Gustav Horn (born 1930) of Offenbach used this old cigar box for his collection of anti-aircraft shell fragments

HAMBURG DISTRICT

West German Mission

Hamburg had more than 1.7 million inhabitants when World War II began and was thus the largest city in the West German Mission. Three branches existed there at the time—St. Georg, downtown; Barmbek, in the eastern part of the city; and Altona, in the western part. Nearly one thousand Saints belonged to those three branches. No other city in the mission had more than one branch in 1939.

Hamburg District[1]	**1939**
Elders	71
Priests	24
Teachers	24
Deacons	54
Other Adult Males	147
Adult Females	527
Male Children	55
Female Children	47
Total	949

When the war began, the district president was Alwin Brey (born 1902), a real estate agent dealing with nautical properties. His counselors were Paul Pruess of the St. Georg Branch and Friedrich Sass of the Lübeck Branch. Their church responsibilities included three branches in other cities: Glückstadt (twenty-five miles northwest of Hamburg), Lübeck (thirty miles northeast), and Stade (eighteen miles to the west). Direct connections via railroad made it convenient for Elder Brey and his counselors to visit the outlying branches and for the Saints from those towns to attend district conferences held every six months in the rooms of the St. Georg Branch in Hamburg.

Fig. 1. The Hamburg District consisted of three branches in the city of Hamburg and three more close by.

Alwin Brey was drafted into the German navy at the end of 1941. His first counselor, Paul Pruess, was not in good health, so second counselor Otto Berndt

(born 1906) temporarily assumed the leadership of the district. Counselor Friedrich Sass had been drafted into the Luftwaffe and was also no longer able to serve. Otto Berndt had done a short stint in the Luftwaffe but had spent so much time in hospitals with minor illnesses that he was classified as unfit for duty and sent home. He admitted that his health was not seriously impaired, but the change in status allowed him not only to avoid military service for the duration of the war but also to travel without restriction—both evidences to him of God's protecting hand. In any case, it was nice to be home in June 1941, when his wife was expecting their fifth child. President Berndt was able to find employment with a company making metal signs with enamel finishes. (He was able to produce one for the St. Georg Branch and proudly mounted it on the wall by the entrance to the rooms at Besenbinderhof 13a.)[2]

Fig. 2. Alwin Brey, the president of the Hamburg District in 1939, served later in the German navy. (I. Brey Glasgy)

Perhaps the greatest challenge for Otto Berndt as the district president was the philosophical disagreement he had with Arthur Zander, president of the St. Georg Branch. Brother Zander was enthusiastic in his support of the Nazi regime—too enthusiastic, as far as President Berndt was concerned. However, it seemed more important to avoid open conflict that might damage the atmosphere of the St. Georg Branch and perhaps call down the wrath of Nazi Party leaders upon the Church. By 1942, there were problems enough for the Church due to the Helmuth Hübener incident (see below), but Arthur Zander was drafted that year, effectively negating the hostilities between him and Otto Berndt.[3]

The case of the three teenagers of the St. Georg Branch who were convicted of conspiracy to commit treason is by now quite well known. Helmuth Hübener (born 1925), Karl-Heinz Schnibbe (born 1924), and Rudi Wobbe (born 1926) were arrested, charged with conspiring to commit treason against the state, tried before Germany's highest court, and punished. Their story has been told in great detail in several books and needs no elaboration here. Nevertheless, a history of the West German Mission during World War II is not complete without at least a short summary of this sad episode.[4]

Fig. 3. From left: Rudi Wobbe, Helmuth Hübener, and Karl-Heinz Schnibbe were all arrested for distributing antigovernment literature. (Blood Tribunal)

By all accounts, Helmuth Hübener was a bright young man, wise and mature beyond his years. An excellent student bound for a career in government service, he came into possession of a radio in 1941 that enabled him to listen to news reports from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC). He quickly came to the realization that the German radio news reports were not telling the

full story—especially regarding German military losses. In about July of 1941, he invited (on separate occasions) his two best friends, Rudi Wobbe and Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, to share his discoveries. Listening to BBC broadcasts was strictly forbidden, and the fact that Helmuth transcribed or summarized broadcasts and then typed them out for distribution around town was nothing short of treason in Hitler's Germany. Karl-Heinz and Rudi (both of whom were convinced that Helmuth's political observations were correct) were the runners who placed the handouts in telephone booths, in apartment house hallways, and even on bulletin boards in blue-collar neighborhoods of Hamburg. Copies of some sixty messages were produced and circulated, and the two runners knew from the beginning that they had to be extremely cautious in distributing the literature.

Unfortunately, Helmuth was not as cautious. Convinced of the righteous nature of his cause, he approached another young man at work with the request that he translate the political messages into French. Helmuth hoped that French forced laborers working in Hamburg's factories could read the messages, many of which openly charged Hitler and the government of lying to the German people about the status of the war. Eventually, Helmuth was reported by suspicious coworkers to the foreman, who collected information for the Gestapo. Helmuth was arrested on February 5, 1942. His best friends were picked up just days later—Karl-Heinz on February 10 and Rudi on February 18. The president of the St. Georg Branch informed the branch members of Helmuth's arrest and expressed his dismay in the fact that Helmuth had used the branch typewriter to produce his anti-Hitler messages. (Helmuth was the branch secretary, and the machine was kept in his apartment so that he could type letters to branch members away from home in military service.)

The three best friends were held in a local prison and interrogated for days in the Gestapo headquarters downtown. They had agreed in advance that if caught, they would do their best to shoulder the guilt individually and thus attempt to avoid burdening each other with guilt. Rudi and Karl-Heinz later wrote of the beatings they received and were both convinced that Helmuth had been formally tortured. In the meantime, the families of the three teenagers were questioned by the Gestapo, as were the presidents Arthur Zander and Otto Berndt. At first, the police could not be convinced that Helmuth could produce such sophisticated literature without the help of adults, but eventually they accepted his claim that he alone had written the messages.

The Gestapo theory that the boys had been enlisted by conniving adults was pursued aggressively, and district president Otto Berndt was summoned to Gestapo headquarters as part of the investigation. His description of the setting gives a clear picture of Hitler's police state:

> I rang the bell and the door opened automatically. The hallway was dark and there was nobody there. Suddenly, I heard a voice over the loudspeaker: "Come in. Take three steps forward!" which I did. The door closed behind me and I stood in the dark. Then a light went on and I saw a man sitting there; he took my papers. He wrote my name in a book, then handed me a piece of paper with a number on it and told me, "Sit on the chair with this number on it and wait until you are called. If you walk around or try to look into other rooms, you are breaking the law." I went upstairs to the next floor and sat on the chair with the assigned number. I had not been waiting long when the door next to me opened and I was ordered to enter and take a seat. Until that moment, I had seen nobody but the man at the entry and all doors had opened and closed automatically. The building was like a mausoleum and I couldn't hear anything. . . . It was creepy and I have to admit that my knees were shaking. I entered the room and it was empty except for two chairs and a table between them—that was the extent of the furnishings. A few files and a telephone were on the table. An official about thirty years old ordered me to sit down. I told him that while sitting in the hall I have been more afraid than at any other time in my life. . . . I felt the presence of evil

> and knew that I was in a dangerous situation and could not escape. Before entering the room I had said ("screamed" would be a better word for it) a quick prayer to my Heavenly Father. I cried for help from the depths of my soul; no sound escaped my tongue. When I sat down, all fear left me and I was encompassed by total peace. . . . I knew that God had heard my prayer and that I was under His protection. I noticed that a higher power had taken control over my body and this feeling stayed with me for four days—the duration of my interrogation. There is no other way to explain it; there is no other way that I could have answered all of those questions honestly and quickly and to the satisfaction of the Gestapo.[5]

In his recollection, Otto Berndt was questioned about the teachings of the Church, the relationship of the Church and the state, the philosophy of the Church regarding Jews, and several other topics.

In early August 1942, the three friends were transported by train to Berlin where their case was to be tried before the highest court of the land—a court famous for quick rulings and summary judgments against those who opposed the regime. The boys were provided defense attorneys who did their duty in a most perfunctory manner. The trial of all three began on August 11 and finished that very day. From the onset, Karl-Heinz and Rudi were convinced that a verdict of guilty was assured. Their sentences were indeed severe: Helmuth was sentenced to die; Rudi to spend ten years in prison; and Karl-Heinz, five years. Helmuth's last statement to the judges inspired both Rudi and Karl-Heinz: "You have sentenced me to death for telling the truth. My time is now—but your time will come!"[6] The last two were soon transported back to Hamburg to prison, while Helmuth awaited the results of many appeals made in his behalf for clemency. All appeals were denied, and Helmuth Hübener was executed in Berlin's Plötzensee Prison on October 27, 1942.[7] In the hours before his death, he wrote three letters to family and friends in Hamburg. Only one letter survives, in the possession of the Sommerfeld family; it includes this text:

> I am very thankful to my Heavenly Father that this agonizing life is coming to an end this evening. I could not stand it any longer anyway! My Father in Heaven knows that I have done nothing wrong. . . . I know that God lives and He will be the proper judge of this matter. Until our happy reunion in that better world I remain your friend and brother in the Gospel. Helmuth.[8]

Bekanntmachung.

Der am 11. August 1942 vom Volksgerichtshof wegen Vorbereitung zum Hochverrat und landesverräterischer Feindbegünstigung zum Tode und zum dauernden Verlust der bürgerlichen Ehrenrechte verurteilte 17 Jahre alte

Helmuth Hübener

aus Hamburg

ist heute hingerichtet worden.

Berlin, den 27. Oktober 1942.

Der Oberreichsanwalt beim Volksgerichtshof.

Fig. 4. This notice of Helmuth Hübener's execution appeared in a Kassel newspaper. (J. Ernst)

The reactions of fellow members of the St. Georg Branch were mixed. Most felt sorrow for the young men when their arrest and punishment were announced but were disappointed that such apparently foolish and self-destructive acts could be committed by Latter-day Saints who had been taught to obey laws and give allegiance to governments. Branch meetings were observed by government agents for some time after the incident, and the Church equipment used by Helmuth to produce the handbills was confiscated and not returned.

Rudi Wobbe and Karl-Heinz Schnibbe spent the next year in prison not far from Hamburg. The conditions of their incarceration improved a bit with time, but it was no happy existence. In December 1943, they were sent to occupied Poland and assigned to work in an aircraft repair factory. In January 1945, the Red Army streamed into Germany, and Rudi and Karl-Heinz were marched

toward the west along with their fellow prisoners. They were back in the familiar surroundings of their Hamburg prison on February 16. Days later, Karl-Heinz was drafted into the German army and assigned to help stop the Soviet invasion in eastern Germany. Rudi was kept in Hamburg because he had a longer prison sentence to serve.

For the next three months, Rudi watched as more and more prisoners left to serve in the German army, but his own status as a political prisoner guaranteed him a longer stay in prison. It was not until late May that he and the last remaining prisoners were freed by French conquerors. The British occupation authority reviewed his story, were convinced of his innocence, and sent him home on June 2, 1945. He viewed with sadness the ruins of his hometown but was thrilled to see his family again after more than three years.


IDENTIFICATION CARD
for ex-political prisoners of the concentration camps and prisons Hamburg, Berlin, Glasmoor, Brandenz.
AUSWEIS
für ehemalige politische Gefangene aus den KZ-lagern u. Gefängnissen Hamburg, Berlin, Glasmoor, Brandenz
Wobbe, Rudolf
born 11.2.26 at Hamburg
German-Deutscher
Hamburg, Ausschlägerelbdeich Sporthaus b. Gerter
was kept in captivity from 18.2.42 to 2.6.45
conc.op.+pris.
liberated from the alliiert. Military
Rudolf Wobbe

Fig. 5. Ruddi Wobbe's identification card indicates that he was a political prisoner under the Nazis. (H. Schmidt Wobbe)

Karl-Heinz was captured by the Soviets in Czechoslovakia in April 1945 and spent the next four years in work camps in Russia. He suffered terrible illnesses, starvation, subzero temperature, mosquitoes, and the torture of being told repeatedly that "we would be going home soon." After losing a dangerous amount of weight in April 1949, he was classified as unfit for work and was sent back to Germany. Following a recuperative stay in a Göttingen hospital, he was released for good in June 1949 and returned to his family in a Hamburg that was finally beginning to rise from the ruins.

In the first few years of the war, the Allies had learned that a combination of explosive bombs and incendiary bombs could produce a disastrous effect known as "firebombing" in major German cities where wood structures were crowded around narrow streets. To be sure, the German military commanders knew this as well, but as the war dragged on, the German Luftwaffe became less and less able to defend the homeland. In July 1943, the British and American bomber forces in England decided that the city of Hamburg should be subjected to an intense campaign of raids within just a few days. Explosive bombs were to be dropped first to burst roof surfaces, doors, and windows, after which incendiaries would be dropped to start fires in the open structures. Four major attacks were carried out on July 25, 28, and 30, and August 3, and the proposed results were achieved—Hamburg burned for days. The heat was so intense and the fires so widespread that thousands died in air-raid shelters of suffocation without being so much as singed by the flames.

In his detailed study of the results of the air war against Hamburg, Hans Brunswig presented information collected by the Hamburg harbor weather service showing that the firestorm produced by the attacks resulted in flames soaring more than four miles into the sky, fed by winds of more than fifty miles per hour (winds caused by the fires sucking oxygen from ambient air on the ground level).[9] Following the success of these attacks, firebombings were carried out against many other German cities, the prime example being the attack of February 13–14, 1945, on Dresden.[10]

The following figures illustrate the extent of the losses in Hamburg during the entire war (about 80 percent of the damage occurring in July 1943). Among the residents and structures listed below were 790 Latter-day Saints, their homes, and their meetinghouses. The following accounts were provided by eyewitnesses regarding their experiences during the firebombings of July–August 1943.

Results of the Allied air war against Hamburg, Germany[11]	
Air-raid warnings sounded	778
Air-raid warnings with enemy airplanes sighted	702
Attacks	213
Airplanes involved in those attacks	Approx. 17,000
Explosive bombs dropped	Approx. 101,000
Incendiary bombs dropped	Approx. 1,600,000
Bombs not effective (fell in water, etc.)	Approx. 50%
Deaths (male 41.8%, female 58.2%)	48,572
Deaths elsewhere from injuries in Hamburg	Approx. 3,500
Apartments not damaged	21%
Apartments with slight damage	19%
Apartments with medium damage	7%
Apartments with serious damage	4%
Apartments totally destroyed	49%
Apartments totally destroyed in all of Germany	22%
Residents in Hamburg in 1939	Approx. 1,700,000
Residents with property loss	Approx. 1,170,000
Residents with total property loss	902,000
Residents with partial property loss	265,000

With her husband serving as a soldier at the Eastern Front, Maria Niemann had recently given birth to a baby girl, and both of them had nearly died in the process. Just months after that trial, Maria's family experienced the horror of the British attacks on Hamburg. Her son Henry (born 1936) was staying with a grandmother across town when the first bombings took place. As he explained, "They just bombed the living daylights out of this town. For hours we were in the basement and people were crying and carrying on and every once in a while you were . . . kind of lifted up in your seat because of the shock [of the bombs]."[12] Between attacks, Henry and his grandmother made their way through the fires and the rubble toward his home:

> There were a lot of streets that we had to bypass because the walls of the apartments and the buildings collapsed into the street and you couldn't get through . . . the narrow streets. . . . When we came to my street, there wasn't anybody outside. All the windows were blown out through the shock and the bar tiles were off the roof. . . . I remember that I started crying and then I started running home.

Henry Niemann found his mother in her bed with his sister—both safe and sound. Maria Niemann recalled the following details about the attack that took place the next day:

> I had to go with my children to the basement, and it was hard for me with a baby and my boy. . . . And so I had to call my neighbor. . . . She was a real good friend to me, and she helped and took the baby, and I took my son, and we went down to the basement. Then the bombs came down. It took our roof away, and here I was with a baby in a carriage and my son, and we had no roof. All the windows were out, and the curtains were hanging outside, and the water pipes were hit, and so there was gas mixed with water. What should we do? I cannot stay in my home with the baby.[13]

Emerging from their basement shelter following one of those raids, Maria saw her city burning in every direction and the neighboring houses in ruins: "The sun was shining, but we didn't see it. It was all black." The three of them made their way out of town and were eventually fortunate to find lodgings in the town of Hude, near the coast of the North Sea, about two hours northwest of Hamburg. According to Henry, they remained there for more than three years.

Gertrud Menssen survived the first few attacks with her two little children and found their home still

standing. However, she feared that "the next time would be our turn." She was right, and their home was totally destroyed during the night of July 27–28. Fortunately, her husband, Walter, just happened to be home on leave. In Gertrud's recollection:

> When we heard the bombers and bombs falling, we grabbed our children only and my purse with important papers—nothing else—and ran this time to the big bomb shelter on the corner under the school yard. I guess we just knew we would get it this time. While we were in the shelter, men would come in and call out the number of the houses that had been hit. And it did not take very long until they called #86 Hasselbrookstr. That was us! . . . When we finally got out of the shelter in the afternoon, the whole city seemed to be burning. It was so dark and smoky and frightening that we put wet hankies over the children's eyes. Why cry about a household of furniture? . . . We were alive! And we were together! That was all that mattered.[14]

Walter Menssen got his family safely out of Hamburg and saw them onto a train to southern Germany before he was required to report for duty again. It would be more than a year before Gertrud and her (by then three) children would see Hamburg again.

During the worst hours of the raids over Hamburg, Gerd Fricke witnessed terrifying scenes: "I remember that when everything burned, the asphalt on the streets was like liquid, and the women with their children and strollers got stuck and burned to death right there. We saw many horrible things." The Fricke family lost everything they owned for the second time.[15]

Although Rahlstedt was seven miles from downtown Hamburg, the bombs dropped on the city eventually struck Rahlstedt and the Pruess home there. Lieselotte Pruess (born 1926) recalled the tragedy that struck her family's home in July 1943 while they were huddled in the basement:

> My father had been outside watching things. Then he came into the basement and said, "We all have to get out right now! The house is on fire!" We had felt something hit the house, but in all of the commotion, we didn't know what it was. So we ran out into the street and saw that our house was on fire. There was no fire department to help. Then my father and some neighbor men went back in to save some stuff. They brought our piano out too. The house burned to the ground, but we had our piano out in the street. I played the piano, and then my sister played the song "Freut Euch des Lebens" ("Let's All Be Happy"). The neighbors remember that.[16]

The Pruess family evacuated to the town of Thorn in Poland, where they were given housing in some army barracks. Soon thereafter, Rosalie Pruess returned to Rahlstedt with a son, and they managed to make the home livable on a subsistence level.

Harald Fricke (born 1926) wrote the following account of the firebombings:

> I was sixteen years old at the time. We (my mother, my sister Carla, my brother Gerhard, my Grandpa and I) were living at the time on Norderstrasse in [the suburb of] Hammerbrook. We survived the first attack in the basement shelter of our home even though the building above us was totally destroyed. Then we were assigned an apartment on Olgastrasse in the suburb of Rothenburgsort. This narrow street was destroyed one or two days later by the fires that spread throughout the city. Nobody could seem to escape the sea of flames anymore. We were fortunate to be in an apartment at the end of the street and were able to run through the hail of bombs and shrapnel across the street to the underground bunker at Brandhofer Schleuse. When we got there, they first didn't want to let us in because the shelter was full and they were experiencing a lack of oxygen. . . . My darling aunt burned to death in a hospital. . . . Her son Herbert Fricke, a lieutenant in the Hermann Goering Guard Regiment, came home to Hamburg for a few days but he was unable to identify her among the many badly burned corpses. She was buried in a mass grave in Ohlsdorf.[17]

Perhaps the most trying challenge during the terrible air raids of July 1943 in Hamburg was to mothers with small children when the father was away in military service. So it was with Anna Marie Frank (born 1919) of the St. Georg Branch. She sought shelter in the basement of their apartment in

the evening of July 27 with her daughter, Marianne (two years old), and her infant son, Rainer. As she anxiously awaited the all-clear signal a few hours later, Sister Frank and the others in the shelter knew that destruction was all around them. When the air-raid wardens opened the doors to the shelter and instructed them to hurry outside, everybody reached for blankets, soaked them in water, and threw them over their heads to prevent suffocation from smoke. Anna Marie Frank could not do this and simultaneously get her two children into the street and to safety, so her neighbors offered to take little Marianne with them. Tragically, when they emerged into the street, the chaos was such that Sister Frank lost sight of the neighbors. Amid the fires, the smoke, and the collapsing buildings, the neighbors and little Marianne disappeared and were never seen again. Anna Marie searched for months in city offices in vain for any trace of her daughter.[18]

District president Alwin Brey just happened to be home on leave from the navy when the firebombings struck his neighborhood. His daughter Irma (born 1926) recalled clearly what happened one night:

> When the alarm sounded that [the British] were coming, we took our stuff that we had packed already and went down to the basement. When we came out, our building was almost completely flat. Our apartment was on the second floor and the inside was full of flames and it burned everything—our furniture and everything, but not just for us, but for everybody who lived in the building. So my dad took us out of the basement. Oh, there were so many dead people lying in the street, and they came with big trucks and picked them all up with forklifts. We were very lucky that my dad got us out. He got a car because he was an officer of the navy, and he got us in those bunkers. They couldn't hurt them. We stayed there, I think, two or three days, and then a little further down off the bunker in the same street my uncle, my mother's brother and his family lived there and they were all killed. Almost everybody on our street was killed, but we made it out alive.[19]

Alwin Brey was able to get his family out of town. They took a train south all the way across the country to the city of Bamberg, in Bavaria. After he found them a small room to live in, he returned to his station in France.

Young Inge Laabs (born 1928) recalled how people referred to Hamburg in July 1943 as "Gomorrah." In her memory she could still picture many buildings burning for days because of the coal supplies in the basements. Her story illustrates the plight of tens of thousands of homeless people in that huge city in July 1943:

> After we lost our home, we lived in an air-raid shelter for a while. When that was no longer possible anymore, we lived in damaged homes. We did not have much to eat and drink at all and could not brush our teeth. We had lost everything and wandered around trying to find a place to stay. Later on, we went to Pomerania (eastern Germany) where my grandparents lived. We could not stay very long because my mother had to return to her work and I to my work training. . . . The time we had to sleep in a railroad car in Friedrichsruh by Hamburg was the hardest. Sometimes, we couldn't even get food with ration coupons.[20]

Arthur Sommerfeld had just returned from working in the Arbeitsdienst program when the firebombings began. He had received a severe head injury when hit by a falling tree and had not recovered entirely, but he came to the rescue when the Sommerfeld apartment began to burn. His mother, Marie Friebel Sommerfeld, begged him to return to the apartment to retrieve their valued genealogical documents. While he was still in the rooms, a phosphorus bomb exploded, and he received burns on over 80 percent of his body. The documents were saved, but he was grievously injured. Fortunately, he survived. Sister Sommerfeld then received permission to evacuate her family to her hometown in the German-language region of Czechoslovakia.[21]

The Guertler family was on vacation in nearby Lübeck-Travemünde when the city of Hamburg was reduced to ashes in July 1943. Daughter Theresa recalled hearing her father describe what

he found while on leave from the military after the bombing:

> When he came to our street, he saw the house was totally destroyed. All that was standing was the chimney from the ground floor to the top floor, and on every level, there was a little kitchen corner attached to the chimney where the kitchen stove was still standing. That's how he described it. So when he found out that the house was destroyed, he was hoping that we were in Travemünde, and we were, and then he told us that our house was destroyed.[22]

Fred Zwick (born 1933) was ten years old when the firebombings took place. He recalled clearly the night his home was destroyed:

> We went to the bunker in the early evening and the air raids started, and I heard a lot of explosions. A lot of smoke was coming in through the vents. The reason was that there was a coal yard right next to it, and they had the coal stored right next to the walls of the bunker, and apparently it was set on fire. There was some water available, and the mothers and the adults, they tried to protect their children with wet blankets so we could breathe because the smoke was just very thick. . . . We got out the next day about two o'clock. . . . Our apartment house was totally destroyed. A neighbor lady went to the basement to get the engagement ring of her daughter. She had suffocated but was still sitting at a table there. She was able to retrieve the ring, but as soon as she touched the hand it fell apart.[23]

Figs. 6. and 7. The Zwick apartment at Süderstrasse 244 in Hamburg in 1939 and after the bombings of July 1943. Note the destroyed and abandoned streetcar. (F. Zwick)

Perhaps the most detailed and chilling account of the firebombing was written in 1963 by district president Otto Berndt.[24] With painstaking detail, he recounted the events of the night of July 27–28.

Fig. 8. Otto Berndt in about 1937. (K. Ronna)

As the air-raid warden of his apartment building, he was allowed to stay outside when the sirens wailed and during the subsequent bombing (which he was pleased to do, having a terrible fear of air-raid shelters). (With the exception of his eldest daughter, who lived across town, his family was safe in a small village north of Berlin.) Soon the apartment building was struck and started burning, but he was able to evacuate all of the occupants unharmed and send them on their way to safer locations. Then he attempted to help others. At one juncture, he ran into a shelter to help get the people out, thinking all the while of the many ways he could be killed in doing so. He was urged on by the thought that his own family might be in such a situation some day and that he would want others to rescue them. In the shelter, he found just one boy of about twelve years of age and quickly carried him outside, only to be told by first-aid personnel that the boy was already dead.

Returning to his neighborhood to determine the status of his home, he entered his apartment while the flames raged on the upper floors. He gathered critical personal items using sheets as bags and carried them down into the street. After about the fourth trip, he found that the bags in the street had caught fire. He then gave up any attempt to salvage more property and ran down the street as the fires spread from building to building. "All of a sudden, I felt an intense anger toward the pilots of the planes that had dropped the bombs," he admitted.

An hour later, President Berndt came to a city canal and heard people on the other side screaming for help as the flames approached their position. There was no boat available to transport them to his side of the canal, so he found a rope. His idea was to

swim across to their side and tie the rope around one person. Helpers on the safe side could then pull the person across while he swam alongside to assure that they did not drown. This he did stark naked, leaving his clothes on the safe side (hoping that sparks flying through air would not ignite them). He managed to help a number of women and old men across the canal for about an hour, then dressed and ran off in the direction of a safer neighborhood. "Not one of them thanked me," he observed. As he ran between burning apartment houses, he saw in the street countless bodies of fire victims, most of which had shrunk to half their size when the heat removed the fluids from their bodies. When he accidentally touched several of them, "they disintegrated and returned to the earth as dust to dust," he recalled.

