

# STUTTGART DISTRICT

## West German Mission



The Stuttgart District boundaries were essentially those of the historical kingdom of Württemberg. Surrounded by the provinces of Baden and Bavaria in twentieth-century Germany, Württemberg has a proud history that is centered in its capital city, Stuttgart. The neighboring districts of the church in 1939 were Karlsruhe to the West, Nuremberg to the northeast, Munich to the southeast, Strasbourg to the southwest, and the Swiss Mission to the south.

Stuttgart District <sup>1</sup>	1939
Elders	41
Priests	9
Teachers	12
Deacons	26
Other Adult Males	69
Adult Females	264
Male Children	36
Female Children	27
<i>Total</i>	484

The population of the Stuttgart District was relatively small in 1939: 484 members distributed among six branches—approximately eighty

members per branch. To attend district conferences in Stuttgart, the members of the outlying branches did not have far to travel. Heilbronn was twenty-five miles to the north, Feuerbach three miles north, Esslingen six miles east, Göppingen twenty miles east, and Reutlingen twenty miles southeast.

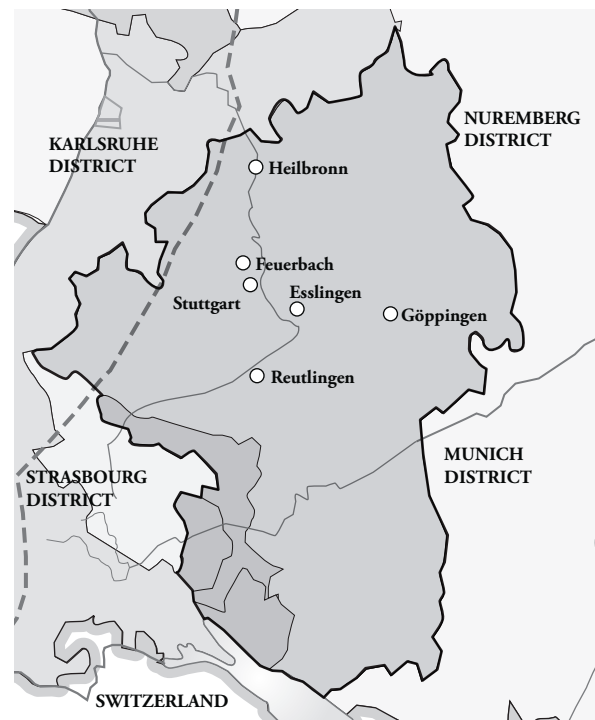


Fig. 1. The six branches of the Stuttgart District were clustered around the city of Stuttgart. Much of this territory had no LDS units.

Regarding the status of the district as the war approached, a solitary entry in the records of the West German Mission gives a good impression:

Saturday–Sunday, April 22–23, 1939: the Stuttgart District conference [was held] in the Gustav Siegle House in Stuttgart. President Emil B. Fetzer [presided]. Two buses brought Saints from the Frankfurt District to sing Evan Stephens’s “The Martyrs.” The Stuttgart [District] choir and orchestra also performed.<sup>2</sup>

This report is a reminder that nearly all districts of the Church in Germany had organized choirs in those days. Rehearsals were taken very seriously, and performances were offered at district conferences, mission conferences, and on other occasions. Like district conferences all over Germany, the one held in Stuttgart in April 1939 was a two-day affair. (In some cases, events took place on three or even four consecutive days.)

**KIRCHE JESU CHRISTI  
DER HEILIGEN DER LETZTEN TAGE**

*Herzliche Einladung*

ZUR

**FRÜHJAHR-S-KONFERENZ**  
*des Stuttgarter und Karlsruher Distrikts*  
*am 6. und 7. April 1940 in Stuttgart*

*Am 6. April im Gemeindefaal Hauptstätterstr. 96*  
*Am 7. April im Mozartsaal der Liederhalle*  
*zu erreichen mit der Straßenbahn Linie 7, 18 und 20*

*Anwesend sind Missionleiter Christian Heck und Anton Hud*  
*beide aus Frankfurt*  
*sowie die übrige Missionleitung*  
*Weidenscher Hauptsitz Frankfurt a. M., Schaumünkel 41 p*

*Eintritt frei*

*Keine Sammlung*

By late July 1939, Elder Fetzer had been succeeded by missionary Norman Seibold of Idaho as the president of the district. Following the departure of the American missionaries a month later, the leadership of the Stuttgart District was vacant for three months. It is assumed that the following district leaders continued to serve during that time: Emil Geist (Heilbronn) as superintendent of the Sunday School, Kurt Schneider (Stuttgart) as the leader of the YMMIA, Elsa Hörger (Esslingen) as the leader of the YWMIA, Gretel K. Fingerle (Esslingen) as the president of the Primary organization, Maria Speidel (Stuttgart) as the president of the Relief Society, and Meinrad Greiner (Stuttgart) as the genealogical supervisor.

The district general minutes indicate that a new president of the Stuttgart District was called by mission supervisor Friedrich Biehl on November 26, 1939: Erwin Ruf was a good choice, having served the previous eight years as the president of the Stuttgart Branch. He in turn chose Karl Lutz and Heinrich Bodon as his counselors. As of that date, President Ruf began to keep the district general minutes, which had been neglected since 1926.<sup>3</sup>

With the same dedication exhibited by many district presidents in Germany, Elder Ruf scheduled a conference in Stuttgart on April 6–7, 1940. The program for the session held on Sunday at 10:00 a.m. in the Stuttgart Liederhalle is representative of this and other conference sessions:

- Mozart Auditorium  
Sunday School conference  
Presiding: Emil Geist  
Prelude: Wilhelm Ballweg  
Chorister: Kurt Kirsch  
Hymn: 132  
Prayer: Johann Knödler  
Hymn: 129
1. Sacrament prelude
  2. Announcement of speakers: D. Rügner
  3. Sacrament postlude
  4. Talk: Gustav Wacker
  5. Sustaining of the general authorities:  
Erwin Ruf
  6. Teaching instruction: Sister Frey

Fig. 2. The official program of the spring district conference of 1940.

7. Story: Anita Neff
  8. Poem: Liesel Lutz
  9. Choral number: Stuttgart Branch children's choir (Maria Ruf)
  10. Prayer: Emil Geist
  11. Choral number: district mothers' choir
  12. The experience of prayer: Georg Stehle
  13. Solo: Sister Bechtle
  14. Mission leadership: Anton Huck
- Hymn: 72  
 Prayer: Eugen Keller  
 Attendance: 250 persons

The final statement in the district general minutes about the conference reads as follows: "It is noteworthy that a fine spirit was felt in all sessions. The combined attendance at all sessions was more than 800 persons."<sup>4</sup>

President Ruf's record includes notes about visits he made to the six branches on a weekly (and at

times even daily) basis. The short distances between cities made it possible for him to attend meetings in as many as three branches on a single day. In most cases, he indicated the topics of the talks he gave in those meetings. He also visited individual members and families living in towns outside of the branch cities.

Erwin and Anna Ruf had two daughters, Maria (born 1923) and Esther (born 1929). Esther recalled how her father always seemed to be traveling for church work: "It seemed like he was gone every weekend."<sup>5</sup> President Ruf worked in a factory for critical war products, and this employment kept him at home throughout the war. The family lived in the Gablenberg suburb of Stuttgart and needed about forty-five minutes to get to church. According to Esther, "There was a streetcar, but we were very conservative with our money, so we walked. After



Fig. 3. Members of the Feuerbach Branch after a district conference. (R. Rügner)

Sunday School, we walked home for dinner, then back to church in the late afternoon.”

Young Helga Hock of the Heilbronn Branch had fine memories of President Ruf, whom she saw on many occasions. “He had curly white hair and a slight speech impediment. And he was very friendly and usually visited our family before he left town again.”<sup>6</sup> Helga recalled taking the train to Stuttgart twice each year to attend the district conference. “That was always an exciting event for us children.”

As was the custom in the West German Mission during the war, Ruf attended conferences of other districts. On October 12–13, 1940, he was in Nuremberg participating in the conference of the Nuremberg District. Mission leaders Christian Heck and Anton Huck were there, as was Johann Thaller, the president of the Munich District. In most district conferences, all visiting district and mission leaders were asked to speak.<sup>7</sup>

The district conference held in Stuttgart on November 9–10, 1940, took place in the concert hall of the city’s Bürgermuseum. As was his tradition, Erwin Ruf recorded the names of all speakers and musicians. He also wrote regarding the Sunday meal, namely that “the [local] sisters provided lunch for more than 100 persons in the [Stuttgart] branch rooms.” The afternoon session that Sunday was attended by enough people to “nearly fill the hall,” which accommodated four hundred persons.<sup>8</sup>

In the spring of 1941, with the war in its second full year, another district conference was convened. This time, the meetings took place in the Stuttgart Branch rooms. It is possible that by that time, many of the Saints had been called away to military service or employment or had sought the safety of smaller towns. In any case, Erwin Ruf’s comments were still enthusiastic: “There was a fine spirit in all meetings. The songs rendered by the various choirs were especially impressive. More than 200 persons attended the afternoon session.”<sup>9</sup>

The district conference held on September 27–28, 1941, was likewise a success. Mission leaders Christian Heck and Anton Huck again came

from Frankfurt to participate. It would appear from Ruf’s record that all programs of the Church in this district were still functioning well at the time. Indeed his final comments for the year 1941 include these numbers: the district member population was 466, five children were born, six persons were baptized, eight were ordained to the priesthood, and eight had died during the year.<sup>10</sup>

The book in which Erwin Ruf kept the general minutes of the district in the early war years was full as of June 28, 1942, and the book in which he very probably continued his record has not been found. The last two major events described in the surviving book were the celebration of the Relief Society centennial on March 21, 1942 (130 attendees), and the spring district conference held on March 28–29 (210 attendees).<sup>11</sup>

The only change in the meetings of six branches of the Stuttgart District during the first three war years was introduced by Ruf in March 1942: he asked that the priesthood holders meet once a week on an evening with the Relief Society sisters. In the following weeks, he attended such meetings and was apparently pleased with the innovation.

The following information regarding the district conference held in Stuttgart on October 18, 1943, is found in the general minutes of the Göppingen Branch:

Brother [Anton] Huck and his wife from Frankfurt attended. The rooms of the Stuttgart Branch were so badly damaged in the attack on October 7–8 that they can no longer be used. The roof of the meeting hall in Munich was also damaged. The afternoon and evening sessions [of this conference] were cancelled when the police confiscated the building for the housing of people who have lost their homes in the air raids. When Erwin Ruf delivered this message to the home of Brother Biebinger, the latter suffered a heart attack.<sup>12</sup>

Thanks to his employment in Stuttgart, Erwin Ruf served faithfully in the calling of district president throughout the war. He was not ashamed of the gospel or the church, as his daughter Esther recalled:

When we went to the air raid shelter, he would always leave a copy of the *Improvement Era* (I think it was in English) on our table in case somebody came into our apartment. That way they would realize that we were Mormons, that our church was connected with the United States. He would also leave a copy of the Book of Mormon on the table.

Elder Ruf was in Stuttgart when the war ended and continued to visit the six branches of the Church in that district as they attempted to regroup. At least four of those branches were looking for new places to meet in the summer of 1945.

### NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
2. West German Mission history quarterly report, 1939, no. 15, CHL LR 10045 2.
3. Stuttgart District history, 166, CHL CR 16982 11.
4. *Ibid.*, 167.
5. Esther Ruf Robinson, telephone interview with the author, April 13, 2009.
6. Helga Hock Seeber, autobiographical report (unpublished); private collection.
7. *Ibid.*, 173.
8. *Ibid.*, 175–176.
9. *Ibid.*, 181.
10. *Ibid.*, 193.
11. *Ibid.*, 195–196.
12. Göppingen Branch general minutes, vol. 15, 226, CHL LR 3235 11.

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## ESSLINGEN BRANCH

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The city of Esslingen had 48,732 inhabitants in the year 1939.<sup>1</sup> Six miles east of Stuttgart, it was the home of the second-largest LDS branch in the Stuttgart District at the time. Of the 117 members, twenty-seven were priesthood holders. Under branch president Karl Zügel, all programs of the Church were functioning as the war approached.

According to the branch directory, Brother Zügel's counselors were Kurt Kirsch and Gottlob Maier. Johann Knödler led the Sunday School, Albert Heinemann the YMMIA and Paula Krieger the YWMIA. Friederika Heinemann was the president of the Primary and Lina Kugler the president of the Relief Society. Brother Kirsch was *Der Stern* magazine representative and Brother Maier directed genealogical research among branch members.<sup>2</sup>

When the war began in September 1939, the branch was holding meetings in a house at Plochingerstrasse 4 in Esslingen. Sunday School began at 10:00 and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. Mutual met on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m. and the Primary on Wednesdays at 6:00 p.m., followed by Relief Society at 8:00. The genealogical study group met on the third Tuesday of the month at 8:00 p.m.

Esslingen Branch <sup>3</sup>	1939
Elders	9
Priests	6
Teachers	3
Deacons	9
Other Adult Males	22
Adult Females	58
Male Children	7
Female Children	3
<i>Total</i>	117

"I can remember the beginnings of the war very well," recalled Ilse Neff (born 1929):

I was ten years old, and we lived in a street where everybody knew their neighbors very well. One night, we heard a loud noise outside, and we woke up. My parents went to see what was going on, and I was terribly scared. I saw a group of men knocking on everybody's door and windows. I asked my father what that meant, and he explained to me that those men were soldiers and that they were looking for men to draft for a possible war. That scared me. . . . One night, we

came back from helping my mother’s friend with her canning. Suddenly, we heard Hitler’s voice on the radio saying that beginning at [4:45 a.m.] Germany was shooting back. I can still hear that in my mind today. That was September 1, 1939.<sup>4</sup>

Ilse recalled that the rooms at Plochingerstrasse were confiscated early in the war because the building had belonged to a Jewish family named Moses. Several homes became available for meetings during the war, but Ilse stated that there were no interruptions in the meetings when the locations changed.

