

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. East German Mission Quarterly Reports, 1938, no. 47, East German Mission History.
3. The Mutterkreuz was awarded in three degrees: for five, seven, and nine or more children.
4. Helmut Mudrow, interview by the author, Ogden, Utah, May 25, 2006.
5. See the story told by Rudi Seehagen in the chapter on the Spandau Branch, Berlin District.
6. Gertrud Schmidt, autobiography (unpublished), 14.
7. *Ibid.*, 14.
8. *Ibid.*, 14–15.
9. *Ibid.*, 16.
10. *Ibid.*, 16.

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## LANDSBERG BRANCH

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Landsberg was a small branch at the west-ern end of the elongated territory of the Schneidemühl District. The city was located on the Warthe River in the province of Brandenburg and had about forty-five thousand residents when World War II began. The modern name is Gorzów Wielkopolski, Poland.

| Landsberg Branch <sup>1</sup> | 1939      |
|-------------------------------|-----------|
| Elders                        | 3         |
| Priests                       | 2         |
| Teachers                      | 3         |
| Deacons                       | 3         |
| Other Adult Males             | 25        |
| Adult Females                 | 36        |
| Male Children                 | 1         |
| Female Children               | 2         |
| <i>Total</i>                  | <i>75</i> |

In 1939, the Landsberg Branch held its meetings in rented rooms at Schiessgraben 1. Elsa Klein (born 1932) offered this description of the facility:

I always thought that the building in which we met was absolutely ugly and dark. On the first floor was an animal breeder. He was the only other person who used that building. The rooms were simple. . . . I know that we had a separate room for the Primary.<sup>2</sup>

Elsa's brother, Werner (born 1929), also re-called the setting:

It was a big warehouse building or a factory. We had a large room on the second floor. Attendance was twenty or thirty people on Sunday. Our branch president was Friedrich Fleischhauer and the Relief Society president was Sister Hintze.<sup>3</sup>

The family of Emil and Emma Klein was very attached to the Church and the branch. Werner recalled his mother singing Church hymns while cleaning the house. She also wrote little plays for the branch members to perform. Werner's brother, Horst, learned how to play the pump organ.<sup>4</sup>

At the onset of the war, Emil Klein was inducted into the city police force. He was a veteran of the Great War and was pressed into service to replace a policeman sent to Poland in the German invasion. Later, Brother Klein was drafted into the German army and was gone from home for the duration of the war. Initially, he was assigned to guard duty at a POW camp in northern Germany, and then the family lost contact with him.

Emil Klein was not at home when his daughter, Elsa, was baptized. The ceremony took place in the Warthe River in late March. As she explained, "We were a very active and busy branch in Landsberg. When somebody was baptized, we made a big event of it." On Elsa's baptismal day, "the entire branch was there," but no talks were given at the site. "I had only one thought: 'Heavenly Father, please help me so that my shirt is not above the water.' I knew that all of me had to be under the water."

In Elsa's school (as in all German schools), the day began with the singing of the national anthem.<sup>5</sup> She found it difficult to hold her right arm in the air in the Hitler salute for the duration of the song, so she switched to her left arm. This mistake earned her punishment from her music teacher. She recalled, "I was often punished for things that I did not do, because I was too shy to defend myself."

By 1943, the Landsberg Branch had moved to a new location at Schlageterstrasse 17. The space was smaller, as Werner later recollected:

It was close to the marketplace. It was in a Hinterhaus. There we had a little room where we had to go up a very steep staircase. . . . We had a room where all of us met together. . . . It was like a business building but it was empty. . . . There was a little sign on the building by the street with the name of the Church on it.<sup>6</sup>

Elsa Klein was barely ten years old when she learned how a humanitarian act could be dangerous in Nazi Germany. Forced laborers from France used to pass her garden on their way to work in a local factory. Once she picked a handful of berries and reached through the fence to give them to the French laborers. A neighbor saw her and reported the family to the police, who sent Sister Klein an official warning. Elsa said, "I remember my mother telling me angrily that I was not to do that again or we would be dead. I could not understand why I was not allowed to do that since it was a nice thing to do."

Christmas 1944 should have been a time of rejoicing, but the spirit of the season was sobered by the news brought to Emma Klein by a neighbor who was a member of the Nazi Party. Emma's son, Horst, had been killed in the Soviet Union. Werner recalled being told that Horst "was shot in the abdomen and probably bled to death."<sup>7</sup>

Elsa remembered hearing the news of her brother's death. "I screamed, and my parents

hid me. . . . My grandmother passed out when she heard the news. My mother did not say anything at all; she was very brave."