At about six o'clock the next morning, when the sun should have been on the rise for the new day, Otto Berndt noticed that the clouds of smoke prevented any sunlight from illuminating the city. He had seen no firefighting personnel because the fires were everywhere and the streets were blocked with burned-out vehicles and furniture rescued from the apartments. Survivors were either fleeing for their lives or trying desperately to help others. At one point, he lay down and slept for an hour or two (time had seemed to be totally irrelevant that night) as chaos reigned round about. Sometime before noon, he found himself on a small boat being carried across the Elbe River to safety south of the harbor. His memories of the moment were clear years later:

> As I sat on deck of the boat, I felt my apartment key in my pocket. I thought about the fact that I had once owned a beautiful apartment. Thirteen years of sweat and frugal living—all destroyed in a single night. The only thing I had left was this little key. Then I made a symbolic gesture by tossing the key into the Elbe, thereby separating myself totally from the past and entering into the present and the future. With no burdens, I stood at the threshold of a new life. Only God could know what it would bring.

President Berndt was united with his family in the village of Nitzow, and his daughter Gertrude joined them there. Exempt from military service, he could have stayed there in safety but felt that he must return to Hamburg to direct the Church there. Before he left Nitzow, he visited the East German Mission office in nearby Berlin and was able to purchase many Church books to replace the ones lost by the Hamburg Saints when they were bombed out. Back in Hamburg, the only place he could find to live was in a room in the building in which the Altona Branch held its meetings. He was still living there when the war ended.

An excellent but sad report was written by Hugo Witt, a member of the defunct St. Georg Branch, who made his way from his home in the Hamburg suburb of Wilhelmsburg to church in Altona on the Sunday after the worst of the air raids. This report was submitted to the mission office in Frankfurt on August 15, 1943:

> Following a terrible war catastrophe, namely air raids by British and American planes over Hamburg-Altona, we were able after a short interruption to resume holding meetings in Altona, thanks to the mercy of the Lord, who preserved our meeting rooms. . . . I will try to describe a little of what I personally witnessed or heard about the catastrophe in Hamburg and how it has influenced the life of the Church in Hamburg:
>
> In the night of Saturday–Sunday 24–25 July, Altona was attacked by a large number of airplanes dropping phosphorus, incendiary, and TNT bombs. I did not experience the worst of the attack because I lived out in Wilhelmsburg. When I made my way to Altona to Sunday School with my family, there were no streetcars in operation. The sun was darkened by the clouds of ashes from burning buildings in Hamburg. Then I made my way by bicycle toward the branch rooms in the Klein Western Strasse [37]. When I tried to cross the Elbe Bridge from Veddel toward Rothenburgsort, I found the way blocked. This compelled me to proceed via the road to Freihafen and over the new railroad bridge over the Elbe. All of the sheds were burning in Freihafen, and the path became increasingly difficult. My eyes started to burn from the smoke and the ashes. I was fortunate to make my way to the Messberg in relatively good time.

> Then my progress was slower and slower toward the downtown where many buildings were on fire. . . . It was almost impossible to ride my bicycle because so many people were fleeing. I then passed the harbor piers and made my way toward Altona. Here I had to climb over the rubble from the facades of buildings that had fallen onto the street. Along the way I had to carefully step around the bodies of the victims. At one point I counted 17 people, mostly women and girls. I finally reached the branch rooms, but of course there was nobody there. Then I went to visit the Thymian family, who lived across the street. Everything was chaos there because they had taken in refugees. There was a family with a two-week-old baby, and they were worried about the baby because there was so much smoke in the air. I stayed there for about 45 minutes. Before I left, Hyrum asked me to say a prayer, which I was pleased to do. Then I left.
>
> I stayed with my family in Wilhelmsburg until Wednesday evening. Then we packed our things and followed the masses leaving Hamburg. They had been passing our house day and night with what little property they could rescue. We went to Göddingen and Bleckede on the Elbe and later with other members we went to Pörndorf, near Landshut in Bavaria. Several weeks later I traveled back to Wilhelmsburg to continue my work in the factory. A week later I brought my family home.[25]

President Berndt had plenty of concerns to deal with in the spring of 1945. He had just succeeded in gathering his family members, who had been spread out over the map, and was living with several other refugee families in the rooms of the Altona Branch. The members of the three branches in the city of Hamburg were all meeting in the damaged rooms of the Altona Branch, but most of the Saints were no longer in Hamburg at all. Nevertheless, President Berndt held a district conference in April 1945, and at the conclusion of the conference, he did something quite different. According to his son Otto (born 1929):

> My father said, Brothers and sisters, I feel that we should all hold hands throughout the congregation. Which we did, and we sang the hymn, "Gott sei mit euch bis aufs Wiedersehen" ("God Be With You Till We Meet Again"). I asked my father why we were holding hands. I didn't understand the importance of it. He said to me, "I have the feeling that many of the brothers and sisters that we saw tonight in the meeting, we will never see in this life again." He was right. . . . There were a lot of people there (they came from miles around)—despite the big hole in the ceiling. This is something that will be with me always.[26]

Notes

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
2. Otto Berndt, autobiography (unpublished, 1963), CHL MS 8316; in German, trans. the author.
3. Twenty years later, Otto Berndt made several distinctly critical statements about Arthur Zander, as he did about several other leaders of the West German Mission and the districts. It appears from his story that Otto Berndt expected that Church leaders should avoid any allegiance to Hitler's government while they represented the Church. In other words, they should join him in condemning but not opposing the government.
4. Two excellent versions in English were written by the principals of the story: Karl-Heinz Schnibbe with Alan F. Keele and Douglas F. Tobler, *The Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984) and Rudi Wobbe and Jerry Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal* (American Fork, UT: Covenant, 1992). The best German account of the affair was written by Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, *Jugendliche gegen Hitler* (Berg am See, Germany: Verlagsgemeinschaft Berg, 1991).
5. Otto Berndt, autobiography.
6. Both Rudi and Karl-Heinz recalled the quotation in very similar words. Both believed that Helmuth had been particularly bold in court in an attempt to absorb the majority of the guilt and thus draw attention away from his best friends.
7. Helmuth was executed on the guillotine. The room (now empty) in which he died is a national monument to victims of National Socialist terror, and the three young men are listed among the many Germans who offered bona fide resistance to the government.
8. Schnibbe, *The Price*, 58.
9. Hans Brunswig, *Feuersturm über Hamburg*, 6th ed. (Stuttgart, Germany: Motorbuch Verlag, 1983).
10. See the chapters on the Dresden branches in 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).
11. Brunswig, *Feuersturm über Hamburg*, 380–81, 383, 385, 401, 405.

12. Henry Niemann, interview by Michael Corley, South Jordan, UT, October 31, 2008.
13. Maria Kreutner Niemann, "An Evening with Maria" (unpublished speech, 1988), transcribed by JoAnn P. Knowles, private collection.
14. Gertrud Frank Menssen, autobiography (unpublished), private collection.
15. Gerd Fricke, interview by the author in German, Hamburg, Germany, August 15, 2006; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
16. Liesellotte Pruess Schmidt, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, December 1, 2006.
17. Harald Fricke, autobiography (unpublished, 2003), private collection.
18. Anna Marie Haase Frank, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, October 27, 2006.
19. Irma Brey Glas, interview by Michael Corley, Taylorsville, UT, October 10, 2008.
20. Inge Laabs Vieregge, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in Germany, October 2008.
21. Werner Sommerfeld, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, January 19, 2007.
22. Resa (Theresa) Guertler Frey, interview by Michael Corley, Salt Lake City, March 14, 2008.
23. Fred Zwick, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, June 29, 2007.
24. Otto Berndt, autobiography.
25. Altona Branch general minutes, 93–96, CHL LR 10603 11. From Brother Witt's apartment in Wilhelmsburg to Altona (approximately six miles as the crow flies), his route on that occasion was certainly not direct.
26. Otto Albert Berndt, "The Life and Times of Otto Albert Berndt" (unpublished autobiography), private collection.

Altona Branch

A suburb on the western outskirts of the metropolis of Hamburg, Altona has existed for centuries. Legend has it that the name means "all too close (to Hamburg)" (*all zu nah* or *al to na* in the local dialect). The Altona Branch was one of three in Germany's largest port city.

The Saints in Altona met in rented rooms at Kleine Westerstrasse 37.[1] They enjoyed the use of a pump organ there, but no other details regarding the rooms and furnishings are available at this writing. Sunday School began at 10:00 a.m., as it did almost everywhere in Germany, with sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The MIA met on Wednesdays at 7:30 p.m., and the Relief Society met on Mondays at the same hour. When the war began, there was no Primary organization in the Altona Branch.

Following the departure of the American missionaries on August 25, 1939, the branch president in Altona was Wilhelm Stelzig. The branch was relatively strong, with ten elders and twenty holders of the Aaronic Priesthood, but was dominated (like so many branches in Germany) by adult females (57 percent). The average attendance at Sunday meetings during the last months of that year was thirty-five members and friends.

Altona Branch[2]	**1939**
Elders	10
Priests	5
Teachers	1
Deacons	14
Other Adult Males	38
Adult Females	113
Male Children	8
Female Children	10
Total	199

Significant changes were made in the Altona Branch soon after the war began. On November 12, 1939, the sacrament meeting was moved to a time immediately following Sunday School. The reason for this change was not given in the branch records, but the same change had been made in other branches because blackout regulations had made it difficult for the members to get home safely after the late sacrament meeting.[3] While the meetings were held consecutively, the sacrament was to be administered only during the Sunday School meeting.

According to the manuscript history of the branch, the members continued to tell friends about the gospel during the war. For example, on

Sunday, March 17, 1940, five persons were baptized. Five weeks later, the following comment was written: "Civil defense problems were discussed in the priesthood meeting." The question was not whether to continue to hold meetings, but how to do so under blackout conditions and other restrictions.[4]

In the branch conference held on September 8, 1940, President Stelzig reported that the number of tithe payers in the branch had increased from thirty-six to forty-two in the previous twelve months.[5]

Excellent minutes were kept of the worship services and other meetings in the branch, although it is not clear who the clerk was during the war. He recorded the names of the priesthood holders who conducted the meetings and administered the sacrament, as well as all speakers and those who prayed. He also noted the names of the hymns sung and numbers of persons who attended (priesthood holders, women, children, and friends). According to his records, attendance at branch meetings declined somewhat during 1940 and 1941 but hovered above twenty-five through 1942.

Hundreds of thousands of adults from occupied countries were transported to Germany to work in factories after German workers were drafted into the Wehrmacht. Among those were now and then members of the Church from the Netherlands. According to the branch history, "Elder Jan Copier, President of the YMMIA of the Netherlands Mission from Utrecht, visited the branch. He told the Saints, 'When we do the will of our Heavenly Father, we can expect salvation.'"[6] Allowing Brother Copier to attend and participate in meetings could have caused difficulty for the Altona Saints because such fraternization with foreigners—not formally a crime—was not condoned in Germany at the time.

In February 1943, the St. Georg Branch in downtown Hamburg was evicted from its spacious and beautiful rooms at Besenbinderhof 13a. This was a tragic loss, but the Altona Branch was quick to take in as many Church members as it could. Given the destruction of major portions of the Hamburg city center, it was not at all easy for the St. Georg Saints to make their way to Altona. During the air raids and firestorms of July 1943, the building in which the Barmbek Branch met was also destroyed, and they too were invited to go to Altona. With the members of all three Hamburg branches invited to attend, there were still only about fifty persons participating in Sunday meetings.

Trials and blessings occurred during the war just as they did during peacetime. For example, the branch history includes this report under the date July 4, 1943: "Sister Ingeborg Suppan had suddenly lost her sight. She received a priesthood blessing on June 28 and reported today the complete restoration of her sight."[7]

District president Otto Berndt presided over a meeting on August 29, 1943, and for all practical purposes united the three Hamburg branches into one. According to the meeting minutes, there were fifty persons present. Hugo Witt recalled, "At the conclusion of the meeting, we all knelt to pray for our soldiers."[8]

The following events are reported in the branch general minutes for the final fifteen months of the war:

> March 26, 1944: district conference in our rooms.
>
> April 9, 1944: meetings canceled due to air-raid alarms.
>
> Summer 1944: For several weeks, our rooms were confiscated by the NSDAP and used as a collection point for sewing materials. Therefore we could not hold meetings.
>
> December 10, 1944: Advent program held with 66 attendees.[9]

Many meetings held during this period ended with a prayer for the LDS men in the German military, with all members on their knees.

With all three branches meeting in the Altona rooms, it must have been a great trial for the Saints in Hamburg when the rooms were temporarily confiscated by the city government to be used as a collection point of a rag drive in late November 1943.[10]

Fortunately, the interruption appears to have lasted only a week or two. The same action was taken again in June 1944.[11]

The records of the Altona Branch Relief Society include the following statement at the close of 1944: "We can describe the general condition of the society as excellent. All registered sisters are 100% active. The activity of the visiting teachers has had to be neglected due to the prevailing difficulties. The sisters live too far from each other and public transportation is impossible."[12] The records show an average attendance of twenty sisters at the meetings that year. As in other branches throughout Germany, the sisters in Altona continued to carry out their duties, often in the absence of their husbands. The challenges became more daunting with each new day.

On January 28, 1945, Herbert Baarz became the new branch president. The status of his predecessor is unclear.[13] The attendance at meetings had increased to seventy or eighty persons. This may seem to be a small number comprising members of the three Hamburg branches, but by that time, several hundred local Latter-day Saints had been killed, were serving in the military, or had left town with their children to find safer places to live.

The meetings of the Altona Branch were canceled on Sunday, April 8, 1945, due to air raid alarms. The next three Sundays were a time of great uncertainty as the British army approached and invaded the city of Hamburg. The following comments were made by the branch clerk:

> April 15, 22 and 29: I was not able to attend when English troops invaded the area and prevented me from going to Hamburg [from Wilhelmsburg]. In the last major air raid over Hamburg, our one remaining meeting house at Klein Westernstrasse 37 was severely damaged so that meetings could not be held there until August 25. From April to August, meetings were held in the homes of members with an average attendance of seventy persons.[14]

The terror of the war had ended in this huge city, but many other problems remained or emerged out of the rubble of the once-proud Elbe River port. The city was in ruins, transportation and utilities out of order, food and water supplies interrupted. With housing at an all-time low, it was terribly difficult to find places to live or materials to repair the meeting rooms of the Altona Branch. According to the branch general minutes, the first sacrament meeting held in the repaired rooms at Kleine Westerstrasse 37 took place on August 25, 1945, when eighty-nine members and friends assembled for the first time in months.[15] A week later, an American soldier, Col. Clarence Nesley, located the meeting place. As a missionary before the war, he had once served as the district president in Hamburg. While his feelings on that occasion were likely very sad, his visit did indeed herald a time when the Saints would enjoy the communion with Saints from other lands and a connection with the Church leadership in faraway Salt Lake City.

In the summer of 1945, the Altona Branch was alive and well. Members strewn all over Europe began to return, and LDS refugees from the East German Mission would soon swell their ranks. Though damaged, the meetinghouse still stood, and the Saints began to meet and rebuild their branch with dedication.

In Memoriam

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

Karl Friedrich Ferdinand Sennewald Bornholdt b. Hamburg 24 Mar 1865; son of Detlef Bornholdt and Telsche Sass; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; m. 29 Aug 1891, Anna Franziska Schlueter; bur. 25 May 1941 (CHL MS 10603, 8; FS)

Herbert Hermann Hans Moritz Kahl b. Lichterwerda, Sachsen, 17 Mar 1915; son of Hermann Kahl and Martha Meta Barichs; bp. 30 Sep 1927; lieutenant; d. 14 Jan 1943; bur. Cassino, Italy (www.volksbund.de; FHL microfilm 271376, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Kurt Heinz Kahl b. Lichterwerda, Sachsen, 28 Jan 1917; son of Hermann Kahl and Martha Meta Barichs; bp. 30 Sep 1927; d. 28 Dec 1943; bur. Cassino, Italy (www.volksbund.de; FHL microfilm 271376, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Metta Katarina Lassen b. Süder Ballig, Hadersleben, Schleswig-Holstein, 16 Mar 1863; dau. of Thomas Lassen and Margarethe Schmidt; bp. 18 Jan 1931; conf. 18 Jan 1931; m. 12 May 1895, Hans Lorenzen; d. heart attack 27 Feb 1942 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 982)

Erich Richard Lehmann b. Cottbus, Cottbus, Brandenburg, 1 Dec 1913; son of Friedrich Wilhelm Lehmann and Marie Konzack; m. Hamburg 19 Oct 1940, Charlotte or Liselotte Holert; d. 15 Jul 1944 (IGI)

Ernst Günther Meyer b. Westerland, Schleswig-Holstein, 27 Oct 1910; son of Tony Elfrieda Kayser or Kaiser; bp. 16 Apr 1920; conf. 16 Apr 1920; d. Hamburg 4 August 1941 (CHL 10603, 118; FHL microfilm 245232, 1930 and 1935 censuses; FS)

Heinrich Friedrich Peter Hermann Palm b. Ochtmissen, Lüneburg, Hannover, 24 Dec 1874; son of Karl Friedrich Gotthard Palm and Catharine Dorothee Margarethe Albers; bp. 23 Aug 1928; ord. teacher; d. 20 or 21 Jan 1943 (FHL microfilm 245250, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI, FS, CHL MS 10603, 81)

Sophie Marie Sellmann b. Stassfurt, Neuendorf, Kloster, Sachsen, 10 Aug 1861; dau. of Gottfried Martin Peter Sellmann and Wilhelmine Henriette Balzer; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; m. Neuendorf, Magdeburg, Sachsen, 22 Jul 1883, Carl Eduard Schulze; bur. Altona, Hamburg, 1941 or 1942 or 1943 (FHL microfilm 245260, 1935 census; CHL MS 10603, 114; FS)

Anna Franziska Schlüter b. Neumünster, Schleswig-Holstein, 11 Nov 1867; dau. of Karsten Schlueter and Elise Behrens; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; m. Altona, Schleswig-Holstein, 29 Aug 1891, Karl Friedrich Ferdinand Sennewald Bornholdt; d. Altona 25 May 1942; bur. 29 May 1942 (CHL MS 10603, 54; FS)

Kurt Fritz Wegener b. Hamburg 11 Mar 1918; son of Carl Friedrich Wegener and Amanda Dohrn; bp. 28 Jan 1930; conf. 28 Jan 1930; ord. deacon 4 Jan 1932; k. in battle 16 Aug 1942 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 898)

Notes

1. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
3. Altona Branch manuscript history, CHL LR 10603, 2.
4. Ibid.
5. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2998 240.
6. Ibid., CHL A 2999 56.
7. Ibid., CHL A 2999 92–93
8. Altona Branch general minutes, 96, CHL LR 10603, 11.
9. Ibid., 113–21.
10. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2999 103.
11. Ibid., A 2999 113, 115.
12. Altona Branch Relief Society minutes, CHL LR 10603, 14.
13. Altona Branch historical notes, CHL A 2999 124.
14. Ibid., 132.
15. Ibid., 133.

Barmbek Branch

The metropolis of Hamburg was Germany's second-largest city in 1939 with 1,711,877 people. The northeastern districts of the harbor city comprised the Barmbek Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (one of three LDS branches in that city). With 178 total members (twenty-six of whom held the priesthood), this was a solid branch.

As the war approached in the late summer of 1939, the Barmbek Branch was under the leadership of Alfred Schmidt, a worker in a cigarette factory in Barmbek. His counselors were Friedrich Mahler and Jonni Schacht. All leadership positions in the branch were filled at the time, with the exception of the Primary organization. Sunday School took place at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The Relief Society met on Mondays at 7:30 p.m. and the MIA on Wednesdays at the same time.[1]

The meetings of the Barmbek Branch were held in rented rooms at Dehnhaide 141. That street was located near the southwest border of the branch territory, toward the center of Hamburg. Waltraud (Wally) Möhrke (born 1919) recalled this about the meeting rooms: "We had a small Hinterhaus behind a carpentry shop. There was a large room for sacrament meetings and smaller rooms for the various classes."[2]

Irmgard Schmidt (born 1923) described the church rooms in these words:

> We had to walk up steps at the side of the carpentry shop. When we were there during the week, we could hear the woodworking machines running. At the top of the stairs, you were looking straight into the main meeting room where there

> were benches for about one hundred people. To the right were two or three classrooms. Then there were more stairs up to another floor where there was a large empty room that we used for activities. . . . I remember that there were really big windows on the right side [of the hall]. The room had a big stove, and somebody had to go early to get the rooms heated.[3]

Herta Schmidt (born 1925) added a few details to this description: "At the top of the stairs there was a foyer with a cloak room and a restroom. There was a platform at the end of the hall for the branch presidency; it was two steps up, and we had both a piano and a pump organ."[4]

Barmbek Branch[5]	**1939**
Elders	9
Priests	4
Teachers	5
Deacons	8
Other Adult Males	25
Adult Females	108
Male Children	11
Female Children	8
Total	178

President Schmidt's family lived at Volksdorferstrasse 223 in the suburb of Wandsbek, and it took them about an hour to walk to church. According to Irmgard, "Sometimes our mother gave us money for the streetcar, but we would rather walk home and use the money for candy. There was a vending machine on the way home, and we did that lots of times. [Anyway] I never thought that it was a long way to walk." Herta remembered that several branch members came from even farther to the northwest.

The Schmidt family included eleven children, and they were well known in their neighborhood. According to daughters Irmgard and Herta, the family had visitors every Sunday. Before the war, those visitors were often American missionaries. During the war, the Schmidt teenagers and their friends often sang hymns and other songs for hours. With the windows open, the sounds of their piano and their voices could carry for great distances down the street. Neighbors often gathered on the sidewalk in front of the house to listen to the impromptu concerts. "The neighbors thought that we were a little weird," explained Irmgard.

Wally Möhrke explained that there was a sign by the door to the branch rooms announcing "Jews are not welcome here" (*Juden unerwünscht*). "I didn't understand why we had to have that sign there. We had a young Jewish man named Salomon Schwarz who loved to attend [our meetings]. And the other young men were really wonderful to him." Tragically, Salomon was arrested and later died in a concentration camp.[6] He had been one of the very few Jewish Latter-day Saints in all of Germany when the war began.

"As the branch president, my father never acted openly against the Nazis. He felt that it was wiser to be silent, to not fight openly against them," recalled Irmgard Schmidt. When the war began, Irmgard had finished her public schooling and was working for a baker's family. She lived with the family in the suburb of Rahlstedt and did the household work of the baker's wife, who was helping out in the business. Irmgard worked for the family for several years until she married.

Wally Möhrke served as the secretary of the Sunday School as a teenager before the war. She recalled her duties:

> I think there were about 100 members who attended the meeting regularly. . . . I sat at a small table in the front of the room next to the branch presidency. I counted the attendance and wrote it in a small book. Then, I compared the numbers to the Sunday before and the Sunday a year before. I had to read the report out loud every Sunday.

Rita Fischer (born 1925) and her twin sister, Gisela, had joined the government's Jungvolk

organization with great enthusiasm in 1936. "We learned a lot of old songs which my mother especially enjoyed. On some Saturdays we had fun going on singing nature hikes. . . . We [went] from door to door in our neighborhood to collect donations [for government programs]. [They] put some pocket change in our tin cans with a slit on top."[7] Another government program that Rita liked was the one that paid for the twins to spend "six wonderful weeks" at a health spa in Heiligendamm on the Baltic Sea coast in 1938. The Fischer family also won a ten-day vacation in the Harz Mountains in 1939. Life for the Fischer family was excellent as war clouds gathered over Europe.

Another inductee into the Jungvolk from the Barmbek Branch was Werner Schmidt (born 1927). Initially rejected because he was too small, he nevertheless wanted to be part of the movement and devised a way to look older: he used electrical tape to simulate a beard, a mustache, and sideburns. When his schoolmates mocked his appearance, he removed the tape but did not realize that the black glue was still stuck to his face. Once he confessed to the ruse, he was asked by the leader whether his father supported Werner. The boy answered honestly in the negative, which could have put his father in a very difficult situation. Fortunately, nothing happened to Werner's father, the president of the Barmbek Branch.[8]

Once in the Jungvolk organization, Werner lost his fascination for the movement and began to disobey orders: "Seven times in all I was sent home for not following orders—orders like 'Lay down!' when there was good mud to lay into." He objected to what he called "the silly reasons" for obeying his leaders. "I loved my freedom too much." As it turned out, the leaders always begged Werner to come back, because the loss of a boy looked bad in the records.[9]

The outbreak of war in September 1939 was shocking and upsetting to Wally Möhrke and her sister Marianne. "We didn't know what a war would be like, could only trust that everything would be all right." The sisters had both finished school and were gainfully employed, and they lived alone after their father, a widower, moved to Berlin. Within weeks, the basement of their apartment building had been shored up to withstand bombs when enemy air raids were anticipated. According to Wally, "They moved some beds and chairs and installed metal doors. They also broke holes through the walls into the neighboring buildings, providing us an escape underground. . . . They also tried out the alarms, and we had to learn the meaning of each siren."[10]

"Finding my mother sitting in her bed crying was an impression I cannot forget," wrote Werner Schmidt. He was twelve, and the war had just broken out. "She knew that her boys would have to go to war. Within days my two older brothers were drafted, and later the third one had to go."[11] Werner could not have imagined at the time that the war would last long enough for him to receive a call to the Wehrmacht as well.

Elsa Anna Kopp lost her husband to the army shortly after the war began. Her children, Edeltraud (born 1930) and Werner (born 1933), grew up essentially without their father, as Edeltraud recalled: "Because Father was gone right when the war started, we got used to just being the threesome that we were—mother, Werner, and I. We didn't really have a father."[12] Sister Kopp worked the graveyard shift in a shoe factory that was so close that she was able to get home in time to feed the children their breakfast and send them off to school.

Herta Schmidt finished her public school the year the war started, then began an apprenticeship as an office worker. After her initial training in that field, she was hired as a typist and stenographer by the company of Bauer und Schauerte. She recalled, "As an apprentice I earned $15 per month. At sixteen, I was a full-time employee, and I still lived at home."

