944, mission leaders were true to their stewardship. Following the departure of foreign (principally American) missionaries in August 1939, only German Saints served as full-time missionaries. By 1941, 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.

Of the thirteen districts in the mission, only one (faraway Hindenburg with a total of seventy-two members) appears to have discontinued district conferences before 1944. All others were under the direction of faithful district presidents, of whom three lost their lives in the war or in the immediate aftermath: Martin Werner Hoppe (Breslau), Karl Göckeritz (Chemnitz), and Max Freimann (Königsberg). Many eyewitnesses reported seeing members of district presidencies visiting the weaker branches to offer priesthood support. Conditions during the war often required district leaders to travel to outlying branches via bicycle.

Nearly every branch in the East German Mission (seventy-two in number when war broke out in 1939) was still holding meetings in 1943. By that time, several had lost their meeting facilities (through destruction or confiscation) but had found other rooms. By the end of the war, nearly half of the branches had lost their meeting places and could hold sacra-

ment 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 mentioned above, 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 in several branches there were only very small numbers of children (see membership tables of individual branches).

The Mutual Improvement Association (*Gemeinschaftliche Fortbildungsvereinigung*) in German branches involved essentially every unmarried member from the age of twelve up. 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 fewer resources available to support the cultural activities of the MIA, (typically, musical and theatrical performances, outings, dances, and dinners). Only in the largest branches of the mission were these meetings still taking place regularly in 1945.



Fig. 1. "Who knows our parents and our origins?" This 1971 Red Cross poster was designed to help young adults locate persons who could identify them. Each was found in the last few months of the war in the ruins of bombed-out cities or on the roads among dead refugees. Most had no option but to adopt new names and birth data.

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 task 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 Leipzig Center Branch chapter).

MILITARY LOSSES AMONG LATTER-DAY SAINTS

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 suffering 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 East German Mission lost their lives during the war. In addition to the mission supervisor and the district presidents named above, several branch presidents or their counselors also perished under various circumstances.

It is probable that one thousand members of the Church in the East German Mission served in the various branches of the German armed forces (Wehrmacht). Fewer than fifty were in the navy, approximately 150 in the Luftwaffe (mostly ground personnel), and the rest in the army. Several dozen served in various police assignments or as POW camp guards, such as did Otto Bork of the Stettin Branch. An additional one hundred to two hundred older male members of the Church were inducted into the Volkssturm after October 1944.

Of those Saints of the East German Mission in German military service, 181 died in wartime (by May 8, 1945) and 55 more died by the end of 1950. 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, and several served from 1938 until at least 1946 (such as Erhard Wagner of the Annaberg-Buchholz Branch and Wilhelm Werner of the Berlin Moabit Branch). From eyewitness testimony it is clear that only a few Latter-day Saint German soldiers escaped being taken prisoners by war's end. Rare are the stories of soldiers who in May 1945 simply went home and became civilians again, as did Walter Kindt of the Schneidemühl Branch. 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. Several 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 home 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 Latter-day Saints Who Died in Military Service in World War II	
Killed in battle or died of wounds	181
Missing in action*	39
Died as prisoners of war	16
<i>Total deaths</i>	236

*It is assumed that all soldiers missing in action were in fact killed 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. Essentially all were buried where they died and only one is known to be buried in modern Germany (Hermann Henkel of the Frankfurt/Oder Branch).

CIVILIAN LOSSES AMONG LATTER-DAY SAINTS

The primary cause of death among Latter-day Saint civilians cannot be directly attributed to the war. However, as explained earlier in the Memorial Book, some non-violent deaths among members of the Church would certainly not have happened in peace time. 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 Allied air raids over their cities. The second most common cause of death through enemy action occurred when the Red Army invaded Germany from the east. The third category of civilian losses includes those members who died while fleeing the invaders or after being forced from their homes by Polish authorities during the years 1945 to 1947. In many cases, the trek to Germany (the Soviet Occupation Zone or what became East Germany—the German Democratic Republic) was as far as three hundred miles. Those refugees who made it to the British or American Occupation zones traveled at least one hundred fifty miles farther. Many Latter-day Saint refugees made part or all of the journey on foot and in seasons of extreme cold. Some used the standard little *Bollerwagen* or *Leiterwagen*—reminiscent of the wagons and handcarts pulled by the American Mormon pioneers who were driven from their homes a century earlier (see photographs in the Chemnitz South and Halberstadt Branch chapters).

