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# INTRODUCTION

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## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has a fascinating history that spans more than 170 years and includes peoples of every continent. The missionary effort that began in the German states in the 1840s resulted in the establishment of branches of the Church all over that land by 1900. While many converts in Germany and Austria chose to emigrate to the United States, others remained in the fatherland to help the Church grow and prosper there. Given the religious, cultural, and political traditions of this relatively young Germany (officially established in 1871), being a Latter-day Saint in Europe was not a simple task.

Joining the Church in central Europe made German Latter-day Saints outsiders in their native country in several respects. They no longer worshipped with their Catholic or Protestant neighbors, business colleagues, school comrades, or best friends. But even in their new church, they may have felt like second-class citizens. Instead of wards and stakes, they were organized into branches and districts. Instead of listening regularly to prophets, apostles, seventies, and bishops, they received instruction at the hands of mission presidents and young missionaries from small towns and farms in the American West. Instead of meeting in beautiful

neighborhood churches with park-like surroundings, they gathered in taverns, apartment houses, or renovated factory rooms in the smoky industrial districts of large cities.

Nevertheless, they worshipped the same Heavenly Father, prayed in the name of the same Savior, studied the same scriptures, supported the same missionary program, and lived and preached the same gospel to their neighbors.

Emigration to North America before and after World War I (1914–18) had weakened large branches in Germany and Austria and in some locations had made smaller branches defunct. As was the case in other European countries, Latter-day Saint branches in Germany were constantly “starting over.”<sup>1</sup> However, as the history of the Church in Germany approached its centennial mark in the late 1930s, emigration had essentially stopped, missionary work had increased, and the branches of the West German Mission (Frankfurt am Main) and the East German Mission (Berlin) were strong and growing slowly. Unfortunately, World War II would seriously weaken the Church in Germany and end for decades its presence in the eastern German territories that became part of post–World War II Poland and the Soviet Union.

The Latter-day Saints in Germany during the Hitler Era (1933–45) found themselves subjected to



Fig. 1. The missions of the Church in Germany and Austria in 1939.

a unique set of challenges. For the first time, large numbers of Latter-day Saints were citizens of a totalitarian regime. Under a government that convinced or compelled more and more of its citizens to march to the same dark tune, members of a church that exalted the concept of agency were bound to feel at odds with the party line. When Hitler’s armies achieved bloodless conquests of Austria (1938) and parts of Czechoslovakia (1938 and 1939), some LDS Germans saw a war coming. By the time the German army invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, Germans were no longer allowed to emigrate.

Thirteen thousand Latter-day Saints were trapped and compelled to share the fate of their eighty million countrymen. What happened to them by the time Germany surrendered on May 8, 1945, is tragic—and for some of them the tribulations were far from over. How they reacted to the events of the time is inspiring.

#### TELLING THE STORY

The history of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Germany during World War II

has never been written in more than a few pages. Gilbert Scharffs devoted a chapter to the topic in his book *Mormonism in Germany*.<sup>2</sup> A few dozen autobiographies have been published by eyewitnesses, and those books give excellent detail about the lives of individual Latter-day Saints in specific towns and branches, but most were written for family members and remain essentially unknown.<sup>3</sup> Several diaries written during the war years have survived, but none have been published.<sup>4</sup> Many survivors have written short stories about their experiences; few of these have ever found their way into print, though some have been submitted to the Family History Library and to the Church History Library.

In 1974, I began to focus my German history interest on the Church in that country. From a review of the wartime issues of the Church magazine *Der Stern*, it was clear to me that the Church suffered heavy losses during the Third Reich. I began asking questions to which nobody could offer answers: How many members in Germany and Austria died from 1939–45? How many priesthood holders were lost? How many branch meeting places were damaged or destroyed? How many LDS families lost their homes? What happened to the branches in territories later ceded to Poland and the Soviet Union? What happened to Primary classes, Relief Society work meetings and bazaars, and Young Women and Young Men programs? How was the missionary effort sustained, if at all? Answers to these questions are finally available and are found in the pages of this book.

This story needed to be told—not in general, but in such detail that the experiences of members of every branch of the Church in Germany and Austria could be described. Why had this not been done in the six decades since the end of the war? This one question I can now answer—after thirty-four years of thinking and planning and five years of intense investigation. The effort required to write this history is enormous and daunting. Such a story could be composed only after years of research and with the help of talented student assistants.

Interest in such a history is great. There could be currently as many as forty thousand members of the Church who served missions in Germany and Austria. At least 250,000 Latter-day Saints and others are related to the persons whose stories are featured in this history. The possibility that a German soldier in a photograph taken during the D-Day invasion in 1944 could have been a priest from the Darmstadt Branch, or that a Relief Society president might be among the dead in the aftermath of the Hamburg firebombings of 1943 might motivate readers of World War II history books to think about the conflict from a different perspective.