Regarding her association in the League of German Girls (BDM), Herta explained that she did not often go to the meetings, particularly the ones held on Sundays. When her leaders asked about her Sunday absence, she simply explained that she was in church, and she was not punished. Because the

family funds did not extend to such items as the BDM uniform, the jacket was provided for Herta. "It was a nice jacket, and I liked it," she recalled. However, she was not interested in marching in parades and was not even impressed when she saw Hitler from only about one hundred feet away at a prewar event. "He was just there. Who cares?"

Wally Möhrke was engaged soon after the war began. Wilhelm (Willi) Sperling was not a member of the LDS Church but a fine man who regularly went to church with Wally. He was drafted in 1940, but the two had already planned to marry; they expedited those plans and married later that year. The official ceremony took place at city hall, as required by law, and then a church ceremony was held in the branch meeting hall. It was there that they exchanged rings. "We knew what the word 'temple' meant, but that seemed to be a concept for [Saints in] America," Wally explained.[13]

With Hamburg under attack by the British Royal Air Force, Wally Möhrke Sperling left the city to spend the winter of 1940–41 in eastern Germany (Silesia). From there she went to Stuttgart to live with her sister-in-law for a few months and then returned to Hamburg. Conditions there had become more dangerous, as she wrote: "Our suitcases with the most important papers and other necessities were always at the ready. Whenever the alarms went off, those were the first things we grabbed."[14]

In the spring of 1940, Rita Fischer graduated from public school, and her parents allowed her and Gisela to participate in the Lutheran Church confirmation ritual with their friends. As Rita wrote, "It gave our [relatives] who were not of the LDS faith the satisfaction that we were Christians."[15] Soon after this event, the twins found assignments on neighboring farms near the town of Ochsenwerder (six miles south of Hamburg), where they could fulfill the requirements of the national Pflichtjahr program. As Rita wrote:

> We could go home every other weekend. The standard salary was only $15 per month with room and board. From our salary Gisela and I spent half of it for the train fares, etc., and the rest we saved for college. The year went by fast. I learned to appreciate my parents and our home with the "bathtub," etc. I never realized that the job of farming was hard work. I am glad I fulfilled my part in having served my Vaterland.

Perhaps the first member of the Barmbek Branch to lose his life in the war was Karl Friedrich Seemann, who was killed in Poland in 1941. His daughter, Ursula Betty Stein (born 1924) had little time to mourn for him; her country needed her. She first served in the Pflichtjahr program on a farm near Posen (Posnan, Poland). Although far from home, she enjoyed the work: "I always had wonderful girls around me, and we did our best to have a good time and help each other out."[16] Regarding the sacrifice of her time to her country, she said: "I didn't question the requirement to leave home. I knew I didn't have much choice. Besides, if I stayed home, maybe something even worse would happen to me."

Herta Schmidt recalled the blackout regulations with which every family had to comply during the war. "We had to darken the rooms every night using a blanket or a sheet or something similar. The warden would come around with a warning if he could see any light [from our windows]."

The Schmidt family lived a considerable distance from downtown Hamburg, and very few bombs fell in their vicinity. "We didn't have a real bomb shelter [nearby]," explained Irmgard Schmidt. "We lived on the ground floor, and our shelter was in the basement. Sometimes when the sirens went off, we just stayed in bed. It was cold in the winter [in the basement], and my bed was warm. We thought, 'We won't get hit.' But you could get fined for doing that."[17] Herta recalled being reluctant to leave their beds: "My father tried to get us out of bed, but it was hard for him." Finally, they gave in and headed downstairs.

While the bombs fell and the antiaircraft guns pounded away, they sat in the basement hoping that nothing would hit their house. "We just sat there, leaning over just in case something came down on

top of us," explained Irmgard. "If so, it would hit us on the back. I knew it wouldn't happen, but we sat there in that position anyway." "There was nothing to do. We just sat there and waited," Herta recalled. Werner took the matter somewhat less seriously and appeared in the basement on several occasions in the costume of a fireman or some other odd character. He wrote, "This brought some laughter for us and the other six families from our apartment [building]."[18]

The Fischer twins graduated from the Dankers Business College in April 1942 and were both hired by their father's employer, the Nova Insurance Company. Initially assigned to a position she did not like, Rita was transferred to a different division in the company and was very happy. She recalled that as the war escalated, more and more Hamburg citizens and her fellow employees experienced personal losses: "At work we all got very close to each other. We shared our sorrows of losing our homes, family, and friends." At home, Rita and her family spent many nights in their basement shelter listening to enemy planes roaring overhead and bombs falling upon the city:

> The explosions lifted up the building, and your head and body went down forward almost to the floor. You just hoped the ceiling and walls would hold and you would not be buried under the bricks and rubble. When the lights went out, I was afraid and prayed that the gas and water lines would not break.

Edeltraud Kopp recalled greeting her teacher with "Heil Hitler!" "We used to stand in the school yard and sing the national anthem, too," she recalled. Her brother, Werner, was also taught the Nazi way of life through the Jungvolk program, as he recollected: "I had a uniform and went to the meetings. It was like the Boy Scouts in America. We learned how to shoot. We didn't go camping often because that cost too much money."

"We could never have imagined what awaited us in 1943," wrote Wally Möhrke Sperling. She compared the shaking of the walls when bombs landed nearby to an earthquake. "We never knew what to expect when we went back to our apartment after an alarm." After the worst attacks in July 1943, when entire Hamburg city blocks were on fire, the smoke was so heavy that "we couldn't see the sun. It was day but still dark. . . . About this time [the government] recommended that all expectant mothers leave the city." Wally was awaiting the arrival of her first child, and she found a place to stay with her sister in the town of Eyendorf on the Lüneburg Heath (about thirty miles south of Hamburg). While there, she was informed that the city of Hamburg planned to confiscate her apartment. On a quick trip back to the city, she prevented that action. On September 5, 1943, her son Horst-Dieter was born in Salzhausen.[19]

The terror of July 1943 was shared by Rita Fischer, whose parents were on vacation when Hamburg was subjected to attack after attack. After bombs damaged the adjacent apartment buildings, Rita left home with Gisela and their grandmother. "I took a last look around the home—the windows were all broken—no gas, water, or electricity. It was so windy outside like a firestorm, and Oma was holding on to our bikes. We were walking with the refugees towards the woods."[20] After a night in the forest near Poppenbüttel, Rita and Gisela went back into the city against the flow of refugees heading out. She later wrote:

> The closer we came [to our home] the stronger the firestorm got. . . . We had to pass a railroad underpass and a military hospital where many wounded soldiers and people were laying, moaning in pain. It was just terrible. . . . When we arrived at our house only half of the front lower [level] was standing. . . . A lady gave us a piece of paper and nail, and we wrote: "Gisela, Rita, Oma fine in Poppenbüttel." It was dark, like midnight and the sun was like a red ball in the sky—but it was noon and very windy. Our Oma was convinced our Savior, Jesus Christ, will come—so we were not afraid.

From a local railroad station, the three took the train east to Schneidemühl. The next day, they

continued on south and east to Liegnitz in Silesia, where they were met by their cousin Gerda. Four days later, their parents found them there. Having heard about the catastrophe in Hamburg, they had traveled immediately in that direction, were prevented from continuing, then turned east toward Berlin, and eventually contacted a relative to whom the twins had written a card before leaving Hamburg. "The good Lord really watched over us," concluded Rita. Brother Fischer decided that the family should return to Hamburg without delay, and soon the father and his twin daughters were back at work in the insurance company.

The Kopp family apartment suffered slight damage in early air raids but remained quite inhabitable. Young Edeltraud recalled how several of their windows were broken by the air pressure released by bombs not far away; the openings were covered by cardboard or plastic of some kind. Their apartment house was too old to have a safe basement, so the family went around the corner to a different building, where their chances for survival from bombs were greater. By the time of the firebombings of July 1943, Sister Kopp had taken her children to a town east of Berlin, where the war did not promise imminent danger.

President Schmidt's employment in a cigarette factory did not represent any conflict with his religious health standards. On the contrary, the items he helped produce served the family in a very significant way: each employee was given a specific amount of cigarettes in addition to his wages, and the Schmidts used those cigarettes to barter for additional food items. Herta said, "My father received 200 cigarettes weekly, and they were a different brand made especially for the employees. There were some delicatessen store owners who really liked those cigarettes. We never had to go hungry thanks to those cigarettes." Irmgard explained that her father could trade eight cigarettes for one loaf of bread and often gave the bread to needy members of the branch.

Ursula Stein was again away from home while Hamburg suffered in the firebombings; she was in Berlin serving in another civilian function. "I didn't have contact with the Church very much if at all, but I kept my testimony in my heart and didn't lose it." Later, she was stationed with an antiaircraft unit on the outskirts of Bremen, where her assignment was to shoot down enemy aircraft attacking that city. She never felt that her life was in jeopardy there, "because the bombs fell on the downtown."

Wally Möhrke Sperling lost contact with the Barmbek Branch after the branch rooms at Dehnhaide were destroyed in 1943. Constantly away from the city, she traveled to the occupied French province of Alsace-Lorraine in 1944. While on the way there, the train was attacked by dive-bombers, and she survived another terrifying aspect of war. While living in the home of her maternal grandparents in the Lorraine town of Saverne, she heard the sounds of the approaching American army; it was time to return to Hamburg. When she arrived back at her apartment, she determined that the central heating system had been damaged and was inoperable, but she was able to procure a small coal stove that could be vented directly out the window. The electricity was turned on for only a few hours at a time. "But we were home again!"[21]

The Schmidts lived far enough from the Hamburg city center and the harbor that they had little to fear from bombs. However, the air pressure from miles away did break their windows several times, and the utilities were interrupted for days on end. As Irmgard recalled:

> We often had no water for a day or two, and the water wagon would come down our street. The people all came around with their buckets to get water. Naturally we kids didn't bring the water home; we had to have water fights in the streets. That's how bad kids are. And when the stores had no food, the government came around with food baskets. We could go and say "Can I have a basket full of food?"

Regarding the problems with the gas lines, Irmgard recalled a common predicament after they had gone to all the effort of collecting ingredients

all day for something to bake. They would put the item in the oven, and the gas would be turned off during the baking. "Then you have no food."

The attitudes of the Saints in Hamburg during the worst air raids of the war deeply impressed young Werner Schmidt, as he later wrote: "Many of the members lost their homes. In the first testimony meeting after that, people who had lost everything got up to say that they had their testimony and their scriptures, [and] genealogy records and that was the most important thing in their mind. The meetings at those times were very special."[22]

Soon after the catastrophic summer of 1943, many schoolchildren were sent away from Hamburg. Such was the case for Werner Schmidt and his classmates, who were transported to the village of Jochenstein on the Danube, where they were quartered in the abandoned barracks of border guards.[23] Among the approximately ninety boys there, Werner was recognized by leaders for his ability to organize and direct activities. He explained how he gained the confidence of his leaders: "I had much training in the Church. . . . [They] were impressed with my straightforwardedness and honesty." Although far from home, Werner recalled, "I had a really good time . . . and [was] well taken care of."[24]

After the Barmbek Branch meeting rooms were destroyed in 1943, the members were asked to go to the Altona Branch building and join there with the hosts and the survivors of the St. Georg Branch, who also had no place to meet. The journey from Barmbek to Altona was a sporadic walk and ride of about eight miles for most of the members. As more of the downtown was reduced to rubble and fewer streetcars were in operation, the journey became very difficult. Both Sunday meetings in Altona were held in the morning, but the Barmbek Saints still had to get up very early in the morning and did not return home until nearly evening.

Due to the difficulty caused by the long trek to Altona, many Barmbek Branch members chose to hold Sunday meetings in a home. President Schmidt invited local members to join his family in their apartment. By this juncture in the war, many members were away in the service of their country, had been killed in the many air raids, or had left town in search of safer places to live.

Georg Nigbur was not a member of the LDS Church, but he was a handsome young man whom Irmgard Schmidt met at an army dance. He had lost a leg to a landmine in Russia but could already get around the dance floor quite well with his artificial leg.[25] Following an engagement that lasted nearly a year, the two were married on September 5, 1944. With the church rooms destroyed, the church wedding ceremony was conducted by Irmgard's father in their home. There could be no honeymoon in those days, so the celebration consisted mainly of a very nice meal with family members and a few friends. "We had real food and small presents," the bride recalled. The newlyweds were given a room in the Schmidt apartment, and Georg went to work for the government.

Toward the end of the war, the Altona building was damaged but still usable. Irmgard Schmidt recalled watching snow fall through a hole in the ceiling into the meeting room. It would have been difficult if not impossible to have any heat under such conditions. Her brother, Werner, described the hole as a skylight that had been shattered: "When it rained or snowed we had to sit on the sides [of the room] where it was dry. To keep warm we kept our coats on and the elderly could sit close to the coal-burning stove. . . . Sometimes the sacrament water was frozen by the time it was passed out. But the spirit was very much present."[26]

By 1944, it was Werner's turn to serve the nation. At seventeen, he was drafted into the Reichsarbeitsdienst and sent to construct military facilities in Czechoslovakia. He was both amused and bored by what he felt were senseless drills and inspections, during which officers, disturbed by tiny infractions or items slightly out of order, would mess up the barracks and order that the procedure be repeated. According to Werner, such

practices were stupid: "Stupidity never turned me on, and many things we had to do were on that level."[27]

In January 1945, Werner made the transition from the national labor service to the army:

> I was drafted into the regular army to be trained as a Tiger Tank driver. Most of the boys were 16 or 17 years old and the leaders—like my corporal—were broken-down soldiers from the eastern front. The rifles we had were from the French army, and tanks were not available—that is we had one to climb in and out of and play like we were driving it. . . . The German army wasn't any more what it used to be, and I had no interest to fight for a lost cause and for an idea I didn't believe in. . . . I didn't put my heart and soul into being a soldier.[28]

At about the time Wally Möhrke Sperling returned to Hamburg, her mail connection with her husband was interrupted for several weeks. She wrote, "I was very bothered by [not knowing his whereabouts]. How many times I prayed to my Father in Heaven for help." As it turned out, Willi had been wounded and was temporarily lost, but he showed up at their apartment in Hamburg in early 1945, his uniform still spotted with blood. "I could hardly believe [that he was home]!" she wrote. "I was so very thankful!"[29]

Toward the end of 1944, Gisela Fischer (then eighteen) was drafted into the Luftwaffe, and Rita volunteered for duty in order to stay with her twin. The girls were assigned to the Leck Air Base near the Danish border. On one occasion in March 1945, they were outside sunbathing when enemy dive-bombers dropped out of the sky to attack the field, and Rita jumped into a foxhole. She described the situation in these words:

> The motors from the airplanes got very loud, and above our heads the guns from the airplanes and our artillery gunmen were firing like crazy. The planes were so low that it seemed like I could reach them with my hands. I found myself deep in the hole so that a bullet could not hit me. I prayed very hard to my Heavenly Father and promised him that when I get out of here I would always go to Relief Society. I always went to Church but not to Relief Society during the week.

Fig. 1. Edmund Kopp spent nearly the entire war away from home. He was killed in 1945. (E. Kopp Biebau)

By Christmas of 1944, Else Kopp and her children were living with relatives in Landsberg/Warthe, about two hours by train east of Berlin. They enjoyed attending church meetings with the Saints in that town, and it was there that her son, Werner, was baptized: "I remember that the people expected the water in the river to feel cold, but for me it didn't. It felt just right." Soldier Edmund Kopp missed this occasion, as he did many other important dates in the lives of his young children after 1939.

While in Landsberg, Jungvolk member Werner Kopp saw Adolf Hitler and shook his hand:

> It was in Landsberg on the SA parade grounds. We all had to stand straight in a row when Hitler pulled up. Hitler came and shook my hand. For me, he wasn't a hero—just an ordinary man like everybody else. Even though he was the leader of Germany, he was ordinary. So what? . . . But looking back, Hitler looked like an old man to me. But I was a young boy at the time. I recognized him immediately—he looked just like in all of his pictures.[30]

Soon after this incident, Sister Kopp had to take her children and flee. She first burned Werner's Jungvolk uniform in the heater, then hurried with her children to the railroad station. Edeltraud recalled hearing the Soviet artillery in the distance and seeing panic reign at the station:

> When we got to the train station, all we could see were people and their belongings. Baby buggies and clothes were everywhere. Nobody

> could take the luggage with them because the cattle cars were already full. The official told our mother that the train was full and couldn't take any more people, so she took Werner and shoved him into the train wagon. She did the same with me. She then told the officer, "Don't tell me what I can or can't do! I'm leaving!" and then she got on the train. We stood the entire trip.

The trip to Berlin should have taken two hours but lasted at least eight, according to Werner. Along the way, people got out and collected snow for water. There was no food to eat until they reached Berlin and were cared for by Red Cross volunteers. Eventually, they reached Hamburg and found a basement room to live in. Their apartment had been destroyed in the firebombing, along with all of their property.

With only five rounds of ammunition in his rifle, Werner Schmidt was sent with his comrades to oppose the advance of the British army in northern Germany. Although he had achieved excellent ratings as a marksman in what little training was available, he had no desire to shoot at the enemy or to be shot at by them. One day in April 1945, he was sitting on a haystack reading in his little New Testament when British soldiers fired in his direction. He was able to find a better hiding place and hit upon the idea of firing his five rounds into the air. The reaction was a surprise to him: "The thought to kill any of them never crossed my mind. But I never saw anyone fall faster to the ground, faster than I could run behind the barn, and then all hell broke loose. I was wondering how effective my five bullets would have been if I really would have started to fight against such firepower."[31] Werner evaded the enemy for a few more hours, then became a prisoner of war. His life was never in jeopardy.

When the war ended on May 8, 1945, enemy units had not reached the northernmost part of Germany, where the Fischer twins were stationed. They decided to simply go home to Hamburg, a distance of nearly one hundred miles. They planned to travel by bicycle. They did not see the British soldiers moving in the opposite direction until they crossed the Kiel Canal. Peddling straight ahead and avoiding eye contact with the soldiers, they moved on unhindered and reached Hamburg without incident. It took them about an hour to work their way from the outskirts of the city to their parents' apartment. The story continues:

> We rang the bell from downstairs so we would not give our parents a heart attack. They were happy, and our father asked us how we got here. He was surprised when he heard our story. . . . An elderly lady came downstairs and offered Gisela and me her spare room. We were so grateful for it and thanked our Heavenly Father also for the safe arrival at home.

In the spring of 1945, Herta Schmidt was far from home in Saxony. She and a girlfriend had been transferred to a location near Chemnitz as employees in a war-critical industry. Only eighteen years old at the time, the two girls were in the area between the invading Soviets and the invading Americans. Not wanting to wait until the Soviets arrived (everybody had heard tales of their misdeeds), the girls left their work and began the long trip home—a distance of nearly 250 miles through territory invaded by the armies of three different enemy powers.

> It didn't seem that dangerous because there were people [refugees] from all over Germany going all different directions. In fact, we had packed a suitcase and it was really heavy. We finally just gave it away and walked home with what we were wearing. We had five pounds of sugar that we had gotten from ration coupons, and we gave it to people who let us stay overnight in their homes. . . . We always had to hide when enemy soldiers came by on patrols. It took us about a month to get home.

When Herta and her friend reached the river that had been established as the border between the Soviet and the British occupation zones, they showed the British guards their papers confirming their right to enter the zone and proceed home to Hamburg. The fact that they could make the long journey without tragic experiences is remarkable.

Willi Sperling was assigned home-guard duties, which enabled him to be with his family when the

war came to an end in Hamburg in April 1945. As his wife, Wally, later wrote, "Finally we didn't need to worry about air raids anymore; finally there would be no more dangerous interruptions in the night; this we felt was a great blessing. . . . A new phase of our lives began on May 8, 1945." Looking back on those difficult years, she wrote, "How often during the war did I consider the message of 1 Nephi 3:7. . . . This strengthened my testimony of the truth of the gospel. Without my knowledge I wouldn't have been able to bear it. Despite all of the trials, I always had a sense of well-being deep inside."[32]

In September 1945, Werner Schmidt was released from a POW camp in Belgium and returned home to Hamburg. While a POW, he had lost his New Testament in a camp flood. "It was a great loss to me," he said. He had been reminded also of the importance of keeping God's commandments and standards of conduct. At seventeen, he knew little about the facts of life. The conversations of other POWs revealed a lack of respect for women and moral cleanliness that shocked him. In general, he found his peace and comfort in the Lord. He was thrilled to be in his parents' home, but they were reluctant to celebrate while two of their sons were still missing. They eventually returned. The family of branch president Alfred Schmidt lost one son to the war but retained their home and were thus full of hope in postwar Germany.

"I think that the war just melted us [Latter-day Saints] together more than anything," explained Herta Schmidt. "As members we cared for each other like a large family, a branch." Another branch member, Ursula Seemann, echoed the thought: "The life in Church was the reason why we stayed strong and kept going. We were so excited to see each other whenever we had the chance."

In Memoriam

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

Peter August Claessens b. Hamburg 21 Nov 1862; son of Carl Kratzel and Johanna Catherina Claessens; bp. 25 Jun 1926; conf. 27 Jun 1926; ord. deacon 9 Oct 1927; d. old age 5 Aug 1943 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 452; FHL microfilm 25741, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

Waldemar Erwin Drachenberg b. Liebenow, Urnswalde, Brandenburg, 3 Aug 1923; son of Friedrich Drachenburg and Hulda Kopp; bp. 6 Sep 1931; conf. 6 Sep 1931; ord. deacon 1 Oct 1939; paratrooper; corporal; d. in training France, 12 Mar 1943; bur. Mont-de-Huisnes, France (E. Frank; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 959; FHL microfilm 25756, 1935 census; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

Mathias Hackner b. Großmehring, Ingolstadt, Bayern, 31 Dec 1856; son of Bartholomäus Hackner and Anna Maria Kaltenecker; bp. 25 Dec 1921; conf. 25 Dec 1921; m. Hamburg 21 Aug 1897, Maria Franziska Mundt; 2 children; d. old age Barmbek, Hamburg, 28 Dec 1942 (FHL microfilm 68783, no. 49; CHL CR 275 8, no. 620; IGI; FHL microfilm 162769, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Wilhelm Carl Ferdinand Hintz b. Aschersleben, Magdeburg, Sachsenn, 4 Jun 1894; son of Wilhelm Carl Ferdinand Hintz and Emma Becker; bp. 7 Mar 1929; conf. 7 Mar 1929; ord. deacon 5 May 1935; d. tuberculosis 7 Oct 1943 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 141; IGI)

August Kannwischer b. Mücelin, Poland, 19 Sep 1855; son of Christian Kannwischer and Luise Geisler; bp. 5 Nov 1923; conf. 5 Nov 1923; ord. deacon 8 Mar 1925; ord. elder 8 Oct 1934; m. Pauline Krüger; d. old age 25 Jul 1944 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 963, FHL microfilm 271376, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Paul Fritz Isaak Koch b. Hamburg 20 Sep 1906; son of Karl Friedrich Wilhelm Koch and Auguste Caroline Sirstins; bp. 17 May 1923; conf. 17 May 1923; ord. deacon 14 Mar 1926; d. burns, POW camp, Caen, France, 9 Sep 1945 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 81; IGI)

Edmund Kopp b. Konojad, Strassburg, Westpreußen, 21 Jan 1905; son of Ludwig Kopp and Paulina Karoline Krueger; bp. 6 Nov 1924; conf. 6 Nov 1924; m. Landsberg/Warthe, Brandenburg, 2 Aug 1930, Else Anna Luckmann; 5 children; k. in battle Russia 1945 (E. K. Biebau; FHL microfilm no. 271381, 1925 and 1935 censuses; FS)

Franz Heinrich Köster b. 22 November 1910; son of Franz Friedrich Ernst Köster and Auguste Wilhelmine Abeling; bp. 17 May 1923; conf. 17 May 1923; corporal; d. POW Caen, France, 9 Sep 1946; bur. La Cambe, France (FHL 68783:76; FHL microfilm 271381, 1925 and 1935 censuses; FS; www.volksbund.de)

Gerd Luhmann b. Wandsbek, Schleswig-Holstein, 19 Nov 1925; son of Franz Wilhelm Luhmann and Carla Adele Schröder; bl. 7 Mar 1926; bp. 18 Sep 1933; conf. 24 Sep 1933; d. scarlet fever 11 Mar or Aug 1941 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 83; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 376; IGI)

Richard Friedrich Momburg b. Hamburg 26 Jun 1936; son of Alban Otto Momburg and Anna M. Koch; d. stroke 26 Mar 1942 (CHL CR 275 8, reel 2426, no. 99; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 325)

Richard Paul Otto Prüss b. Hamburg 25 Jun 1925; son of Richard Rudolf Ernst Prüss and Rosalie Erika Marta Mertens; bl. 6 Sep 1925; bp. 18 Sep 1933; conf. 24 Sep 1933; ord. deacon 1941; corporal; k. in battle Western Front 14 Aug 1944; bur. Champigny-St. Andre, France (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 182; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

Fig. 2. Richard Prüss. (H. Pruess Mueller)

Ernst August Schmidt b. Hamburg 26 Jul 1913; son of Alfred Schmidt and Anne Naujoks; bp. 25 Dec 1921; ord. elder; m. Wandsbek, Schleswig-Holstein, 3 Jul 1937, Helene Amanda Teichfischer; 1 child; rifleman; d. in field hospital 2/591 at Smolensk, Russia, 10 Feb 1942 (W. Schmidt autobiography; IGI, PRF; www.volksbund.de)

Johannes Carsten Friedrich Richard Sievers b. Neumünster, Schleswig-Holstein, 5 October 1855; d. Wandsbek, Hamburg, 5 June 1941 (FS)

Karl Friedrich Stein b. Hamm, Westfalen, 18 Oct 1902; son of Wilhelm Stein and Martha Auguste Böse; bp. 27 or 31 Oct 1923; conf. 27 or 31 Oct 1923; ord. deacon 11 Jul 1932; ord. teacher 11 Sep 1933; m. Hamburg 18 Oct 1923, Bertha Wilhelmina Maria Knopf; 1 child; soldier; k. in battle 10 Dec 1942 or Krakow, Poland, 3 Jun 1941 (CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 158; www.volksbund.de; CHL CR 275 8, no. 826; CHL 68783, no. 182)

Notes

1. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
2. Wally Möhrke Sperling, interview by the author in German, Hamburg, Germany, August 15, 2006; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
3. Irmgard Schmidt Nigbur, interview by the author, Sandy, UT, February 20, 2009.
4. Herta Schmidt Wobbe, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, January 23, 2009.
5. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
6. Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, *The Price* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984), 33–34.
7. Rita Fischer Frampton, autobiography (unpublished).
8. Werner Schmidt, autobiography (unpublished), 3.
9. Ibid.
10. Wally Möhrke Sperling, autobiography (unpublished, 2006), 1.
11. Schmidt, autobiography, 4.
12. Edeltraud Kopp Biebau and Werner Kopp, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, May 3, 2009.
13. In fact, the closest LDS temple to Hamburg, Germany, at the time was in Salt Lake City. No members of the Church in the West German Mission are known to have married in the temple before World War II.
14. Sperling, autobiography, 2.
15. The Fischer children were by no means the only LDS teenagers to participate in the confirmation ceremonies of their Lutheran and Catholic friends in those days. The practice might compare with the tradition of the baccalaureate program associated with high school graduation in some communities in the United States.
16. Ursula Betty Seemann, telephone interview with Judith Sartowski in German, March 12, 2008.
17. Block wardens were responsible for seeing that everybody left their apartments and went down into the basements as soon as the alarms sounded.
18. Schmidt, autobiography, 4.
19. Sperling, autobiography, 4.
20. See the description of firestorms in the Hamburg District chapter. See also the Dresden Altstadt section in 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).
21. Sperling, autobiography, 4.
22. Schmidt, autobiography, 4.
23. Since the annexation of Austria to Germany in 1938, the border was no longer international and thus not guarded during 1938–45.
24. Werner Schmidt, autobiography, 5.
25. Years later Georg would tease his wife about how she chased him and he could not run away fast enough. He joined the Church after the war.
26. Schmidt, autobiography, 4–5. In those days, LDS branches used small glass cups for the sacrament. Several eyewitnesses have reported breaking ice that had formed in those cups in order to drink the water.
27. Schmidt, autobiography, 6–7.
28. Ibid., 7.
29. Sperling, autobiography, 5.
30. By January 1945, Hitler took up residence in the chancellery in Berlin and was rarely seen in public again. He committed suicide there on April 30, 1945.
31. Schmidt, autobiography, 8–9.
32. Sperling, autobiography, 5.