International negotiations between the Allied victor nations in 1945 resulted in the annexation of a great deal of east German territory. The northern half of East Prussia was ceded to Russia. The southern half of East Prussia, most of Pomerania and Silesia, and about one-fourth of Brandenburg, were ceded to Poland. Essentially all of the members of the

Church living in those provinces of Germany in 1939 fled the area before the arrival of the Soviets or were forcibly evicted from their homes by 1947. This included the East German Mission districts of Breslau, Danzig, Hindenburg, Königsberg, Schneidemühl, and Stettin. Those members of the Forst and Guben Branches (Spreewald District) who lived on the east side of the Neisse River also lost their homes. The total number of Latter-day Saints who left those areas was 3,161 (42 percent of the population of the East German Mission).⁹

According to one modern study, 9,476,900 Germans fled or were driven out of what was then eastern Germany (now Poland and Russia), and more than one million died in the process.¹⁰ It has been established that some of the Latter-day Saints who made that trip also perished on the way or as a result of the experience. Several members simply disappeared and may be presumed dead.

The only Church branch in the former eastern German territories that did not become defunct by 1947 was Selbongen (Königsberg District). The members who survived the war and did not flee Selbongen were forced to become Polish citizens and to conduct their church services in the Polish language. This they did for nearly thirty years, after which they immigrated to Germany.

German Latter-day Saint Civilians Who Died during or as a Result of World War II	
Killed in air raids	48
Killed during the invasion of Germany	18
Died from diseases or starvation	99
Died from other causes	177
Died in concentration camps or euthanasia facilities	6
Missing	21
<i>Total deaths</i>	369

As was the case among the soldiers, it is very possible that dozens more civilian deaths

actually occurred among the members of the Church.

Though it is evident that the members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the East German Mission were not always spared suffering and death, there are hundreds of stories told by survivors who believe that they were shielded from harm on specific occasions—some of the Saints 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 as told for example by Willi Dzierzon (Freiberg Branch, Dresden District).

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 account of Heinz Koschnike (Breslau South Branch, Breslau District) is especially impressive. Siegfried Dietze’s father came under pressure because he had business dealings with Jews (Dresden Neustadt Branch, Dresden District). As it turned out, his (Christian) German customers did not support the Party boycott instituted against Brother Dietze. The fact that young people were being poisoned against Jews is evident from the confession of Gerd Skibbe (Wolgast Branch, Rostock District): one day he thought himself bold enough to shout insults at a local Jewish businessman but was then sternly chastised by his father who understood that such

social misbehavior could lead the German people down the road to destruction.

At the end of the war, Richard Müller (Danzig Branch, Danzig District) saw evidence of the mistreatment of Jews near the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. However, only one LDS eyewitness indicated knowing of the terrible treatment to which Jews were subjected in concentration camps in Germany or of the genocide that was being practiced in the extermination camps located east of Germany in occupied territories (Bruno Stroganoff of the Tilsit Branch, Königsberg District). As with most Germans, Latter-day Saint survivors were shocked to learn the details of the atrocities after the war.

The story of Franz Nolte (Breslau South Branch, Breslau District) is the only account among Latter-day Saints in the East German Mission of a Church member formally punished for his interactions with Jews. Fortunately, his imprisonment lasted only one year. Other Saints rendered support to Jews during the war and risked serious consequences, as was the case with the Berlin Schöneberg Branch in their care of Sister Heber. The fact that Walter Luskin (Guben Branch, Spreewald District) was half-Jewish turned out to be an advantage rather than a disadvantage; he was exempt from military duty and spent the war years tailoring uniforms at the local army post.

THE EAST GERMAN MISSION AT THE END OF WORLD WAR II

With six of the thirteen districts of the East German Mission practically defunct by the end of the war, the mission territory was reduced by more than one half. Thousands of members were left homeless and hundreds of families left without fathers (at least temporarily). Nearly one-half of the surviving branches had no meeting rooms large enough to accommodate

the active branch population. Most branches were led by aging priesthood holders, while a few branches held only Sunday School meetings (essentially study groups) organized by the surviving women while they hoped and waited for their men to return (see Bischofswerda Branch, Dresden District).

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 electricity or water supply. 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.¹¹

Most Latter-day Saint refugees from East Germany sought new lodgings in the Soviet Occupation Zone. In the southern portion of that zone (Chemnitz, Dresden, and Zwickau Districts), they were often able to establish connections with existing branches (that being the area in which the highest density in Latter-day Saint populations was found). In the northern areas of the Soviet Occupation Zone (Rostock District), the branches of the Saints were few and far between. In several locations, those branches attracted refugees, and in other places new branches were established by and for the new arrivals.