Walter Tischhauser (born 1935) described the meeting rooms in the Moses building in these words: “It was quite a large building that was four or five stories high. The rooms were also large—a little bit like small halls. This building belonged to the Moses family, who were Jewish. We called the building the ‘Moses house.’”<sup>5</sup>

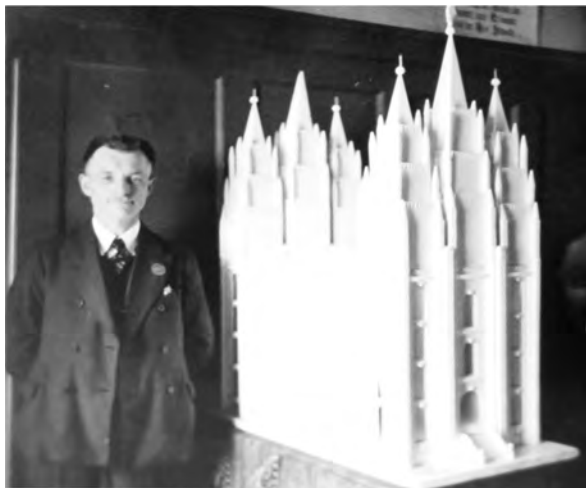


Fig. 1. Anita Neff’s father with his model of the Salt Lake Temple. (A. Neff Bauer)

The walk to church took forty-five minutes for Lina Tischhauser and her children. Her husband was not a member of the Church, but he did not oppose their desire to attend meetings. Daughter Elsbeth (born 1932) remembered walking home after Sunday School, then back again for sacrament meeting in the evening. That meant a total of three hours on the way. “I think there were about fifty people in the meetings in those days,” she said.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 2. The living room of the Oppermann home was one of several locations of branch meetings during the war. (Oppermann family)

The Stuttgart District general minutes written by president Erwin Ruf include reports of his many visits among the Saints in Esslingen. His record of January 23, 1940, indicated that the meetings that Sunday had to be cancelled due to a lack of coal to heat the room.<sup>7</sup> A few months later (June 3), he wrote the following: “Attended the Sunday School and the fast meeting of the Esslingen Branch. Today the members of the Feuerbach and Stuttgart Branches were fasting and praying that the Esslingen Branch would be successful in locating new rooms to meet in.”<sup>8</sup> A month later, the meetings were still being held in the home of the Fingerle family while the search continued. It was not until December that a decision was made to designate the Fingerle home as the official venue for branch meetings: “[Erwin Ruf] visited the Esslingen Branch fast meeting and offered the dedicatory prayer on the rooms in the Fingerle home where meetings will be held.”<sup>9</sup>

The hostess, Bertha Pauline Fingerle, was Walter Tischhauser’s grandmother. He described the branch’s new location as follows:

On the main floor of her house, she emptied the living room in which up to twenty-five people could be accommodated. The classes for Sunday School were taught in smaller rooms in the house, for example the bedrooms. I remember sitting on the bed and being taught. This house

was located at Mellinger Strasse 12a. During this time, the branch was not larger than twenty-five people usually.

Early in the war, an incident occurred that convinced some Church members in Esslingen that Germany's government was willing to hurt its own citizens. Young Ilse Neff recalled her friendship with Helene Zügel, one of the ten children of the branch president. Helene was intellectually disabled but was not socially inept. Ilse told this story:

The government ordered the family to send Helene to an institution, since they wanted to help her (or so they said). But one day, the family received a letter describing her sudden death. We all knew how she died and that it hadn't been a sudden death. She must have been about [eighteen] years older than me. She could communicate well and would sometimes come to visit us in our home. She liked talking to my mother, although she had to walk a long way to get to our home from where she lived. She knew so many things. One time, she even explained to me what the Millennium would be like. I was so impressed about the way she explained it to me. She also sang Church hymns with me.



Fig. 3. A prewar photograph of the Esslingen Branch. (A. Neff/Bauer)

Helene was likely a victim of the heinous euthanasia program carried out by the government. The official cause of her death was given as "septic angina." She was twenty-nine years old.

The district general minutes mention the deaths of several Esslingen Saints, notably Erwin Riecker, who was killed in Russia in March 1942. A

memorial service was held in the branch for him.<sup>10</sup> He was, of course, only one of several men of this branch to give their lives for Germany.



Fig. 4. Three of the eight Tischhauser children. (A. Neff/Bauer)

Elsbeth Tischhauser recalled how the army put pressure on her brother Rudolf to join:

Every month, people from the [Nazi] party came and told my parents that my brother would be the perfect soldier because he was so tall. And they also said that if we won the war, he would have the best life possible. After all these things, my mother eventually said to my brother Rudolf that he should go. For us, it was a horrible time when my brother left, and we had to realize that many of the soldiers were killed in battle.

Esslingen was spared great damage, despite the fact that the city is so close to Stuttgart and was home to a railroad repair facility. According to Ilse Neff, "We didn't have many air raids, but when we

went to bed at night, we each had a chair next to the bed with our clothes on it to get dressed fast. We also had a small bag to carry with us to the basement. Sometimes, there was an hour between the first sirens going off and the all-clear signal.” A girl of faith, Ilse was impressed when she heard that branch president Karl Zügel and his counselor Gottlob Maier had gone up the hill above the city to offer a prayer. They petitioned God to protect that city and the Saints who lived there.

In 1943, Walter Tischhauser was planning to be baptized, but a minor crisis of faith occurred when he turned eight, as he described it:

My aunts (with last name Fingerle) were my teachers in the Church, and I loved them very much. When I was eight years old, I wanted to be baptized because that is what I had always been taught in Church. My mother wrote of my desires in a letter to my oldest brother, who was then serving in the Arbeitsdienst in the Rhineland. He wrote back wondering why I wanted to be baptized since he thought I always wanted to become a great Hitler boy. Then he explained that one could not be a good Mormon boy and at the same time be a good Hitler boy. That is when I decided to not get baptized. All of my family members who were in the Church were shocked, but I was convinced that I had made the right choice.

Walter did not turn his back on the Church for long, as he explained: “I was baptized when I was eleven years old in 1946. The war was over by then, so I could concentrate on becoming a good Mormon boy again.”

Regarding the challenge of finding enough food to eat during the war, Walter made this comment:

Although we were quite a large family, we never had to go without the basic food groups. I remember that I never had to be hungry. It was more difficult for us to find enough clothing—especially shoes. Those things we would only get with ration coupons. My brother had to serve in the military and sent the cigarette coupons home. Nobody in our family smoked, so we could exchange the smoking cards for something else.

Elsbeth Tischhauser recalled how the city government had ponds dug around town so that water for fighting fires after air raids would always be available. In about 1944, her father sent her to the local pond several times to remove waste with a bucket. On one such occasion, she was kneeling by the pond when she heard airplanes approaching:

I was wondering why there was no alarm and thought that they must be German planes. But they started shooting right away. I kept on working. A window in the house next to me opened, and a woman shouted to me that I should get into her house as fast as possible. The planes aimed directly at me. I ran down into the basement, but when it was over, the people had a hard time getting me to come out again because I was shaking so much. If I didn’t have a thousand angels next to me that day, I wouldn’t have survived.

Entertainment for teenagers was a challenge, Ilse Neff recalled. “I remember one Heinz Rühmann movie that was in the theaters, and my mother allowed me to go. We had to go three different times until we could watch the entire movie because an air raid happened during the first two showings. We had to go into the basement of the movie theater when the alarm sounded.”

Young Hans Fingerle (born 1940) was just old enough to recall being with his father for a short time before Ludwig Fingerle (born 1913) was drafted into the air force. In his father’s absence, Hans had plenty of experiences to pass the time. He recalled this one aspect of life during the last years of the war when Germany was losing on many fronts:

We had refugees stay with us in our apartment even during the war. One day, somebody from the housing office came and told us that we had too much room to spare and that they would send people to stay with us. We did not know any of them but they lived in one of the rooms of our apartment with four people. They spoke a different dialect, but I do not know if they were from the east. One of the boys in the family was my age, so we played a lot together.<sup>11</sup>





Fig. 5. Ludwig and Margarete Fingerle with their son Hans in about 1943. (H. Fingerle)

Hans's father, Ludwig (born 1913) had been drafted into the air force and, like so many other soldiers on both sides of the conflict, would rather have been home. One can sense the longing in these words written to his wife on February 11, 1945, from Ober Ursel, near Frankfurt:

I hope you are all well and happy. How did you spend your birthday? I am still waiting for a letter from you. Your last letter was written on January 20. Since then, so much has happened that I don't know which of it would most interest you. One thing: the next few weeks will determine what will happen to our people and our country. May the Lord have mercy on us. We must pray that our enemies do not overcome us. Now I understand that in Joseph Smith's vision, he had to turn away his eyes when he saw the misery that would befall mankind. . . . May God protect you and all of our loved ones.<sup>12</sup>

The trials of a mother caring for her children during the absence of her soldier husband are reflected clearly in the letter written by Margarete Fingerle to Ludwig on April 8, 1945—just one month before the end of the war:

You have probably heard that the front moves closer and closer to us. But we won't be discouraged or give up. We maintain the hope that we will stay healthy and see you again. How beautiful the world could be; the flowers are beginning to blossom around here and I am with you in my thoughts, my dear. . . . I am so glad that we had time together to travel and see some wonderful places. Will we ever be able to do that again? . . . I have to go now; it's 11 o'clock. How we all are awaiting the day when we will see you again.

Hugs and kisses from your dear Gretel<sup>13</sup>

Sister Fingerle would have to wait until the next life to see her husband again. The letter was returned as undeliverable. The chaos that reigned around Berlin in the last days of the war made it impossible for army postal officials to find Ludwig Fingerle.

Soldier Rudolf Tischhauser was a member of the Church, but in one of his last letters written as the end of the war loomed, he told his mother that he would rather shoot himself than be taken prisoner by the Russians. Neither scenario was his fate; he was killed in an artillery barrage. By the time the war ended, Lina Tischhauser had lost two sons and two brothers, as her daughter Elsbeth explained:

My brother Ludwig was killed in the war in December of 1944. Rudolf was later killed in April 1945. My uncle died around April 20, 1945. And my oldest brother Otto Fingerle died the day that the war was declared lost. He was shot by partisans. It was such a difficult time for all of us, especially for my mother.<sup>14</sup>

Ilse Neff recalled how the American invaders appeared one day in the spring of 1945 on the hills above Esslingen. When the city's mayor initially refused to surrender the city, the enemy threatened to bombard the town. Fortunately, several

influential citizens conducted talks with both sides and were able to motivate the mayor to renounce his call for resistance. The city surrendered without a fight, and the people were spared. According to Ilse, the Americans were merciful to the populace, but the same could not be said of the French: “It was a different atmosphere. . . . We were a little scared of the Africans who served among the French troops. We had never before seen so many in one group. Especially the women were afraid.” Fortunately, the Esslingen Branch members did not suffer much at the hands of the conquerors.

Little Hans Fingerle described an experience he had with the occupation forces:

I was not afraid of the black soldiers I saw. One time, I was with a friend from kindergarten, and we saw a pickup truck with American soldiers. I thought it was funny that they had a broom on the side of their truck. When the truck passed us, I pointed to the broom, and we both laughed. All of sudden, somebody hit me in the rear, and when I turned around, I saw a black soldier standing there. He must have thought that I had laughed about him. That was my first encounter with a soldier that was not white.

Ludwig Fingerle was killed in the defense of Berlin on April 25, 1945, but his wife did not have proof of his fate until a letter written by a comrade arrived in August 1948. Horst von Glasenapp returned from a POW camp in the Soviet Union that summer and fulfilled his self-imposed duty of writing to Margarete Fingerle. He explained how his antiaircraft battery, which included Corporal Ludwig Fingerle, had moved in several directions through the capital city, trying to avoid a direct confrontation with the invading Red Army. Eventually, the men found themselves at the north edge of the Tiergarten (Berlin’s equivalent to New York City’s Central Park). Von Glasenapp’s very detailed letter includes the following description of the events of evening of April 25:

We expected to be attacked by the Russian night fighters at any moment. When we heard the motors of the planes and saw the illumination

flares they dropped, I ordered my unit to stop and to take cover as fast as possible. We were across the street from Bellevue Palace. We sensed instinctively the impending danger, but the first bombs fell even before we had found safety in the trenches. At dawn the next day, April 26, we survivors buried our three comrades who were killed, including Ludwig Fingerle, under the trees of the Tiergarten, across the street from Bellevue Palace.<sup>15</sup>

Without the letter of this kind commanding officer, the fate of Ludwig Fingerle may well have remained a mystery.

Lina Tischhauser had raised her children in the faith before and during the war, but her husband was not a member of the Church and did not encourage his children to be baptized. However, some of his misgivings about religion were apparently resolved after Germany’s catastrophic defeat, as his son Walter recalled:

My father always believed very strongly in the [Hitler] regime and the system. When the war was over, my father basically broke down and had to reevaluate everything that he believed in. Especially because he found out what had really happened in connection with the Jews, for example. He stated that he felt so used and betrayed that he would never believe and trust anybody again. During the [Third Reich], he also never wanted to hear anything about the Church. But because there were so many children in our family, we always got extra support from the Church (food, clothing, etc.) after the war. The branch presidency then told my father that the Church had helped his family so much—now would be the time to be baptized. Even my mother testified that the blessings had been the biggest help getting through the war.

Richard Tischhauser was baptized in 1948.

The city of Esslingen was indeed fortunate to emerge from the war nearly unscathed. Official city records show that only forty-seven civilians and seventy military personnel from Esslingen lost their lives and that only 3 percent of the structures (all of them in suburbs) were destroyed. The war ended for the people of Esslingen when the French arrived

in April 1945. The branch membership had been reduced significantly, but the meetings continued, and the Saints in that city looked forward to life in a peaceful Germany.

#### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Marie Kathrine Bäuerle** b. Esslingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 24 Aug 1863; dau. of Jacob Bäuerle and Sophie Karle; bp. 2 Mar 1910; conf. 2 Mar 1910; d. pneumonia 20 Oct 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 301; IGI)

**Otto Alfred Brändle** b. Marbach, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 18 Mar 1918; son of Rudolf Brändle and Emma Walker; bp. 23 Dec 1928; conf. 23 Dec 1928; noncommissioned officer; k. in battle Orschiza, Ukraine, 20 Sep 1941 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 471; FHL microfilm 25728, 1930 census; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Lina Frida Rosa Brodbeck** b. Esslingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 9 Jun 1907; dau. of Paul Brodbeck and Frida Claus; bp. 6 Apr 1930; conf. 6 Apr 1930; m. Esslingen 24 Oct 1936, Eugen Vollmer; d. throat and lung ailment Esslingen 11 Aug 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 574)

**Bernhard Johannes Fingerle** b. Esslingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 29 Jul 1914; son of Christian Johann Fingerle and Barbara Ulmer; bp. 9 Aug 1922; conf. 9 Aug 1922; ord. deacon 7 Dec 1930; ord. teacher 14 Jul 1935; ord. priest 19 Jul 1942; m. 7 Dec 1943; sergeant; k. in battle Michelbach, Alsace-Lorraine, France, 7 Dec 1944; bur. Cernay, France (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 252; FHL microfilm 25766; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI, AF; www.volksbund.de)

**Ludwig Erwin Fingerle** b. Esslingen, Neckar, Württemberg, 15 May 1913; son of Christian Johann Fingerle and Barbara Ulmer; bp. 14 Jul 1921; m. Esslingen 3 Jul 1937, Margarete Alma Kirsch; 2 children; k. in battle Berlin 25 Apr 1945; bur. Berlin 26 Apr 1945 (H. v. Glasenapp)

**Otto Bernhard Jakob Fingerle** b. Esslingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 28 Nov 1901; son of Christian Johann Fingerle and Bertha Pauline Kiesel; bp. 30 Aug 1911; conf. 30 Aug 1911; ord. deacon 5 Aug 1923; m. Esslingen, Neckar abt 1921, Lina Ahles; k. in battle Berlin, 8 May 1945 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 828; FHL microfilm 25766; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI, AF)

**Albert Heinemann** b. Jebenhausen, Donaukreis, Württemberg, 30 Oct 1906; son of Carl Heinemann and

Julie Nothdürft; bp. 31 Oct 1924; conf. 31 Oct 1924; ord. deacon 7 Feb 1926; ord. teacher 15 Aug 1926; ord. priest 6 Dec 1936; m. 16 Feb 1929, Friederike Maier; at least three children; k. in battle Russia, 13 Feb 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 93; FHL microfilm 162780; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Hans Heinemann** b. Oberesslingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 5 Oct 1917; son of Karl Heinemann and Julie Nothdürft; bp. 18 Jan 1926; conf. 18 Jan 1926; noncommissioned officer; k. in battle San. Kp. 1/178 H. V. Pl. Wysokoje-West, near present-day Wysokoje, Orscha, Belarus, 11 Mar 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 177; FHL microfilm 162780; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Frida Klaus** b. Wäldenbronn, Esslingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 25 Jul 1879; dau. of Gottlieb Klaus and Christine Clauss; bp. 28 Aug 1943; conf. 28 Aug 1943; m. — Brodbeck; d. dysentery 17 Sep 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 754; IGI)

**Walter Knödler** b. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 19 May 1921; son of Johann Knödler and Karoline Bauer; bp. 7 Sep 1929; conf. 7 Sep 1929; ord. deacon 6 Dec 1936; radio operator; k. in battle South Tunisia 23 or 28 Mar 1943; bur. Bordj-Cedria, Tunisia (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 392; FHL microfilm 271380; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Maria Theresia Merkt** b. Spaichingen, Schwarzwaldkreis, Württemberg, 18 Aug 1866; dau. of Sylvester Merkt and Josephine Merkt; bp. 2 Jun 1924; conf. 2 Jun 1924; m. Wilhelm Friedrich Krötz; d. asthma 24 Dec 1940 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 5; FHL microfilm 271381; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Erwin Eugen Riecker** b. Mettingen, Esslingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 8 Dec 1917; son of Eugen Riecker and Ernestine Margarete Fingerle; bp. 23 Dec 1928; conf. 23 Dec 1928; ord. deacon 7 Jul 1935; lance corporal; k. in battle Ssokorowo, Russia, 27 Mar 1942 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 8; FHL microfilm 271403; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

**Elise Sprenger** b. Wetzikon, Zürich, Switzerland, 15 Oct 1868; dau. of Johannes Sprenger and Agnes Eugster; bp. 11 Apr 1924; conf. 11 Apr 1924; m. — Kurlé; missing as of 20 Nov 1946 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 926; FHL microfilm 271382; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Wilhelmine Stierle** b. Stetten, Echterdingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 2 May 1872; dau. of Andreas Wilhelm T. Stierle and Rosine K. Gehr; bp. 18 Jul 1914; conf. 18 Jul 1914; m. Stetten, 10 Dec 1893, Franz Smyzcek; 5 children; d. asthma Esslingen, 6 or 13 Oct 1941 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 693; IGI, AF)

**Walter Rudolf Tischhauser** b. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 23 Aug 1926; son of Richard Karl Tischhauser and Lina Rosa Fingerle; bp. 23 Jul 1939; conf. 23 Jul 1939; infantry; k. in battle Kämpfenau near Gotenhafen, 5 Apr 1945 (CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, all-mission list 1943–46, 186–87, district list 218–19; FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 206; www.volksbund.de; E. Tischhauser Ertel, AF, PRF)

**Helene Elsa Zügel** b. Rudersberg, Jagstkreis, Württemberg, 21 Feb 1911; dau. of Karl Gottlob Zügel and Ernestine Wenninger; bp. 22 Jun 1919; conf. 22 Jun 1919; d. septic angina (suspected euthanasia) 16 Dec 1940 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 306; FHL microfilm 245307, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Walter Nephi Karl Zügel** b. Esslingen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 9 May 1923; son of Karl Gottlob Zügel and Ernestine Wenninger; bp. 25 Jun 1931; conf. 25 Jun 1931; ord. deacon 21 May 1939; k. in battle near Metz, Alsace-Lorraine, France, 9 Nov 1944; bur. Andilly, France (FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 814; FHL microfilm 245307; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; www.volksbund.de)

## NOTES

1. Esslingen city archive.
2. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHLLR 10045 11.
3. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
4. Ilse Anita Neff Bauer, interview by Jennifer Heckmann in German, Esslingen, Germany, August 23, 2007; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
5. Walter Richard Tischhauser, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in German, January 20, 2009.
6. Elsbeth Tischhauser Ertel, interview by Jennifer Heckmann in German, Langen, Germany, August 14, 2006.
7. Stuttgart District general minutes, 162, CHL CR 16982 11.
8. *Ibid.*, 169.
9. *Ibid.*, 177.
10. *Ibid.*, 199.
11. Hans Ludwig Fingerle, interview by the author in German, Hermannsweiler, Germany, August 20, 2008.
12. Ludwig Erwin Fingerle to Margarete Kirsch Fingerle, February 11, 1945; trans. the author; used with the permission of Hans Fingerle.
13. Margarete Kirsch Fingerle to Ludwig Erwin Fingerle, April 8, 1945; trans. the author; used with the permission of Hans Fingerle.
14. Lina also lost a half-brother. Four of the five men were members of the Church.
15. Horst von Glasenapp to Margarete Fingerle, August 11, 1948; trans. the author; used with the permission of Hans Fingerle.

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## FEUERBACH BRANCH

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“The branch meeting rooms were in a Hinterhaus on Elsenheimsstrasse,” recalled Reinhold Rügner (born 1931). “We went through the main building at number 8, then across a courtyard and into the Hinterhaus. We had all of our meetings in one large room. There was room for forty to sixty people. We also used the foyer and the kitchen for classes. We didn’t have restrooms.”<sup>1</sup> Such was the setting of the Feuerbach Branch.

Hermann Mössner (born 1922) added the following details to his cousin’s description:

A family who belonged to the Apostolic Church owned the building. They were very religious people and strong members of their church. They allowed us to use their rooms but we weren’t allowed to dance or have dance lessons, which the young members of our Church always liked. The rooms were located near a chicken coop and every time we went to meetings, the chickens were very loud. It wasn’t a very inviting atmosphere for Church meetings, but we accepted it. On the inside, the rooms were kept very simple.<sup>2</sup>

Barely three miles north of the center of Stuttgart, Feuerbach was nearly a suburb of the provincial capital. The branch there had sixty-three members and was in good condition in the summer of 1939. Reinhold’s father, Gottlob Rügner, was the branch president and was assisted by counselors Johann Buck and Hans Lang. Other branch leaders at the time were Hermann Mössner (YMMIA), Bretel Buck (YWMIA), and Maria Greiner (Relief Society). The branch president was also the genealogy instructor and Sister Greiner was *Der Stern* magazine representative. There was no Primary organization at the time.<sup>3</sup>

The meeting schedule shows several gatherings beginning at 8:00 p.m., such as the Relief Society on Mondays and the MIA on Tuesdays, which must have been slightly inconvenient for the

branch members who lived in other towns around Feuerbach. The Sunday School began at 10:00 and was followed by priesthood meeting at 11:30, with sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m.

<b>Feuerbach Branch<sup>4</sup></b>	<b>1939</b>
Elders	7
Priests	1
Teachers	4
Deacons	2
Other Adult Males	7
Adult Females	36
Male Children	4
Female Children	2
<i>Total</i>	63

Brother Rügner's family walked about one hour to church from Weilimdorf. With eight children,

there was not enough money to pay for a street-car ride unless the weather was bad. According to Reinhold, "We walked there for Sunday School, then went home and came back later for sacrament meeting." That would have amounted to four hours of walking each Sunday. He added, "One got used to it."

Hermann Mössner recalled the beginnings of war in September 1939:

I was seventeen years old when World War II started, and for me nothing changed that much. But I remember that some members of our branch became members of the National Socialist Party and even brought their flag into the branch rooms. I remember the exact day that the war started in September of 1939. I was in the third year of my work training as a plumber, and we were working on a project when we heard that Adolf Hitler had declared the war at midnight the night before. It was such an uncertain situation for all of us, and we didn't understand why there was a second war now [after Germany lost the Great War in 1918].



Fig. 1. The Jungvolk group to which Reinhold Rügner belonged in about 1942. (R. Rügner)

“I was baptized in either 1939 or 1940 in the Neckar River. It was summer and the water was warm. Karl Mössner baptized me, and he died as a soldier a little bit later [1941],” recalled Reinhold Rügner. By 1943, life in Weilimdorf was becoming difficult as attacks on Stuttgart threatened the towns nearby. Reinhold was evacuated with his class to the town of Kuchen, where the boys were taken in by local families. Reinhold lived with a widow from 1943 to 1944 and described the situation in these words:

During that year, I was never allowed to go home. Kuchen is about forty miles away from our home. My mother was also not able to visit me during that time. We didn’t have the financial means. My father was assigned to visit the Göppingen branch every month or so. On those Sundays, I took the train from Kuchen to Göppingen so that I could attend the meetings with him. I looked forward to those days because I could see a member of my family.

In 1944, Reinhold was sent to a higher-level school in Nürtingen near the Neckar River: “It was a school that was mostly run by the [Nazi] Party. They used it to train their future party members, but it was not official. We stayed in boarding schools. My plan was to finish the degree and then work in the government somewhere later on.”

Hermann Mössner was old enough to be drafted by 1942, but his work in a munitions factory in Feuerbach allowed him an exemption. During those years, he often attended branch meetings in Stuttgart when he was off duty. In July 1944, he emerged from a shelter where he had spent many hours during what he called “the heaviest attack on Stuttgart” to find that the rooms of the Stuttgart Branch had been totally destroyed. Because his own apartment was also destroyed, he returned home to live with his parents. By September, he was in the uniform of the German Wehrmacht: “I left my wife with tears in my eyes. We were married for only a



*Fig. 2. The Rügner family and other members of the Feuerbach Branch. (R. Rügner)*

few weeks.” After an abbreviated training period, he was sent off to the Western Front.

As a forward observer in lines opposing British troops, Hermann’s responsibility was to report the movements of the enemy. He was so close to the action that while he and his comrades were sheltered in the basement of a house, a British tank ran over the building. Hermann was not harmed, but he was found by the enemy later that day and taken prisoner. It was November 18, 1944, near the city of Aachen, Germany. One month later, the fierce Battle of the Bulge would begin very close to that city; Hermann was safer as a POW. From the first camp in Belgium, he was moved to another in Leeds, England.

The Rügner family apartment was destroyed in an air raid in January 1945, and the family lost most of their property. All that remained were the things they had carried into the shelter and some items that had been stored in the basement. Reinhold was allowed to leave school for a few weeks to assist his father in the cleanup. About that time, the branch

meeting rooms were damaged, but the broken windows were covered up, and life went on.

Reinhold recalled losing his brother Werner in the last year of the war: “He told us right before he left that he really did not want to leave [for war] anymore. My brother died in an airplane accident on June 6, 1944, in Czechoslovakia. He had been on leave until June 1 and had just reported back for duty. A telegram with the message of his death was handed to us by a city official.”

Reinhold was sent home from the Nürtingen school in April 1945 and arrived in time to see the French invaders arrive. He told this story:

To be honest, we had great respect for the French. It was a scary time. Many of the French soldiers had dark skin because they came from Morocco. That was the first time that I saw dark-skinned people. I knew that they existed, but it was a good experience to finally meet an African person. Often, they acted very uncivilized and would steal the chickens and rabbits that we raised for food. We also had a curfew and were not allowed to leave the house after four or five p.m.



Fig. 3. *The Primary organization of the Feuerbach Branch. (R. Rügner)*

Life under military occupation was an insecure existence at best. Gottlob Rügner once stood between his daughter and French soldiers with evil intent who threatened to shoot the branch president. He stood his ground, and the soldiers left. On another occasion, Reinhold and a sister climbed out of their window after curfew and ran two blocks to a house where a French officer was quartered to report soldiers threatening their family. The officer returned with them, “raised his gun, and walked into our home. He escorted the soldiers out just in the nick of time.”