Glückstadt Branch

Situated on the right bank of the Elbe River twenty miles downstream from Hamburg, Glückstadt was a city of about ten thousand inhabitants in 1939. The branch of Latter-day Saints in that city consisted of only thirty-nine persons, and four were elders. According to the mission directory, all branch leadership positions were filled at that time by members of the Sievers and Teichfischer families.[1]

Glückstadt Branch[2]	1939
Elders	4
Priests	1
Teachers	0
Deacons	1
Other Adult Males	6
Adult Females	18
Male Children	1
Female Children	1
Total	32

When World War II began, the branch was holding meetings in rented rooms at Am Fleth 60, a place the Saints were privileged to call home throughout the war. Hanna Helene Sievers (born 1930) recalled one large room that served as the chapel in the back of the building and two smaller rooms for classes. There was a sign in the front window to the street indicating the presence of the branch in that building. Hanna's family moved into an upstairs apartment in the same building in 1939.[3]

Sunday School began at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The Relief Society met on Tuesdays at 7:45 p.m. and the MIA on Thursdays at the same time. A genealogy class was held every first and third Wednesday of the month at 7:45 p.m. There were too few children then to hold Primary.

Hanna provided the following example of the dedication of Glückstadt Branch members: "I remember that my grandparents always came to church—whether it was good weather or bad. Even if it snowed, they put on an extra pair of socks—they always attended church. They walked three miles one way, and the first meeting started at 9:00 a.m. They were strong in the gospel, and all the members helped each other."

According to Hanna's elder sister Marianne (born 1923), some of the members of the branch lived in neighboring towns and came to Glückstadt for meetings from as far away as Itzehoe, ten miles to the north.[4] Because both sisters were required to participate in the League of German Girls, they had to miss church meetings on occasion. "I was not very happy about that," recalled Hanna. "Once the police came and picked me up."

When the war began on September 1, 1939, Marianne had already finished her public schooling and was working in a shoe store. According to her recollection, "I often took people from work to church with me on Sundays. They all knew that I was a member of the church."

Fig. 1. Marianne Sievers. (R. Fock)

Hermann Sievers was a Social Democrat, like so many people in the northern German cities. According to his daughter Hanna, he was not afraid to voice his political opinions, and his outspokenness caused considerable trouble. "Once they dangled him from a bridge and demanded that he deny his faith, but he refused to do so. Another time, they held a gun to his head and demanded the same thing. They even picked him up from work one day and examined his records, then let him go. This all happened during the war."

Life goes on for young and old during wars, and Marianne Sievers fell in love with a lifelong friend and fellow member of the branch, Richard Fock. Her story reads as follows: "We had known each other long before he left to serve in the military. We gave each other a star in the night sky that would remind us of each other. We kept a promise that we would wait for each other." Richard (born 1924) was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood and recalled that he had fallen in love with Marianne when he was fifteen.[5]

Richard had planned to be a railroad mechanic and in the summer of 1942 completed a three-year apprenticeship. At seventeen, he was just the right age for military service and was told that if he volunteered, he would be assigned to the Luftwaffe (air force). He was also told that if he did not volunteer, he would be drafted into the infantry. He chose the first option, hoping to become a pilot. Unfortunately, he was soon disappointed to learn that he was to serve as an aviation mechanic and would not be flying airplanes. The various stages of his training took him to Giessen, Germany, and then to Warsaw, Poland, and eventually to Kharkov, Ukraine. It was there that he first saw a Russian fighter shot down. He observed in his autobiography, "Later I saw many planes shot down, as well as many emergency landings and accidents, also involving German airplanes. I was glad that I had not become a pilot."[6]

Fig. 2. Richard Fock as a young Luftwaffe recruit. (R. Fock)

Unlike the terrible suffering of their fellow Saints in Hamburg, the members of the Glückstadt Branch did not lose their homes or starve during the war. Hanna Sievers explained that they sometimes came home from shopping trips without specific food items (despite having the required ration coupons). However, the family was fortunate to have a small garden plot and thus avoided starvation. Sister Sievers also worked on a farm now and then and enjoyed the advantages that came with that labor situation.

Unlike the situation in most LDS branches in Germany, attendance in the meetings of the Glückstadt Branch actually increased during the war years. Several families who had lost their homes in the attacks on Hamburg moved north and found places to live in and near Glückstadt. One of those was the family of Adelbert and Anna Koch of the St. Georg Branch in Hamburg. Sister Koch's mother belonged to the Glückstadt Branch. Young Brunhilde Koch (born 1934) recalled seeing perhaps forty people in the meetings on a typical Sunday in 1943–44.[7] The family returned to Hamburg in 1944 and experienced the end of the war there.

Glückstadt was not a large city, but there was a major railroad yard there that attracted the attention of enemy bombers now and then. As Hanna recalled, "The basement of our building was almost impossible to reach, so we went down to the [church] meeting rooms during air raids. There were not many attacks on Glückstadt. Toward the end of the war, one building was hit by an incendiary bomb and burned."

While away from home, Richard Fock was never privileged to meet another LDS soldier, to attend church meetings, or to read the scriptures. He missed this very much and eventually resolved to do the following:

> I swore to myself that as soon as I was released from the military, I would never miss an opportunity to serve the Lord. I was allowed to go home on leave a few times, and I experienced the joy of the reunion and the sadness of separation [from the Saints], even though Marianne would play hymn no. 60 "I Need Thee Every Hour" on the pump organ and I would sing it. That gave us strength and hope for the impending separation.[8]

Richard spent the rest of the war on the Eastern Front, which crept steadily westward toward Germany. He served in dangerous conditions on

several occasions but was never in battle and never wounded. On Christmas 1944, he was stationed at an airfield in Poland. One month later, he was at Finsterwalde, near Berlin, and there he decided it was time to marry his sweetheart, Marianne, back home in Glückstadt.

Fig. 3. Marianne Sievers and Richard Fock married just two months before the war ended. (R. Fock)

The marriage of two young branch members must have been cause for a special celebration among the Glückstadt Saints in the spring of 1945, when things were looking very bad for Germany. In the words of Marianne Sievers:

> We got married on March 3, 1945, in the civil registry office after my husband came home on leave from the Luftwaffe. My father had told me a few days earlier when he would come. On the exact day, he came. We had told the people at Church that we would get married on a certain day and everything worked out very well. [District president Otto] Berndt from Hamburg came and married us. We also had a small celebration with cakes. My husband was home for two weeks, and then he had to return to duty.

Richard expressed his sentiments regarding the wedding: "Those were some of the most beautiful days of our life. Our wedding day represented the attainment of a long-awaited goal." On March 16, lance corporal Richard Fock returned to Finsterwalde but was soon moved east to Silesia and was still there when the war ended on May 8, 1945. To avoid capture by the Soviets, he and his comrades worked their way south into Czechoslovakia and west toward the city of Plzen, where they came into contact with advancing American troops. When the Germans hesitated to surrender, the Americans countered with an ultimatum: if the Germans did not surrender by a specific time the next day, they would be refused by the Americans and handed over to the Soviets. This was sufficient motivation for Richard and his friends to give themselves up immediately.[9]

Life as a POW was never pleasant, but Richard was pleased to have a tent to sleep in and enough food to avoid illness and starvation. Unlike hundreds of other German Latter-day Saints in POW camps all over Europe and North America, Richard was released very early by the Americans in Czechoslovakia. By July 22, 1945, he was on his way through Germany toward home. In Bad Segeberg, just a few miles east of Glückstadt, he was issued official release papers by the British occupation administration. Although he traveled the last few miles on foot, Richard Fock was not bothered, knowing the trip would end in the arms of his dear wife and the home of his parents. Within days, he was again employed as a railroad mechanic and could look forward to the fulfillment of other personal goals and to a life of service to his God and his Church.[10]

The British army entered Glückstadt in April 1945. There was no fighting, and the Saints there were

not bothered by the invaders. Their homes and meeting rooms were intact, and they busied themselves with the task of taking in LDS refugees from eastern Germany. Conditions in Glückstadt were relatively good as they began a new life in a new Germany.

In Memoriam

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

Hilde Marie Brandemann b. Högelund Kr. Hadersleben, 16 Nov 1889; dau. of Peter Bundessen and Auguste Marie Nielsen; bp. 24 Nov 1929; conf. 24 Nov 1929; missing (CHL CR 375 8, no. 91)

Margaretha Helene Fischer b. Obendeich bei Herzhorn, Schleswig Holstein, 8 Apr 1904; dau. of Johannes Karl Teich Fischer and Helene Sievers; bp. 30 Oct 1924; conf. 30 Oct 1924; m. 21 Apr 1929, Alwin Drier; missing (CHL CR 375 8, no. 92)

Karl Johannes Teichfischer b. Engelbrechtsche Wildnis, Steinburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Preussen, 23 Jun 1874; son of Claus Teichfischer and Anna Gesche Soltau; bp. 18 Sep 1921; conf. 18 Sep 1921; ord. deacon 15 Jan 1924; ord. teacher 29 Aug 1926; ord. priest 25 Mar 1928; ord. elder 1 May 1932; m. Herzhorn, Steinburg, Schleswig-Holstein, Preussen, 4 Sep 1898, Helene Amonda Sievers; 11 children; d. stomach cancer Herzhorn 4 Mar 1941 (Fock; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 870; FHL microfilm 245282, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Walter Tiedemann b. 18 April 1915; son of Johann Jürgen Tiedemann and Anna Catharina Margaretha von Roenn; bp. 10 Jun 1939; conf. 10 Jun 1939; d. 5 August 1943 (FS)

Notes

1. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
3. Hanna Helene Sievers, interview by the author in German, Glückstadt, Germany, August 16, 2006; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
4. Marianne Sievers Fock, interview by the author in German, Glückstadt, Germany, August 16, 2006.
5. Richard Jürgen Johannes Fock, autobiography (unpublished, 1999), 2.
6. Fock, autobiography, 3.
7. Brunhilde Koch Richter, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in German, October 3, 2008.
8. Fock, autobiography, 4.
9. Ibid., 7.
10. Ibid., 8.

Lübeck Branch

One of only two Baltic Sea port cities in the West German Mission, Lübeck is located forty miles northeast of Hamburg. Famous for its seven church steeples, the city had a population of 154,811 when World War II approached. The branch in that city numbered 109 persons, including five elders and seven men and boys who held the Aaronic Priesthood. Like so many other branches in the mission, this one had a very large number of adult women but few children.

Lübeck Branch[1]	**1939**
Elders	5
Priests	1
Teachers	4
Deacons	2
Other Adult Males	22
Adult Females	66
Male Children	5
Female Children	4
Total	109

Leonard J. Bingham, a missionary from the United States, was the branch president in Lübeck on August 25, 1939, when he was instructed to depart the city with his colleague Joseph Loertscher. In his account of leaving the city on Saturday, August 26, he made no mention of designating a successor to lead the branch. However, all indications are that Elder Bingham's first counselor, Gottlieb Wiborny, assumed the position of branch president.[2]

When World War II began, the branch was meeting in rented rooms at Mühlenstrasse 68 in Lübeck's downtown. Reinhold Meyer (born 1923) recalled the location as "an old office building. There were three or four rooms upstairs. One was a double

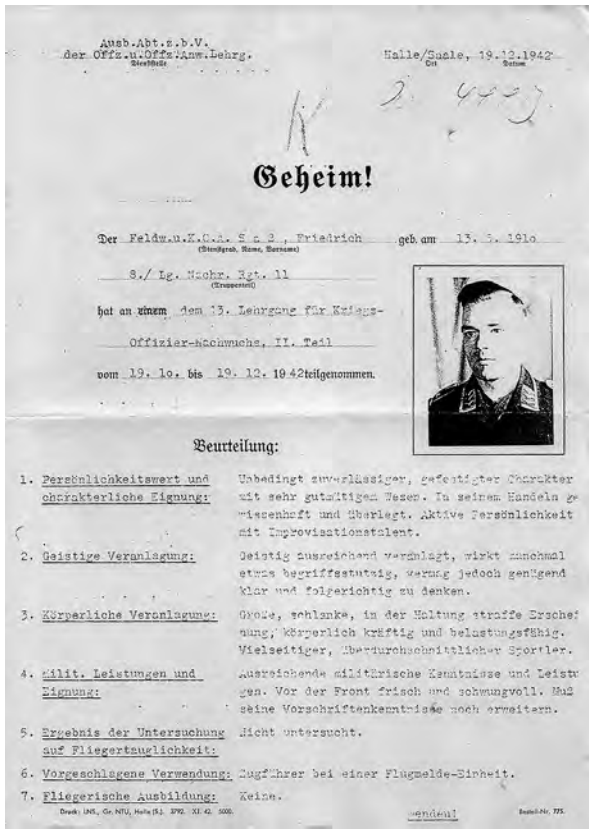
room that we used as a chapel, and there were classrooms for the children. There was a sign outside indicating the presence of the Church there. It was an attractive building, and I was not ashamed to go there."[3] He recalled an attendance of perhaps fifty to sixty persons on a typical Sunday.

Fig. 1. Friedrich (Friedel) Sass was the second counselor to Hamburg District president Alwin Brey when World War II began. (J. Sass)

Sunday School was held at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The MIA meetings were held on Tuesday evenings at 8:00 p.m., the Primary Organization on Wednesdays at 3:00 p.m., and the Relief Society on Thursday evenings at 8:00 p.m. Reinhold remembered that they took the glass sacrament cups home each week and cleaned them.[4] According to Wilfried Süfke (born 1934), there was a pump organ in the main meeting hall as well as a small stage. He remembered sitting on individual seats (rather than benches) that could be moved to the sides of the rooms to facilitate social activities.[5]

The Meyer family lived at Burgkoppel 33 in Lübeck, and it took them about forty-five minutes to walk to church. Making the trip twice each Sunday meant that the Meyers spent three hours walking. "We never missed meetings," explained Reinhold, "and it was dark when we got home to have our dinner." Frieda Meyer had been a widow since 1924 and raised seven children on her own. Fortunately, she was able to remain a housewife during those years and was faithful in taking them to the meetings.

Reinhold Meyer was employed in the aircraft industry in the early years of the war, helping to produce the Heinkel 111 and Dornier 217 airplanes. He knew that the planes were to be used to bomb the enemy and that the enemy might bomb Lübeck in return. During the first three years of the war, there were numerous air-raid alarms, but the local residents did not take them seriously. According to Reinhold, "We made our basement nice with beds down there. Instead of changing our clothes and running down there every time the sirens went off, we just slept there."



Ausb.Abt.z.b.V.
der Offz.u.Offz.Anw.Lehrg.

Halle/Saale, 19.12.1942

Geheim!

Der Feldw.u.Z.O.A. S z. b., Friedrich geb. am 13. 3. 1910
(Dienstgrad, Name, Vorname)

S./Lg. Nachr. Rgt. 11
(Truppenteil)

hat an einem dem 13. Lehrgang für Kriegs-Offizier-Anwärter, II. Teil

vom 19. 10. bis 19. 12. 1942 teilgenommen.

Beurteilung:

1. Persönlichkeitswert und charakterliche Eignung:	Unbedingt zuverlässiger, gefestigter Charakter mit sehr gutmütigem Wesen. In seinem Handeln gewissenhaft und überlegt. Aktive Persönlichkeit mit Improvisationstalent.
2. Geistige Veranlagung:	Geistig ausreichend veranlagt, wirkt manchmal etwas begriffsstutzig, vermag jedoch genügend klar und folgerichtig zu denken.
3. Körperliche Veranlagung:	Große, schlanke, in der Haltung straffe Erscheinung, körperlich kräftig und belastungsfähig. Vielseitiger, überdurchschnittlicher Sportler.
4. Milit. Leistungen und Eignung:	Ausreichende militärische Kenntnisse und Leistungen. Vor der Front frisch und schwungvoll. Muß seine Vorschriftenkenntnisse noch erweitern.
5. Ergebnis der Untersuchung auf Fliegertauglichkeit:	Nicht untersucht.
6. Vorgeschlagene Verwendung:	Zugführer bei einer Flugmelde-Einheit.
7. Fliegerische Ausbildung:	Keine.

Druck: LMS., Gr. NTU, Halle (Saale) 3792. XII. 42. 5000. Bestell-Nr. 775.

Fig. 2. The officer's profile for Friedrich Sass was classified as geheim *(secret). (J. Sass)*

Many residents of the industry-poor city of Lübeck failed to take the air-raid sirens seriously in the early years of the war. Wilfried Süfke recalled the following:

> When we heard the alarms, we did not even go into the basement but stayed in our apartment. . . . It was dangerous and careless of us to do that, but back then it seemed reasonable. [Later] we heard of people who were injured or killed, and then we decided to go into the basement quite often. . . . Being only seven years old at the time, I was not afraid of dying.

The beautiful old city of Lübeck was destroyed to a great extent in a single attack on March 29, 1942. The towers of five of the seven prominent churches were gone, and much of the city's core was reduced to rubble. Fortunately, the Meyers lived far enough from that area to escape harm. The Mühlenstrasse meetinghouse was not destroyed but was soon confiscated by the city government to be used as a place for homeless residents. More than three hundred people lost their lives in the attack. The official report showed that 7 percent of the city's structures were totally destroyed, 10 percent severely damaged, and 41 percent slightly damaged.[6]

Fig. 3. Members of the Lübeck Branch on an outing in a local forest. (J. Sass)

Jürgen Sass (born 1933) recalled with great clarity the night his hometown was so badly damaged:

> The alarm had sounded; we were in the front room dressing when a tremendous explosion rattled doors and windows. As we peeked through the blinds, the sky was lit up by four illuminating devices which had been dropped to serve as target guides for British bomber squadrons. We fled immediately to our shelter, where we were soon joined by our grandmother. . . . Again and again, muffled explosions could be heard through the din of anti-aircraft fire. . . . Suddenly we were startled by a loud whine, followed by an earsplitting explosion which shattered windows and knocked tiles off the roof. A bomb had landed and exploded in a garden plot across the street. That was a close call![7]

When Jürgen Sass was eight years old, his mother, Hedwig, took him to the rooms of the St. Georg Branch in Hamburg, where there was a baptismal font (one of only three in the Church in all of Germany).[8] Jürgen's father, Friedrich (Friedel) Sass, had been stationed there in the air force for several years already and was fortunate to perform his son's baptism on May 23, 1942. Shortly after that event, Brother Sass was transferred to a combat zone.[9]

Figs. 4 and 5. The family of Friedrich (Friedel) and Hedwig (Heidi) Sass in about 1942. (J. Sass)

According to the branch history, "Brother Wiborny guided the branch through the trying and fateful years of the war."[10] No reports regarding him or his family could be found as of this writing. The branch history offers only one paragraph about the status of the Latter-day Saints in Lübeck during the war:

> The members gathered for meetings in the former civil registry office on Mühlenstrasse. Following the bombing of Lübeck in 1942 that destroyed 60% of the city, the meeting rooms were confiscated and the members were again compelled to hold meetings in their homes. At times during the war, meetings were also held in Reinfeld [seven miles east of Lübeck].[11] A book of meeting minutes was kept from January 3, 1943 to April 21, 1946. Walter Meyer usually conducted the meetings, but the names Hans Kufahl and Reinhold Meyer occur in this capacity as well. The average attendance was 10–17 persons, most of whom were members of the extended Meyer family.[12]

According to Reinhold Meyer, the first meetings after the disastrous attack of 1942 were held in a Catholic church ("but only once"), then in

the apartment of his elder brother, Walter Meyer. Wilfried Süfke recalled sitting on the floor under such circumstances, but there was enough room. "We didn't have accompaniment on the pump organ any more, but we could still sing the hymns."

Fig. 6. Friedel Sass received the first-place medal for his age-group in the army 10-kilometer run in 1942. He ran the distance in 42:08.5. (J. Sass)

Late in 1942, Reinhold was drafted into the Luftwaffe and was stationed first in Reims, France. Initially, he was classified among the "flight personnel," but by then the number of German airplanes had decreased to the point that he was reassigned. "I never did have to fly, and I'm glad for that. [The Allies] had so many planes. I counted them later on—a thousand planes and I couldn't see any more." Following a short and intense illness, he was assigned to office duty. In 1943, he was transferred to Belgium and trained to drive motorcycles, automobiles, and trucks. Once while he was home on leave, his comrades were all sent to the Soviet Union—a move that cost many of them their lives. Reinhold was spared, at least for a while.

Friedel Sass was transferred to the Eastern Front in 1943 for a very short time, but long enough to have a painfully personal experience. He confided the story to his mother, who often related it to his sons:

> It may have been while he was delivering a message, when he suddenly found himself face-to-face with a Russian soldier. It was a matter of who was going to pull the trigger first, and it was [your] father that did. He said it's something to see somebody a block or so away shooting at you and you shoot back, that's one thing, but to be face-to-face with a living being, that is something else. He must have stayed with that man for a bit [before he died], because he learned that he had three children, just as [your] father did. He left a wife, just as [your] father did. He said it was a very, very traumatic experience.[13]

Specific memories of life in Lübeck during the war remain clear in Jürgen Sass's mind, such as this one:

> I was probably at the most, ten years old, while on the way to my elementary school . . . and there was a field where some construction was going on. [The workers were] forced laborers—probably Poles or Russians—and there was a guard with a gun. Whoever they were, there was a fistfight. . . . [They were] really fighting hard over a strangled cabbage on which all the leaves were already gone. That affected me. . . . I figured, gee, those guys must be starving.[14]

Jürgen Sass saw his father only on rare occasions during the war. Friedel Sass had been drafted in 1939, so his children grew up essentially without him. Jürgen recalled two poignant letters written by his father to Friedel's mother (Jürgen's grandmother). Brother Sass wrote one such letter on his wedding anniversary (September 30) and told of an American artillery barrage that could have killed him. "Please, Lord, if I have to die, not today!" he had thought during the barrage.[15]

Jürgen avoided the Hitler Youth experience for the first year, then volunteered after all: "I felt the

need to belong to an organization of other young boys." One occasion must have been quite exciting, namely when the boys were camping and engaging in war games: "American planes flew overhead, and surrounding anti-aircraft batteries began to fire. Our group leader, who was probably not much older than 14, had us stand under trees, while [shrapnel] fragments rained around us. . . . Fortunately, none of us got hit."[16]

Wilfried Süfke was fortunate to have both parents home during the entire war. His father, Walter, was a salesman of agricultural seeds. His mother, Minna, owned and operated a small grocery store on the main floor of the apartment building in which the family lived. According to Wilfried, "Even when the British came in [as conquerors], we were able to keep the store running." Another major advantage in the life of young Wilfried was that he was never sent away from Lübeck as part of the children's evacuation program (Kinderlandverschickung), unlike hundreds of thousands of children all over Germany.

Friedel Sass was a very talented man. A dedicated member of the Church, he was serving as second counselor to Alwin Brey, the president of the Hamburg District, when the war began. From the beginning of his army service, he was selected as an officer candidate and moved steadily up the ranks. The excellent collection of documents preserved by his family attest to the stellar reputation he enjoyed among both superiors and subordinates. He appeared to be a faithful soldier who enjoyed serving his country. The many photos taken of him under both military and civilian circumstances show a man who seemed very happy with his life.

Holger Sass (born 1938) was a child when Allied airplanes coursed over Lübeck in the last years of the war. To him, it was all quite exciting, and he was totally unaware of the danger. "One time, when the sirens sounded to let us know that everything was okay, we could [go outside and] look at the fires. If you're a kid at that young age, it's kind of special."

During the summer of 1944, Reinhold Meyer was involved in a most precarious undertaking. A German V-1 unmanned rocket had plummeted into the French countryside and needed to be disarmed. Reinhold drove an expert he called "Old Gus" to the site and was required to hand him tools during the delicate operation. Just a few seconds after Old Gus removed the firing pin, it popped. "If the device had triggered just a few seconds earlier, I wouldn't be here telling this story," he claimed. However, the device injured Old Gus's hand, and Reinhard helped stop the bleeding. Then the two attached a few pounds of dynamite, retreated to a safe distance, and set off the charge to totally destroy the rocket's lethal payload.