The war had no substantial effect on the town of Landsberg until the last. In early 1945, Werner (then fifteen) volunteered for service in the Red Cross and received some training. He was immediately put to work and learned about the results of war in a dramatic fashion:

My job then was to meet the trains bringing wounded German soldiers from the Russian front and then transport the wounded to our army hospitals. These men were in horrible condition. The air was filled with the odor of blood, pus, dead flesh, and gangrene. There were young men with both legs amputated who screamed in pain when we moved them onto stretchers. It was difficult for a young boy such as I not to vomit or pass out from smelling the odors and seeing the condition of these men.<sup>8</sup>

As the Red Army approached Landsberg in the early spring of 1945, air raids began to leave their mark on the city. Several homes in the Klein family's neighborhood were destroyed. The Soviets (actually Mongolians) did in Landsberg what they had done elsewhere—they stole, vandalized, and molested women young and old. Werner was only sixteen years old but seemed to understand the terrible experience feared by women all over town—including his mother and his twelve-year-old sister. His fears were nearly realized on one occasion when an enemy soldier entered their apartment:

He walked into the bedroom and motioned for Elsa to come in. . . . He put his rifle down. . . . My mother and I watched in horror, not knowing what to do. I could see and hear my mother praying with terror in her eyes. I concluded that I would grab the soldier's gun and shoot him. No matter what, I would not stay there and let him rape my little sister. Some kind of miracle took place. The man picked up his gun and left the house without saying a word. We felt that, once again, we had been protected by a higher power.<sup>9</sup>

Branch president Fleischhauer's shoe shop was burned down by the conquerors, and there was an explosion (probably of chemicals) while the shop burned. The family's house went up in flames as well, while Werner watched from his home down the street. "We never knew what happened to him and his family," Werner wrote years later.<sup>10</sup>

Sister Klein kept a constant vigil against marauding soldiers. She made her own hair white, and she had her daughter carry a doll so she would appear very young. They were always cautious and agreed upon specific hiding places. One night, a Russian soldier came into the room where Elsa was hiding. She recalled the situation later with great clarity: "He used a lighter to look all over the room to see if anybody was there. I was pressed against the wall, and I could see my own shadow, but he never saw me. He looked through the room three times while I was praying."

In the spring of 1945, peace was just weeks away; Werner Klein may have believed that, as a teenager, he was safe in Landsberg. However, one day everything changed, and he found himself being held prisoner along with other boys and girls his age. The Soviets rounded them up and imprisoned them under horrible conditions for several days while interrogations and



*Fig. 1. Werner Klein was only fifteen when he joined the Red Cross. (W. Klein)*

beatings took place. (Werner was spared.) Next, they were sent home—not as free people, but in order to get clothing to take along, as they would soon be forced to leave their homes. Saying good-bye to his mother was very painful for Werner.<sup>11</sup>

Werner and the other youths were

then transported by truck to various working sites. At one point, all personal property was taken from the prisoners and burned, but somehow Werner was allowed to keep a few items—his belt and his photographs being the most valuable. In the days to come, he was subjected to terrible food, his head was shaved, and he was deloused. This was a most difficult state of affairs for the young man. As he later explained,

There was never a moment when I was alone; always I was surrounded by other prisoners and the guards. For prayer, I could only lie in bed and say to the Lord what was in my heart. Even when going about following orders, there was in my heart a prayer for protection and wisdom.<sup>12</sup>

For the next few days, the young people worked in a stone quarry and helped dismantle railroad tracks to be shipped to the Soviet Union.<sup>13</sup> A few days later, Werner and a friend named Günther were out in a field planting potatoes and decided to escape. Soon they were able to carry out the escape plan, running away while guards wildly shot at them. They were then on their own and determined to make their way home to Landsberg. The prison camp was in Schwiebus, about forty miles southeast of their hometown. The two boys traveled by night to avoid enemy soldiers. They passed abandoned, destroyed towns and the bodies of soldiers long since dead. At one point they were captured and put to work on a farm. Nevertheless, Werner was not satisfied being a prisoner, and the boys engineered another escape.<sup>14</sup>

Werner's accomplice was eighteen but a boy of little imagination and motivation. He allowed Werner to make essentially all decisions. The final decision led to their separation. Because the Warthe River was too wide to swim across, the boys had to cross a bridge guarded by enemy soldiers. Early in the morning, the soldiers were asleep, and Werner knew it was time to sneak across the bridge. Günther

wished only to sleep and refused to go along. With time being of the essence, Werner was compelled to go on alone, but he was too late. The bridge was guarded again. Fortunately, he found a rickety old boat and managed to paddle across the river. He never saw Günther again and was sad that their separation had come that way. Nevertheless, for the young adventurer, this was a moment of jubilation:

Now I was exultant. I was on the right side of the river to reach Landsberg. After all I had been through, I thought that nothing could stop me from reaching my goal. My thoughts were of my mother and sister. . . . I was daydreaming like this when I was brought back to reality by the sound of a gunshot.<sup>15</sup>

Red Army soldiers had seen him, and they brought him back to the east bank of the Warthe, but they decided that he was harmless and let him go. As his odyssey continued, Werner again attempted to cross a bridge but was captured by Polish militia. “We Germans feared the Polish more than the Russians,” he wrote. In an odd twist of fate, they released him when they learned that he had escaped from the Soviet prison camp in Schwiebus.