In 2003, when Brigham Young University invited me to join the faculty of Religious Education as the instructor of Germanic family history, I realized that I now had the opportunity to write this history. I knew that nobody had attempted this work, and I was more convinced than ever that it must be done. Finally, these faithful members of the Church—living or deceased—would have the chance to tell their story.

My goal from the beginning has been to describe in great detail the lives of typical Latter-day Saints. Rather than an investigation of the relationship of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the government of Hitler's Germany or the National Socialist (Nazi) Party, this is the story of everyday Saints. How did they maintain a testimony of the everlasting gospel under conditions few large groups of Church members have ever experienced? How did they conduct worship services without priesthood holders, locate each other after air raids, support each other after they lost their homes and loved ones? The remarkable stories they tell answer such questions.

When the foreign missionaries were evacuated from Germany and Austria in August 1939, the leadership of the Church was placed in the hands of local members. All contact with Church leadership in Salt Lake City, Utah, was lost when the United States was drawn into the war in December 1941. How did the leaders of the West and East German

Missions administer the affairs of the Church? How did they communicate with district and branch presidents? Did they continue to hold conferences, print and distribute literature for instruction, keep membership records, promote genealogical research, and do missionary work? These matters are described within the stories of eyewitnesses quoted here and in branch history documents, many of which have likely never been examined before.

### COMPILING THE DATA

In order to present this history from the perspective of first-person experience, my assistants and I set out to interview all available surviving eyewitnesses, to locate biographies and autobiographies by and about eyewitnesses, and to study all available documents produced by Church units in the East and West German Missions. It was also decided early on that this history should be augmented with photographs, maps, and historical documents depicting the lives of the Latter-day Saints described in the pages of this book. To accomplish these goals, we needed the assistance of many individuals and the public media.

We immediately began assembling lists of survivors by conducting interviews with people we already knew and asking them to share with us the names of their living relatives and friends. Our list eventually grew to more than five hundred persons (of the nearly 13,400 members of the Church in the two missions in 1939). Interviewees provided not only excellent first-person narratives regarding conditions and events in Germany and Austria during World War II, but also copies of stories of their own lives and the lives of deceased siblings, parents, and friends.

As we began our search for documents produced by Church units such as branches and mission offices, we were enthusiastically supported by the staff of the Church History Library in Salt Lake City. The *Church News* was kind enough to feature an introduction to our research on the cover of the

February 11, 2006, issue. This coverage yielded more than three hundred responses from individuals wishing to share their stories or to recommend persons for us to contact. The same article was translated and featured in the German *Liabona* later that year and likewise attracted many responses from readers in Germany and Austria.

Organizing the data collected was, of course, a major challenge. The most efficient way was organizing each member under the name of the branch he or she belonged to on September 1, 1939, when the war began. By the time the war officially ended on May 8, 1945, literally thousands of Saints had changed their branch affiliations. The move (or flight) to different or newly founded branches continued in many cases for years, notably among homeless members and soldiers returning from POW camps.

### THE STATUS OF THE CHURCH IN GERMANY AND AUSTRIA AT THE ONSET OF WORLD WAR II

1939	East	West
Elders	402	390
Priests	194	179
Teachers	243	161
Deacons	445	345
Other Adult Males	1,245	939
Adult Females	4,336	3,172
Male Children	384	329
Female Children	358	280
<i>Total</i>	7,607	5,795

Mission	East (Berlin)	West (Frankfurt)	Total
Districts	13	13	26
Branches	75	71	146



*Fig. 2. The Selbongen Branch building was constructed in 1929. During World War II, this was the only structure owned by the Church in Germany. The Polish name of the town is Zelwagi, and the building is currently owned and used by the Catholic Church. (Deseret News, 1938)*

From reports compiled in the years before World War II, quite a lot is known about the membership of the Church in the two German missions.<sup>5</sup> The missions were similar in population and in geographical size (see map on page 2).<sup>6</sup> No stakes of Zion had been established in Europe by 1939, thus the Saints were organized in districts and branches. Each German Mission had thirteen districts; each district included from three to eleven branches. The largest district in either mission was Berlin (East German Mission), with ten branches and 1,270 members. The smallest district was Hindenburg (East German Mission), with only four branches and sixty-five members.