When the Allied landings took place on the beaches of Normandy on June 6, 1944, Reinhold's unit was about a hundred miles inland. They were assigned to construct barriers to hinder the Allied advance, but there were simply no supplies with which to do so. "We just kept moving back, away from them," he recalled. When the Allies entered Paris in August, Reinhold was actually staying in a hotel there and came very close to being captured. His unit quickly moved northeast toward Germany's Eifel forest.

By early 1945, Reinhold Meyer had crossed the Rhine River into the heart of Germany and had moved steadily north and east ahead of the advancing British army. In April 1945, he and his comrades buried their weapons and surrendered to the British. They were moved to Lüneburg and then to Hitzaker on the Elbe River. For several nights, they had no shelter and simply slept in the sand. Once, Reinhold was ordered to latrine duty, which he of course did not like. Because nobody was really paying attention to him, he simply walked away from the distasteful task.

Just days before he was killed in Remiremont, France, Friedel Sass wrote a letter to his mother including the following lines:

> For the second time I have lost all my belongings. . . . Mostly I regret the loss of my briefcase

> with the addresses of my comrades from the Eastern Front, as well as my camera. Yesterday I bought for Jürgen's birthday a wristwatch, Swiss brand, with fifteen jewels. Now I have to see how I can get it home in time for his birthday. Unfortunately, I have not been able to get anything for my other two boys.[17]

Jürgen likely never received that watch because his father was killed a few days later, on October 12, 1944. The family received the sad news one day before Jürgen's eleventh birthday.

Figs. 7 and 8. Friedel Sass was killed in France on October 12, 1944. He lies buried in a German military cemetery. (J. Sass)

During the last days of the war, Holger Sass witnessed what to him was a most confusing incident. Standing near an army warehouse, he noticed that there were small fires inside even before a German officer ordered several of his men to go inside. "We never knew what was in there, but I think they were trying to destroy the stuff so that the [enemy] would not get it," he surmised. "They started a fire in the building, and then some soldiers went back in. They must have known that they would not get out because it was already burning. I think that seeing that [event] would affect anybody."

The British army entered the city of Lübeck on May 2, 1945, six days before the war officially ended.[18] No attempt was made to defend the city. According to young Jürgen Sass, "The subsequent occupation by British troops proved to be rather tolerable. There seemed to be little animosity on either side. . . . Church services . . . were restored, at first in a member's home, later on in schools."

The branch history offers a single sentence regarding the Latter-day Saints in Lübeck in the months following the end of the war: "Many refugees from Selbongen, Königsberg, Stettin and Pomerania (in the East German Mission) made their way to Lübeck and the towns nearby, bringing perhaps as many as 400 members to Lübeck."[19]

As a German soldier, Reinhold Meyer was a priest in the Aaronic Priesthood. While away from home, he could never attend a Church meeting and had no scriptures to read. Only once did he come into contact with another German LDS soldier—a young man from Hamburg's St. Georg Branch—but the experience was not a positive one. "He acted like he didn't know me, but I had stayed in his home once during a district conference in Hamburg. I don't know why he didn't want anything to do with me."

In August 1945, Reinhard was put on a truck and driven to Lübeck. His family had never been told his whereabouts. "My mother had been praying for me. Several times bombs had fallen close to me and could have killed me, but I was protected. And I never fired my gun at the enemy. I never killed anybody."

In Memoriam

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

Herbert Emil Derr b. Chemnitz, Sachsen, 22 Nov 1909; son of Emil Derr and Hulda Spindler; bp. 11 May 1918; conf. 11 May 1918; ord. deacon 17 Sep 1928; ord. teacher 16 Jan 1932; naval officer; k. Clisson, Nantes, 13 Aug 1944; bur. Pornichet, France (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 13; www.volksbund.de; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 813)

Henriette Maria Helene Dürrkop b. Lübeck 6 Sep 1870; dau. of Jürgen J. H. Dürrkop and Dorothea Horstman; bp. 28 Sep 1923; conf. 28 Sep 1923; m. 11 Nov 1894, Johann Heinrich Friedrich Klinkrad; d. 30 Jul 1944 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 35)

Heinrich Gottfried Christoff Kock b. Mölln, Lauenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, 24 Apr 1874; son of Heinrich Adolf Kock and Dorothea K. Wilhelmine; bp.

27 Feb 1912; conf. 27 Feb 1912; m. Lütau, Lauenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, 23 Apr 1899, Johanna Marie Sophie Berlin; 10 children; d. heart ailment Lübeck 13 Apr 1944 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 27; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 970; FHC microfilm 271380, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

Heinz Hugo Helmuth Kock b. Lübeck 29 Dec 1923; son of Heinrich Gottfried Christoff Kock and Johanna Marie Sophie Berlin; bp. 11 May 1934; conf. 4 Jun 1931; d. pneumonia POW camp Russia 17 Nov 1945 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 116; FHC microfilm 271380, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Helmut Ludwig Friedrich Heinrich Kock b. Lübeck 18 Feb 1916; son of Heinrich Gottfried Christoff Kock and Johanna Marie Sophie Berlin; bp. 27 Sep 1924; conf. 28 Sep 1924; rifleman; k. in battle Zambrow, Poland, 11 Sep 1939; bur. Mławka, Poland (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 30; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 44; www.volksbund.de; FHC microfilm 271380, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

Marianne Josepha Sophie Lenz b. Lübeck 3 Jan 1908; dau. of Thomas Lenz and Martha Frieda Georgine Krüger; bp. 17 Jun 1929; conf. 17 Jun 1929; m. 2 Mar or May 1936, Walter Spiegel; d. heart failure 23 Nov 1942 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 42; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 817)

Anna Maria Elisabeth Lübcke b. Lehmrade, Lauenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, 31 Aug 1868; dau. of Johann H. Joachim Lübcke and Margaretha M. M. Hardekaper; bp. 1 Jun 1900; conf. 1 Jun 1900; m. 8 Jan 1892, Johann J. H. Burmeister; d. 28 Aug 1943 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 11; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 553; FHL microfilm 25733, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Dorothea Maria Elisa Agnes Franziska Mecker b. Lübeck 30 Mar 1863; dau. of Johann Joachim Heinrich Mecker and Johanna Regina Henriette Rosenhagen; bp. 8 Jul 1920; conf. 11 Jul 1920; m. Lübeck 5 Oct 1883, Johann Heinrich Friedrich Naevecke; eight children; d. cardiac asthma, angina, and old age 31 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 61; IGI)

Edwin Ewald Meyer b. Lübeck 26 Sep 1941; son of Ewald Johann Wilhelm Meyer and Martha H. O. Luth; d. heart attack 27 Nov 1941 or 1944 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 151; IGI)

Gudrun Adelgund Genovefa Meyer b. Lübeck 9 Dec 1939; dau. of Walter Hans Bernhard Meyer and Cäcilie Sophie Frieda Kost; d. pneumonia Lübeck 5 May 1944 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 148; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 422)

Hermann Johann Karl Meyer b. Eggerstorf, Grevesmühlen, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 16 Mar 1876; son of Anna S. D. Meyer; bp. 12 Jul 1924; conf. 12 Jul 1924; ord. deacon 3 Sep 1925; ord. teacher 4 Nov 1934; ord. priest 17 May 1936; m. Grevesmühlen, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 13 Oct 1899, Anna Marie Caroline Johanna Mathilde Tack; three children; 2m. 1 Nov 1919, Friede D. D. Busekist-Best; d. heart attack Lübeck 27 Apr 1941 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 59; IGI)

Walter Hermann Julius Meyer b. Lübeck 16 Jan 1919; son of Hermann Johann Karl Meyer and Frieda Dorisa Dorothea Best; bp. 3 Jul 1931; conf. 3 Jul 1931; k. in battle Italy 3 Nov 1944 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 102; CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, 74–75; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 59; IGI)

Frieda Maria Berta Ollrogge b. Lübeck 12 Sep 1899; dau. of Heinrich Ollrogge and Dora Rickmann; bp. 3 Jul 1931; conf. 3 Jul 1931; m. 17 Mar 1922, Carl Friedrich Emil Schiemann; d. cramps 6 Sep 1939 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 105; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 14)

Anna Luise L. Plückhalm b. Dambeck, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 17 May 1914; dau. of Gustav Plückhalm and Martha Bähls; bp. 9 Apr 1928; conf. 9 Apr 1928; missing as of 1 Feb 1946 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 150; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 436)

Heinrich Christian Ernst Rönpage b. Moisling, Lübeck, 28 Aug 1864; son of Hans Heinrich Ernst Rönpage and Sophie M. Maass; bp. 20 May 1910; conf. 20 May 1910; m. Lübeck 25 Jul 1891, Johanna Marie Sophia Faasch; eleven children; d. old age 19 Sep 1940 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 66; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 636; IGI)

Margarethe Helene Wilhelmine Rönpage b. Lübeck 14 Jan 1893; dau. of Heinrich Christian Ernst Rönpage and Johanna Maria Sophia Faasch; bp. 30 Jun 1910; conf. 30 Jun 1910; m. 10 Jun 1915, Ludwig A. J. Wegner; d. 4 Oct 1945 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 88; IGI)

Friedrich Adolf August Sass b. Lübeck 13 May 1910; son of August Wilhelm Hermann Sass and Frieda Sophie Dorothea Stephan; bp. 3 Jul 1931; conf. 3 Jul 1931; ord. deacon 11 Jan 1932; ord. teacher 7 May 1933; ord. priest 21 Jun 1933; ord. elder 16 Apr 1935; m. Lübeck 23 Sep 1932, Hedwig Wilma Minna Johanna Ront; three children; lieutenant; k. in battle Remiremont, Vosges, France, 12 Oct 1944; bur. Andilly, France (J. Sass; www.volksbund.de; CHL CR 275 8, no. 2443, no. 103; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 17; photo, IGI)

Carl Friedrich Emil Schiemann b. Grevesmühlen, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 30 Aug 1890; son of August Schiemann and Dora Burmeister; bp. 3 Jul 1931; conf. 3 Jul 1931; m. 17 Mar 1922, Frieda Maria Berta Ollrogge; d. stomach surgery 19 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 104; CHL CR 275 8 2458, 496; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 13)

Emil Friederich Vollrath Steinfeldt b. Lübeck 11 Sep 1908; son of Johannes Heinrich Joachim Steinfeldt

and Hedwig Wilhelmine Charlotte Bohnsack; bp. 24 Sep 1921; conf. 24 Sep 1921; m. Grete Hansen (div.); k. in battle Russia 27 Oct 1942 (FHL microfilm 68799, no. 77; CHL CR 275 8, no. 519)

Notes

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
2. Leonard J. Bingham, autobiography, 125, CHL MS 18074. See also West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
3. Reinhold Meyer, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, November 3, 2006.
4. West German Mission branch directory, 1939.
5. Wilfried Süfke, telephone interview with the author in German, February 16, 2009; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
6. Lübeck city archive.
7. Jürgen Sass, autobiography (unpublished, about 1985).
8. The other baptismal fonts were in the rooms of the Essen and Stuttgart Branches of the Ruhr District, also in the West German Mission.
9. Sass, autobiography.
10. Fred Warncke et al., *Geschichte der Gemeinde Luebeck, 1880–1997* (typescript, 1997), 2, CHL LR 5093 21.
11. There is no explanation for meetings being held at this location. None of the branch leaders listed in 1939 lived in Reinfeld.
12. Lübeck Branch history, 3.
13. The family believes that Brother Sass was awarded the Iron Cross for successfully delivering the message under hazardous conditions.
14. Jürgen Sass, interview by the author, May 25, 2006, Ogden, UT.
15. Sass, interview.
16. Sass, autobiography.
17. As cited in Sass, autobiography.
18. Lübeck city archive.
19. Lübeck Branch history, 5.

St. Georg Branch

As the largest of three branches in the largest city in the West German Mission, the St. Georg Branch was located in the heart of Hamburg, a city of 1.7 million people. With 413 members in 1939, the St. Georg Branch had the largest population in the mission, followed by Nuremberg. It had an outstanding number of elders (thirty-nine) and fifty-four more men and boys who held the Aaronic Priesthood. This was indeed a very strong branch in which nearly all programs of the Church were running at high efficiency when the war broke out.

St. Georg Branch[1]	**1939**
Elders	39
Priests	13
Teachers	13
Deacons	28
Other Adult Males	54
Adult Females	214
Male Children	28
Female Children	24
Total	413

The location of the meeting rooms was also fortuitous—just a few short blocks from the main railway station and the city hall. Branch historian Hans Gürtler described the rooms at Besenbinderhof 13a in these words:

> How happy we were when the Redding Printing Co. rented us some rooms on the main floor that was not only much larger [than our previous venue] but also isolated and offered us total peace and quiet. . . . The date was January 30, 1910. This would be our location for thirty-five [thirty-three] years. . . . Just before the war we were able to rent small rooms above and next to the main hall. A foyer with a cloak room was added. The crown jewel was the kitchen that was built in the basement."[2]

The entry to the rooms in building 13a was from the street called Besenbinderhof. The Saints went through a portal in the main building, then into an alley and down the so-called Hexenberg (Witch's Mountain) perhaps one hundred feet to the door of the building. The setting outside could not have resembled a traditional German church in any way.

Hertha Schönrock (born 1923) recalled a sign that indicated the presence of the branch in that building and that a baptismal font was constructed

on top of the stage in 1940. "It was very rare and we were blessed to have one."[3] Ingo Zander (born 1934), a son of the branch president, was baptized in that font in 1942.[4] The Zander family lived in the suburb of Hamm and needed a good half-hour to get to church with the streetcar and on foot (a trip the family made twice each Sunday). Hertha Schönrock was impressed by the emphasis on reverence in the meetings. "If we came late, they wouldn't let us in. The doors were closed to promote reverence."

The branch presidency in 1939 consisted of Arthur Zander, Franz Jakobi, and Walter Bankowski. Erich Gellersen was the supervisor of the Sunday School; Erich Leiss, the leader of the young men; Paula Schnibbe, the leader of the young women; and Anna Ruthwill, the leader of the Relief Society. The branch directory of August 1939 does not list a leader of the Primary organization (or a meeting time for that matter), even though there were fifty-two children in the branch at the time.[5] Eyewitnesses estimated the average attendance at one hundred to one hundred and fifty persons on a typical Sunday (perhaps one-third of the registered members).

Sunday School began at 10 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 7 p.m. The Relief Society and priesthood groups met on Monday evenings at 7:30 and the MIA met on Wednesdays at the same time. The meeting schedule likewise includes times for a genealogy class and rehearsals for the branch choir and the branch orchestra. Special entertainment was scheduled for a Friday "at least once each month," according to the branch directory of 1939.[6]

Living in the suburb of Wilhelmsburg (across the Elbe River to the south), the Schönrock family had a distance of about four miles to negotiate four times each Sunday if they were to attend all of the meetings of the St. Georg Branch. According to daughter Hertha, "It looked like geese were marching in a line when our entire family was on the way to church. Sometimes it was too expensive for all of us to take the train or the bus to church. When we were older, we spent the time between meetings in the homes of friends."

Hertha enjoyed her experience as a member of the League of German Girls, but she was not an admirer of Adolf Hitler. "I saw him once with my League group when he came to Hamburg, but I never considered him anyone special." Hertha's father, Wilhelm Schönrock, was a communist who sometimes went to a neighbor's apartment to listen to BBC broadcasts. As an electrician, he had worked on the new battleship *Bismarck* and had even participated in the maiden voyage of that famous vessel.

"My life changed drastically in 1938 with the Night of Broken Glass," recalled Karl-Heinz Schnibbe (born 1924). "All of the Jewish businesses were destroyed. I was very angry and decided to leave the Hitler Youth."[7] Soon thereafter, he was called into the Nazi Party headquarters in Hamburg and accused of being a communist (his father was actually a Social Democrat, almost as bad as a communist in the opinion of the Nazis). Karl-Heinz was relieved to be informed that the Hitler Youth no longer had room for him.

Several eyewitnesses recall seeing police officials sitting on the back row during meetings. "We knew who they were," claimed Erwin Frank (born 1923). The men never said anything and never interrupted or tried to cancel the meetings. The Mormon Church apparently meant little to the city government at the time. In general, the neighbors of LDS families in Hamburg also knew little about their Church activities. Erwin's parents had eight children and were interested only in the Church, not politics. According to Erwin, "Back then the big thing was the Nazis and the communists and neither party appealed to us."[8]

"Both of my parents had been out of work," recalled Gerd Fricke (born 1923), "but Hitler turned things around. When my parents found work, they supported him at first." Gerd's father was not active in the Church, but the fact that he joined the SA (the party's organization for men) did not mean that he belonged to the Nazi Party, according to Gerd. During the first years of the war, Gerd worked in a factory where parts for submarines were produced.

Fig. 1. The main meeting room at Besenbinderhof 13a was probably the largest used by any branch in Germany in 1939. The room accommodated up to five hundred people. The baptismal font was constructed on the rostrum (behind the photographer) in 1940. (I. Gellerson Long)

"Back then, we teenagers still found ways to have fun. We were involved in sports and other entertainment. It wasn't all deadly serious."[9]

Just before the war, the family of Richard and Rosalie Pruess of Rahlstedt owned a three-wheeled automobile. According to daughter Lieselotte (born 1926), her father drove as many as six of the family members to church in that vehicle. Rahlstedt is a northeast suburb of Hamburg and fully seven miles from the branch rooms at Besenbinderhof. As a Primary girl, Lieselotte had actually made the trip alone on the bus and the streetcar many times in the mid-1930s. "When I was eight and nine, I took my little sisters too because they begged to go."[10]

Richard Pruess was anything but a Nazi and refused to use the standard greeting of "Heil Hitler!" Nor was he ashamed to receive a Jewish guest in his home. Salomon Schwarz, a member of the Barmbek Branch, visited the Pruess family on occasion—in fact, often enough that the neighbors were aware of him. It was possibly the general respect for Brother Pruess that prevented neighbors (some of whom were "good Nazis") from reporting him to the police for entertaining a Jew in his home. In Lieselotte's recollection, her father removed the *Juden verboten* sign from the church on one occasion; he was accustomed to saying that those who persecute Jews will be punished.

Otto Berndt (born 1929) was inducted into the Jungvolk just months before the war began. He recalled:

> I liked the Hitler Youth because I had the opportunity to go places which I would have never had. We learned the Hitler way and had meetings every week. It actually was indoctrination of the highest order but we were all too dumb to realize what was being done with the youth. After school, we had to assemble and sing the German national anthem and the Horst Wessel song. We did a lot of marching and singing in formation.[11]

Fig. 2. Richard Pruess drove several members of his family to church in this three-wheeled vehicle. (H. Pruess Mueller)

The outbreak of war was not much of a surprise to Erwin Frank and his family. "It got to the point that Hitler didn't seem to be satisfied with what he had. As soon as he marched into one country, he was ready for the next." Erwin's prime concern in the fall of 1939 was not the war; he was only sixteen and had begun his apprenticeship as a galvanizing specialist. He needed four years to prepare for his examination, but his program was interrupted in 1940 by a call to the Reichsarbeitsdienst.

The war began when Karl-Heinz Schnibbe was a young apprentice. He recalled his reaction to the news:

> We heard that Germany had attacked Poland; it was announced over the radio as "special news." I was young and didn't give the matter much thought. When the war started, nobody believed that Germany could lose. I thought that Germany could do anything she wanted because the country was strong and Hitler was a strong personality. Poland was conquered in two and a half weeks, which was unbelievable. I must say though that the older people were worried.

The announcement of the war against Poland also appeared in all German newspapers. Karl Schönrock (born 1929) recalled reading about it as he delivered his newspapers one day:

> We delivered our papers in the afternoon after school (my sister and my brother also had paper routes). . . . I had thirty or forty people to deliver newspapers to. I wasn't scared that Germany was going to war. I felt it was somewhat justified because of an announcement that some Polish troops had attacked the radio station in the [German] city of Gleiwitz. Later on, of course, after the war, they said those were German [criminals] disguised as Polish soldiers.[12]

Werner Schönrock (born 1927) was in the Jungvolk when the war began. He recalled:

> I was a member of the Jungvolk as well as the Hitler Youth later on and I liked going there. In my free time, I liked being involved in sports, especially gymnastics and handball. Because the sports field was right next to our home, we were able to do so much there. We were still able to do all those things during the war though the circumstances got more hazardous.[13]

Werner's athletic field took on a different role as the air raids over Hamburg became more frequent: antiaircraft batteries were set up there, and eventually two bunkers for civilians were erected.

Ingeborg Thymian (born 1930) was baptized in the Elbe River on March 16, 1940. She had wanted to be baptized at the age of eight (two years earlier), but there was a problem. She recalled, "Because I had braided my hair that day, it was always floating on the water. After the third unsuccessful attempt, they told me that they had to baptize me at another date." The successful baptism was conducted despite a different obstacle—ice in the Elbe. A hole was cut in the ice, and Ingeborg was baptized. "We, as children, were always scared that somebody would get sick in the cold water, but Heavenly Father protected us."[14]

The Kinderlandverschickung (children's rural evacuation program) took Astrid Koch (born 1932) away from her family in Hamburg when she was only eight years old. She shared the following recollections:

> When we got to Pulsnitz [in Saxony], there was a big hall in a school and they had something for us to eat. People who wanted to take children in came there and picked out the children. I didn't

> know where I was going. [The people who chose me] were the Hardtmanns; they thought it might be interesting to raise a young child, so they decided on doing that. My twin sisters were also in that town; they were four years older, they were twelve. They went to a different family. My people were very nice, and the people that owned that house [the Erichs] had a daughter my age.[15]

Walter and Gertrud Menssen had married just before the war and were parents by January 1939. Walter (born 1913) was drafted just months after the war began. Gertrud (born 1919) was fortunate to find a nice apartment in his absence. It was there that their second child, a daughter named Edeltraut, was born in May 1941. Because Walter had always wanted a garden, Gertrud found and leased a plot of land measuring sixty by ninety feet in the Hamburg suburb of Horn. They constructed a one-room cottage on the property and spent most of June and July of 1941 there, despite the rain that fell nearly every day that summer. Little did they know that this would become their principal residence in a few years.[16]

Walter Menssen had spent several months in the army in early 1939 and was called in again at the end of that year. When the war began, the Luftwaffe needed men to serve in units all over Europe. Brother Menssen led a charmed life as a soldier, beginning with an assignment just a few miles from his home. He was soon working in the comfort of an office while he watched thousands of air force men be assigned to faraway stations. His health was excellent, with the exception of a short stay in the infirmary. This may have been the reason that he was given the classification of "conditionally fit for duty," which meant that he would not be assigned to locations beyond the borders of Germany.[17]

Werner Schönrock finished his public schooling in 1940 and hoped to join the war effort as a navy man. To his disappointment, he was too small. "They sent me home and told me that I should eat more." A few months later, he reported again and was sent for aquatic training that would render him more fit for duty. This time he became ill, however, and was hospitalized for three months with tuberculosis. It seemed that he was not to serve in Hitler's military.

Like hundreds of other LDS men of the West German Mission, Hans Gürtler (born 1901) hoped against hope that he would not be drafted. Already a husband and father of four, he received his call to the Wehrmacht in March 1941. He was first stationed in Harburg, a southern suburb of Hamburg; but in late 1941, he was sent to central Germany for additional training. A man of letters, he was quite opposed to Hitler's regime and expressed this in private by arranging with a comrade to change the wording of the soldier's oath: "Otto Schmidt and I had promised each other that we would not repeat the [words of the] oath correctly, but rather to pronounce a curse on Adolf Hitler, which we then did. Of course, our pious wish went unheard among the loud voices around us, which we wished would happen. After all, we didn't want to cut our own throats." His career as a soldier began most peacefully. For example, during a stay in the Polish city of Posen, he was able to attend a theater play three times in ten days.[18]

Fig. 3. Lieselotte and Richard Pruess in the uniforms of the League of German Girls and Hitler Youth respectively in about 1941. (H. Pruess Mueller)

Therese Gürtler (born 1929) recalled how her father, Hans, was always writing poems. As an opponent of the Hitler regime, he even wrote poems against the state and the war. Therese and her siblings were aware of this but of course never mentioned it outside of the home. She did remember that one man in the branch found out and threatened to report Brother Gürtler to the Gestapo. Apparently the fact that Hans Gürtler was soon drafted satisfied the man, and the anti-Hitler poet was not denounced.[19]

During the many minor air raids of the early war years, Therese Gürtler spent a lot of time with her family and their neighbors in their basement shelter. As she later explained:

> We usually would bring some games down with us, and it was always something that didn't really scare me. But when you heard the sirens before—when the air raid started, when they were warning us—that was a sound that was so eerie and so frightful. That's really the only thing that I remember being scared of. But for some reason, I was never afraid that we would be bombed, or that we would be hurt, or that we would lose our home. I guess, when you grow up in a family that is living the gospel and believing, there is a feeling of security and safety that is kind of indestructible. You're taken care of by your parents, and you know you'll be fine.

Most LDS children in the Jungvolk told of positive experiences, but that was not the case with Werner Sommerfeld (born 1929); to him, the Jungvolk program was anything but entertaining. He provided the following description:

> Boys of 12 and 13 were taken for intense military training. I can still remember the camps with the ground covered with gravel, where we had to crawl on our elbows from one side of the compound to the other, while they fired bursts of live ammunition over our heads. Many young boys were crying and calling out for their mothers. Some raised a little too high and were injured or killed. . . . My group became trained in anti-tank warfare. We carried bazookas (Panzerfaust) and balanced them under our arms to aim at oncoming tanks. We were expendable.[20]

Karl Schönrock recalled his experience in the Jungvolk, where membership was required of boys and girls when they turned ten: "They mostly indoctrinated us and we were encouraged to read *Mein Kampf* and that was all. As a matter of fact, I still have the book. They didn't give us a copy; I had to buy it. I was maybe twelve when I bought it, and I actually read it, but I didn't understand much of it at that age."