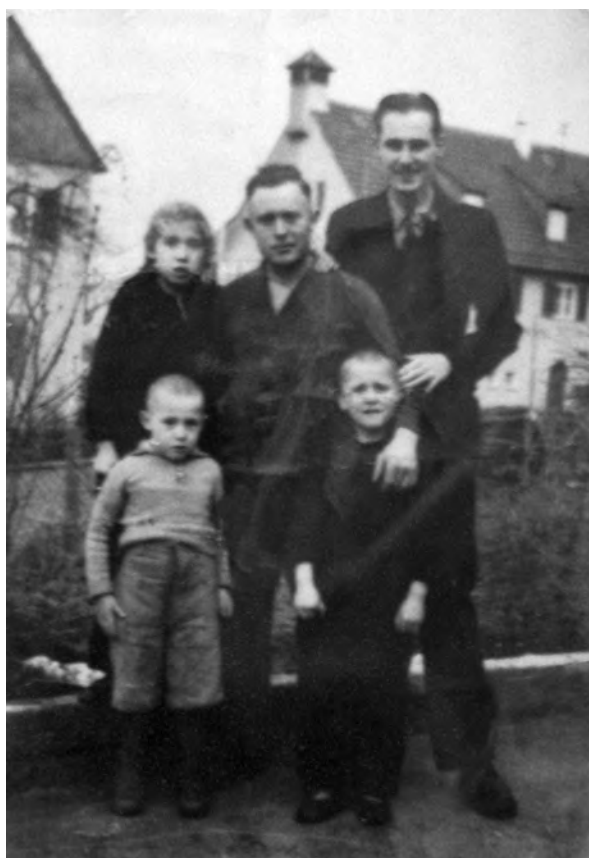


Fig. 4. Family members of Reinhold Rügner. (R. Rügner)

As a POW in England, Hermann Mössner was a very successful missionary for the Church. He told this story:

I was the only Latter-day Saint [among the German POWs]. I taught the other soldiers who shared a room with me and they were ready to get baptized when it was time for us to go home. The

baptism took place while we were still prisoners. The British Latter-day Saints came and picked us up and the entire camp noticed it. The Catholic priest, who was also a German, started to complain to the commandant of the camp. I was then invited to the office of the British major, and next to him stood a representative of the Church of England. He was the only one who spoke to me and it was not in a nice tone of voice. He asked me, “By what authority to do baptize your fellow prisoners?” He screamed that question. I, in contrast, answered him with a calm voice that we did it with the authority of the priesthood (I had been ordained an elder in 1943). He then yelled at me to get out of the room. By the end of the time in the camp, there were five of us members of the Church. They went home and even converted their families. I also carried my scriptures with me—even in the most dangerous situations at the front. I was so blessed through that. I lost my scriptures, which were given to me by my grandfather, when I was at the front one day. But when I was in England, I wrote a letter to the mission office in London, and they sent me Church literature to read.

Brother Mössner was allowed to conduct the baptisms of his friends in the Bradford/Leeds chapel.<sup>5</sup> On many Sundays, the POWs walked three miles from the camp to church, where they struggled with the English language but not with the communications of the Holy Spirit. Hermann was actually called to be the Sunday School president while a POW there. Unashamed of the gospel of Christ and not afraid of his captors, Hermann also worked to find a dignified place to meet in the camp with the converts. His story continues:

The officers in the camp did not allow us to hold meetings in the chapel that was available. But I wrote to Salt Lake City and complained that we wanted a place to meet. Just a short time later, I was again asked to go into the commandant’s office. He then allowed us to hold meetings in the chapel. Gordon B. Hinckley was the one who received my postcard and wrote a letter to the camp in which we were held. We conducted our meetings but we didn’t have the sacrament during that time. We also had some investigators who attended our meetings. We were also allowed to leave the camp on Sundays, so six or more German prisoners of war walked to Leeds



City to find a branch to attend. People spit at us and laughed. The branch in Leeds was so welcoming, and they were happy to have us.<sup>6</sup>



Fig. 5. Hermann Mössner, a German elder and the men he introduced to the gospel (from left): Wolfgang Krüger, Willi Raschke, Hermann Mössner, Heinz Borchert, Erich Rühlke. (H. Mössner)

During his incarceration, Hermann was called to the camp office one day and introduced to Hugh B. Brown, then the president of the British Mission. President Brown had been conducting a district conference nearby and had heard of this young German Latter-day Saint. Hermann was moved by the compassion of that great leader.<sup>7</sup>

Hermann Mössner's remarkable story of religious dedication among German POWs had a happy ending:

I was sent home in May 1948. My son was already three years old, and it was the first time that I was able to see him. Coming home was the most wonderful day of my life. The train stopped in the station, and the authorities told us that we had to wait until we were released the next day. We thought that because the train was already at its final destination, we would be able to walk those few miles home. That's what we did. The next morning, I walked back to the train and we were released. Everybody was so surprised to see me again.<sup>8</sup>

The Feuerbach Branch had suffered significant losses in families, homes, and property, but the

survivors continued to hold meetings and regrouped in the summer of 1945. In retrospect, Hermann observed:

The accounts of distress of individual families whose fathers and sons had died at the war front, and the losses among the members due to air raids were painful; yet it was the faith in our God and the firm hope of eternal life that gave us the strength to carry on.<sup>9</sup>

## IN MEMORIAM

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

**Karoline Friederike Bauer** b. Neuenhaus, Nürtlingen, Schwarzwaldkreis, Württemberg, 1 Nov 1887; dau. of Ernst Ludwig Bauer and Marie Katharine Schlecht; bp. 27 Sep 1928; conf. 27 Sep 1928; m. Ludwigsburg, Ludwigsburg, Württemberg, 14 Jan 1912 or 1913, Adolf Peukert; d. peritonitis, 11 Nov 1940 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 325; FHL microfilm 245254; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Emil Buck** b. Stuttgart, Feuerbach, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 13 Jul 1912; son of Johannes Buck and Sophie Löffler; bp. 11 Apr 1924; conf. 11 Apr 1924; corporal; d. H.V. Pl. Melnitschny/Kuban 10 Aug 1943; bur. Apscheronsk, Russia (FS; www.volksbund.de)

**Frieda Patzsch Lehmann** b. Triberg, Villingen, Baden, 16 Dec 1891; dau. of Lukas Lehmann and Kandide Schweer; bp. 30 May 1931; conf. 30 May 1931; m. Hermann Louis Patzsch; m. 18 Dec 1938, Gottfried Horrlacher; d. sickness 20 Sep or Oct 1939 (FHL microfilm 68790, no. 39; CHL CR 375 8, 2451, no. 499; IGI)

**Hildegard Mössner** b. Feuerbach, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 13 Jan 1918; dau. of Karl Mössner and Rosine Wilhelmine Schönhardt; bp. 22 May 1927; conf. 22 May 1927; d. hemoptysis and tuberculosis 10 Feb 1940 (FHL microfilm 68790, no. 15; IGI; FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 402; CHL CR 375 8, 2451, no. 402; FHL microfilm 245238; 1930 and 1935 censuses)

**Karl Mössner Jr.** b. Feuerbach, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 11 Dec 1912; son of Karl Mössner Sr. and Rosine Wilhelmine Schönhardt; bp. 10 Feb 1924; conf. 10 Feb 1924; ord. deacon 15 Apr 1928; ord. teacher 23 Aug 1931; ord. priest 9 Feb 1935; ord. elder 25 Apr 1937, Swiss-German Mission; m. 15 Feb 1936, Else Kübler (div.); m. 29 Oct 1938, Olga Poers or Evers; rifleman; k. in battle near Karoli, Belarus, 18 Jul 1941 (FHL

microfilm 68790, no. 13; www.volksbund.de; FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 860; CHL CR 375 8, 2451, no. 860; IGI; AF)

**Esther Rügner** b. Feuerbach, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 20 Apr 1919; dau. of Gottlob Rügner and Lina Dorothea Schonhardt; bp. 6 Jun 1928; conf. 6 Jun 1928; m. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 5 Feb 1938, Herbert Helmrich; d. Typhoid, Bad Diersdorf, Eulengeb., Sil., Preußen, 9 or 10 September 1935 (FS; Reinhold Rügner)

**Werner Friedrich Rügner** b. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 12 Jan 1923; son of Gottlob Rügner and Lina Dorothea Schönhardt; bp. 25 Jan 1931; conf. 25 Jan 1931; ord. deacon 20 Jun 1937; ord. teacher 2 Mar 1941; ord. priest 30 Mar or May 1944; lance corporal; k. airplane accident Wobora, 6 Jun 1944; bur. Plzen, Czechoslovakia (FHL microfilm 68790, no. 24; FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 434; FHL microfilm no. 271407; 1930 and 1935 censuses; www.volksbund.de; IGI; AF)



Fig. 6. Werner Rügner as a Hitler Youth and as a soldier of the Luftwaffe. (R. Rügner)

NOTES

1. Reinhold Rügner, interview by Michael Corley, Salt Lake City, December 5, 2008.
2. Hermann Mössner, interview by Jennifer Heckmann in German, Stuttgart, Germany, August 23, 2007; summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
3. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHLLR 10045 11.
4. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CHL CR 4 12.
5. Hermann Mössner, "Mormon Pioneers in Southern Germany" (unpublished manuscript).
6. Mössner, interview.
7. Mössner, "Mormon Pioneers."
8. Mössner, interview.
9. Mössner, "Mormon Pioneers."

GÖPPINGEN BRANCH

The city of Göppingen is located twenty miles east of Stuttgart on the main railway line to Munich. With 28,101 inhabitants in 1939, the city was in many respects representative of towns in the historic south German region of Swabia.<sup>1</sup>

Göppingen Branch <sup>2</sup>	1939
Elders	2
Priests	0
Teachers	0
Deacons	0
Other Adult Males	4
Adult Females	14
Male Children	3
Female Children	2
<i>Total</i>	25

The branch of the Latter-day Saints that met in rented rooms on the second floor of the building at Poststrasse 15 in Göppingen was one of the smallest in the West German Mission in 1939. Of the twenty-five members, only two (both elders) held the priesthood. The largest component of the membership were women over twelve years of age. The meeting schedule showed Sunday School beginning at 10:00 and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The Primary organization met on Wednesdays at 3:00 p.m. and the MIA on Wednesdays at 8:00 p.m.

The leader of this small branch throughout the war was Georg Schaaf. The other elder and the only other man listed among the branch leaders in July 1939 was Friedrich Weixler, who served at the time as the first counselor in the branch and as the superintendent of the Sunday School. The lone woman in the branch directory was Dorothea Weixler (the president of the Relief Society).<sup>3</sup>

Brother Schaaf kept detailed minutes of the meetings held in this small branch. Those minutes survived the war and give important insights into the status of the branch during the years 1939 to 1945. For the most part, only the activities of the meetings are given, with rare information about events elsewhere. For example, there is no mention of the departure of the American missionaries in August 1939 nor the outbreak of war a week later. Nothing is written about air raids over Göppingen or of the end of the war when the American army entered the town on Hitler's birthday, April 20, 1945.<sup>4</sup>

Ruth Schaaf (born 1930), a daughter of the branch president, recalled that there were two rooms used by the branch at Poststrasse 15. She did not recall specific furnishing or decorations but said that there was a pump organ that was moved to her family's apartment when the branch rooms were confiscated. "Some members from Ulm also came to our branch meetings because they didn't have a branch anywhere near them."<sup>5</sup> Werner Weixler (born 1932) recalled that Poststrasse 15 was an office or manufacturing building owned by the Stern family, who were Jewish. There was no sign on the building indicating the presence of the branch there.<sup>6</sup>

Friedrich Weixler (born 1909) was drafted into the German army in 1940. He had been employed as a department head in a leather factory but had attracted negative attention in at least one respect. One day the government suddenly discontinued paying child support to the Weixler family. When Brother Weixler inquired of the local Nazi Party boss, he was told that as long as he paid 10 percent of his income to the Church, he would not receive subsidies for his children.<sup>7</sup> "After my husband left for the service, we had just enough money to pay the rent but hardly any money for food or anything else," recalled Dorothea Weixler (born 1910).

Like most German schoolchildren, Ruth Schaaf was a member of the Jungvolk. She recalled the experience in these words:

We mostly learned about the country's leaders, for example, where they were born, etc. I still remember when Hitler was born and where. We also learned how to do crafts. We also wore our uniforms (that was required)—a white blouse and a black skirt combined with a khaki jacket. Later on, we also had a black necktie and a special kind of knot in the front. We went and waved whenever there was a parade. We also stood at attention at a specific location whenever there was a radio broadcast with a speech by the Führer.

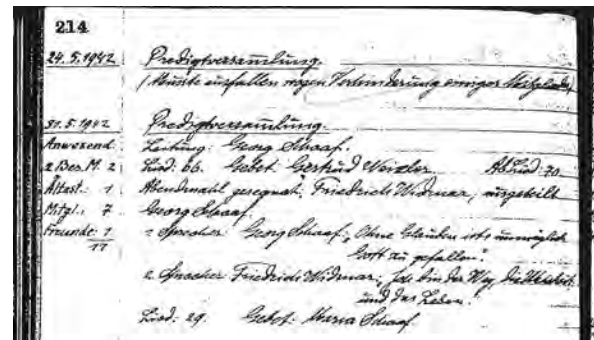


Fig. 1. An example of Göppingen branch minutes. (CHL)

The branch minutes feature prominently the names of three families: Schaaf, Weixler, and Ceol. These families clearly constituted the majority of the attendees at sacrament and fast meetings for at least the years 1939 through 1942. The average attendance in those days was twelve persons (very precisely counted). An example of a typical sacrament meeting record is as follows:

May 31, 1942: Sacrament meeting

Presiding: Georg Schaaf; hymn 66; invocation: Gertrud Weixler; sacrament hymn 70; sacrament blessed by Friedrich Widmar and passed by Georg Schaaf. First speaker: Georg Schaaf "Without faith it is impossible to please God;" second speaker: Friedrich Widmar "I am the way, the truth and the life;" hymn 29; benediction: Maria Schaaf. Attendance: two members from the district, one elder, seven members, one friend.<sup>8</sup>

The average attendance at meetings of the Göppingen Branch actually increased during the war thanks to an influx of visitors from the district

and other branches. From twelve persons in 1942, the number rose to seventeen in 1943 and eighteen during the final year and a half of the war. On occasion, there were as many as twenty-three persons present, but there were likewise days when only nine persons came to church. On a regular basis, district president Erwin Ruf inspected the records and added his signature of approval.