The average size of a branch in the Church in Germany in 1939 was slightly more than one hundred members. Each branch had a presidency, clerks and secretaries, a Sunday School, a priesthood group,

a Relief Society, a Primary organization, and youth groups. Each district had a presidency, with clerks and leaders for each of the auxiliaries. Districts also had genealogical specialists, choir leaders, and in some cases, recreational specialists.

Across the two German missions only one meetinghouse actually belonged to the Church—a modest but excellent structure erected in 1929 in Selbongen, East Prussia (East German Mission). The typical location for LDS branch meetings was something far less prominent. Even freestanding structures were very rare in the Church in Germany and Austria in those days. Most branches rented rooms in large buildings erected primarily for commercial use. Factories, warehouses, office buildings, and the like were sought out for space. Renovations were usually financed by the branch and resulted in a chapel of appropriate size. In a

few cases, rooms used by societies or other churches were rented.

In most cases Latter-day Saint meeting venues included two or more classrooms. Most branch facilities featured restrooms and a cloakroom, but there was never an office for the branch presidency or the clerks. Some locations included a cultural hall, but most cultural activities took place on a stage or a rostrum in the main meeting room. Most chapels were used during the week for auxiliary meetings. A baptismal font—a wonderful feature—could be found in only three branches in all of Germany: St. Georg (in the city of Hamburg), Essen, and Stuttgart (all in the West German Mission).

Decorations in branch chapels were sparse and tasteful. In most cases, one or two modest paintings or photographs adorned the walls. The Savior, Jesus Christ, was the most common subject of those pictures, but contemporary photographs also show small renditions of the Salt Lake Temple and of the Prophet Joseph Smith, or photographs of then Church President Heber J. Grant. Benches were rare; folding chairs could be moved with ease to make room for cultural activities and to facilitate cleaning.<sup>7</sup> Music was provided in most cases by a simple pump organ, but some branches had a piano, and several larger branches actually had both instruments.

Church meetings for smaller groups were usually held in private homes, and attendees could number as high as thirty. This became progressively more common as branches lost their meeting rooms in air raids as the war drew to a close. In 1945, schools became popular meeting venues, and in such cases no signs of the presence of the LDS Church were visible.

District presidencies had no specific physical locations or offices. They conducted their business in the rooms of local branches or in their homes. Each mission rented office space in an affluent neighborhood—the West German Mission at Schaumainkai 41 in Frankfurt am Main and the East German Mission at Händelallee 6 in Berlin.

The standard meeting format in a branch was similar to that of branches and wards in other countries: Sunday School was held on Sunday morning; sacrament meeting took place in the late afternoon or evening. Meetings for the Relief Society, priesthood groups, and the Mutual Improvement Association (MIA) were held on evenings during the week. In most branches throughout the two missions, the Primary held its meetings on Wednesday afternoons, primarily because public schools in Germany dismissed by 1:00 p.m. on Wednesdays. Choirs were integral parts of German branches and districts, so choir practice was usually held weekly on a convenient evening. (German Saints are known for singing the hymns of Zion with great enthusiasm.)

Semiannual conferences were an important and popular part of Church life in Germany in 1939 and throughout most of the war. Mission conferences were common before the war, but could not be held later in the war because of restrictions in travel and resources. Each district held semiannual conferences, and each branch was expected to hold an annual conference. In addition, Sunday school conferences were prominent events, and other auxiliaries promoted their work through regular conferences. The largest events were district conferences. Some lasted from Friday through Sunday and included concerts, dances, and performances by LDS choirs, orchestras, and theatrical groups. These were exciting affairs that drew hundreds of members, who in turn often brought their friends.

#### GERMAN LATTER-DAY SAINTS AS CITIZENS UNDER HITLER

Adolf Hitler and his National Socialist (Nazi) Party officially (and legally) came to power in January 1933. In August 1934, German president Paul von Hindenburg died, and Hitler combined the offices of chancellor and president. By 1935, he had outlawed the Communist Party and neutralized all other political parties, which gave him control of

the parliament (Reichstag). He also won the loyalty of the German military by strengthening the army and the navy and establishing an air force—all in contradiction to the Treaty of Versailles, which had severely restricted the German military following World War I.

In Hitler's Third Reich, Latter-day Saints in Germany and Austria (annexed by Germany on March 12, 1938) were expected to be model citizens like all other Germans. In other words, Saints were to be Germans first and to have no secondary allegiance. Nazi Party programs were developed for every member of society old enough to say "Heil Hitler!" By 1936, everybody was encouraged—and some strongly pressured—to join the corresponding Nazi organization; there were distinct groups for men (Sturmabteilung), women (Frauenbund), boys (Hitlerjugend), girls (Bund Deutscher Mädel), athletes (Sportbund), truck drivers (Kraftfahrerkorps), teachers (Lehrerbund), and so on. Each group had its own uniform and insignia; to belong to none of them was to invite negative attention. Nevertheless, many adult Latter-day Saints were able to slip by without associating with the party, often by making excuses about spending their free time in some kind of humanitarian service or by working overtime.