At this time, shortly before the war ended, Emma Klein must have thought that things could not get worse. One son was dead, and her husband and her two other sons were missing. Only her daughter, Elsa, was still with her. Werner recalled:

What my mother went through, losing her sons and losing me when I was taken away, then receiving the note that my father was killed and me getting sick [later] with tuberculosis in a hospital. I never heard her mourn or complain or doubt—never!<sup>16</sup>

Werner continued toward Landsberg and managed to reach home just days before the war ended on May 8. The reunion with his mother and his sister was glorious, and they immediately knelt in prayer to thank the Lord

for bringing him home. For several days, his mother treated his feet that had been damaged by long walks without shoes and in new but ill-fitting tennis shoes.<sup>17</sup>

Werner was home again, but in his words, “The peace that followed was worse than the war.” Landsberg was in territory given to Poland by the victorious Allies. During the summer of 1945, the Kleins were evicted. As Werner wrote:

Polish soldiers came into our house and ordered us to leave. We had fifteen minutes to pack a few things into three suitcases, which we put in a small hand wagon. All poor people like us were forced to get out of the Mark Brandenburg country. We left behind what we could not carry. . . . It was summer; the sun beat down on us and water was scarce. It was a heart-breaking thing to see the human tragedy—homeless people moving along with what strength they had, tired and weak from the heat and starvation.<sup>18</sup>

The Kleins accompanied other refugees westward toward Berlin and found a place to stay and work on a farm near the town of Gransee. This lasted all summer, until their Soviet employers released them for lack of work. They walked to the nearby town of Königstett, where they again found employment and a place to live. The two jobs Werner had there were bizarre: he worked first as the local grave-digger, then with some other boys destroying ammunition at a defunct munitions factory in the forest. He later explained the danger: “There were a lot of unexploded mines lying around everywhere—in the grass, in the sand, and between the trees. We had to watch every step we took. One wrong step meant a serious injury or even death.”<sup>19</sup>

The most terrifying experience Elsa Klein had in the year after the war was one that no girl could forget. The terror came not from an enemy soldier, but from a German farmer as Elsa was on a country road one evening, looking for her mother. The farmer pulled up beside

her with his team. She recounted the event in these words:

There was snow on the ground, and it was cold. He told me to get on his wagon, and being young, I got on. He stopped at the side of the road and [we got off.] He attempted to rape me and told me that if I screamed, he would kill me right away. He then said that he would kill me anyway. I didn't even have an elastic band on my pants but only leather which he could not untie. He got angrier and angrier. When I started screaming for help, he started to choke me. I begged him to stop and told him that even the Russians hadn't gotten that far with me. The moment I said a prayer in my heart, I heard the horses starting to pull the wagon away. He let go of me and ran after the horses. He told me that he would get me.

Fortunately, Elsa ran to a cemetery to hide and was discovered there by her mother and Werner. Because of the terror she had experienced, she could not speak for some time.

By the time spring 1947 had arrived, the Kleins had been without contact with the Church for two years. Sister Klein longed for that association and wrote a letter to the LDS branch in Cottbus, Germany, near the Polish border. She was then invited to go to Cottbus. With this development, the story had a relatively happy ending. Emma Klein took Elsa and Werner south to Cottbus. They made their way to the home of Fritz Lehnig, where a veritable Latter-day Saint refugee colony had been established. There Emma found her husband, Emil, who had been taken prisoner on the Western Front and released in 1945 by his American captors. With a heavy beard, he was hardly recognizable but alive and well.<sup>20</sup>

Their son Siegfried Klein was never found. Werner explained years later that his brother was drafted in late 1944 and was involved in the final, hopeless effort to stop the Soviet advance on Berlin. Siegfried was probably killed in or near the city of Küstrin, between

Landsberg and the Reich capital. No official word was ever received.

The Kleins were probably the last Latter-day Saints to leave Landsberg. With their departure, the branch ceased to exist.

### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Heinz Siegfried Klein** b. Memel, Ostpreußen, Preußen 1936 OR 4 Sep 1927; son of Emil Max Klein and Emma Helene Teichert; bp. 21 Sep 1935; MIA or d. Sep 1949 (Klein; AF; IGI)

**Horst Helmut Klein** b. Memel, Ostpreußen, Preußen 1924 OR 27 Jul 1923; son of Emil Max Klein and Emma Helene Teichert; bp. 25 Jun 1932; corporal; k. in battle, Ljubimowka, southwest of Tschunaki, Ukraine 24 Dec 1943; bur. Dmitrijewka, Nikopol, Ukraine (Klein, 13; www.volksbund.de; AF; IGI)

**Emma Emilie Piska** b. Krumthis, Deutsch Krone, Westpreußen, Preußen 3 or 5 Nov 1880; bp. 22 Jul 1924; m. Leo Julius Krueger; 4 children; d. Landsberg, Pommern 29 Mar 1940 (*Sonntagsstern*, no. 17, 26 May 1940 n. p.; FHL Microfilm 271381, 1935 Census)

**Kurt Ludwig Stubbe** b. Kreuz, Posen, Preußen 5 Nov 1909; son of Ludwig Carl Stubbe and Emma Louise Auguste Kemnitz; bp. 2 Apr 1926; ord. deacon; corporal; d. wounds in Res. Field Hospital IV Lemberg Bergsanatorium, Ukraine 21 Sep 1942 (*Sonntagsgruss*, no. 1, 3 Jan 1943, 4; www.volksbund.de; FHL Microfilm 245277, 1935 Census)

### NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. Elsa Klein Tietjen, interview by the author in German, Amtsberg, Germany, May 30, 2007; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
3. Werner Klein, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, March 23, 2007.
4. Werner Klein and Joy Robinson, *Under the Eye of the Shepherd* (Springville, UT: Cedar Fort, 2006), 6.
5. In some schools, the national anthem ("Deutschland über Alles") was followed by the Horst Wessel song—the anthem of the Nazi Party.
6. Klein, interview.
7. Klein and Robinson, *Under the Eye*, 13.
8. *Ibid.*, 14.
9. *Ibid.*, 20.
10. *Ibid.*, 18.

11. Ibid., 30.
12. Ibid., 33.
13. For several years following the war, the Soviets also dismantled machinery in their military occupation zone and shipped it to Russia to replace what they had lost at the hands of the Germans.
14. Klein and Robinson, 45.
15. Ibid., 47.
16. Klein, interview.
17. Klein and Robinson, 52.
18. Ibid., 56.
19. Ibid., 64.
20. Ibid., 69.

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## SCHNEIDEMÜHL BRANCH

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The city of Schneidemühl was not located in the center of the district of the same name, but at the end of 1939 there were substantially more priesthood holders in that branch than in any other. Perhaps that was the reason for the selection of Schneidemühl as the home of the district. During the war, the branch president was Wilhelm Jonischuss, and his counselors were Richard Rieve and Friedrich Wolff.<sup>1</sup>

This branch was a fine example of the role played by larger families in smaller branches. Fritz Birth had eleven children and Johannes Kindt had seven (from two wives—his first wife had died). Together the two families made up almost one-quarter of the branch population.

For the duration of World War II, the Schneidemühl Branch met in rented rooms on Gartenstrasse. The address was house 31, in the main floor of the first Hinterhaus.

| Schneidemühl Branch <sup>2</sup> | 1939 |
|----------------------------------|------|
| Elders                           | 7    |
| Priests                          | 3    |
| Teachers                         | 4    |
| Deacons                          | 3    |
| Other Adult Males                | 12   |

|                 |    |
|-----------------|----|
| Adult Females   | 44 |
| Male Children   | 3  |
| Female Children | 6  |
| <i>Total</i>    | 82 |

Hans Kindt (born 1922), the eldest child of district president Johannes Kindt, recalled that the branch rooms in the Hinterhaus included a main meeting hall, three or four small classrooms, a cloakroom, and restrooms. He remembered that the phrase “The Glory of God is Intelligence” was painted on the wall at the front of the chapel. There was a pump organ, and the rooms were heated by a stove.<sup>3</sup>

Ruth Gärtner (born 1923) recalled that a picture of the prophet Joseph Smith hung on one of the walls. Her family’s Church attendance was stellar, thanks to the character of her mother, a “very dedicated member of the Church”:

We had to be [in church] rain, snow, or ice. We walked an hour to church for Sunday School and went back home. Then at 7:00 was the sacrament meeting, and then we walked another hour, and by 9:00 we were back home. So we walked four hours on Sundays.<sup>4</sup>

President Johannes Kindt was not a follower of Adolf Hitler and encouraged his sons to avoid involvement with the Hitler Youth.<sup>5</sup> According to Hans, “He told me to say that we didn’t have the money to pay for the uniforms. So [the leaders] gave me the uniform and then I didn’t have an excuse. I liked it at first because I liked the competition of sports.”

Hans’s younger brother, Walter (born 1923), planned to be a surveyor and needed to be in the organization or he risked losing his apprenticeship. Walter was a talented young man and eventually became the leader of a group of 350 boys. On one occasion, a friend wondered why Walter did not attend Hitler Youth activities on Sundays, so on the next Sunday, all 350 boys came to the Kindt home to pick Walter