As the president of the Relief Society in Göppingen, Dorothea Weixler once arranged to have a celebration in the banquet room of a local restaurant, as she recalled: “But when we got there, we were not alone. Somebody from the government came to see what we were doing. We had a good party—and he liked it too. He stayed with us the entire time.”

Werner Weixler recalled the influence of the Nazi Party in his school. On political holidays, his teachers wore SA uniforms. He described some of his teachers:

I clearly remember two of them. I was still friendly with one of them after the war; he was just misled. But the other one was a real fanatic: Herr Beck. He was our history teacher and he always brought the Bible with him. He really knew the Bible, but not because he was a good Christian—just the opposite. He loved to show us everything bad about the Jewish people and their literature.

Magdalena Ceol (born 1931) was the daughter of an Italian (Guiseppe Francisco Ceol) and a German (Renate Marie Maier). The Ceol family regularly attended branch meetings (where Brother Ceol’s name was recorded as “Georg Franz”), but Magdalena recalled that social and political pressures were applied to her father because of his Italian heritage: “My whole family hated the German government because of this.” In response, Brother Ceol decided to take his family to Italy in 1943. They lived in relative peace there, although two of the Ceol sons were drafted into the Italian army.<sup>9</sup>

Heinz Weixler turned ten in 1943 and was automatically inducted into the Jungvolk program.

He gave the following description of the group’s activities:

For me, it was a lot of fun. Every Wednesday and Saturday, we had to appear at the meetings. On Wednesdays, we put on our uniforms. We had one for the summer and one for the winter. Our leaders were only two or three years older than we were. The oldest boy in the entire unit could have been eighteen or nineteen. We even had our own rooms to meet in. They taught us how the war was going and we played war games. We went to the forest and had little colored strings around our arms. Red meant that that you belonged to one group, and blue the other group. They encouraged fighting and wrestling. It was a lot of fun for most of us but not for everybody. It depended on whether you were athletically inclined or not. But if there was a boy that was not physically fit, he was made fun of.

District conferences held in Stuttgart were evidently important occasions for the Göppingen Saints who could make the trip in less than one hour by train. The branch minutes indicate that substantial numbers traveled to the capital city twice each year to participate. On October 18, 1943, sixteen members and five friends from Göppingen attended the conference and were informed that the Stuttgart Branch rooms had been damaged so severely in an air raid on October 7–8 that they could no longer be used.<sup>10</sup>

A close study of the branch minutes allows the inference that President Georg Schaaf was in poor health for much of the war. At least once a month, meetings were cancelled due to his illness or simply the fact that he was unable to attend. On occasion, a visiting elder presided over the meetings. By mid-1944, Gottlob Rügner, an elder from the Feuerbach Branch, had been asked to assist the branch in Göppingen.

A sad development was recorded in the minutes in August 1944: “On August 9, we were required to make our meeting rooms available for use by people bombed out of their homes. Until further notice, the meetings will take place in the branch

president's apartment. The following items were left in the rooms: a stove, a table, two chairs, a lamp, and the blackout curtains."<sup>11</sup>

Ruth Schaaf recalled that her family lived in a very poor neighborhood. Her father had suffered a serious injury to his hand as a young man, which prevented him from becoming a craftsman. This impediment relegated the family to a low socioeconomic status. Werner Weixler recalled being a bit embarrassed at entering the Schaafs' neighborhood to attend branch meetings in the branch president's home: "It wasn't a great neighborhood, and I was embarrassed that when we were singing, the neighbors could hear us."

Werner recalled another situation at school. He was an excellent pupil and was tested for candidacy for an elite Nazi Party school in Rottweil. It was a great honor in Germany at the time, but Friedrich Weixler would not sign the admission papers for his son. As a social democrat before the war, Brother Weixler was still very much opposed to Hitler's party and the government.<sup>12</sup> Werner recalled being somewhat disappointed when one of the other boys chosen for that school came home on vacation: "I was jealous of him because he always had a sharp uniform. I could have been one of them."

"I never met another Mormon soldier while I was away from home," recalled Friedrich Weixler, "but I carried a Book of Mormon with me. I served in Russia, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Albania, and France." Back in Göppingen, Sister Weixler firmly believed that her husband would come home some day: "I never thought anything else," she said. He came home on leave only two or three times during his five years of service and never wrote to say that he would be coming home soon.

By August 1944, Renate Ceol had returned from Italy to Göppingen with her daughter Magdalena, and the two experienced the air raids of the last few months of the war. During one of those attacks, the Ceols' apartment building was hit by incendiary bombs. Magdalena recalled that when she and her mother emerged from the basement shelter as

the all-clear signal sounded, the upper floors of the building were already on fire.

In 1944, Ruth Schaaf was called upon to serve her *Pflichtjahr*, an experience that she described as follows:

I served my duty year in the home of another family. I was allowed to choose between helping on a farm or living with a family who had many children. I helped a Mrs. Wendling, who had four little children. They also lived in Göppingen. At first, I still lived with my parents, but after a while I had to move in with the family. After I was done with my duty year [in February 1945], I worked for a wood company in Göppingen-Holzheim.

During one of the attacks on Göppingen, the Schaafs' apartment house was damaged. Ruth recalled, "I was on my way down to the basement when I stopped and wondered where my little sister Elfriede was. I turned around, went back up to the apartment and found her underneath all the shattered glass from the window. I grabbed her and carried her downstairs."

Elfriede Schaaf was only four years old when Göppingen was targeted by the Americans for bombings, but she clearly recalled being showered by glass that day. She explained that her parents usually took the children to a concrete bunker not far from their home but that they also took shelter in their own basement on occasion. "If I close my eyes the film starts: I can still see the bombs falling and my sister running out of the room. . . . I was only a child, but I already knew what war was about."<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, war had its elements of adventure for little boys. Werner Weixler recalled looking out the attic window to see the American bombers going by. On one such occasion, however, the thrill of the spectacle nearly turned to tragedy: "They were almost right overhead. Suddenly we saw the bomb bays open and the bombs dropping. We were so shocked that we had barely crossed the room when the first bombs struck the ground just a little ways down the street. [Afterward] we went out and saw huge holes in the street and houses burning."

One day, Werner went to school to find out that his closest friend was not there; he had been killed in an air raid.

With the events of the war intensifying in the spring of 1945, meetings of the Göppingen Branch were frequently canceled. Such was the case on four consecutive Sundays beginning on March 18. The entry on April 15 includes two important and rare events in the branch: infant Siegfried Schaaf was blessed, and Magdalena Ceol was confirmed a member of the Church. Both ordinances were performed by visiting elder Meinrad Greiner during the Sunday School hour “for fear of an impending air raid alarm.”<sup>14</sup> Just five days later, the American army arrived; the war was over for the people of Göppingen.

Little Elfriede Schaaf remembered interacting with the conquerors:

American soldiers were very good to us children. They shared their food with us. We each picked one soldier and called him “my soldier.” One time, while I was waiting for my soldier to come, I was trying to follow my siblings and friends when they climbed up onto something. But it was too high for me. A black soldier lifted me up and gave me a kiss on the cheek. I ran home that day thinking that I would turn black if I didn’t wash my face. So I washed. I told my mother the story because she was already wondering why I was in such a panic. She laughed when she heard what had happened.

“When the Americans entered Göppingen, we were hiding in the basement. We heard the trucks and tanks driving by,” recalled Heinz Weixler. “I was not scared when the Americans came to Göppingen,” his mother explained, “but I had a funny feeling. It was so strange to see the enemy in our town.” Like millions of Germans, they realized that they had lost the war and simply hoped for decent treatment at the hands of the victors.

Looking back on her youth during the war years, Ruth Schaaf offered this observation: “Even though it was a war situation, I was not afraid of getting hurt or dying. When the war was over, I was

fifteen years old. So in a sense, playtime for me was already over anyway. But we found ways to entertain ourselves even despite the realization that there was a war being fought around us.”

Friedrich Weixler served as a communications specialist, his principal duty being to lay telephone wires. Looking back on his time as a soldier, he explained: “I was a good Mormon. I didn’t smoke or drink alcohol. I was a good soldier and didn’t shoot people. It was important for me to not be guilty of that. The Lord protected me in every way.” On one occasion, Friedrich was commanded to execute four civilians but was fortunate because even though he declined to shoot innocent civilians, he escaped punishment for refusing to obey an order. In May 1945, he was captured by the Americans in southern Germany. However, in the confusion of the immediate aftermath of the war, he managed to slip away and make his way home to Göppingen. He thus avoided what could have been years of imprisonment.

The city of Göppingen suffered four major air raids that cost at least 325 people their lives, and approximately two thousand of the town’s men died for their country.<sup>15</sup> On May 6, 1945, Georg Schaaf made his first peacetime entry in the branch minutes, allowing the presumption that the Göppingen Latter-day Saints were determined to maintain the life of their branch in a ruined but renewed Germany. They had weathered a terrible war and remained faithful in their callings.

#### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Erich Arthur Ceol** b. Göppingen, Württemberg, 22 Apr 1919; son of Joseph Franz Ceol and Maria Renata Maier; bp. 10 Oct 1929; conf. 10 Oct 1929; missing as of 20 Mar 1944 (CHL CR 375 8 2445, no. 783; FHL microfilm no. 25738; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; AF; PRF)

**Wilhelm Rube** b. Unterurbach, Jagstkreis, Württemberg, 25 Nov 1878; son of Johann Georg Rube and Sabine Zehnter or Zehender; bp. 13 Sep 1929; conf.

13 Sep 1929; m. 28 May 1910, Margarethe Katherina Stettner; 2 children; d. suicide, Göppingen, Donaukreis, Württemberg, 29 Jun 1946 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 399; FHL microfilm no. 271407; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Paulina Wittlinger** b. Holzheim, Donaukreis, Württemberg, 6 Sep 1871; dau. of Johannes Wittlinger and Katharine Hörmann or Hermann; bp. 14 Jul 1929; conf. 14 Jul 1929; m. — Lang; d. old age 7 Nov 1946 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 381; FHL microfilm no. 271383; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; PRF)

## NOTES

1. Göppingen city archive.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
3. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHLLR 10045 11.
4. Göppingen Branch general minutes, vol. 15, CHLLR 3235 11.
5. Ruth Schaaf Baur, telephone interview with the author in German, April 13, 2009; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski. The city of Ulm was thirty miles southwest of Göppingen.
6. Werner Weixler, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, March 23, 2007.
7. Friedrich, Dorothea Gertrud, and Heinz Weixler, interview by the author in German, Salt Lake City, March 16, 2007.
8. Göppingen Branch general minutes, 214.
9. Magdalena Ceol, telephone interview with the author in German, April 28, 2009.
10. Göppingen Branch general minutes, 226.
11. *Ibid.*, 235.
12. Friedrich Weixler was one of many Germans who listened to BBC radio broadcasts, which was strictly illegal. Werner recalled how his mother scolded her husband for endangering himself and the family.
13. Elfriede Schaaf, telephone interview with the author in German, April 13, 2009.
14. Göppingen Branch general minutes, 240. Magdalena told of being baptized in an indoor pool in Stuttgart.
15. Göppingen city archive.

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## HEILBRONN BRANCH

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The city of Heilbronn on the Neckar River has been an important cultural center for centuries. Located twenty-five miles north of Stuttgart near the borders of the states of Baden and Hessen,

the city once had a flourishing Jewish community and was the center of business for miles around.

Heilbronn Branch <sup>1</sup>	1939
Elders	3
Priests	2
Teachers	0
Deacons	3
Other Adult Males	7
Adult Females	30
Male Children	3
Female Children	6
<i>Total</i>	54

As war approached in Europe in the late summer of 1939, the branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Heilbronn numbered fifty-four persons. The great majority were twelve or older, and eight men and boys held the priesthood. Most branch leadership positions were filled in those days, with Emil Geist serving as the president. His only counselor at the time was Josef Schurr. President Geist was also the leader of the Sunday School, while Richard Geist guided the activities of the YMMIA and Rosa Christmann the YWMIA. Käthe Geist was the president of the Relief Society and Otto Christmann promoted *Der Stern* magazine subscriptions. There was no Primary president or genealogical instructor in the branch at that time.<sup>2</sup>

The Sunday School was held at 10:00 a.m. in 1939, and sacrament meeting convened in the evening at 7:00 p.m. The MIA members met on Tuesday evenings at 8:00 p.m., and the Relief Society on Fridays at 8:00 p.m. All meetings were held in rented rooms in a building at Goethestrasse 41. Heinz Mahler (born 1931) recalled the nice furnishings in the room in a Hinterhaus, including a rostrum, a pump organ, and a banner hanging over the podium with the words "The Glory of God Is

Intelligence.” There were several classrooms and even a kitchen.<sup>3</sup> Heinz recalled walking a few miles to the meeting house; many other branch members also had a long walk there.

Helga Hock (born 1934) added the following detail:

We met in the upper rooms of the Hinterhaus. There was one large room for sacrament meeting and several smaller rooms for Sunday School. We had pictures on the wall of Joseph Smith and other prophets of the Church. We also had a picture of the temple. . . . We sat on chairs in our rooms and took those with us [when we moved out of the building]. On a typical Sunday, there were about twenty-five to thirty members in attendance.<sup>4</sup>

Heinz Mahler recalled clearly the outbreak of war in 1939: “Soldiers marched through the town to the railroad station, and people walked with them; the kids walked along with them, they had flowers in their rifles. It was a big, spectacular parade.” He also recalled the victory parade at the end of the campaign against France in June 1940: “There was a regiment of white horses from Heilbronn. We stood in the window of the city hall where my aunt worked, and we could see the big parade.” Spirits were very high in Germany at the time.