The two prevailing faiths—Catholic and Protestant—comprised more than 95 percent of the German population in that era. Many smaller churches also existed in Germany but apparently were not large enough to warrant concern on the part of the government or the party; Latter-day Saints fell into this category. The two major churches were too powerful to be successfully attacked by the Nazi Party, while the smaller ones (commonly called *Sekten*, "sects") were disregarded by both the government and the common people. The small number of Latter-day Saints in the Third Reich (just over thirteen thousand among a population of eighty million) may have been an advantage in this regard, because Church units were never large enough to attract attention. Indeed, in many cases, their meeting rooms were located in

buildings behind the main structure at that location (*Hinterhäuser*). Signs identifying the existence of the Church were usually small and unobtrusive. One usually had to be an insider to know that the Church existed in a given town or city.

One of the most visible ways in which a citizen could perform his or her civic duties was in the military. Perhaps as many as 1,800 Latter-day Saints in Germany and Austria performed active military service between 1939 and 1945 (but few ever volunteered). Many more served in reserve units, including hundreds who had served in the German army during World War I. There was no option of civil (non-military) service in Hitler's philosophy, and the concept of the conscientious objector was unknown.<sup>8</sup>

Community service was expected and commonly rendered by citizens in Nazi Germany, and LDS Church members were consistent and often willing participants. They collected old winter clothing for soldiers at the front, fed the homeless in soup kitchens, hurried to fight fires and rescue buried victims after air raids, and took refugees into their homes when no other housing was to be found. Of course, those functions were carried out by Germans of all religious persuasions who simply believed in helping because it was the right (patriotic) thing to do (or who feared that non-participation might lead to the conclusion that they did not support the effort).

In a negative sense, being a good citizen in the Third Reich also included assisting the government in identifying and apprehending those persons who were considered enemies of the state, such as criminals, traitors, spies, and malcontents—but principally Jews. Several eyewitnesses interviewed in connection with this history remembered scenes of destruction after the "Night of Broken Glass" (Reichskristallnacht, November 9–10, 1938), when organized Nazis raided Jewish stores and invaded Jewish homes. Some eyewitnesses later saw Jewish neighbors and friends being taken away in trucks, but—like most Germans of the day—had no idea

what terrible treatment awaited those Jews under the secret German program termed the “Final Solution of the Jewish Question” (the murder of European Jews). Several Latter-day Saints decided for one reason or another that obedience to Hitler and his state was not required of a good member of the Church. Several died in concentration camps and several more spent time there.<sup>9</sup>

#### THE SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN THE THIRD REICH

As they had been for decades in Germany, Church members in the Hitler era belonged for the most part to the lower middle class. Many men were skilled laborers of the artisan classes, having learned a trade through an apprenticeship lasting from two to four years. A small number were masters in their trades and crafts. In only a few cases were Latter-day Saints in management positions; there were few if any professionals such as physicians, attorneys, and teachers. For example, mission supervisor Friedrich Ludwig Biehl worked in a dental laboratory. His first counselor, Christian Heck, was a traveling salesman, and his second counselor, Anton Huck, was a retired streetcar operator.

Several members owned their own businesses such as Louis Gellersen of the Stade Branch, who operated a bicycle shop and a gas station. The Hermann Huck family of Frankfurt am Main and the Otto Baer family of Nuremberg each owned a neighborhood grocery store. Eugen Hechtle was a tailor in Mannheim and Hermann Walter Pohlsander, an accountant for the city of Celle. Rudolf Niedermair of the Linz Branch in Austria was a career soldier whose service in the Austrian army began before World War I. He had risen to the rank of major and was a post commander by the time the second war began.

Rare was the Church member who rose to management rank in business or industry, such as Kurt Schneider, the president of the Strasbourg District. As a young man, he was already the director of the Strasbourg division of the Rheinmetall Company

and in that capacity enjoyed the services of a fancy company car and a chauffeur.

Because the gospel had been preached primarily in the cities of Germany, very few Latter-day Saints in the Nazi era were farmers. It was simply too difficult to travel to church on Sundays from far away. (The Haag am Hausruck Branch in Austria is a marked exception.) Although many LDS families lived in multistory apartment buildings, they often rented garden space at the edge of town and even kept animals such as chickens and goats. On the other hand, stories of dogs and cats are not common; no eyewitnesses in the West German Mission recalled experiences with pets.