When the air raids over Hamburg became more frequent and intense, the city government required that watchmen be stationed in all larger buildings. Harald Fricke (born 1926) recalled standing guard in the church rooms with his father. Their responsibility was to watch for and report any bomb damage and to fight any fire that might start in the meeting rooms. After each attack, if nothing was out of order at the church, they hurried home to determine the status of their apartment and their family.[21]

Fig. 4. The economy edition of Adolf Hitler's book Mein Kampf *(My Struggle) was seen on many coffee tables in Germany during the National Socialist era. (K. Schoenrock)*

Perhaps the most challenged people in Germany during the war were the young mothers who were left to raise their children alone. Such was the condition of Maria Niemann (born 1911) who dearly missed her husband, Henri, while he served on the Eastern Front for four years. With her young son, Henry (born 1936), she did her best to keep order in life. She recalled:

> We cried for [my husband] and always [awaited] a letter that he was still alive and everything was fine. So, for him it wasn't fine, but I was calmed down and I was happy to hear that he was still alive. . . . He came home for [leave] sometimes and then I was happy to have him for a day and off went his soldier clothes and [on] his private clothes and then I always reminded him . . . that he should take his [identification] papers with him or he would go to jail.[22]

Hertha Schönrock was a spirited young lady who worked in a textile factory. The bombing raids carried out by the British over Hamburg angered her so much "that I was close to enlisting in the army. I sometimes wished I was a boy so that I could do more."[23] Her sister, Waltraud, worked in a different factory where clothing and gowns were produced.

Figs. 5 and 6. Scenes from the St. Georg Branch in happier days. (H. Pruess Mueller)

Johann Schnibbe had been called to be a traveling elder during the early years of the war. He often visited branches in other cities as part of this assignment. Another aspect of his service was visiting four families in the St. Georg Branch. He took his son, Karl-Heinz, along for those visits. As Karl-Heinz recalled, "We either took the streetcar or walked. If nobody was home, my father insisted that we go again the next day and that's what we did. Nobody had a telephone. We were assigned to visit four families and it took about three hours to visit them all."

Like most of the Saints in the West German Mission in the early years of the war, the Richard Pruess family of Rahlstedt sat in the basement of their home while the air-raid sirens wailed and the bombs fell; the public shelter was too far away from their home. According to little Hilde (born 1934), the basement had been reinforced by large wood beams and concrete blocks were stacked outside in front of the basement window.[24]

The government program of evacuating school children from cities under attack took Hilde away from her family several times for a total of nearly two years. She spent more than one year in the southern German town of Wunschendorf. She was home again for a while, then sent back to Wunschendorf. On another occasion, she was sent to Thorn in eastern Germany where she lived in a school along with refugee families. Thorn was a long way from her family and her church.

In August 1941, Erwin Frank was drafted into the national labor force and stationed in France. It was there that he enjoyed a rare privilege, a get-together with his friend Paul Mücke, another member of the St. Georg Branch. The two spent only one afternoon together before Paul returned to his unit. At the completion of the six-month assignment, Erwin returned to Hamburg to the same message thousands of young men received just days after they completed the Reichsarbeitsdienst tenure: a draft notice. Paul was instructed to report for service in the Luftwaffe. It was January 1942.

Eyewitnesses generally agree that several Latter-day Saints in the St. Georg Branch were also ardent members of the National Socialist Party. According to historian Hans Gürtler:

> Essentially all possible political opinions were represented in the branch. It was especially painful that we had National Socialists in our midst—people who idolized Hitler. Despite general caution, we had some disturbances now and then. Even today, we can still recall the negative feelings we had when prayers were said at the pulpit for that Satanic charlatan. Some even dared to put the swastika flag in our hallowed meeting rooms and to use the Hitler salute. On the other hand, it can and should be noted that many of our members only saw the positive aspects of Hitler's regime and could not see behind the scenes. . . . One humiliating concession to the government was a necessary evil—the exclusion of Jews from our meetings.[25]

Branch president Arthur Zander was considered by many eyewitnesses a devout National Socialist. Although most claimed that he did not give political

speeches in Church meetings, they did recall that he interrupted meetings so that Hitler's speeches could be played over the radio for the Saints to hear. Indeed the disagreements about politics may have been more distinct in this branch than in any other in the West German Mission. Ingo Zander described his father as "a very dynamic, magnetic person."[26] Perhaps President Zander was also very decisive, because many eyewitnesses identified him as the man who posted the sign "Juden verboten" at the front door and denied entry to such members as Salomon Schwarz, a man with an undetermined degree of Jewish blood. (Brother Schwarz was then taken in by the neighboring Barmbek Branch, where no such sign was posted.) In contrast, some eyewitnesses suggested that President Zander posted the sign in order to curry favor with the local police authorities; he may have believed that without the sign, the branch would be forced to close down entirely.

Fig. 7. "Jews are not allowed!" Signs of this variety were posted all over Germany to make life impossible for Jews who had not yet left the country. (G. Blake)[27]

Like so many children in Germany during the war, young Otto Berndt became an expert on air raids. His recollections are a combination of religious and practical knowledge:

> Whenever we had to go to the bunker because of an air raid, we would all kneel in prayer and ask for protection from what was to come. An air raid would always last two hours. You could set your clock by it. The British bombed during the night and the Americans bombed during the day, so that there wasn't much time to do much of anything [else]. I don't remember being comforted by prayer, but now that I'm older and it's all over with I know that "somebody up there loves me."[28]

Branch historian Hans Gürtler was quite mild in his comments regarding Helmut Hübener, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, and Rudi Wobbe, the three teenagers tried and convicted of treason in 1942.[29] He referred to their illegal actions as

> the saddest experience in the branch. [These] three younger brethren had listened to foreign radio broadcasts and had copied them using the branch mimeograph machine, then distributed the flyers. It was a serious challenge for the district president [Otto Berndt] to prevent the branch from suffering the worst imaginable punishment. How often the existence of the branch seemed to hang by a thread![30]

The reactions of the Saints to the arrest and trial of the three Aaronic Priesthood holders who defied the government were mixed and emotional (see their story in the Hamburg District chapter). Karl-Heinz Schnibbe recalled that one older man in the branch told him to his face that "he would have shot me personally if he knew what we had done." Most eyewitnesses stated that while they felt sorry for the boys when they were punished, the case had placed the three Hamburg branches in serious jeopardy with the police; the boys were foolhardy to undertake any such resistance, and the fact that they used church equipment to support their treasonous activities was inexcusable. The membership records show that Helmut Hübener, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, and Rudi Wobbe were all excommunicated from the Church shortly after their trial in Berlin (an action that was reversed by the Church's First Presidency a few years later).[31]

After a full year in Saxony, Astrid Koch was returned to her family in Hamburg. However, she had been treated so well in Pulsnitz that she asked her parents to send her back to her host family: "The

first thing I told my parents was: 'I want to go back to Onkel and Tante (I called them that) because I loved being there.'" The Kochs sent her back in the summer of 1942 and Astrid lived there until 1946.

By the summer of 1942, Erwin Frank was on the island of Sicily where he worked as a radio operator reporting flights of enemy aircraft toward German positions. He was scheduled to be sent across the Mediterranean Sea to a station in North Africa, but Allied forces gained the upper hand in the region and the move was canceled. Subsequent transfers took him to the islands of Sardinia, Corsica, and Elba.

The air raids that plagued Hamburg were already taking their toll on the populace in 1942—if not in high death counts, then at least emotionally. Gerd Fricke recalled rejecting instructions to go down into the basement when the sirens wailed one night:

> I was too tired to go downstairs, so I stayed in my bed. My mother, my brother, and my sister all went down. I was lying in bed when the roof of our house was blown off. I wasn't fully dressed, so I ran downstairs in a shirt and pants. While we waited in the basement, a bomb fell into our apartment and everything burned, but we got out of the basement safely. That was the first time we lost everything and it happened again [in 1943].

Walter Menssen once returned to his quarters in a Hamburg suburb to find his commanding officer sitting in a chair, reading in one of his American church books. The officer asked him point-blank if he was a Mormon, and the answer was unhesitatingly affirmative. "That is the only reason you are in this office," was the man's response, "because I can trust you." Walter recalled having taken the officer back to his quarters after too many drinks at social affairs on several occasions and knew that statement to be true. The officer then recounted his experiences in the United States and declared that the greatest man he had ever known was one Heber J. Grant, whom he met in a bank in New York City. "He invited me to Salt Lake, and I stayed in his home for two weeks. I was driven around in Salt Lake and saw everything. That is the reason you are here." Once again, a soldier of the LDS Church had been rewarded for living a life of high standards.

Indeed, Walter was tempted on several occasions by comrades who wished to see him deny his standards and smoke cigarettes or drink alcohol. They offered him money to smoke and even spiked his soda drinks, "but a Mormon can smell that alcohol a mile away," he claimed. He used his cigarette rations to pay other soldiers to take over his duty assignments so that he could attend church with his family. "In other words, keeping the Word of Wisdom helped me quite a bit."[32]

Little children seldom understood the reasons for air raids over Hamburg, but they did not enjoy being rousted out of bed in the middle of the night or sitting in dark and cold basements and shelters surrounded by terrifying noises. Regarding the possibility of being hurt or killed under those circumstances, Ingo Zander's observations are typical: "I probably didn't give much thought to dying, but you wouldn't totally dismiss [the possibility] either. I remember once when a classmate didn't show up for school, I went to where he lived. Where his house had been, there was a crater as deep as the house had been high and nobody heard anything anymore of him."

Many children in Germany's largest cities enjoyed the hobby of collecting pieces of shrapnel from the streets on the mornings after air raids. Karl Schönrock of the St. Georg Branch was one of those collectors, as he later explained: "We collected [the shrapnel] from the antiaircraft shells that exploded [above our homes]. In school we compared who had the most and the best-looking ones." Sometimes, Karl and his siblings would go outside during air raids and watch the British flares descend from the sky and the shells of the antiaircraft guns attempting to shoot down the enemy airplanes. With metal raining from the sky, they soon learned that it was better to stay inside during such dangerous activity.

Ingrid Lübke (born 1933) had distinctly sad memories of the air war over Hamburg: "My school

was next to a POW camp. One day we had an alarm so we left the school to go to a shelter. When we came back, the school yard was full of bodies [of prisoners] and they even hung in the branches of the trees. It was awful!"[33] Later in the war, she experienced a different type of very personal danger: "Sometimes planes intentionally aimed at us children when we were playing. Once, we ran to the next house that we saw and hid there to be safe. Another time, I was playing outside the shelter and a plane shot at me; [the pilot] saw me and I even saw him and I fell down, but nothing happened to me."

The loss of the meeting rooms in 1943 at Besenbinderhof was painful and very inconvenient. Still very intact, the rooms were needed for more important purposes in the opinion of the city government. After thirty-three years of meetings under what were likely the finest conditions for Latter-day Saints in all of Germany and Austria, the rental contract was canceled and the branch was required to remove the Church property from the building. Historian Hans Gürtler had this to say about the move: "There is no reason to seek the actual cause and perpetrators of the expulsion. At that time, our Church simply did not have the respect it enjoys today [1969] and anybody who did not like us could easily throw stones in our path."[34] The meeting rooms were confiscated in the spring of 1943, and the members were then required to make their way to the home of the Altona Branch—about three miles to the west across town.

Arthur Zander may have wondered what his role was to be as a branch president without a branch, but the Wehrmacht solved this problem by drafting him in 1943. With the destruction of the family's apartment in July 1943, Sister Zander took their three sons and headed for southern Germany. Like so many other families in the St. Georg Branch, the Zanders were absent from town for the rest of the war.

Like tens of thousands of other German schoolchildren, Otto Berndt and his entire school class of thirty-five boys were evacuated to the Czech town of Kubice to spare them the dangers of a Hamburg under constant assault from the sky. For two years, the boys lived in a hotel next to the railroad station in that farming community. Their teacher was with them and was what Otto called "a good egg. We weren't expected to work like slaves. In the morning we had our regular school." For two years, the boys stayed in Kubice. Otto was visited once by his father; otherwise he was totally isolated from his hometown, his family, and his church.[35]

In August 1943, homeless Gertrud Menssen and her two children were sent to Bavaria, where they were taken in as refugees on a farm. At first, the host family gave them poor accommodations and treated them as strangers. The guests could not understand the local dialect, suffered from lice ("how sickening!"), and were very homesick for Hamburg, but "the hardest thing was that we were so far away from the Church." Eventually, Gertrud learned that the LDS branch in Munich was within reach; a journey of one hour on foot and ninety minutes or more by train took her to the Bavarian capital, where she enjoyed meeting with the Saints a few times. "[The trip] took us the whole day and that was hard with little children and me expecting our third."[36]

Figs. 8 and 9. The Pruess home in Rahlstedt before the bombing (left) and after reconstruction in 1944 (right). The top two floors could not be rebuilt at the time. (L. Pruess Schmidt)

Harald Fricke was evacuated with his family (his mother, brother, and sister) to the part of Poland that had been Germany before 1918. He recalled attending church meetings in the nearby branches of Elbing and Danzig—two cities that could be reached by train from Marienwerder where the family was temporarily housed. "We somehow found out where all the branches met," he recalled. After five or six weeks, Sister Fricke took her children

home to Hamburg, where they were assigned another apartment.

As a new recruit, Gerd Fricke went through basic training for six months near Bremen. Just before Christmas 1943, he was transferred to France, but never moved farther west than Luxembourg. He soon became yet another LDS soldier who was harassed because of his health standard: "One time, I was tempted by the other soldiers to drink alcohol. I said that I wouldn't do it, and they wanted to pour it down my throat. I resisted and they later said that I was pretty tough and really knew what I wanted."

The family of Emil and Lilly Koch lost everything they owned in the firebombings of 1943. According to daughter Lilly, the family left town and found a place to live near Dresden in Saxony. However, Brother Koch was a city employee, and he was required to return to Hamburg to work. His daughter Lilly went with him because she had a job in a factory where airplane engine parts were made. The two first lived with relatives, but once they found their own apartment, the rest of the family could return from Saxony to be with them.

Lilly Koch described some of the challenges of being an adolescent during World War II:

> Being a teenager during the war was not a nice situation. I remember that I turned 18 years old during the war and was astonished that many things were already forbidden—like going dancing. That is why we often felt like we were losing contact with our friends and especially with the other members of the Church, because we did not know where all the others were and what we could do. Everything was always destroyed.[37]

The family of former district president Alwin Brey had lost everything when their apartment house burned in July 1943. Brother Brey then took his family to Bamberg, in southern Germany, where they found a small room to live in. Because there was no branch in that city, Frieda Brey and her children were isolated from the Church. Soon after their arrival in Bamberg, daughter Irma (born 1926) was called to serve a Pflichtjahr on a farm. She lived and worked there with many other girls her age who assumed work normally done by the men who had been drafted. Irma was very homesick but was at least safe from the terrible attacks on Hamburg.[38]

Fred Zwick went with his mother to Polzin, in Pomerania, after their apartment was destroyed. However, his father came on leave and insisted that they return to Hamburg. He told them that the Russians might be invading that area and that he had heard what Russians did to women and children. Back in Hamburg, the only place they could find to live in was a little cottage on a garden property belonging to Fred's grandparents. He described the structure in these words:

> It wasn't too small of a building. It was livable. It had a little store room and a room for a portable potty, and then a kitchen. We had our water pump; the pipe went out through the wall into a shed and then there was a stove in it and a table of course and windows. Next to it was kind of a living room and next to that was a really small bedroom. There was plenty of room for three people.[39]

Waltraud Schönrock's life took an early turn toward adulthood when she became engaged to fellow Latter-day Saint Gerhard Kunkel at the age of seventeen. She was eighteen when they were married on September 25, 1943, and she offered this description of the event:

> It was a simple wedding. Our mother prepared a small dinner at home and that was all. We got married in the civil registry office [in city hall] first, and then we went to church on Sunday. . . . I had a white dress and even a veil. [Gerhard] returned to his unit a few days after our wedding. We didn't have a honeymoon.[40]

After the Koch family lost everything they owned in the firebombings, they traveled to Pulsnitz and were taken in where Astrid had been for more than two years. It was nice for the family to be together again, but that experience was short-lived. Brother Koch was required by his employer (the city of Hamburg) to return to work. The rest of the family stayed until after Christmas and returned

to Hamburg in early 1944. Astrid remained with her host family for two more years. In Pulsnitz, she joined with her Lutheran hosts in attending church, and they even wanted her to be baptized as a Lutheran, because her LDS baptism had been postponed. Astrid eventually learned the local dialect and felt very much at home in her Saxon refuge.

Part of Astrid Koch's Pulsnitz experience was her membership in the Jungvolk program. She fondly recalled helping make wood toys for children, for example: "We had to sand them and paint them. And we went on outings and field trips, and we collected magazines from local people. Those were for the wounded so they had something to read in the hospitals. They made half of our school into a hospital. When I was a member of the school choir, we went over to the hospital and sang for them at Christmas."

Fig. 10. The Zwick family acquired this small garden house just before the war and lived in it after they were bombed out. (F. Zwick)

After the horrific summer of 1943, Maria Niemann took her children north to the town of Hude in Schleswig-Holstein. They found a very pleasant apartment there; but according to her son Henry, they had no contact with the church for the next four years. Maria continued to have health crises and was in the hospital again when her husband came home on leave. Although she recognized the hand of God in saving her from the destruction of Hamburg, she was without her husband for four years beginning in 1944. It was an especially discouraging time, during which her father-in-law died. Regarding her absent husband, her prayer often included the same plea: "Heavenly Father, don't let him [have to] kill anybody."[41]

In early 1943, Werner Sommerfeld was sent away from the dangerous life of Hamburg residents. Placed on a farm in Hungary, he was fed by Germans and for the first time in recent memory, he had "enough to eat for an entire year." After a year of life in an area where there was essentially no war, he rejoined his family, but not in Hamburg. His mother had taken the children to Jungbuch, her hometown in Czechoslovakia. Werner was still a small teenager and thus avoided being taken away into military service; he was free to begin an apprenticeship in plumbing. It was about that time that Arthur Sommerfeld was drafted and sent to Russia (despite the severe burns he suffered in July 1943) and that their father, Gustav, was sent to France, where he soon became a prisoner of the British and was moved to England.[42]

Anna Marie Frank (born 1919) had lost her apartment on July 28, 1943, and her two-year-old daughter, Marianne, had disappeared in the smoke and flames of the burning city. Sister Frank was then evacuated to eastern Germany with her son Rainer (only fourteen months old). While there, another disaster befell the family when Rainer contracted diphtheria and died in April 1944. Bereft of both of her children, Anna Marie returned to Hamburg and found a job in a factory and mill where she sewed bags for flour. She worked there through the end of the war and for some time afterward. It was not until 1946 that she learned that her husband, Willy Frank, was a prisoner of war in Yugoslavia. She wrote to him every week from then until his release in 1948.[43]

"After we were bombed out [and lost everything], we lived in the garden plot community," recalled Ingrid Lübke. Her description continues:

> We didn't have electricity, water, or a bathroom. We got our water from a pump, but in the winter it froze and we had to take hot water and pour

> it over the pump so that we could get at least some water. It was also far away and [the bucket] was heavy to carry. When it came to food, it was sparse, but we had an advantage because we had some garden land around our little house. I remember my grandmother telling me one morning: "Look, there are two slices of bread, a little bit of sugar, and some black coffee. That is all I have for today." We ate rutabaga and we ground fish heads so that we could eat them.

Gertrud Menssen's third child, a son named Wolfgang, was born in Bavaria in February 1944. Thinking that Hamburg had been sufficiently destroyed to no longer merit the enemy's attention, Gertrud longed to return and prayed and fasted many times for a confirmation of that plan of action. Her husband had been transferred to a town close to Hamburg and learned that his family could apply for a modular cottage that could be erected on his garden property (to replace the original hut that had since been destroyed). By March, their application was granted and their new cottage constructed. According to Gertrud, "The house was great—it had a big family kitchen and one bedroom just barely big enough for two sets of bunk beds (from a bombed-out shelter) and one crib which was a miracle to find. . . . No plumbing, of course—outhouse only."

Soldier and staff member Walter Menssen was often able to spend weekends with his family. Unfortunately they were still not safe from enemy attacks and he soon dug out a shallow bomb shelter near the cottage. They took a practical approach to life in the last year of the war, as Gertrud recollected: "We did not worry anymore to have to die. We only had one wish every night—that we could all go together. If Walter could be with us, all was fine." In her husband's absence, Gertrud scraped meals together from ration coupons, but had to leave the long lines in front of stores on occasion when the air raid sirens wailed. "It was really bad again, but we lived through it all." They did indeed, and Walter returned shortly after the war to a loving family.[44]

In a most daring move, Walter Menssen forged release papers for two of his brothers-in-law. Because he worked in the air force administration office, he had access to nearly everything he needed to issue papers that would allow his relatives to leave the military early and return home—everything, that is, except the official stamp of that Luftwaffe district. His solution was novel: "I took a fresh egg, cooked it, peeled it, and rolled this egg over an old seal of old papers of mine and then took that egg and put that seal over the new paper I had written." By securing a release for his relatives, Walter may well have saved them a term in a POW camp after the war or even a fate much worse.[45]

In the fall of 1944, orders were given to German soldiers to defend the Mediterranean island of Elba to the last man. Fortunately, Erwin Frank was suffering from malaria at the time and was on the opposite side of the island from the French landing and the combat that ensued. The contingent of three thousand German defenders was soon reduced to three hundred (among them Erwin Frank) who were finally extracted from the island. From that point, Erwin saw only Italy and points north. Whatever the military and the media wished to call the moves of the next few months (such as a "repositioning"), Erwin understood it to be a steady retreat. However, things were not all bleak in his life. On his last wartime visit home, he met and fell in love with a young lady of the Barmbek Branch—Ruth Drachenberg. They were engaged in October 1944.

The St. Georg Branch history includes several comments regarding the few men left in Hamburg as the war dragged on. They were mostly too old to serve in the military, and they took on three, four, or more assignments vacated by the young men who were drafted. However, Hans Gürtler stated in his branch history that the spirit remained very positive among the members as they gathered to worship, and in some respects, the members of the branch grew closer in those challenging times.[46]

As the company clerk, Brother Gürtler traveled frequently during the war but was never in combat and never in danger. In his autobiography, he detailed his route through eastern Europe in

1942–44. He had time to make friendships, carry on extensive correspondence, and write poems to send to his brother Siegfried, an actor and voice talent at the state opera in Bielefeld. In 1943, Hans had moved his wife and their children to the eastern Bavarian town of Cham, where Brother Gürtler sent all possible extra food from his rations (and the booty gained from swapping cigarettes with comrades). Karla Gürtler had lost everything in the destruction of Hamburg but lived in good circumstances with her children in Cham.[47]

Ingeborg Thymian recalled the following about those who attended the meetings in Altona after all three Hamburg branches were united:

> The attendance pretty much stayed the same. What astonished me was that there were many handicapped people in our branch. Even our branch president was blind. We could count the healthy people on one hand. Every other person had some disability, for example having lost a leg or an arm. It was a unique situation and I always wondered why, but I think it must have been because of the war. The branch president also brought his dog with him to the meetings. He would lie next to him at the podium in order to help with anything that his master needed.

"It took us about fifteen or twenty minutes to reach the air-raid shelter from our home," explained Hertha Schönrock regarding air raids during the last year of the war. "We also had to take the stroller with us for Waltraud's baby. One wheel kept falling off, and so it took us even longer. Sometimes, the [illumination flares] were already coming down, and we were still walking." The tension must have been severe at such moments, because the bombers followed the flares marking the target by only a few minutes. One of the raids damaged the roof and the windows of the Schönrock apartment, but eventually there were eleven persons sleeping in the living room.

Even Wilhelmsburg, a suburb south of Hamburg's harbor, was damaged in the attacks. Hertha and Waltraud Schönrock experienced the attacks in terror one night when the British dropped phosphorus bombs, and Waltraud's leg was burned.

> It hurt my leg very badly and I could even stick my fingers into [the holes in] my leg. I sat in water all night, and that relieved the pain. The stairs down to the canal were full of people and . . . they were burning. My husband's pants were on fire, so he jumped into the canal. We saw terrible things. People were sitting by the side of the streets burning. My father and my husband went back the next day to find our grandparents, but they didn't survive.

It was nothing short of remarkable that Richard Pruess found enough building material to restore the lower floors of his Rahlstedt house during the war. "You could hardly get a nail in those days, but we somehow got nails, wood, and glass," recalled Lieselotte. Several Russian POWs were allowed to assist in the reconstruction of the home. The rest of the family out in Poland were worried about the approach of the Red Army from the east and wanted very much to return to Hamburg. A few months later, they did, and "we lived in the basement because there was [almost] nothing upstairs."

Richard Pruess Jr. was a soldier who made a comment often attributed to German LDS young men: "My only wish is that I won't have to kill anybody in this war." His sister, Hilde, heard him make this statement before he left home in the uniform of the Wehrmacht. In August 1944, another sister, Lieselotte, had a remarkable dream:

> My brother [Richard] came to me in a dream. He was a soldier in France at the time. He said, "This is the end for me, but didn't we have beautiful times together? Didn't we have beautiful times when we were little?" In other words, he kind of said good-bye to me. A week or two later, we got the message that he had died. Then I remembered the dream and connected it to the time he died. It was kind of sad when you said good-bye, but the memories he brought to my mind were nice memories.

By the late summer of 1944, former branch president Arthur Zander had been transferred from the Netherlands to France as the Wehrmacht tried to counter the Allied invasion after D-Day. He was wounded, captured there by the Americans, and

then shipped as a POW to the United States. He stayed in Oklahoma until the end of 1945 and then was returned to Germany and Hamburg.

For the last year of the war, Irma Brey served in the Reichsarbeitsdienst. Assigned to work in an underground munitions factory, she was frightened by the Russians who worked with her. She lived in army barracks with other young women. All during her service away from home, on the farm, and in the munitions factory, she was totally isolated from the Church.

Life was difficult for Hamburg residents of all ages, but youngsters like Fred Zwick still found happy ways to pass the time. Before the family's apartment house was destroyed, he played with his friends at a kindling wood business next door. They would climb on the wood piles and make structures with bundles of wood. Later, he lived near a park called "ash mountain" with a playground and a swimming pool. "In the winter, we took our sleds there and went sledding down the little hill made of ash," he explained. Fred met some French laborers at a local greenhouse and he played with them. "Somehow they got hold of some sugar once and made candy for us. They were our favorite guys to be with." Life was not all suffering and privation in wartime Hamburg.