According to the centennial history of the Heilbronn Branch, Emil Geist was too old to be drafted and thus was able to stay in town and direct the activities of the branch during the entire war. In 1941, the contract for the rental of the meeting rooms was canceled, and a new location needed to be found. Eveline Christmann Mohr described the situation:

My father [Otto Christmann] was one of the first men to be drafted. We had moved into our new home with its art studio in the spring [of 1939] and he had to leave his 30-year-old wife and their three little children. So we rearranged the studio to make room for the branch meetings. There were [on average] about twenty people in attendance. Our house was spared the damage of the air raids.<sup>5</sup>

Eveline’s brother, Alex (born 1932) recalled that the studio was a former garage, but once outfitted for meetings, “it looked like a real church building. We had one large room and two smaller rooms with a podium and chairs. It was a smaller branch, but we liked our group.”<sup>6</sup>

Alex described wartime life and feelings in these words:

During the first few years of the war, it seemed that our daily schedules were not interrupted very much. We went to school, did our homework, helped in the house, and played outside. During the last two years, it got more difficult because of the constant air raids. It was hard for me to realize that everything was being destroyed and people were dying. I became very angry at the people who caused so many to suffer. I was angry and disappointed at the British and the Americans for leaving so much chaos behind. But war is war—what else could I expect?



*Fig. 1. The Christmann home on Viktor Scheffel Strasse, in which branch meetings were held from 1941 through the end of the war. (100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn)*

Emil Geist was the brother of Martha Mahler and uncle of Heinz, who recalled how his uncle was once summoned to the police office along with the branch records. President Geist insisted that he was not allowed to show the records to anybody but Church officials, which made the police that much more suspicious. Then Heinz’s father, Ludwig Mahler (a former longtime member of the Nazi Party’s SA organization) went to the aid of his brother-in-law. He promised the police that Emil Geist was telling the truth and that the only



information in the records books was that of donations made by members to the Church. President Geist was released without penalty.

Helga Hock explained that her father was quite opposed to National Socialist politics. She recalled the following:

There were also some brethren who came to Church in their uniforms. It made my father very angry because he didn't understand what that had to do with the Church. Those brethren also made sure that we knew that they supported Hitler. They also prayed for the Führer. My father was not interested in politics at all. He had served in World War I and had lost all of his brothers in that war. He said that one war in his life was enough for him, and he knew that when Hitler became the chancellor, another war would be the result.

Little Gisela Mahler (born 1937) recalled the political forces influencing her young life: "We had to hang out a swastika flag from the window. And when we were out in public we had to raise our arms and say 'Heil Hitler.' And even in school we had to greet the teacher with 'Heil Hitler, teacher so-and-so.'"7

A huge air raid struck Heilbronn on September 10, 1944. According to Heinz Mahler, "Nobody was prepared for that. We didn't take it seriously because it hadn't happened before. Lots of people didn't even go to the shelters." The building in which the Mahlers lived was hit by incendiary bombs and began to burn. Down in the basement, the smoke was so thick that little Gisela (age seven) passed out. Heinz first thought that she was dead, but he lifted her up and carried her out of the basement. In escaping the building, he had to jump over a small pool of phosphorus that had not yet ignited. Still carrying his little sister, he was finally able to get out in the open. A soldier helped revive Gisela. Their father located them a few minutes later at a prearranged meeting place. Heinz then noticed that there were several holes burned in his clothing by cinders falling from the sky.

That air raid cost the family their earthly belongings, but they were all still alive. However, Heinz lost a dear friend, as he recalled:

When I was about twelve or thirteen, I loved to build model ships. A neighbor girl would come over to the house and help me; she would cut out the pieces and I would glue them together. She was a good friend. I once gave her a string bracelet that she tied around her wrist. After the terrible air raid of September 10, 1944, I was worried about her, so I ran down the street toward her house, seeing lots of smoke in that direction. Apparently her neighborhood had been hit. When I got there, I saw a long row of bodies laid out on the sidewalk, covered up by tarps. At the end of the row I saw an arm uncovered, and I recognized the bracelet on the wrist. I was absolutely crushed when I realized that she had been killed.



Fig. 2. Members of the Heilbronn Branch in 1944. (100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn)

Helga's grandfather was eighty-four years old and a bit feeble. One day when it came time to hurry to an air-raid shelter, he insisted on staying in the basement of his own apartment house. Other family members got out of the building after it was hit and began to burn, but the old man went the wrong direction; he left the basement through the back exit and found himself trapped by a fence. The next day his burned body could be identified only by the bones in his hand that had been fractured years earlier.

Toward the end of 1944, Helga Hock followed her mother to the town of Weinsberg, three miles east of Heilbronn and presumably a safer place to live. However, there were other dangers lurking, such as the fanaticism of die-hard Nazis. In 1945, Helga's brother was to be drafted into the Volkssturm as he turned sixteen that year. As Helga recalled: "My mother told him that we had paid enough for the war already and that nobody knew what was going to happen. She wouldn't let him go. So we hid him." Of course, such action was considered treason, and the penalty in those final days of the war was usually death. Fortunately, the boy was not discovered. Helga assumed his duties, such as fetching milk, because he could not show himself in public.

On December 4, 1944, the majority of Heilbronn's downtown was destroyed in a catastrophic air raid. The building at Goethestrasse 41, where the branch had met until 1941, was nothing but rubble. At least two branch members died in the attack, and others lost their apartments, but those who lived on the outskirts of town survived in good condition.<sup>8</sup> Helga Hock lost several of her relatives in that attack—her grandfather, her great-aunt Marie, Marie's daughter Rosa, and the wife of Helga's uncle Karl Christmann and five of their seven children.<sup>9</sup>

As a teenager, Alex Christmann wanted to see the air raids for himself. He recalled one occasion when he went upstairs to look out the attic window instead of going down into the basement shelter:

The airplanes started flying over the city. We were in the northern part of the city then, and they attacked the southern part. . . . I saw the flames and the smoke in the sky. The attacks were about [three to four miles] distant, so it didn't harm us in any way. But what we could do was watch, and that was just as hurtful. We also had members of our branch who lived in that area, but as far as I know, nobody was directly affected. The city center was heavily destroyed, and even some areas outside the center were damaged. We lived

right at the border of the city, and even that area was affected in part. But our street was kept safe for some reason. Nothing happened to us. About two hundred meters away from us, houses had been destroyed and burned out.

The Christmann grandparents died in one raid and several other relatives were killed during the war. Despite the fact that their home on Viktor Scheffel Strasse was not destroyed, Sister Christmann took her children away from Heilbronn. Her parents lived in Grossgartach, just five miles to the west, and the Christmanns lived with them there for perhaps the last year of the war.

Gisela Mahler remembered that her father moved the family out of Heilbronn after they were bombed out for the second time. They first lived in Renzen with their uncle Hermann Frank and his wife, Lydia. Later, Brother Mahler found an apartment in the town of Oberhöfen just a few miles away. The family remained in Oberhöfen for the ensuing five years. Just before the end of the war, Heinz and his little sister Inge had a serious scare, according to Gisela: "My brother had a little wooden wagon, and my sister was in it. Heinz saw an American airplane coming at them very low to the ground—so low that Heinz could see the pilot's face. And he got scared, so he grabbed Inge to protect her. Just then the pilot dipped his wings in a friendly gesture and then flew away."

Heilbronn was one of the few major cities in southern Germany that offered resistance to the invading Americans. The city history shows that defenders held the Americans at bay from April 3 to 12 before the fight came to an end. More than two-thirds of the city lay in ruins, and approximately 7,100 civilians had died in the air raids (officially twenty-seven attacks) and during the final battle. At least 2,741 Heilbronn men had died in the service of their country.

Out in Weinsberg, any hopes of the Hock family seeing the war end in peace were dashed when the town refused to surrender. Helga related the problems that followed:

In Weinsberg, there was a Nazi Party group leader. The Americans told us that if Weinsberg would capitulate, they would not harm us. That group leader told us that we shouldn't capitulate. The people who had already hung out white flags were murdered that day. Then the American deadline passed, and because we didn't capitulate, the Americans came with four planes and completely destroyed the little town of Weinsberg.

Thinking back on the behavior of her parents during the war, Helga made the following comment:

My parents had a strong testimony of the gospel. I know that during the war, all of the members came closer to their Heavenly Father—we prayed while waiting for the attacks to be over. For my father, it was always a testimony that the Lord protected us, even though we lost our home. Many of the situations were difficult, but we never lost our testimonies. We felt the Lord's protection.

According to Eveline Christmann, the American soldiers occupied all of the houses on their street with the exception of the Christmann house “because we had ‘an American church’ meeting there. I believe that we enjoyed very special protection there.”<sup>10</sup> When Otto Christmann returned from the war at the end of 1945, he needed his studio again, so the branch meetings were hosted by Josef and Johanna Schurr in their apartment at Liststrasse 3.<sup>11</sup>

### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Marie Anna Braun** b. Nordrach, Offenburg, Baden, 24 Mar 1870; dau. of Anton Braun and Magdalene Erdrich or Endrich; bp. 27 Aug 1902; conf. 27 Aug 1902; m. 9 Jun 1894, Johann Karl Christmann; 8 children; k. air raid Heilbronn, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 4 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 246; FHL microfilm 25741; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Rosa Christmann** b. Heilbronn, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 13 Sep 1903; dau. of Johann Karl Christmann and Marie Anna Braun; bp. 6 Jun 1925; conf. 6 Jun

1925; k. air raid 4 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 144; FHL microfilm 25741; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Margareta Johanna Scholl** b. Mannheim, Mannheim, Baden, 13 Nov 1900; dau. of Johann Martin Scholl and Elisabetha Ültzhöfer; bp. 1 May 1920; conf. 2 May 1920; m. Mannheim 30 Aug 1934, Gustav Heinrich Wacker; d. lung disease 13 Sep 1943 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 601; FHL microfilm 245291; 1935 census; IGI; AF)

**Anna Katharine Schulz** b. Zazenhausen, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 13 Sep 1896; dau. of Karl Schulz and Anna Schmidt; bp. 18 Sep 1930; conf. 18 Sep 1930; m. Heilbronn, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 27 Dec 1916, Gotthilf Esslinger; d. cachexy 8 Mar 1940 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 451; IGI)

**Erwin Schulz** b. Heilbronn, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 27 Mar 1917; son of Karl Schulz and Anna Schmidt; bp. 18 Sep 1930; conf. 18 Sep 1930; k. in battle Russia, 2 Apr 1943 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 454; FHL microfilm 245260; 1935 census; IGI)

**Franz Schuwerk** b. Altoberndorf, Schwarzwaldkreis, Württemberg, 4 Oct 1904; son of Josef Schuwerk and Anna Wolf; bp. 23 Jul 1927; conf. 23 Jul 1927; ord. deacon 2 Oct 1932; m. 15 Oct 1932, Anna Behr; d. in hospital in POW camp at Ogulin-Lika, Yugoslavia, 11 Nov 1945 (CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, district list 218–19, district list 1947, 544–45; FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 412; FHL microfilm 245260; 1930 and 1935 censuses; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

### NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, “Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955,” 257, CHL CR 4 12.
2. West German Mission, branch directory, 1939, CHL 10045 11.
3. Heinz Mahler, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, June 13, 2006.
4. Helga Hock Seeber, interview by the author in German, Munich, Germany, August 21, 2008; unless otherwise noted, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
5. *100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn* (Heilbronn: Gemeinde Heilbronn, 1999), 13; trans. the author.
6. Alex Christmann, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann in German, April 15, 2009.
7. Gisela Mahler Nitz, interview by Michael Corley, Salt Lake City, November 21, 2008.
8. *100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn*, 13.
9. Helga Hock Seeber, autobiographical report (unpublished); private collection.
10. *100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn*, 13.
11. *100 Jahre Gemeinde Heilbronn*, 14.

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## REUTLINGEN BRANCH

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The members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints living in Reutlingen were few in number in 1939. Although they lived only twenty miles from Stuttgart, they were not supported by American missionaries at the time and might well have felt a bit isolated from the Church.

Sacrament meeting took place at 10:30 a.m. in a room at Hohenzollernstrasse 1.<sup>1</sup> The branch directory also indicated that cottage meetings were being held at 8:00 p.m. on Mondays and Thursdays. With such a small branch population, it is likely that a single room could accommodate those who attended the meetings.

Reutlingen Branch <sup>2</sup>	1939
Elders	2
Priests	0
Teachers	0
Deacons	2
Other Adult Males	8
Adult Females	16
Male Children	1
Female Children	0
<i>Total</i>	29

Little is known about the general membership of the Reutlingen Branch, but documents found among the reports filed by president Erwin Ruf of the Stuttgart District show that several citizens of Reutlingen were required to officially withdraw (or be released) from the local Evangelical [Lutheran] Church in order “to join the Mormons” as of April 4, 1938:<sup>3</sup>

- Jud Friedrich [N.], born 1886, a master furniture maker
- Jud Amalie nee Reisch, born 1885

- Jud Anneliese [N.], born 1915, a seamstress
- Jud Helene [N.], born 1917, a franchise manager
- Jud Friedrich [N.], born 1923, attends school

The branch directory submitted to the mission office in June 1939 shows only one name: Friedrich Jud as branch president. Other than the names of two more members who died, the only other information available about this small branch during the years 1939 to 1945 is that the membership grew by two persons by November 1941—one elder and one male child.<sup>4</sup>

The general minutes of the Stuttgart District were kept conscientiously by president Erwin Ruf from November 1939 to June 1942 and include frequent notes of his visits among the Saints in Reutlingen.<sup>5</sup> On each occasion, he indicated which meeting he attended and provided the topic of the talk he gave. He also indicated that on a regular basis, he inspected the records of the branch. No other comments were recorded.