According to the testimonies of surviving eyewitnesses, most Latter-day Saint women were homemakers. When the German economy experienced boom years in the late 1930s, great emphasis was placed on occupational training for girls in the schools. Most teenage LDS girls prepared for gainful employment in the Hitler era, while their mothers often remained in the home. However, the war required a change in status for many of the homemakers when they were required by the government to assume jobs vacated by men who were drafted into the military. Most of these jobs were in the blue-collar sector.

Very seldom did a Latter-day Saint family own a single-family dwelling. Few were wealthy enough to employ domestic servants, own an automobile, or have a telephone in the home. Most had indoor plumbing, but families often shared a restroom (WC) at the end of the hallway with their neighbors. Eyewitness stories about carrying water from the neighborhood well or fountain are not rare, and that option became more common as city water lines were destroyed.

#### RATION COUPONS AND SHORTAGES IN WARTIME GERMANY

As in most nations heavily involved in World War II, ration coupons were an integral part of life

in Germany. Restrictions on most food and luxury items were constant and specialty items often disappeared from the public view. Standing in lines to redeem food coupons consumed a great deal of time, and families often split up to accomplish the task: the mother went to the butcher, one child to the baker, another child to the greengrocer, and so on. However, a ration coupon was no guarantee that the item was actually available. It was a common occurrence that a store ran out of the item and the owner came out to announce to those still in line that there was no more of the foodstuffs they wanted (or he simply closed the door and hung out the *Geschlossen* sign).

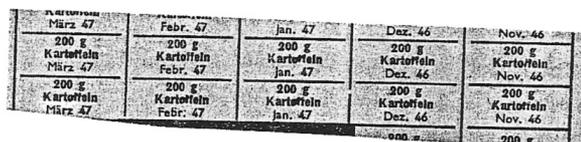


Fig. 3. Ration coupons, each for 200 grams (7 ounces) of potatoes.  
(J. Ernst)

Toward the end of the war, the German government accomplished near miracles in keeping food distributed throughout the country. Still, ration lines became ever longer, and stories are commonly told of women who refused to leave the lines when the air-raid sirens sounded. They preferred to believe that the raid would not come to their neighborhood, allowing them to complete their purchases and feed their families. Essentially all eyewitnesses who lived in large cities in Germany and Austria reported that they had enough food until the very day the enemy arrived in their neighborhood. Then the food system broke down totally and starvation threatened their existence.

### TRANSPORTATION IN THE THIRD REICH

Germany's public transportation systems were excellent during the Nazi period, built for densely populated areas where personal automobile ownership was a rarity. Latter-day Saints often tell of

traveling to Church meetings on the bus or the streetcar, but some chose the longer walking time because they could not afford public transportation. Railroad service across the Reich featured only steam locomotives, but some traveled at very high speeds, and timetables were strictly observed during the first years of the war. Latter-day Saints report that there were no general restrictions on travel away from home during most of the war years, though some trains were full of troops and civilians had to wait for later connections on trips that for many reasons took longer than usual: water and coal supplies waned, tracks and bridges were destroyed, and various branches of the government and the military were competing for the use of an ever-decreasing number of trains.

When attacks from the air and invading armies destroyed the trains and tracks, schedules were interrupted and travel became unreliable. People rode in whatever conveyances were available, often in box-cars or cattle cars. During the final year of the war, the railroads were frantically conveying soldiers to the front and wounded soldiers and refugees to the rear. According to eyewitnesses, it was no longer necessary to purchase tickets; passengers fought their way onto the trains, many climbing through windows to get in. Refugees were often compelled to discard their luggage in the scramble to board a train.

Most railroad stations had air-raid shelters because they were prime targets for attacks. Trains moving down the tracks or standing on sidings were under constant attack during the last year of the war, when the German Luftwaffe (air force) could no longer provide sufficient defense. Many Latter-day Saints were in trains attacked by fighter planes, and several lost their lives. At the end of the war and for months afterward, people rode trains under dangerous circumstances; passengers were commonly seen sitting on the roof, standing on the running boards, or clinging to other parts of the train.

By the end of the war, bus and streetcar transportation had been seriously interrupted or curtailed in most German cities. Now and then, a streetcar

would run for a few blocks, then passengers would get off and walk down the line for a few blocks where the service would continue again. In cities with subway systems (*Untergrundbahn* or *U-Bahn*), some of the lines survived nicely below the streets and U-Bahn stations were commonly used as air-raid shelters.

Of the few Latter-day Saints who owned automobiles or trucks, most used them as part of their employment. Many of those vehicles were destroyed in air raids. During the last days of the war, surviving personal automobiles were usually seized by the government, the military, or the invaders. Personal property was no longer protected.