The branch history includes some very sad notes about the members in the early months of 1945 as the war drew to a close: "Not only was it a struggle to make the trek for hours to Altona to the meetings, but the winter of 1944–45 was bitterly cold in the rooms. On the coldest days, the water froze in the sacrament cups! The terrible inflation added to the suffering of many members."[48] With the three branches in the city united as one, the attendance was usually about one hundred persons. There were generally only Sunday meetings held in early 1945.

After two years in the Czech town of Kubice with his school class, Otto Berndt was invited in January 1945 to join the army. As a member of the birth class of 1929, he could not be forced to serve, so he chose to attend the Adolf Hitler School east of

Fig. 11. The Zwick family managed somehow to find a Christmas tree in 1944. (F. Zwick)

Prague. In the confusion of the war, he did not stay at that school but returned to Hamburg instead. Back at home, he was ordered to report for military service but was classified as unfit for regular duty. He was handed a rifle and ordered to join the home guard in defending the city. As he recalled, "I was supposed to be an ammo handler for an 88 mm gun. For some reason it never materialized that I was really drafted. My dad told me, 'Don't be a dead hero.'" Rather than look for a fight to join, Otto Berndt and his father traveled to the town of Nitzow, near Berlin, to gather the rest of the family and move them back to Hamburg. It was already clear that the Nitzow area would be included in the, Soviet occupation zone and President Berndt had no intention of leaving his family in that region.[49]

In early 1945, Hilde Pruess was again away from Hamburg, this time living near the home of the Wagner family, members of the branch in Annaberg-Buchholz in the East German Mission. She enjoyed attending church meetings with the Wagners; but when the Soviet army approached the town, Hilde was put on a train all by herself and sent back to Hamburg. She recalled her fears at the time:

> I was eleven years old and had to cross the country by myself. Suddenly, I met a strange lady who said that I could take the last train to Chemnitz.

> I thought she was an angel. I don't remember if I was carrying a suitcase, but I know that I was praying. I just took train after train until I got to Hamburg. When I arrived at my home, my parents didn't recognize me. I had been gone more than a year and was wearing a hat, so my dad didn't know who I was at first.

Lilly Koch described the challenges of attending church in Altona when her family lived in the distant southern suburb of Harburg—well beyond the Elbe River harbors south of Hamburg: "The streetcars were usually not running on Sundays and it was too far to walk, or there were air-raid alarms and we couldn't go. There were still enough priesthood holders to administer the sacrament if we did attend the meetings. Before the war, we had enjoyed special programs and celebrations, but during the war such events were not possible." The Koch family survived the war intact. "During the air raids, we sat in the basement in the corner as a family and prayed to our Heavenly Father to help us," explained Lilly.

In February 1945, political prisoner Karl-Heinz Schnibbe was released from his prison cell on an island of the Elbe River. ("It felt like Alcatraz to me.") He was allowed a short visit with his mother before he was sent to the east to help defend Germany against the Soviet invaders. While with his mother, he spent several precious hours sitting in an air-raid shelter beneath the main railroad station. Among other news, his mother told him that she and his father needed more than three hours to walk through the rubble of the inner city from their home to the meetings in Altona. After their talk, Karl-Heinz left the air-raid shelter and departed immediately for the Eastern Front. He would not see his mother again until 1949.

The last major air raid over Hamburg occurred in March 1945. Karl Schönrock recalled being a bit too far from the concrete bunker when the alarms sounded, but wanting very much to get there:

> The soldiers were just ready to close the door as I came running, and I got in there and only a few minutes later we got a direct hit on that [bunker]. As a matter of fact, it tilted towards the crater. . . . It's a strange feeling when the earth shakes like in an earthquake. And they didn't just drop a bomb here and there; it was carpet bombing. We had about a dozen craters on the soccer field right next to our home. We had one big crater in the backyard which was maybe thirty yards away from the house where it hit our favorite apple tree (the tree disappeared). The crater was big enough to put half a house in, mostly because the ground there was really soft. . . . It looked like the craters of the moon.

In the last months of the war, Inge Laabs learned what it was like to go without the basic necessities of life: "I remember that it was hard to find anything to wear to keep warm. Our shoes were worn and our clothing had holes. We were cold."[50] It was hard for Inge to see her hometown in ruins: "Some parts of the city were closed to pedestrians because so many dead people were lying in the streets." The war ended on Inge's seventeenth birthday, May 8, 1945; but just a few weeks before that, she and her family members were still trying to avoid attacks by dive-bombers. "We couldn't even go out to get water without something dangerous happening. When they attacked us, we jumped into the bushes. We also couldn't make fires to cook or keep us warm." Regarding her attitude toward the death and destruction of the war, Inge stated, "I tried to make the best of everything and turn it into a positive experience. Now I know that I was often protected by my Heavenly Father."

Although he did not qualify for military service, Werner Schönrock came close to losing his life in early 1945. Caught outside in a sudden air raid, he felt a piece of shrapnel hit his hand. He was standing at that moment next to a neighbor who was home on leave from the army. That neighbor sustained such drastic shrapnel wounds that he lost a leg. In the same attack, a bomb fell into the apartment building where the Schönrock family lived, but the damage was not severe. According to Werner, "We were lucky that nothing else happened that day."

The American advance overtook Gerd Fricke's unit in 1945. "One time they attacked us with phosphorus, and I thought I wouldn't survive." A buddy was killed just a few feet from where Gerd was standing. The advancing GIs soon made Gerd a POW. His experience of being incarcerated by the Americans in Germany was very short but not as pleasant as reported by German POWs who spent time in the United States. According to Gerd:

> We slept in a potato field and [the guards] enjoyed seeing us get wet when it rained. [One day] they drove us out of Ulm [in southern Germany] and demanded that we give them everything we owned. Then they allowed us to do whatever we wanted, so many of us simply started to walk home. [The Americans] didn't want to give us a train ticket home, but I protested, saying that I had fought for my country and now I deserved to ride the train home. I rode on a coal car and was filthy when I got home. It was wonderful to see everybody again. My mother hadn't known if I was alive or not because I hadn't been allowed to write home while I was a POW.

Far from the rubble of Hamburg, Sister Niemann and her two children were spared the ravages of war and a dangerous invasion. According to her son, Henry, the war ended in the town of Hude when the last German defenders retreated through the area. "The British came with their tanks and rolled through. They were there and that was it."[51] Henry had just turned nine years old and had little recollection of life without war.

With the British army just twenty miles from Hamburg, Walter Menssen decided that he was through with the war. Discarding his uniform in favor of a civilian suit, he packed his things and was ready to leave his quarters when his commanding officer entered. Thinking that he might be shot as a deserter, Walter was relieved when the man offered him the use of his staff car to go home. "No, I take the motorbike," he replied. "I wish I could do it [go home] too, but I can't," replied the officer. Walter's unit left for the Danish border to the north but ran into the British on the way. The ensuing battle cost many of the men their lives even though the war was long since lost.[52]

For Astrid Koch in faraway Pulsnitz, the war ended when Polish soldiers appeared in town and began to loot. They were driven out by the locals, but soon the Soviet army appeared, and life for Astrid (not yet thirteen) became a little frightening. Her host family took her, and they fled for a few miles but were overtaken by the conquerors. As she recalled:

> We had to be careful because they were after all the girls and women. A lot of people got raped. The niece of the people I stayed with was twelve years old, and she got raped. My hosts must have been scared to death taking care of me. They hid me in a building where they made elastic stuff. When the Russians came back, they went looking for the women and children. We had a man looking out for us, and he told us to hide. So they put us in one kind of a storage room and put boxes and everything in front of the door, but they found out there was a door behind it. So they had us all come out, all of us women and children. A soldier with a big gun told us to stay outside in the sun, but only one woman was raped, and nothing happened to the rest of us.

On May 6, 1945, the commanding officer of Erwin Frank's unit made these comments: "They want us to stay together in case they need us for some action or cleanup, [but] if any of you think you can make it home, you're welcome to try. I can't give you any release papers, so you'll be on your own." Erwin went to the nearest village where he found people who could provide him with civilian clothing and a bicycle. He needed to ride his bike for only one day to reach Hamburg. He was home, but without official release papers from the British occupation authority, he could get neither employment nor ration coupons. In August 1945, he reported to the authorities in Hanover and was given the necessary papers.[53] That month, he married Ruth Drachenberg, and they began a new life without National Socialism.

When the British army entered Hamburg, no attempt was made to defend the city. Ingrid Lübke

had positive recollections of her encounters with the "Tommies": "The British came to Hamburg first, and the children ran out to meet them and they gave us chocolate. I didn't know what a roll was or a banana and an orange but we could suddenly buy them again in the grocery stores." All over western Germany, children were treated very kindly by the invading forces, and many LDS eyewitnesses would later tell of such encounters with fond memories.

Three days after returning home (in time to greet his new baby girl), Walter Menssen was arrested by the British, but his charmed life in the service seemed to continue. Despite being terribly hungry and lacking proper facilities on occasion, he was home with his family in a few months and immediately joined the surviving Saints who were meeting in the Altona Branch rooms.[54]

With peace restored and the war ended, the dispersed members of the St. Georg Branch began to return to their devastated city. According to Hans Gürtler:

> From wherever they had been scattered, fled, or sent all over Germany, they came back in the summer of 1945—the families, the mothers with their children, the widows, the flak assistant girls and the brethren who were fortunate to be POWs for just a short time. But many, many did not return. Several men were still missing in action and others still in POW camps.[55]

Hans Gürtler spent the last few months of the war in Hungary and Austria. He was taken prisoner by the Americans near Salzburg in May 1945, and it was then that he first experienced the trials of being a soldier. Going without food, water, or shelter for days on end, he lost his favorite possessions as GIs divested him of most of his personal property. Moved across southern Germany to France, he was handed over to the French and put to work. In St. Avold he experienced what he would call "the worst experiences of my POW time." Although he allied himself with the cultural arts groups in the camp, he worked with a crew of prisoners assigned to remove land mines from the countryside. The danger was severe, and he became seriously ill at least once.[56]

Hans Gürtler's daughter Therese summarized her sentiments about the war and her belief in God in these words:

> We didn't have to maintain a testimony. It was just always there. There was never anything happening that would endanger my testimony, or where I would question that maybe God didn't love me because I had to suffer. I don't have any ill memories of the war. None at all. Only the sound, when the air raid was announced. That is a sound that was frightful. But I don't have any negative memories from the war. So my testimony was never attacked. It was intact.

Marie Sommerfeld and her children were quite safe in Czechoslovakia until the last months of the war, when Germans in that area became personae non gratae. At first, Czech authorities told them to leave, and then the Soviets took over and forced their departure. Loading their things into a two-wheeled cart, they slowly made their way toward the German border. With nothing to eat, they dug for potatoes in nearby fields. Because of the reports of molestation by conquering Soviets, Marie's daughters dressed as boys and tucked their hair into their caps to avoid attracting attention. Werner was brokenhearted when Russian soldiers stole his accordion. Near the city of Dresden, Leni Sommerfeld became separated from the family—apparently abducted by a Russian. As Werner later wrote, "We waited and searched in the city of Dresden, hoping against hope that she would turn up. In the end there was nothing for us to do but to press on for Hamburg." Sister Sommerfeld was suffering from a serious kidney ailment during the entire trip home, and the loss of her daughter was nearly overwhelming. About one month after arriving in Hamburg, Leni showed up and reported that she had managed to escape harm during the separation from her family. The only place the Sommerfelds could find to live was in the basement of an apartment building under construction; there were no doors or windows in the structure. During the winter of 1945–46, they came

close to freezing to death, and both Arthur (already home from the Eastern Front) and daughter Mary became seriously ill. Fortunately, everybody survived the trials and Gustav Sommerfeld eventually returned from his tenure as a POW.

Looking back on the difficult experiences of the war, Werner Sommerfeld made this summary statement:

> The German people are good, strong, faithful people, and my mother in particular was a woman of great faith. Many times, she didn't know where she would get food for her five children. She prayed many times and there were many, many miracles in her life where she just found food at the door or somebody just came by with food. And that was not just true with our family. The [Latter-day Saints] trusted in the Lord and lived by faith each and every day.[57]

When Arthur Zander returned to Hamburg in 1946, he found his wife and his three sons living in a tiny (six-by-twelve-foot) garden shed. The structure was so small that according to Ingo, "there were no utilities at all, because it was not designed for people to actually live there. In the morning we had to take out our beds to make way for a table and chairs and at night we reversed the procedure."

As a seventeen-year-old, Harald Fricke had finished his service with the Reichsarbeitsdienst and was drafted into the Wehrmacht. Stationed near the Baltic Sea, his unit was passed by as the Red Army rushed toward Berlin. After the war, he and his comrades were transported as POWs to the city of Stalingrad, where they helped clean up and reconstruct that important industrial center. He recalled some of the trials of the experience:

> At the age of nineteen, I suffered from constant hunger and the lack of proper hygiene. I only survived because a Russian woman doctor sneaked me some medicine and hid me when it came time for physical examinations. Every day German soldiers died in the camp and their bodies were loaded onto small carts and dumped into mass graves. While working near the Volga River during the winter [of 1945–46], the tip of the big toe on my right foot was lost to frostbite and I suffered from thrombosis and other illnesses. This made me incapable of working and I shrank to skin and bones. So they shipped me home which was a great blessing.[58]

When Harald returned to Hamburg, his mother told him that she had constantly prayed that somebody would care about and for her son. The Russian doctor had been that somebody.

In the summer of 1946, Hans Gürtler was released from the POW camp in France and sent to Münster in northwest Germany to be processed out of the military. He immediately made his way back to the northern Hamburg suburb of Rahlstedt, where his family had been living since the end of the war. Not knowing precisely where his family lived, he tossed pebbles against windows after midnight until he woke neighbors who could give directions. He recalled the reunion: "Karla woke up and then . . . she and the children, all of them suddenly wide awake, came down in their pajamas. What a reunion!" They entertained each other with stories as he unpacked the goodies he had brought home—including many poems, a piece of leather, and a chess game. "After six years, I was finally free!" he wrote.[59]

Since March 1941, Karla Gürtler had taken care of four children almost totally by herself. However, she recalled the life of a single mother in positive terms: "Of course it's difficult to be a mother in the war, but everyone was in the same boat. When times got tough, I lived through them the best I could. I had to live for my children. And I think the link to the Church was more intensive during such a time because we needed the faith."[60]

After spending four years away from Hamburg, Maria Niemann finally returned to her apartment in 1946. Although extensively damaged in the air raids, it had been repaired, and refugees were living there when the Niemanns arrived. At first, the refugees insisted that they had forfeited their rights to the apartment by being absent for so long, but city officials intervened and asked the refugees to leave. Maria was home, but she had not heard from

her husband since the end of the war. "I prayed and my children prayed," she recalled, "and my daughter put his picture in the window every day and said, 'My father, please come home, I love you.'"[61]

In the summer of 1946, Astrid Koch's mother made her way illegally across the border into the Soviet occupation zone to pick up her daughter in Pulsnitz. There were serious challenges to be overcome when the two made their way back to the British zone, but they managed to do so without injury. After being away from Hamburg for five of the previous six years, Astrid lived with her family in a small apartment her father had found in the rubble of the port city. The Kochs were together again and looked forward to a totally new phase of life.

Frieda Brey and her children had spent three years in the Catholic city of Bamberg in southern Germany. It was a beautiful town, and they enjoyed the peace that prevailed there, but it was a happy day when they returned to Hamburg in 1946. Two years later, former district president Alwin Brey was released from a POW camp and made the trek home to his family.

Willy Frank (born 1915) was captured in Yugoslavia at the end of the war. As a POW there, he wrote to his wife, Anna Marie, every week; but until 1946, he did not know whether she was actually alive. Finally, his message got through via the Red Cross; he was able to write to her and she was able to write back to him. They had lost their two children, and this was a very lonely time for both. One day in 1948, it was announced that his group would be transported to Germany. They rode in boxcars from Yugoslavia to Germany; then they were allowed to ride in first-class coaches for the rest of the trip to Hamburg. For his time and labor as a prisoner of war, he was paid a total of 50 Marks (about thirteen dollars). He had lost nearly half of his weight during his term as a POW.[62]

The war was fully four years in the past when Fred Zwick's father returned from a POW camp in 1949. Sister Zwick had written many letters after the war to locate her husband. It was likely a very sad time for her, but she did not express that openly to her son. As Fred recalled, "Children really weren't included in family affairs or with parents. Children weren't told much." Finally, a connection was established with Fred's father through the Russian Red Cross, and things began to look up. When he returned, his wife and his son were still living in the garden cottage.

"When I came back to Hamburg in 1949, the city was one big heap of rubble," recalled Karl-Heinz Schnibbe. As a political prisoner and then a POW in Russia, he had sacrificed seven years of his young life, but he was happy to be home with his family. "The streets were cleared, and the rubble was piled up on the sides. And everywhere things were being built up and repaired again. I found my street right away."

Perhaps more than any other LDS branch in the West German Mission, the St. Georg Branch was practically broken apart during World War II. After losing their comparatively luxurious meetinghouse, the members had been dispersed all over the continent. Many families were homeless and separated, taking refuge in what they hoped were safe and peaceful locations within Germany. In essentially every case, they were isolated from the Church while away from Hamburg. Those who stayed in the city during the war and could still attend church meetings made the long trek through the rubble of their city to the meeting hall in Altona, where important vestiges of their Latter-day Saint existence were maintained. There were enough older men at home to administer in all priesthood functions. With the war over, the Saints of the St. Georg Branch would need nearly five years to gather home, and their branch was never reconstituted. Beginning in the summer of 1945, they became members of several new branches in and around the city of Hamburg. At least forty members of the branch (10 percent) did not live to see peace return to Germany.

In Memoriam

The following members of the St. Georg Branch did not survive World War II:

Walter Heinrich Johannes Bankowski b. Hamburg 19 Nov 1910; son of Ludwig August Otto Bankowski and Auguste Caroline Sievers; bp. 28 Jan 1930; conf. 28 Jan 1930; ord. deacon 13 Oct 1930; ord. priest 4 Jan 1932; ord. elder 26 Feb 1935; m. Hamburg 24 Mar or Apr 1937, Anna Wittig; d. stomach tumor 19 June 1944; bur. Pomezia, Italy (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 19; www.volksbund.de; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 8; IGI)

Martin Heinrich Friedrich Bergmann b. Fliegenfelde, Stormarn, Schleswig-Holstein, 23 Jun 1887; son of Christian Friedrich Bergmann and Luise Dorothea Anna Kämpfer; bp. 2 Jun 1911; conf. 2 Jun 1911; ord. elder 2 Jun 1927; m. 5 Jun 1943, Caroline Kropp; k. air raid 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 37; CHL CR 275 8, no. 317; CHL 10603, 118)

Ilse Johanna Charlotte Blischke b. Burg, Jerichow, Sachsen, 25 May 1911; dau. of Fritz Blischke and Anna Louise Graul; bp. 17 Feb 1925; conf. 17 Feb 1925; missing as of 20 Mar 1946 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 31; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 231)

Carl Waldemar Bobbermin b. Itzehoe, Steinburg, Schleswig-Holstein, 2 Jul 1911; son of Wilhelm Fr. August Bobbermin and Auguste Krempien; bp. 22 Apr 1923; conf. 22 Apr 1923; k. while deactivating bombs 17 Apr 1947 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 42)

Emma Ida Bochnia b. Klein-Lassowitz, Rosenberg, Schlesien, 21 Nov 1901; dau. of Friedrich Bochnia and Bertha Maleck or Malesk; bp. 27 Dec 1931; conf. 17 Dec 1931; m. 21 Nov 1936, Johann Friedrich Paul Haase; k. air raid Hamburg 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 139; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 64; CHL 10603, 118)

Elke Brey b. Hamburg 19 May 1942; dau. of Alwin Max Brey and Frieda Ocker; d. scarlet fever 27 May 1945 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 49; IGI)

Carla Maria Cizinsky b. Hamburg 16 or 18 Aug 1942; dau. of Walter Theodor Wilhelm Cizinsky and Carla Maria Krüger; d. diphtheria 16 Mar or May 1945 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 60; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 478; IGI)

Alfred Werner Frank Fick b. Hamburg 6 Jul 1925; son of Richard Karl Wilhelm Fick and Grete Anna Elisabeth Schloss; bp. 18 Sep 1933; MIA 1 Jun 1943 (E. Frank; www.volksbund.de; IGI, PRF)

Marianne Sonja Frank b. Hamburg 14 Jun 1941; dau. of Willy Richard Otto Frank and Anneliese Haase; k. air raid Hamburg 27 or 28 July 1943 (FHL microfilm, location by W. Frank; FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 105; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 451)

Rainer Willy Frank b. Hamburg 12 Feb 1943; son of Willy Richard Otto Frank and Anneliese Haase; d. diphtheria East Germany 18 Apr 1944 (Haase-Frank; IGI)

Bertha Sophie Marie Gebert b. Tews-Woos, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 2 Aug 1882; dau. of Wilhelm Gebert and Marie Mahnke; bp. 9 Sep 1911; conf. 9 Sep 1911; k. air raid 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 119; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 284; CHL 10603, 118)

Karl Adolf H. Geerken b. Hamburg 28 Mar 1879; son of Heinrich Klaus Geerken and Johanna Dorothea Christ. Gale; bp. 1 Nov 1913; conf. 1 Nov 1913; ord. teacher 2 Nov 1919; ord. priest 7 Mar 1920; ord. elder 25 Jul 1926; k. air raid 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 120; CHL CR 275 8, no. 320; CHL 10603, 118)

Erna Luise Marie Groth b. Hamburg 21 Nov 1894; dau. of Heinrich Johann Groth and Louise Sophie Johanne Törber; bp. 27 Oct 1922; conf. 27 Oct 1922; m. —— Schulz; k. air raid 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 2, no. 129; CHL CR 275 8, no. 557; FHL microfilm 25778, 1930 and 1935 censuses; CHL 10603, 118)

Rudolf Reinhold Groth b. Hamburg, 2 Jan 1916; son of Adolf Brauer and Erna Luise Marie Groth; bp. 16 Aug 1924; conf. 16 Aug 1924; ord. deacon 13 Oct 1930; ord. teacher 6 Jan 1935; ord. priest 1 Nov 1937; ord. elder; k. air raid 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (G. Fricke; IGI; FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 128; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 57; CHL 10603, 118)

Anna Emma Guddat b. Tilsit, Ostpreußen, 26 Oct 1900; dau. of Heinrich Gustav Gudat and Wilhelmine Reszeleit; bp. 8 Sep 1911; conf. 8 Sep 1911; m. 1919, —— Kunkel (div.), 2m. Johannes Ernst Carl Sudrow; k. air raid 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 230; CHL CR 275 8, no. 888; FS)

Otto Bruno Günther b. Hartenstein, Zwickau, Sachsen, 12 Oct 1869; son of Ernst Wilhelm Günther and Marie Heise; bp. 7 Jun 1935; conf. 9 Jun 1935; ord. deacon 6 Apr 1936; ord. teacher 6 Dec 1936; ord. priest 17 Oct 1937; ord. elder 24 Sep 1939; k. air raid 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 129; CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, 74–75; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 251; CHL 10603, 118)

Johann Friedrich Paul Haase b. Röslau, Karthaus, Westpreussen, 7 Apr 1892; son of Johann Haase and Auguste Dornburg; bp. 27 Jun 1911; conf. 27 Jun 1911; ord. deacon 22 Oct 1916; ord. teacher 15 Oct 1919; ord. priest 7 Mar 1920; ord. elder 25 Jul 1926; m. 3 Apr 1914 Anna Wilhelmine Wischmann, 2 sons, 2 dau.; m. 21 Nov 1936, Emma Ida Bochnia; k. air raid Hamburg 27 or

28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 138; CHL CR 275 8, no. 318; CHL 10603, 118)

Juliane Friedel Harms b. Hamburg 25 Apr 1935; dau. of Herbert Ernst Alexander Harms and Frieda Anna Auguste Mücke; d. Hamburg 3 Oct 1940 (FHL microfilm 162775, 1935 census; IGI)

Dora Marie Sofie Heckler b. Hannover, Hannover, 1 Apr 1891; dau. of Emil Wulf Heckler and Dorette Marie Hering; bp. 30 Mar 1924; conf. 30 Mar 1924; d. breast cancer 30 Jan 1944 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 146)

Bertha Franziska Anna Herrmann b. Hamburg 18 Jan 1888; dau. of Ernst Heinrich David Herrmann and Helene Auguste Franziska Sperber; bp. 15 Apr 1908; conf. 15 Apr 1908; m. Hamburg 1 Feb 1908, Johann Heinrich Carsten Harms; 1 or 2 children; 2m. 18 Dec 1930, Adolf Haimerl; k. air raid Hamburg 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 151; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 576; IGI, AF)

Helmuth Hübener b. Hamburg 8 Jan 1925; son of Emma A. Gudat; bp. Hamburg 27 May 1933; conf. 28 May 1933; ord. deacon Hamburg 3 May 1937; executed for treason Berlin 27 Oct 1942 (Tobler; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 994)

Hermann Otto Kluwe b. Berlin, Brandenburg, 5 Dec 1895; son of Martha Kluwe; bp. 30 Sep 1927; conf. 30 Sep 1927; ord. deacon 5 Aug 1928; ord. elder 5 May 1930; m. Hamburg 9 Mar 1935, Tony Elfriede Kayser; d. stomach cancer Oranienburg, Niederbarnim, Brandenburg, 28 Feb 1940 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 178; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 733; IGI)

Heinrich Gustav Knop b. Koblenz, Rheinprovinz, Preussen, 3 Mar 1874; son Heinrich Wilhelm Knop and Pauline Friederike Bartz; bp. 25 May 1908; conf. 25 May 1908; ord. priest 15 Oct 1919; m. 9 Aug 1901, Frieda Christine Caroline Ihde; d. 9 Feb 1941 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 185; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 591; IGI)

Karl Otto Friedrich Köhler b. Pritten, Dramburg, Pommern, 5 Apr 1883; son of Karl Kesch and Wilhelmine Friederike Dorothea Köhler; bp. 15 Sep 1906; conf. 15 Sep 1906; ord. deacon 23 Feb 1914; ord. teacher 15 Oct 1919; ord. priest 7 Mar 1920; ord. elder 27 Feb 1921; m. Stettin, Pommern 9 Jun 1906, Elsa Emma Auguste Laabs; 6 children; d. pneumonia Wilhelmsburg, Harburg, Hannover, Preussen, 11 Aug 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 197; CHL CR 275 8, no. 321; FHL microfilm 271381, 1935 census; IGI)