Following the destruction of the mission office in Berlin in 1943, the office operations and surviving equipment were moved to the apartment building in which Paul Langheinrich (second counselor to Herbert Klopfer since early 1940) lived on Rathenowerstrasse (see East German Mission chapter). Even before

the war ended, the mission leaders and office staff (young women missionaries) began to compile lists of Latter-day Saints who had left their homes. Many eyewitnesses tell of family members who agreed that they would contact the mission office if they were separated during the war. A veritable “missing persons” registry was established and maintained for several years.

Mission leaders were concerned about the refugees finding housing and maintaining contact with the Church. During the summer of 1945, Richard Ranglack (interim mission supervisor) and Paul Langheinrich set out to ascertain the status of the surviving branches and to see to the welfare of refugees. They were fortunate to be granted the use of a fine modern villa south of Zwickau at Wolfsgrün, where a substantial colony of Saints evolved, eventually numbering nearly two hundred persons. Another refugee colony was established in Langen, nine miles south of Frankfurt am Main in the American Occupation Zone (the first Saints there being the Moderegger family of the Tilsit Branch). These Saints erected their own church building there, and the population swelled to more than three hundred by 1950.

It seems that wherever they found themselves, the Saints of the East 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 1945, 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 capable hands and conditions steadily improved.

According to the statements of eyewitnesses, the general state of mind of Church members in the East German mission in the summer of 1945 represented a combination of sadness and relief. Hundreds of members were dead or still missing, men were in short supply, homes and meetinghouses were destroyed or damaged, food was scarce, utilities were interrupted, and transportation was unreliable. Nevertheless, the Saints were alive and had maintained their testimonies of the gospel of Jesus Christ—or in the words of many survivors, their testimonies had maintained the Saints. World War II had weakened the Church as an organization in significant respects, but the faith was alive and well.

A fitting example of the mission membership after the war is Fritz Birth of the Schneidemühl Branch in Pomerania. Brother Birth was an elder, a father of eleven (two of whom had died as German soldiers in the Soviet Union), the former owner of a house and two businesses, and later a refugee in Cottbus (Soviet occupation zone). Brother Birth had been inducted into the home guard in late 1944 and ended up losing his right arm. After rejoining his family in Cottbus (Spreewald District) in the summer of 1945, he found a new apartment for them and assisted in caring for the refugees in the growing colony of Saints in that city. By the fall of 1945, Fritz Birth had established a new shop as a glazer and was installing window panes with his one remaining arm. Despite serious personal losses,



Fig. 2. Refugee Saints established a colony in the Wolfsgrün Castle in the summer of 1945 (L. Eichler Love)

he was determined to make the best of his new circumstances in postwar Germany.

All over Germany, the surviving Saints of the East German Mission were busy in the summer of 1945 rebuilding their lives, their homes, and their branches. Years would pass before some of the bad memories faded, but the work of the kingdom of God on the earth was carried forth with dedication by Saints who praised God for preserving their lives.

NOTES

1. Douglas F. Tobler, "German Mormons as 'Righteous Gentiles': Trying to Save a Few Jewish Friends," 1995, 7 (unpublished MS). Private collection.
2. After the Reichstag (parliament building) fire of 1933, Hitler had used the German government to legally outlaw the Communist Party and to at least severely repress other political parties. Activity in any but the Nazi Party was thus grounds for suspicion on the part of the state.
3. See the story told by Heinz Koschnike in the Breslau South Branch chapter.
4. See the chapter on the Chemnitz Center Branch for an example of punishment for low-intensity opposition to the government. 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.
5. J. Richard Barnes, a veteran of the West German Mission, was an officer with the U.S. 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.
6. See Frederick W. Babbel, *On Wings of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1972).
7. Church records show that only one man in the East German Mission at the end of 1938 was a Seventy and that was mission president Alfred C. Rees of Salt Lake City, Utah. The numbers of priesthood holders are shown in a table in the East German Mission chapter.

8. Indeed, the only interruptions described by eyewitnesses to the author occurred after the war, principally under the occupation of the Soviet army.
9. The total of 3,161 refugees would of course have to be reduced by the number of Saints who had been killed or had died prior to that time and the very few who remained in the region (See Selbongen Branch chapter).
10. K. Erik Franzen, *Die Vertriebenen: Hitlers letzte Opfer*, 280; see also Martin K. Sorge, *The Other Price of Hitler's War* (New York: Greenwood, 1986), 126–28.
11. Eyewitness Ruth Schumann Hinton of the Chemnitz Schloss Branch 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."



Members of the Hitler Youth participating in a more sobering aspect of their service—searching for survivors after an air raid. [Bundesarchiv 146-1974-120]