Eyewitnesses recalled walking long distances from home to school and to church. Walking times of more than one hour in one direction were not uncommon. For persons in good health, walking was no hardship. Indeed, many branch outings involved *wandern*, the tradition of walking all day through forests outside of town and enjoying a picnic (and a choir practice) along the way. Some eyewitnesses told of being baptized in a pond in the forest, and branch members walked nearly an hour each way to witness the ceremony (at all seasons of the year).

#### SCHOOLS IN NAZI GERMANY

The complex and respected German school system that dated back to the 1870s had been expanded and improved during the early twentieth century. However, the Allied air attacks did not spare schools; programs were often interrupted, abbreviated, and cancelled, and graduations postponed. Some schools in larger cities did double duty, accommodating children from bombed-out schools in split sessions. Many LDS eyewitnesses recalled that the official school starting time was delayed by an hour or two on any morning following a night interrupted by an air raid.

Several eyewitnesses recalled having teachers who were enthusiastic Nazi Party members. (All

teachers employed by the state were required to join the party.) Some told of singing the Deutschlandlied (the German national anthem) or the Horst-Wessel-Lied (the official party hymn) every morning. Others recalled army-like inspections (was their clothing in order, hair combed, fingernails cleaned?) and punishments administered when the expected discipline was not maintained.

Entire classes of school children were moved from larger cities to rural areas as part of the children's evacuation program (see *Kinderlandverschickung* in the glossary). Many a teacher was sent with his homeroom class to a distant small town to continue instruction away from the air raids. When schools were damaged or transformed into hospitals later in the war, the children were often pleased at first. Later, they learned of the disadvantages of having less formal instruction.

Religious instruction was provided for Catholic and Protestant students for the first eight grades of public school. Latter-day Saint children were allowed to choose between these two religions where both were available, or to not attend at all. There are no reports of programmatic persecution of LDS students in public schools, though confrontations with fanatic Nazi teachers or religion instructors (usually local Catholic and Protestant parish leaders) did occur now and then.

Most German students left public schools after the eighth grade to pursue an apprenticeship or employment. Few continued formal education, with less than 10 percent planning on attending the university. The majority of LDS youth did not or could not pursue higher education.

#### AIR RAIDS OVER GERMANY AND AUSTRIA

As early as the first week of the war, Polish airplanes attacked cities in the German Reich. By 1941, British air raids were launched against most large German cities, especially in the western part of the nation. When the United States joined the war in the European theater in 1942, the Allied

bombing campaign became better coordinated, and a standard procedure was developed: the British Royal Air Force conducted their raids under cover of night and the American Army Air Corps flew during the day. In some cities, air raids were rare, perhaps occurring only once or twice. In others, especially where critical war industries were located, raids were more frequent. During the year 1944, the most important cities were subjected to raids every week. Because many large cities in Germany were just a few miles apart, enemy airplanes flying in one direction of the compass had to be considered on their way to one of several cities. Alarms were sounded in all possible target cities. In many communities, false alarms were more frequent than actual attacks.

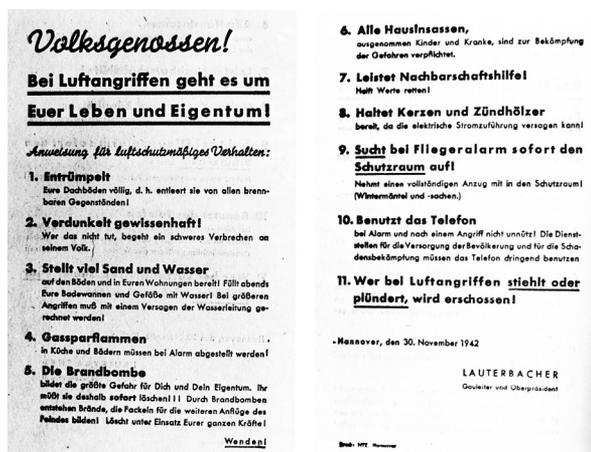


Fig. 4. These eleven rules were circulated in the city of Hanover to help people prepare for air raids and conduct themselves properly when attacks occurred.

Even in large cities, Germans seldom had access to official, heavy concrete bunkers for refuge from enemy attacks. Many bunkers were constructed in parks, in or near railroad stations, and near large intersections. Nowhere were there enough bunkers to offer protection to everyone. The typical German city-dweller simply sought refuge in his own basement. Of course, those basements had not been constructed to protect people from five-hundred-pound (or heavier) blockbuster bombs, but residents did what they could to fortify the ceilings and walls

of the basement. In most cases, entry and exit were through the main hallway or stairway serving the entire building. Shelters in a variety of public buildings and even large private or commercial buildings were clearly marked as *Luftschutzraum* or *LSR* and were open to all.