Gerhard Karl Paul Köhler b. Wilhelmsburg, Harburg, Hannover, 7 Apr 1921; noncommissioned officer, d. Deksekuli Kurld (near Latvia) 3 Mar 1945; bur. Saldus, Latvia (www.volksbund.de)

Minna Auguste Anna Karoline Konow b. Lauenburg, Lauenburg, Schleswig-Holstein, 4 Mar 1889; dau. of Carl Joachim Friedrich Konow and Bertha Dorothea Elise Kummerfeld; m. —— Kardell; d. 1 May 1940 (IGI; FHL microfilm 271376, 1935 census)

Felix Richard Krause b. Marienthal, Zwickau, Sachsen, 19 Jul 1896; son of Karl August Krause and Maria Hulda Uhlmann; bp. 18 May 1911; conf. 18 May 1911; m. Hedwig Toni Auguste Witt; 2 children; k. in battle France 7 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 214; CHL CR 275 8, no. 667; CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, 74–75; IGI)

Dorothea Lina Krüger b. Wittenberge, Westprignitz, Brandenburg, 16 Jun 1871; dau. of Karl Krüger and Wilhelmine Kaeppen; bp. 17 Aug 1900; conf. 17 Aug 1900; m. Karl Unbereit; k. air raid Hamburg 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, 74–75; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 675; FHL microfilm 245289, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Marie Sophie Lengies b. Hamburg, 20 Aug 1901; dau. of Wilhelm Friedrich Lengies and Johanna Elise Eleonore Ludewig; bp. 10 Sep 1909; conf. 10 Sep 1909; m. 2 Feb 1923, Franz Bohnhorst (div.); missing as of 20 Mar 1946 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 42; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 306; FHL microfilm 25726, 1930 census; IGI)

Ulrich Ernst Julius Lenschow b. Hamburg, 3 May 1920; son of Heinrich August Christian Lenschow and Emma Erna Karoline Katharine Lenschow; k. MIA Heiligenbeil or Kosselbude or Zinten, Ostpreußen 1 Mar 1945 (Gellersen; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

Herbert Paul Lode b. Hamburg 11 Apr 1918; son of Fritz Lode and Frieda Marie Haase; bp. 26 Nov 1927; conf. 26 Nov 1927; k. in battle Acca, France, 20 May 1940 (CHL CR 275 8, no. 963; Otto Berndt Report A 4560: 71; IGI, AF)

Anna Dorothea Henriette Noack b. Hamburg 18 Dec 1873; dau. of Adolf Carl Eduard Noack and Anna Catharina Margaretha Piening; bp. 8 Jan 1926; conf. 8 Jan 1926; m. Hamburg 25 Oct 1910, Hans Heinrich Becker; 6 children; d. heart attack Husum, Schleswig-Holstein 25 Apr 1944 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 17; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 347; IGI, AF)

Wilhelmine Resgoleik b. Groß Trumpeiten, Niederung, Ostpreußen, 19 Mar 1877; dau. of Johann Resgoleik and Marie Dalladat; bp. 31 Oct 1909; conf. 31 Oct 1909; m. 26 Jan 1923, Johann E. Carl Sudrow; k. air raid Hamburg 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 2, no. 131; CHL CR 275 8, no. 665)

Hans Heinrich Max Franz Vick Ruwoldt b. Wokrent, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 9 Feb 1892; son of Heinrich Karl Johann Vick Ruwoldt and Friederike Wilhelmine Sophie Peters; bp. 7 Oct 1926; conf. 7 Oct

1926; ord. deacon 17 Mar 1930; ord. teacher 6 Sep 1931; ord. priest 7 May 1933; ord. elder 3 Jun 1935; m. Alt-Meteln, Mecklenburg-Schwerin 25 Apr 1919, Berta Anna Minna Schmaal; 1 child; k. air raid Hamburg 12 Aug 1943; bur. Ohlsdorf, Hamburg (Otto Berndt report A 4560:71; www.volksbund.de; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 484; IGI, AF)

Johannes Ernst Carl Sudrow b. Röbel, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 7 Feb 1865; son of Johann Heinrich Christian Sudrow and Marie Sophie Friederika Fleischer; bp. 22 Apr 1923; conf. 22 Apr 1923; ord. deacon 8 Dec 1923; ord. teacher 10 Oct 1926; ord. priest 6 Jan 1935; ord. elder 7 Jun 1936; m. Pauline Emma Louise Viebeck; k. air raid Hamburg 27 or 28 or 29 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 2, no. 130; CHL 10603, 118)

Louise Sophie Johanna Törber b. Klein Hundorf, Mecklenburg-Schwerin, 21 Dec 1873; dau. of Friedrich Törber and Dorothea Berg; bp. 27 Oct 1922; conf. 27 Oct 1922; m. Heinrich Johann Groth; k. air raid 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 1, no. 127; CHL CR 275 8, no. 558; CHL 10603, 118)

Emilie H. Gertrud Unbereit b. Hamburg 4 Jan 1902; dau. of Karl Unbereit and Dorothea Lina Krüger; bp. 9 Mar 1911; conf. 9 Mar 1911; k. air raid Hamburg 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, 74–75; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 676; FHL microfilm 245289, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

Karl Unbereit b. Hamburg 5 Dec 1903; son of Karl Unbereit and Dorothea Lina Krüger; bp. 17 Mar 1912; conf. 17 Mar 1912; k. air raid Hamburg 27 or 28 Jul 1943 (CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, 74–75; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 677; FHL microfilm 245289, 1930 and 1935 censuses)

Bertha Wiedemann b. Seifersdorf, Liegnitz, Schlesien, 28 Apr 1871; dau. of Franz Wiedemann and Magdalena Poppe; bp. 24 Feb 1924; conf. 24 Feb 1924; m. —— Schmidt; d. dropsy 10 Jan 1945 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 2, no. 94; CHL CR 275 8, no. 917; IGI)

Heinrich Wilhelm Worbs b. Nieder Baumgarten, Boltenhain, Schlesien, 21 Nov 1875; son of Heinrich Wilhelm Worbs and Rosa Helene Kuttig; bp. 29 Sep 1922; conf. 29 Sep 1922; ord. teacher 13 Mar 1927; ord. priest 14 Jun 1942; d. pneumonia from concentration camp 8 Oct 1945 (FHL microfilm 68804, book 2, no. 171)

Notes

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
2. Hans Gürtler, "Geschichte der Gemeinde St. Georg" (unpublished history, 1969), 46; private collection.
3. Hertha Schoenrock Hoffmann, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, August 21, 2009. The font of the St. Georg Branch meeting rooms was one of only three in all of Germany.
4. Ingo Zander, interview by the author, West Jordan, UT, March 2, 2007.
5. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
6. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 10045 2.
7. Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, interview by the author in German, Salt Lake City, February 3, 2006.
8. Erwin Frank, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, November 17, 2006.
9. Gerd Fricke, interview by the author in German, Hamburg, Germany, August 15, 2006; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
10. Lieselotte Pruess Schmidt, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, December 1, 2006.
11. Otto Albert Berndt, "The Life and Times of Otto Albert Berndt" (unpublished autobiography); private collection.
12. Karl Schoenrock, interview by the author, Ogden, UT, May 30, 2006.
13. Werner Willi Schönrock, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in German, March 17, 2008.
14. Ingeborg Thymian Schaaf, interview by Jennifer Heckmann in German, Göppingen, Germany, August 18, 2006.
15. Astrid Koch Fischer, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, March 24, 2006.
16. Gertrud Frank Menssen, autobiography (unpublished); private collection.
17. Walter Menssen, autobiographical interview, 1974; private collection.
18. Therese Gürtler, autobiography (unpublished).
19. Therese Gürtler Frey, interview by Michael Corley, Salt Lake City, March 14, 2008.
20. Werner Sommerfeld, autobiography, (unpublished); private collection.
21. Harald Fricke, interview by the author in German, Hamburg, Germany, August 15, 2006.
22. Maria Kreutner Niemann, "An Evening with Maria" (unpublished speech, 1988), transcribed by JoAnn P. Knowles; private collection.
23. Herta Schoenrock Hoffmann, interview by the authors, August 21, 2009, Taylorsville, UT.
24. Hilde Pruess Mueller, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, August 9, 2007.
25. Gürtler, "Geschichte der Gemeinde St. Georg," 33.
26. According to Ingo, "I asked my father once if he was a Nazi, and he said 'no.'"
27. Blake indicated that this particular sign was not posted at any LDS meeting location.
28. Berndt, "Life and Times of Otto Albert Berndt."
29. See the Hamburg District chapter for details on this sad episode in the history of the St. Georg Branch.

30. Gürtler, "Geschichte der Gemeinde St. Georg," 35. As it turned out, the fate of the three boys was not generally known. Eyewitnesses from other branches in the West German Mission state that they never heard of Helmut Hübener until decades after the war. It is possible that only the mission leaders knew and felt it inappropriate to spread the sad report.
31. The apparently harsh action by Hamburg Branch and District leaders was considered to be a political necessity of the time and nobody was reprimanded.
32. Walter Menssen, autobiographical interview.
33. Ingrid Lübke Rutz, telephone interview with Judith Sartowski in German, February 20, 2008.
34. Gürtler, "Geschichte der Gemeinde St. Georg," 35. There is no suggestion that the Helmut Hübener affair had anything to do with the loss of the rooms at Besenbinderhof. With increasing damage to the city, such rooms were needed by government agencies and war-critical industries.
35. Berndt, "Life and Times of Otto Albert Berndt."
36. Gertrud Frank Menssen, autobiography.
37. Lilly Rosa Auguste Koch Eloo, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in German, March 7, 2008.
38. Irma Brey Glas, interview by Michael Corley, Taylorsville, UT, October 10, 2008.
39. Fred Zwick, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, June 29, 2007.
40. Waltraud Schoenrock Kunkel, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, August 21, 2009.
41. Niemann, "Evening with Maria."
42. Werner Sommerfeld, autobiography.
43. Anna Marie Haase Frank, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, October 27, 2006.
44. Gertrud Frank Menssen, autobiography.
45. Walter Menssen, autobiographical interview.
46. Gürtler, "Geschichte der Gemeinde St. Georg," 33–34.
47. Hans Gürtler, unpublished autobiography, n.p.
48. Gürtler, "Geschichte der Gemeinde St. Georg," 37. See the Altona Branch chapter for descriptions of damage to the meetinghouse roof and skylights that resulted in such cold conditions.
49. Berndt, "Life and Times of Otto Albert Berndt."
50. Inge Laabs Vieregge, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in Germany, October 2008.
51. Henry Niemann, interview by Michael Corley, South Jordan, UT, October 31, 2008.
52. Walter Menssen, autobiographical interview.
53. Walter Menssen claimed to have provided forged release papers for Erwin, but this account makes no mention of such papers.
54. Walter Menssen, autobiographical interview.
55. Gürtler, "Geschichte der Gemeinde St. Georg," 37.
56. Hans Gürtler, unpublished autobiography, n.p.
57. Werner Sommerfeld, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, January 19, 2007.
58. Harald Fricke, autobiography (unpublished, 2003); private collection.
59. Hans Gürtler, unpublished autobiography, n.p.
60. Karla Schreiner Gürtler, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, July 12, 2007.
61. Niemann, "Evening with Maria."
62. Willy Frank, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, October 27, 2006.

Stade Branch

Situated in the flatlands about two miles west of the Elbe River, Stade was a city of 88,548 when World War II approached.[1] Ten miles from the huge port of Hamburg, the city was home to a very small branch of Latter-day Saints, not even twenty people. With so few members of the Church in Stade, the list of branch leaders is far from complete. Prominent family names were Gellersen, Tiedemann, and Peters.

Stade Branch[2]	**1939**
Elders	4
Priests	0
Teachers	1
Deacons	1
Other Adult Males	2
Adult Females	8
Male Children	2
Female Children	0
Total	18

Louis Gellersen, the owner of a gas station and bicycle shop, was the branch president and was assisted by Christian Tiedemann and Willy Peters. The branch held its meetings in rented rooms on the main floor of a building at Grosse Schmiedestrasse 4. Sunday School took place at 10:00 a.m. and sacrament meeting at 12:30 p.m. There was no official Primary or Relief Society at the time, but members met for MIA every third Thursday of the

month, and a genealogy class was held every fourth Thursday, both at 8:00 p.m. One rare characteristic of the Stade Branch was that the president could be reached by telephone at Stade 2664.[3]

Fig. 1. Members of the Stade Branch in about 1933. (I. Gellersen Long)

Even before it began on September 1, 1939, the war had ill effects on the Stade Branch. We read the following in the branch history:

> From August 23 to September 16 [1939] we did not hold any meetings due to the political conditions among Germany, Poland and England. The priesthood holders had responsibilities to the people and the [government], so the meetings had to be cancelled. In addition, no evening meetings could be held because of the blackout regulations.[4]

Young Inge Gellersen (born 1928) recalled her experience with the Jungvolk program and national politics in school:

> When I was ten years old, I was inducted into the Jungmädel, but my father didn't let me go. I think I went twice with a friend, but I didn't like it. They held the meetings in a school; we sang songs, and even the national anthem. We sang the anthem every morning in school, our hands up [in the Hitler salute]. My father never bought me a uniform for the Jungmädel. . . . If you don't have a uniform, you don't want to be in a group when everybody else is wearing one.[5]

Inge recalled the meeting rooms: "The Stade Branch met in one large room and a smaller room. They were separated by a curtain. The children had their own section. . . . There was a sign in the window that said that those were the rooms of the Church. It also stated the meeting schedule and times." Her memories also reflected the vast difference between the LDS setting and the local Lutheran Church: "My mother invited everybody to Church if they seemed interested. One day, she invited a boyfriend of mine. I thought I would die!" Inge's elder brother Manfred (born 1922) recalled their mother's missionary spirit: "She was a kind of district missionary. She went around the whole city twice inviting people to come to church."[6]

Inge also recalled politics in the branch rooms:

> There were pictures on the wall in our room. . . . Next to our Joseph Smith picture was one of Hitler. One day, some [government] officials sat in to listen to testimony meeting. Everybody got up and bore their testimony—even me, as a child. The first person to get up was Brother Tiedemann, and he bore a strong testimony and even said something nice about the Nazis—how well they treated us Mormons. . . . Before they left, they clicked their heels and said, "Heil Hitler!" They told us to be careful what we said and did, but after that meeting they left us alone.

The branch history gives insight into the affairs of this small group of Saints. For example, the clerk noted, "No meetings were held from January 7, 1940, to February 25, 1940, because of the terribly cold temperatures." On April 28, 1940, meetings were canceled due to illness (the same was the case on three other Sundays from 1939 to June 1941 for various reasons and on Sundays when district conferences were held in Hamburg). By June 1941,

the attendance had already dropped to about half.[7] This means that only a handful of members were still gathering to worship together by the time the war was halfway over.

Fig. 2. Baptisms in the Stade Branch were conducted in this small canal just north of town. (I. Gellersen Long)

According to Inge Gellersen, Willy Peters had made nice benches for the meeting rooms, but during the war he asked to be released as the second counselor in the branch presidency so that he would be able to attend meetings of the Nazi Party. Sister Peters continued to attend church meetings faithfully.

The Gellersen home at Freiburgerstrasse 54 was located next to and behind the bike shop. At some point during the war, the government took Brother Gellersen's new bicycles; after that, his only business was the repair of older models. His gas station also closed down.

The Gellersen family walked about half an hour to church downtown. Manfred recalled, "We made the trip there and back twice each Sunday. At times the wind blew so hard that we had to walk backwards against it." During the week, Sister Gellersen cleaned the church rooms and also provided wood and coal from the family supply to heat the rooms on Sunday. As Inge recalled, "She didn't want to take the wood and coal there on Sunday because she might get her clothes dirty on the way." According to Manfred, his mother was once cleaning the rooms when some men came in and offered her a job cleaning other rooms in the building. Her response was, "I'm Frau Gellersen. We run a service station, so I don't need a job. This is my church, and I'm doing this for free." Sister Gellersen also put up exhibits in the front window on such themes as the Word of Wisdom, the Book of Mormon, and baptism for the dead. Manfred recalled, "My brother had to paint all of the posters for those exhibits."

A trained automobile mechanic, Manfred Gellersen told his father one day that he was thinking of volunteering for the army. His father's response left a distinct impression: "You don't volunteer. You wait until you're called. I've been there! I know!" Louis Gellersen had taken part in Germany's losing effort in World War I. When Hitler ordered the attack on the Soviet Union in June 1941, Brother Gellersen informed his son, "The war is lost!" In September, Manfred's draft notice arrived. He reported to work the next day in his Sunday suit to announce that he was quitting in order to answer the call to the Wehrmacht, although he had no other option.

Manfred was assigned to a duty that reflected his occupational training. "If you can service automobiles, you can service tanks," he was told. By April 1942, he was in the Soviet Union. He recalled, "I got tired of fixing tanks at 75 degrees below zero." (Temperatures actually reached only about 40 below.) Fortunately, his observance of the LDS health standards rescued him from such duties. Of the 150 men in his company, he was the only one who did not drink alcohol, but he ended up mixing huge batches of brew for his comrades with hot water, rum, and sugar. One night, an officer angry with his drunk driver got Manfred out of bed to drive for him because Manfred was the only one not drunk. "I ended up doing that the whole time," explained Manfred.

In the fall of 1942, Manfred was assigned to Armored Assault Regiment 203, working with the Mark III tank. His unit moved within thirty miles of Moscow before the vehicles froze up in the extreme

cold. "We would have won the war [against the Soviet Union] if we'd reached Moscow, but the good Lord interferes with guys like Hitler. We were stuck in the mud, and then it froze, and we had to abandon all of our stuff. (Oil doesn't freeze, it just gets thick like fat.) Then we moved south, and they gave us all new equipment." Manfred's unit was sent toward Stalingrad, where they were to help rescue the encircled German Sixth Army. "But the Romanians and Italians didn't fight, so we couldn't help [our German comrades]. We had to move back from Stalingrad, so they shipped my unit back to Germany."[8]

On one occasion, Manfred narrowly avoided being killed or captured by the Soviets. He and a comrade were sent to pick up a load of ammunition and accidentally drove their small vehicle into the midst of fifteen enemy soldiers at an intersection. Reacting with lightning speed, Manfred made a hard right turn and drove past a house, crashing into a fence. His friend was thrown from the vehicle, and Manfred jumped out and ran for cover while fifteen Soviet soldiers fired their machine guns. They missed, but Manfred encountered one more soldier behind the house. Both instinctively bolted in opposite directions, and Manfred was free to make his way back to the German position, ashamed at having left his comrade behind, along with his commander's suitcase, maps, and other property. Fortunately, when he arrived at his headquarters, his abandoned comrade was already there, safe and sound.

The people of Stade were very fortunate that the city was not the home to critical war industry. Aside from watching and hearing enemy aircraft fly over on their way to Hamburg and other major cities, the residents of Stade went on with their affairs as best they could. The few Latter-day Saints there were sufficiently well off that they were able to respond quickly when the following appeal arrived from the mission office in Frankfurt:

> According to general newsletter no. 2 of the West German Mission dated June 27, 1943, as well as by the request of the Hamburg District Presidency, a request is being made of all members to voluntarily donate anything they can—be it money, clothing or other items—for the relief of the members of the Ruhr District, especially the branches in Barmen and Elberfeld, who have lost their homes in recent air raids. The following items were then collected and prepared for shipment to the district leaders in Hamburg:
>
> Brother Louis Gellersen 200 Marks
> Brother Christian Tiedemann 20 Marks
> Emma Hagenah 5 Marks (nonmember friend)
> 225 Marks total
>
> The following items were donated by Sister Helene Gellersen of Stade:
>
> [coats, underwear, sweaters, pants, blankets, jackets, pens, paper, cutlery, soap, cups, etc.]
>
> Stade on July 9, 1943
>
> Louis Gellersen, branch president[9]

Fig. 3. A very old view of the city of Stade. (I. Gellersen Long)

Like most teenage girls in the Third Reich, Inge Gellersen was called upon to serve for one year in the Pflichtjahr program. She described the experience in these words:

> When I was thirteen years old, I had to serve a Pflichtjahr. I went to a farm in Depenbeck, and when I saw the house for the first time I realized that it must be a huge farm. They had cows and a big and beautiful apple orchard. There were a French POW and a Belgian POW, a Russian forced laborer and a Polish girl named Helena. I got up early every morning before the "madame," as the French and Belgian soldiers called her. . . . The madame cooked the dinner,

> but my task was to prepare breakfast for everybody. I worked mostly in the house, but sometimes they would send me outside to help with the hay. The lady was required to give her workers food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Sometimes it wasn't very much. She also sent me into town with the ration coupons and told me what to get.

The madame allowed Inge to go home every other Sunday, and she rode her bicycle the ten miles each way. On one occasion, an overzealous policeman stopped her on the road because she was using her headlight after dark. He chastised her for this violation of the blackout laws, insisting that she could be attacked by an enemy airplane. He then fined her 25 Marks, but she earned only 20 Marks every two weeks and did not have that much money with her. The policeman dutifully came to her home to collect the money and recommended that she make her bicycle trips in daylight.

One of the dangers of life in Hitler's Germany was the possibility of making an innocent statement in the presence of a fanatical party member. Inge recalled how this happened to her mother:

> One day a man came to pick up his bike. My mother gave it to him and then looked up to the sky and said, "Oh, we have a blue sky again! Why are we still fighting in this war?". . . She meant that [the enemy] would come and bomb the city again at night. The man looked at her and said, "I'm a friend of your husband, and I won't tell anybody what you just said." But then he showed us that he was from the secret police. He threatened that he could take her away without giving her the opportunity to say good bye to anybody. "But I'm your husband's friend, and I'll let you off this time. But you have to promise me to never say anything like that again." My mother was a changed person after that. She had always listened to the English BBC radio broadcasts, but she stopped listening to it for fear that somebody would come to take her away.

On leave at home in 1944, Manfred Gellersen was ordained an elder by his father. After returning to the Eastern Front, he was involved in several serious engagements and was awarded the Iron Cross (both First and Second Classes). He was also wounded twice but recovered fully each time. In early 1945, he was stationed in East Prussia near the Baltic Sea coast. The Red Army pushed the German troops against the coast but did not complete the campaign because the Soviets were in a hurry to reach Berlin and end the war. Near the small port of Pillau, Manfred and several others put out to sea in a small craft and were fished out of the water by German sailors who transported them west to the harbor at Swinemünde. Working his way west toward home across northern Germany, he narrowly avoided capture by the advancing British army.

The branch history does not include any irregular statements during the last two years of the war. The Saints in that north German city were truly fortunate in that only one of their number died in the war, and nobody was homeless when the war came to an end. By then, the attendance at meetings had decreased to ten persons, but there is no explanation for this phenomenon.[10] The final entry in wartime reads, "On May 6 our branch meeting rooms were confiscated by the [British] occupation authorities. From now on we will have to hold our meetings in homes."

Manfred Gellersen actually made it all the way home to Stade without spending a day in a POW camp. Moving across the flatlands of the Elbe River basin was difficult, but he stayed in ditches and out of sight until he was able to sneak into his own home like a burglar around three in the morning to surprise his family. However, once at home he could not show himself without the proper release papers. He soon reported to the local British military office, where he was instructed to go to a local POW camp to receive his release papers. As a civilian, he then visited his 1941 employer to ask for his job back, but the employer refused to hire him. Fortunately, there were plenty of jobs for a good mechanic, and Manfred began a new life with his family.

Looking back on his military experiences and his many medals, Manfred explained that he was not a hero. "The heroes are all dead," he declared. "I never

had to shoot my weapon at anybody, but they shot at me plenty often!" He never attended a Church meeting away from home, because there simply were none close to his duty locations. Conversations about religion were extremely rare, he explained, "because there was no religion in the German army I knew. And there were no Nazis either. Just soldiers. We just thought about winning the war." Regarding the challenge of remaining a worthy priesthood holder at the front, he stated, "I had plenty of opportunities to fool around [and do sinful things], but I had a good foundation from home."

The British had taken Stade without firing a shot, relieving the residents of the danger of any last-minute deaths trying to save Nazi Germany. Inge recalled her first interaction with the invaders: "They would stand next to their trucks and yell things like, 'Hi, Blondie!' I only spoke a little school English, and we had never learned about the word 'Hi!' so I wasn't sure what they wanted to say. One time, they yelled, 'Hi, Blondie! The war is over! We're going home!' All I could answer was, 'Yes, go home!'"

The Stade Branch was still without an official home at the end of the summer of 1945 as the members continued to collect themselves again from the long conflict. "There were only a few of us left by then," recalled Inge, "my parents and I and the Tiedemanns." Their numbers grew over the coming months and included LDS refugees from the eastern provinces of Germany that had been ceded to Poland.

In Memoriam

Only one known member of the Stade Branch did not survive World War II:

Ernst August Tiedemann b. Schölisch, Stade, Hannover, 29 Sep 1911; son of Christian Ferdinand Friedrich Tiedemann and Margarethe Adele Catharine Marie Bröcker; bp. 18 Jul 1929; conf. 18 Jul 1929; m. 20 Jun 1933, Sophia Richter; k. in battle Eastern Front 21 Apr 1944. (FHL microfilm 68805 no. 7; CHL CR 275 8 2438, no. 829; IGI)

Notes

1. Stade city archive.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
3. West German Mission manuscript history, CHL MS 1004 2.
4. Stade Branch history, 236, CHL LR 5093 21.
5. Inge Gellersen Long, interview by the author, Bountiful, UT, April 10, 2009.
6. Manfred Gellersen, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, November 3, 2006.
7. Stade Branch History, 241, 243, CHL LF 5093 21.
8. The attack on Stalingrad in the late fall of 1942 was to be supported by many divisions of soldiers from Germany's allies, but when those divisions failed to move forward, the German Sixth Army was isolated and surrounded from the west by the Red Army. By the time the survivors surrendered in early February 1943, as many as 295,000 men were lost. Many Germans came to believe that the disaster of Stalingrad heralded the end of the Third Reich.
9. Stade Branch History, book 2, 10, CHL LR 5093 21.
10. Ibid., 17.