It is possible that the Reutlingen Branch discontinued meetings in early 1943. As of February of that year, Friedrich Jud began regular visits to and participation in meetings of the Göppingen Branch.<sup>6</sup> The distance from Reutlingen to Göppingen is only about thirty miles as the crow flies, but the trip by rail would have been indirect and likely took close to two hours in those days.

### IN MEMORIAM

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

**Friedrich Hans Jud** b. Reutlingen, Schwarzwaldkreis, Württemberg, 27 Oct 1923; son of Friedrich Johannes Jud and Amalie Reisch; bp. 29 May 1932; conf. 29 May 1932; ord. deacon 2 Apr 1939; rifleman; d. in field hospital 3/619 at Taganrog, Russia, 25 Jan 1943 or 1945 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 547; FHL microfilm 271374; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; AF; www.volksbund.de)

**Eva Maria Ulmer** b. Willmandingen, Reutlingen, Schwarzwaldkreis, Württemberg, 16 May 1861; dau. of

Johannes Ulmer and Catharine Barbara Moek; bp. 17 May 1941; conf. 17 May 1941; m. 9 Feb 1892, Ludwig Eissler; d. old age 6 Jun 1943 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 719; IGI; AF)

**Albrecht Weichinger** b. Boll, Schwarzwaldkreis, Württemberg, 11 Sep 1911; son of Joseph Weichinger and Wilhelmine Frank; bp. 9 Jun 1924; conf. 9 Jun 1924; d. murder 16 Oct 1941 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 16; FHL microfilm 245296; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

## NOTES

1. West German Mission, branch directory, 1939, CHL 10045 11.
2. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
3. CHL MS 13360, 165.
4. Erwin Ruf, Stuttgart District statistics, CHL CR 16982 11.
5. Stuttgart District general minutes, CHL CR 16982 11.
6. Göppingen Branch general minutes, CHL LR 3235 11, vol. 15.

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## STUTT GART BRANCH

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For centuries, the city of Stuttgart was the capital of Württemberg, the largest state in southwest Germany. In 1806, Napoleon raised Württemberg to the status of kingdom, and Stuttgart became home to royalty. Although relegated to secondary political status when the German Empire was founded in 1871, Württemberg remained a proud component of the new Germany, and Stuttgart was its principal jewel. In 1939, the city had more than 490,000 inhabitants.<sup>1</sup>

The Stuttgart Branch consisted of 197 registered members that year and was therefore the largest unit of the Church for miles around. One in six of those members held the priesthood, and with eighteen elders, the branch was in a position to render support to weaker units of the Stuttgart District.

The president of the Stuttgart Branch as World War II approached was Erwin Ruf. His counselors at the time were Karl Lutz and Wilhelm Ballweg. All leadership positions in the branch were filled: Karl Mössner (Sunday School), Friedrich Widmar

(YMMIA), Erika Greiner (YWMIA), Julie Heitele (Primary), and Frida Rieger (Relief Society). Several other members were serving at the time in district leadership positions.<sup>2</sup>

Stuttgart Branch <sup>3</sup>	1939
Elders	18
Priests	0
Teachers	5
Deacons	10
Other Adult Males	21
Adult Females	110
Male Children	18
Female Children	14
<i>Total</i>	197

Branch meetings were held in rented rooms in a building at Hauptstätterstrasse 96. Sunday School began at 10:00 and sacrament meeting at 7:00 p.m. The Primary organization met on Tuesdays at 5:30 p.m. and the Mutual at 8:00. The Relief Society met on Thursdays at 8:00. The fast and testimony service was held once each month immediately following Sunday School, and a genealogical study group met at 8:00 p.m. on the first and second Tuesdays of the month.

The building at Hauptstätterstrasse 96 was less than one mile from the center of Stuttgart, and the branch had moved into the rooms there on February 14, 1926.<sup>4</sup> Walter Speidel (born 1922) recalled that the church rooms were upstairs above a factory and that the missionaries had lived in back rooms before their evacuation. "I was the Sunday School secretary when the war started, and I remember writing attendance numbers in the 120s often. There might have been seventy to eighty persons in the sacrament meetings."<sup>5</sup>

The Stuttgart Branch was one of only three in all of Germany that had a baptismal font in the meeting rooms.<sup>6</sup> This one was described by several

eyewitnesses as a large tub. The chapel in the rooms at Hauptstätterstrasse 96 had a rostrum, according to Ruth Bodon (born 1927): “And my father donated a piano. The seats were individual chairs rather than benches. There was also a picture of Jesus on the wall, and I think there was a sign [with the name of the Church] out by the street.”<sup>7</sup>

Esther Ruf (born 1929) recalled that there was also a pump organ in the main meeting room: “The piano was to the left at the front of the room and the pump organ to the right.”<sup>8</sup> Dieter Kaiser (born 1939) recalled that when Maria Ruf was playing the piano, “I would run from the back of the room to the front, sit on her lap, and snuggle up to her because she smelled so good.”<sup>9</sup>

Life for Germans in general was quite good in 1938, but this was not true for the Jews who had not yet left the country. Lydia Ruf (born 1923) recalled the event that signaled all-out war against the Jews in Nazi Germany—the Night of Broken Glass:

Early in the morning [of November 10, 1938] I happened to go downtown in Stuttgart and saw the demolished windows of the Jewish shops. They were looted and merchandise strewn around. The news on the radio indicated that it was the rage of the German people against the Jews that caused them to destroy the Jewish shops. However, some of us knew very well that the [SA] troops were responsible and not the German people.<sup>10</sup>

With the departure of the American missionaries in August 1939, Erwin Ruf was called to serve as the president of the Stuttgart District. He in turn called Karl Lutz to lead the Stuttgart Branch. President Ruf then proceeded to write a history of the Stuttgart Branch under the title “Memorandum for the Celebration of Forty Years of History of Our Beloved Stuttgart Branch.” With a date of 1899 for the founding of the branch, Ruf described in detail the challenges faced by the first missionaries and Saints in the city and in Württemberg. His final sentence reads: “I hope that [the Saints] will continue to sustain the new branch president, my former first counselor, and

be obedient to him. If you do this, you are assured of the blessings of heaven.”<sup>11</sup>

“I can still hear [in my mind] the radio announcement about the beginning of the war,” recalled Walter Speidel: “‘The Poles have finally attacked us, and as of 5:45 this morning we are shooting back.’ We had thought that the Polish army would invade Germany, and one of my cousins had already been drafted.” A month later, Walter was called to serve in the national labor force, and by January 1941 he was wearing the uniform of the Wehrmacht. Before leaving for basic training with the army, he was asked to speak in sacrament meeting, then was given a blessing by branch president Karl Lutz. In that blessing he was promised that he would return “without harm to body or spirit.”

Maria Ruf (born 1923) recalled hearing the broadcast announcing the attack on Poland. She heard Hitler say that he would be joining his troops at the front. If something happened to him, he would be succeeded by Rudolf Hess, and if something happened to Hess, Hermann Goering would be the next leader. “Everybody was touched,” she recalled, “It made you hope that nothing would happen to them. I came home to find out that my dad was drafted. That’s what I remember from the first day of the war.”<sup>12</sup>

Maria had finished high school and was hired as a secretary in a bank in the summer of 1939. She was still a member of the League of German Girls at the time and recalled that without that membership, she would not have gotten the job. Once employed, however, she wanted out of the league and managed to achieve her goal. At the same time, the office manager insisted that if she were not a member of the league or the National Socialist Party, she would forfeit her job. As it turned out, the league would not take her back. In total honesty, she insisted that even if she joined the party, she would not attend meetings. Before the manager could put more pressure on Maria, he was drafted into the army, and the matter was forgotten.

When she finished public school in 1941, Ruth Bodon was first called upon to serve her *Pflichtjahr*

for the nation. She was assigned to work in a home and assist with domestic duties, as she recalled: “The man was an engineer, and the woman had two children. I went there in the morning and home in the evening. [The program] was Hitler’s idea that you kind of get prepared for marriage and to be a good housewife.” Following her year of service, Ruth began an apprenticeship as a dental assistant, and this training lasted for about a year.

After his selection for the Afrika Corps, Walter Speidel noticed odd reactions from German civilians when they saw his brown desert uniform, something quite foreign to the German army. By early 1942, he was ready for what promised to be a lengthy deployment in North Africa. Before leaving, Walter considered becoming engaged to a sweet young woman of the Stuttgart Branch whom he had known for years and seriously dated for several months. However, her mother objected to the union at that time. Walter described the hometown farewell from his sweetheart in these words:

After MIA, and at the end of our walk home, we spent more time than usual to say good-bye in the dark entrance to the Gablenberg pharmacy. We held on to each other as if this would be the last time we would see each other ever again. She broke down several times and couldn’t stop crying. But in the end, we knew we had to part. So, after a long time, we pulled ourselves together, and finally walked hand in hand to Gaishammerstrasse. We embraced and kissed one last time, and then she ran into her building. I turned around and walked briskly back to my streetcar stop.<sup>13</sup>

Nephi Moroni Lothar Greiner (born 1929) was in trouble with the Hitler Youth when his father did not permit him to participate in activities on Sundays. He told the youth leaders, “I will raise my own son, and we go to church on Sunday!” The Hitler Youth leaders threatened action, as Lothar recalled, “They put me through a kind of humiliating ceremony; they took the insignia from my uniform—it was sort like being drummed out of camp. I can remember that very clearly.”<sup>14</sup>

The records of the Stuttgart Branch in the Church History Library include two interesting documents issued by the office of the Lutheran Church in Stuttgart. The first bears the date October 22, 1941: “Anna Hilde Rügner née Armbruster, a bookbinder, born August 11, 1920, in Weil im Dorf has left the Lutheran Church. She plans to join the Mormons.”<sup>15</sup>

A few months later, a report was sent from the office of St. Paul’s Lutheran Church to the office of the Evangelical Lutheran Church District of Stuttgart. The report is a reminder that a change of heart (in either direction) can happen to LDS persons as well as persons of any faith:

May 22, 1942: The person named below wishes to be allowed to enter the Lutheran Church again: Mrs. Meta Wagner née Manz, born 12 August 1908 in Stuttgart, residing at Augustenstrasse 131. She joined the Mormon Church in 1926 because she wanted to marry a man who was a member of that church. However, she eventually married a Catholic man. She had the child born to her in 1941 baptized in the Lutheran Church and now wishes to reenter the Lutheran Church. The attached document certifies that she has left the Mormon Church.<sup>16</sup>

The Erwin Ruf family were modest people who did not try to attract attention. Esther found that if she attended Jungvolk meetings on Wednesdays, she could skip them in favor of attending church on Sundays and nobody would report her (“I was kind of shy anyway.”) In school her Old Testament (Jewish) given name could have been a reason for contention in Nazi Germany, but again she was able to avoid trouble. As she described the situation, “It wasn’t too bad being a member of the Church, but as the years went by you said less and less about religion. They classified me as ‘believing in God’ [rather than as Catholic or Protestant].”

At the completion of their schooling, German teenagers were often given instruction in formal dance, but Maria Ruf’s parents did not allow her to participate. Fortunately she was able to join with several other Latter-day Saints to learn under the tutelage of Max Knecht of the Stuttgart Branch.

They even staged a small prom, with phonograph records rather than a band. However, it turned out that some of the branch members did not approve of dancing in the church and voiced their protests. According to Maria, during the war “life got rather serious. I don’t think I had a normal teenage life because of the war.”

From March 8 to May 25, 1942, Walter Speidel and his comrades were moved from Germany through Italy to Tunisia in northern Africa. They saw many interesting and historic sites on the way and likely wondered what it would be like to fight the British in the desert. Serving under Field Marshall Erwin Rommel, the “Desert Fox,” Walter was part of the communications team that worked to install and maintain radio systems and telephone lines.

Soon after his arrival, Walter was very close to the action. The German Afrika Corps was retreating slowly before the British from Egypt westward toward Tunisia, and soon the Americans approached their positions from the west. According to Walter, “The Afrika Corps was always desperate for fuel and ammunition because the British, destroyed 60 percent of it on its way across the Mediterranean Sea.”<sup>17</sup>

Walter’s description of the combat situation on July 11–12, 1942, reflects what many LDS German soldiers felt at one time or another during the war:

The situation seemed hopeless. . . . For the first time, I thought that I might die. We knew we couldn’t defend ourselves against tanks with our rifles and machine guns. . . . I thought of the blessing I had received before I left Stuttgart. I was promised that I would not have to shed blood, that my life would be protected and be spared in the end. With every breath, I sent up to heaven one Stossgebet [quick, desperate prayer] after the other. . . . There was only one thing I knew I could do: Pray, pray, and pray some more. My life was in His hands. Without His protection, I could not survive.<sup>18</sup>

Maria Ruf recalled the many ways in which civil defense authorities asked the Stuttgart civilians to prepare for air raids: “Each family [in the apartment building] had some kind of job,” she explained:

I was designated as the messenger; it was my job to run to the police station to report if anything happened to our building. We had water in the attic space in case a fire started there, and everybody was supposed to have a small suitcase packed with our best belongings to take to the basement during an alarm. We also had a [hole] from our basement into the next building in case our [exit] was blocked.

Nearly all the Latter-day Saints in Stuttgart lost their homes in the many air raids that plagued the city. Ruth Bodon was living in the home of her uncle when the bombs landed very close. However, Ruth and her cousin had not taken the sirens seriously; while others in the building went to the basement shelter, the two girls went back to sleep. “All of a sudden I woke up and all hell broke loose!” she recalled:

We heard the bombs hitting and the antiaircraft shooting and we ran down to the basement in our nightgowns. My aunt who had so often made fun of us Mormons and Christians was down there praying to God for help. . . . Then the air raid warden came in and told us all to get out because the whole block was burning. . . . We had a container of water in the basement and we put our sheets in it and [put them over our heads and] then went out two at a time. We ran down the street and the houses were burning on both sides. It was just awful. My uncle’s family lost everything.