Air raids were announced by civil defense officials with loud wailing sirens. Systems of two or three different signals were used: one to announce a possible attack, one for a probable or imminent attack, and one for the actual arrival of attackers over the city's airspace. The interim between the first and the last alarms was from ten to twenty minutes or more. Thus there was usually time for people to find shelter, even if it was some distance from the home. Proof positive of a pending strike was seen in the form of illumination flares dropped above the target by advance enemy airplanes. Called *Christbäume* or *Weihnachtsbäume* (Christmas trees) by the Germans, those flares were visible from miles away and heralded death and destruction. Civil defense units sometimes responded by burning decoy flares to mislead the bombers.

Every neighborhood had an air-raid warden. Wardens were sometimes auxiliary policemen but most often were low-ranking members of the Nazi Party. It was their job to see that people vacated their apartments, public buildings, and streets and sought refuge in the shelters. Wardens also reminded people to close their blinds or turn off their lights to achieve total blackout conditions. Heavy fines were levied against violators of this safety standard. It was also the air-raid warden's responsibility to see that all entries to shelters were closed and locked when the final siren was heard. Persons not yet in shelters were then on their own to find places of protection. For a variety of reasons, some people chose to stay in their apartments rather than go to the shelter. In reality, the chances of survival were almost equal wherever they were. On the streets, however, they could be killed by enemy bombs as well as by shrapnel from friendly guns attempting to shoot down the attackers.

Latter-day Saint eyewitnesses tell of preparing for air raids the same way their neighbors prepared. All but the smallest children were expected to carry a bag or a suitcase with the most important survival items as they descended into the basement or hurried down the street to a public shelter. One of the parents usually carried the most valuable family documents, including genealogical papers, family photographs, and books of scripture. Most brought a change of clothing and enough food for the next few hours. There was little time to worry about what was left behind.

Life in the typical air-raid shelter was little more than survival. Some tried to sleep (which was usually impossible because of the noise), while others prayed, read newspapers, or played cards (if there was enough light to do so). Parents tried to entertain or comfort their children. Some sat on chairs, others on the floor—usually in rooms that lacked proper heating or cooling systems. Most were exhausted from lack of sleep and wanted only to return to their homes.

Three means of self-defense were practiced everywhere people gathered in private shelters. First, because apartment houses in most cities were built with no space between them, the basements of any two adjacent apartment buildings shared a common wall. Residents were instructed to make a hole in the wall (*Mauerdurchbruch*) large enough for an adult to crawl through.<sup>10</sup> If the exit of one basement was blocked, the people could escape through that wall into the next basement by removing loose brick or temporary wood structures. Another standard feature in each shelter was one or more barrels of water; if fires had broken out close to the escape route, each person could soak a blanket in the water and put it over his head to prevent suffocation as he exited the shelter. Finally, in the attic space on top of the house, the contents were removed to provide less material for combustion and to make it easier to find and remove incendiary bombs. Such bombs often penetrated the roof and came to rest on the floor of the attic.

The timer fuses usually did not initiate fire for several minutes, allowing residents who kept supplies of sand and water in the attic to smother the bombs before they began to burn or douse smaller fires before they spread.

When the all-clear siren sounded, air-raid wardens moved to evacuate the shelters as fast as possible. The main purpose of this maneuver was to prevent the occupants from suffocating in the shelters when smoke became thick or firestorms ensued. In crowded neighborhoods with tall apartment buildings, fires that started in the upper floors soon spread downward and to adjacent buildings. The oxygen feeding those fires was sucked out of the environment, making it hard or impossible to breathe. The upward rush of the air to the fire felt like wind and gave rise to the term *firestorm*. People emerged from the basements and ran down the street in search of open space where air was more plentiful. A technical description of the concept of firestorm is provided by author David Irving from a police report of the city Hamburg:

An estimate of the force of this fire-storm could be obtained only by analyzing it soberly as a meteorological phenomenon: as a result of the sudden linking of a number of fires, the air above was heated to such an extent that a violent updraught occurred which, in turn, caused the surrounding fresh air to be sucked in from all sides to the centre of the fire area. This tremendous suction caused movements of air of far greater force than normal winds. In meteorology the differences of temperature involved are of the order of 20° to 30° C. In this fire-storm they were of the order of 600°, 800° or even 1,000° C. This explained the colossal force of the fire storm winds.<sup>11</sup>

Following air raids, the fortunate people were those who emerged from the shelters to find that there had been no attack at all. It was also a relief to learn that the damage done was to structures blocks away and that one's own home was intact. However, this relief was often dispelled by the sound of another alarm siren a few hours later.

## CULTURE AND ENTERTAINMENT IN NAZI GERMANY

Despite the privations of the war years, motion picture theaters, opera houses, dance halls, and bars stayed open until they were destroyed or their utilities were cut off.<sup>12</sup> New movies were released and new hit songs were played over the radio. Newspapers were printed in many cities until the day the Allied invaders arrived. Citizens played soccer games and went ice skating, swimming, and hiking. Some Germans and Austrians even continued to take vacations (without leaving the country) for the first few war years. Birthday parties took place, christenings and weddings were celebrated in local churches, and clubs maintained their regular activities as long as possible. Local and national governments did their best to sustain the lifestyle of their citizens during the war and were remarkably successful in the effort. Of course, when the war came to an end and the conquerors ruled, life was reduced to mere subsistence and entertainment was no longer a priority.

### THE END OF PEACETIME

When World War II began on September 1, 1939, the majority of Germans believed that Germany's cause was just and that victory was probable, if not certain. Many Latter-day Saints apparently were of the same belief. It is possible that members of the Church in Germany realized before other Germans that the war was not a just cause and that defeat and invasion were possible if not probable. This must have been a frightening prospect.

Several decades ago, Douglas F. Tobler was told by several eyewitnesses that they believed the prophecies of the Book of Mormon, namely that any people fighting against the inhabitants of the "promised land" (identified in LDS scripture as North America) were doomed to ultimate failure. Those eyewitnesses must then have had terrible premonitions when Germany and the United States exchanged declarations of war in December 1941.

## EDITORIAL COMMENTS

In chapters in which an eyewitness provided a single interview or document, it may be assumed that all information attributed to that eyewitness was taken from the same source. This allows the elimination of hundreds of repetitious footnotes.

Precise details regarding the sufferings of Latter-day Saints in the following pages have been summarized or even suppressed in some cases. Sufficient allusions are made to the fact that what happened was often much worse than expressed in my descriptions. The presentation of gruesome detail serves no worthy purpose. It is not the goal of this book to emphasize the morbid, the heinous, the perverse, and the inhumane. What the Saints of the West German Mission experienced during World War II was often so terrifying and hideous that the reader may believe the many eyewitnesses who stated simply that "there are no words that could adequately describe what happened." Of course, no such generalizations or simplifications have been made when quotations were taken from interviews and written eyewitness accounts.

The spellings of the names of the following cities are represented in this book by their accepted international variants: Cologne (*Köln*), Hanover (*Hannover*), Munich (*München*), Nuremberg (*Nürnberg*), Vienna (*Wien*), and Strasbourg (*Straßburg*). The name Frankfurt will be used throughout the book to refer to the city on the Main River (not to be confused with Frankfurt on the Oder River in the East German Mission).

### NOTES

1. Douglas F. Tobler, interview by the author, Lindon, UT, July 25, 2008.
2. Gilbert Scharffs, "Mormonism Holds on during the World War II Years," in *Mormonism in Germany: A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Germany* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 91–116.
3. No such publications are known among the members of the West German Mission, but several have emerged in the East German Mission. An excellent example is by Werner Klein of

the Landsberg Branch, *Under the Eye of the Shepherd* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2005).

4. Soldier Kurt Ruf of the Stuttgart Branch and young mother Charlotte Bodon Schneider of the Strasbourg Branch kept very detailed wartime diaries that have been preserved.
5. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
6. Hitler's Germany had about eighty million inhabitants in 1939 and was roughly the size of the state of Texas.
7. Eyewitnesses in several branches recalled rescuing chairs from the ruins of the branch meetings and taking them home for use in group meetings. When branches were evicted from meeting rooms (which happened frequently after 1942), the pump organ was moved to the home of a member who could host meetings.
8. The Jehovah's Witnesses and a break-off group, the Bible Students in Germany (known as die Zeugen Jehovas and die ernstesten Bibelforscher), publicly opposed military service and as a group became inmates of prisons and concentration camps.
9. See the story of Heinrich Worbs of the St. Georg Branch of the Hamburg District. The sad fate of the three teenagers of the St. Georg Branch is now well known and has been summarized in the Hamburg District chapter.
10. David Irving, *The Destruction of Dresden* (London: William Kimber, 1963), 42.
11. *Ibid.*, 162.
12. The Berlin Opera House was destroyed and rebuilt twice during the war. No attempt was made to restore it after the third time it was bombed and burned out.