To Lothar Greiner, the worst thing about the war was that his family was separated. During air raids, he and his father were required to stay in their apartment building to fight fires while his mother and his sister went down the street to a large bunker. After their building was hit and destroyed one night, Lothar went to the bunker: “It was my sad task to tell my mother that we had lost everything. I found her in the bunker, and she exclaimed joyfully, ‘Lothar is here! Now we can go home!’ I told her that we couldn’t because there was nothing left but rubble.” Sister Greiner and her daughter were then evacuated to Waldenburg, a few miles to the east, but Lothar and his father were not allowed to leave Stuttgart. “It became my greatest wish,” he said, “to see my family united again.”





Fig. 1. Kurt Ruf used this Russian booklet for his diary in 1941. Kurt crossed out the book's title and wrote "war journal, 1943, Kurt Ruf." (L. Ruf Wright)

Lydia Ruf had hoped that her brothers, Kurt and Alma, who were both employed by the Robert Bosch Company (an important war industry), would be exempt from military service. Alma had even obtained a patent for a measuring device, but their work did not keep the two out of the war for long. Kurt decided to volunteer in order to choose his unit; he selected the tank corps. Alma was not drafted until 1944, and Lydia remembered his departure:

The last picture I have of him was taken at the [railroad station] in Stuttgart before he was shipped to Russia. There he stood in his uniform, leaning on his rifle—this fair-haired, young boy with the curly hair, who didn't have a single violent bone in his body, going to war. We knew, as we looked on his face, that he would not return. His expression seemed to say the same.<sup>19</sup>

During their contacts "nearly every day," Walter Speidel and field marshal Erwin Rommel learned that they were from the same part of Württemberg and enjoyed speaking their native Swabian dialect with each other. The field marshal also found out that Walter did not smoke or drink alcohol. In fact, on one occasion, the commander saw Walter's copy of the Book of Mormon, picked it up, thumbed through it for a few moments, and then asked if it was a Bible. Walter's response was a quick "Yeah,

sort of," and that was the end of the discussion. "My friends all knew that I was a Mormon," he stated.<sup>20</sup>

District president Erwin Ruf was not allowed to leave Stuttgart, but he often sent his family away from the city to the safety of small communities. Anna Ruf had relatives in Deckenpfronn (twenty miles to the southwest), and she and her daughters spent significant time there. According to Esther, "I often took the train there by myself, even when I was only twelve. I thought I was all grown up. After getting off of the train, I still had to walk for an hour. It was kind of like a vacation for a few days. [But from Deckenpfronn] we could see Stuttgart burning [after air raids]."

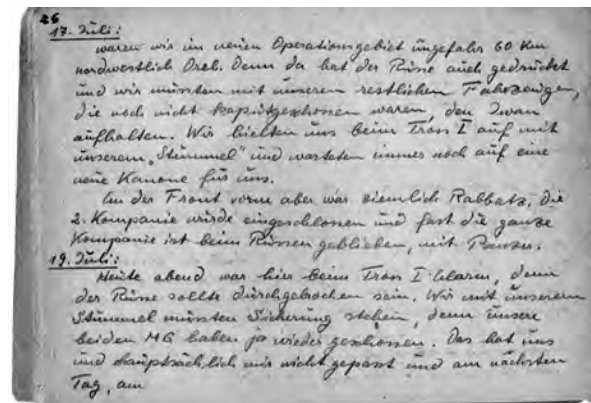


Fig. 2. A page from the highly detailed diary of soldier Kurt Ruf. (L. Ruf Wright)

"Every night at about 2:00 a.m. the sirens would go off," recalled Harold Bodon (born 1936). "I was surprised that my dad let me go upstairs to watch the planes drop their bombs. I guess that was part of the curiosity factor." Harold recalled seeing phosphorus burning and hearing people screaming in the street below. "It was getting very dangerous in Stuttgart, and our [apartment] house was the only one on the street that wasn't destroyed." It was 1943, and for the family of Heinrich and Lina Bodon, it was time to leave Stuttgart. Brother Bodon received permission to move his business to his hometown of Waldsee, about one hundred miles southeast of Stuttgart.

Harold's younger brother, Karl-Heinz (born 1937), also had vivid memories of the air raids and preparing for them:

Before we left [the apartment], we would go through a routine of covering all the windows and putting tape where there could have been some light seeping through. . . . I remember this old fellow who always came down into the basement shelter with some little toys, goodies, cookies, or what have you. It was all very orderly. Nobody seemed to get upset at all. We just all went down [to the basement]. We did it many, many times, and it was almost like a little get-together.<sup>21</sup>

The German Afrika Corps was eventually surrounded by Allied forces in Tunisia and Walter Speidel was taken captive by French Indochinese on May 12, 1943. Turned over first to the British and then to the Americans, he was transported by train through Algeria and Morocco, then to Tangier and Casablanca. A ship took him to New Jersey, and a train from there to Aliceville, Alabama, where he arrived on July 9.<sup>22</sup>

On the very day Walter was captured near the city of Tunis, his friend Kurt Ruf was thousands of miles away in the Soviet Union, writing the first entry in his new diary, entitled "My War Diary for the 1943 Campaign, Part I." The first entry gives important insights into his attitude at a time when in the minds of many German soldiers it was no longer a certainty that the Soviets would be conquered:

May 12, 1943: I was just released from the field hospital after a week of reserve status. It is again time for me to serve. Today I joined with forty-nine other men for the trip to Russia. I cannot say that I was very happy about this because I really had it up to here with my first experience in Russia in 1942. But you have to obey in the army whether you want to or not. So I won't mope around and will do the best I can to enjoy life.

Kurt said good-bye to his family in Stuttgart and boarded a train for the long trip to the Eastern Front. His diary is very detailed and provides information about his locations and activities on a daily

basis. As the radioman of a tank crew, his fate was connected to the status of his tank. The great majority of his time in the summer of 1943 was spent in radio training and in waiting for repairs to be made on his vehicle. Meals, sleeping quarters, and weather were frequent topics in his entries, but there were of course accounts of combat, adventure, and danger, as is seen in his report of July 6. When Kurt's crew encountered the Soviets that day, the Germans advanced with 104 tanks and "countless support vehicles." Of course, the Germans respected the Soviet T34 tanks that opposed them. After two hours of fire, during which Kurt could not determine whether the noise came from the tanks to either side or from the enemy, he received a radio message indicating that his crew was to pull "vehicle no. 441" out of a huge crater close to their position. Initially, the men hesitated to leave the safety of their tank:

I said to myself, I have to go help my comrades. Who knows if some of them are wounded? So I decided to get out, and my heart was not even pounding. I opened my hatch, jumped out, and quickly got behind the tank. My buddies were right behind me—our commander and the other two crew members. Now there were four of us outside ready to help. We got our tow rope ready, but every time we stuck our heads out, the Russian sharpshooters were after us and we felt bullets whizzing by our ears. When we heard an artillery round coming our way, we hit the dirt and waited. Then we went to work again. I took one end of the chain, my buddy took the other, and we made ourselves as thin as possible and headed for the hook on the tank. The rope was too short, so we had to get another one. In the meantime, one of our crew got to the machine gun and kept the Russians busy for a few seconds. Finally we had the two tanks connected, and could start pulling him out. But, wouldn't you know it? Our tank wouldn't start. We had taken a hit from an artillery shell that knocked out our starter motor.<sup>23</sup>

Kurt's detailed report indicates that they eventually got their tank started and hauled their friends out of the bomb crater.

The next combat action came after only a few weeks of waiting while their tank was repaired. All summer long, Kurt's crew drove hundreds of miles as they maneuvered toward (and at times away from) the enemy. On one occasion, the crew accidentally filled their tank with diesel fuel instead of gasoline, and an officer accused them of treason. It turned out that a fuel depot assistant was the guilty party. It seemed that there was always something going wrong with the tank, and parts were extremely difficult to find.

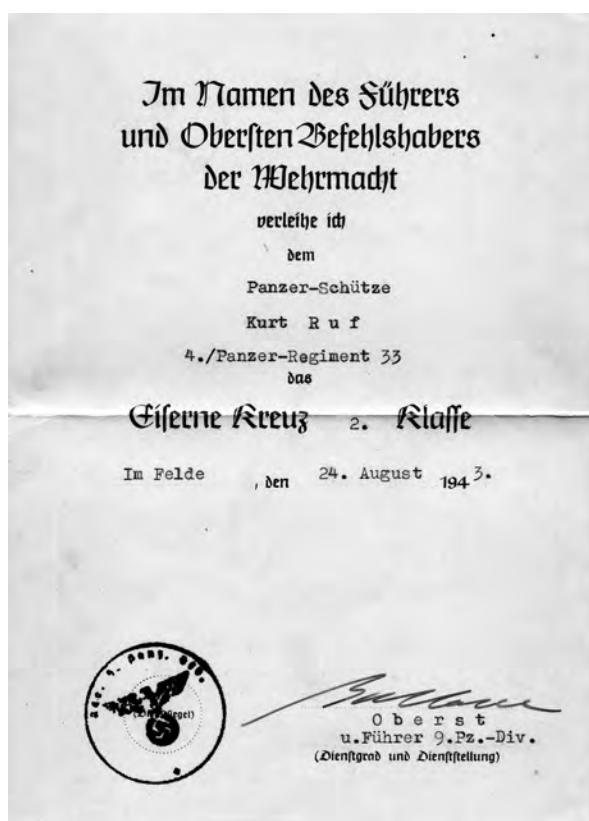


Fig. 3. Kurt Ruf was awarded the Iron Cross Second Class for valor in battle. (L. Ruf Wright)

On August 1, 1943, Kurt Ruf was promoted to corporal, but things were not going well for his tank division. Three days later he wrote, "Every day we move back and leave more territory to the Russians without a fight. We have been eating all of our chickens, geese, ducks, calves, and pigs. Anything that could not be consumed was destroyed, including

gardens and crops." The Red Army pressed their enemy constantly, and Kurt was in combat on a regular basis. One day a cannon round penetrated his tank's armor plate and shrapnel flew inches past his head, hitting his comrade. He understood just how close he had come to dying.

The air raid that devastated large parts of Stuttgart on October 7–8, 1943, also destroyed the church rooms at Hauptstätterstrasse 96 that had served the Saints so well for seventeen years. After that, it was seldom known much in advance precisely where the meetings would be held. According to Lydia Ruf, meetings were held in the forest in good weather:

Word got around that we should go to, say [streetcar] S-5 and the last station ["Georgsruh," according to Lothar Greiner]. There we would meet in the woods for sacrament meeting, check to see what happened to everybody, and thus keep track of each other. Church members became very, very close. Everybody helped each other. . . . It was a great time of togetherness. Also, after losing it all, those who had formerly been deemed wealthy were just like all the rest. Now we were all equal. No one had any more than anyone else. War is a great equalizer.<sup>24</sup>

"The new year [1944] is here, and the front is on fire everywhere," Kurt Ruf wrote. One of Kurt's battles in early 1944 was against his comrades' attempts to get him to drink alcohol. He resisted and ended up being the guardian of his drunken friends while his standards protected him. "I don't need alcohol to make me brave," he wrote, "I am my own master. I just had to laugh as I watched them break tables and chairs."

Alma Ruf did not last long as a soldier. On March 14, he was killed in battle in the Soviet Union. Lydia described the reaction of the Stuttgart Branch: "When we heard about his death, there was a memorial service at church. It is customary in Germany to wear black to a service of this kind, but I refused to wear black. Somebody accused me by saying, 'You're not even grieving for your brother.' I said nothing, but to myself I thought, 'I should wear white because I had known him.'"<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 4. The military ID of Alma Ruf. (L. Ruf Wright)

In distant Waldsee, Heinrich Bodon continued to operate his fur business. Young Karl-Heinz recalled the following about the business:

People would bring us their dead foxes, . . . so we got all of those skins. Dad would work together with another firm to prepare the skins so that they could be made into fur coats. My mom and another lady sewed the furs together and made the coats. My dad and his brother took the coats to towns all around southern Germany and had two-day sales. They also sold muffs, caps, and collars.

Harold Bodon recalled that his father was also the town’s civil defense director—possibly a commitment he accepted in order to get permission to move his family out of Stuttgart. Brother Bodon wore the small round Nazi Party lapel pin, but did not maintain any loyalty to the party. The family initially lived in the Hotel zur Sonne in Waldsee, but later moved into a house at Stadtgraben 14. Harold was baptized near there on June 28, 1944, as he recalled: “It was a little creek. I remember that we were all dressed in white, and there were a lot of people standing about two hundred feet away. I think my father and [my brother-in-law] Kurt Schneider did the ceremony.”<sup>26</sup>

Heinrich and Lina Bodon were determined to raise their children in the gospel, despite the fact that Waldsee was a great distance from any branch of the Church. Every Sunday, they conducted a

Sunday School in their home. According to young Harold, “My dad told us that if we participated [in Sunday School] he would take us either to a soccer game or to the movies in the afternoon. The soccer team was Schwarz-Weiss-Waldsee, and the movies were always about Hopalong Cassidy. That kept the family together. We learned a lot of good stuff, and eventually we made the right decisions [based on what we learned].” At the same time, the war went on, and Harold recalled that at school he and his classmates were given wooden rifles and taught to march: “We hoisted the swastika flag and goose-stepped and had a great time.”

Toward the end of the war, Dieter Kaiser’s father (not yet baptized) got in trouble with the strict Nazis at his work. He was employed in research and development, and his company employed several forced laborers from occupied countries. He had insisted to his superiors that the laborers needed better food and medical treatment, but his protests fell upon deaf ears. One night, an air raid threatened the prisoners, and Herr Kaiser let them out of their incarceration. In Dieter’s recollection, “My dad came home with holes burned in his white shirt. If he had not let the prisoners out, they would have been killed by the bombs. The next day, I went with my father to the railroad station; he was now a private in the army and was headed to the Eastern Front.” The message to troublemakers was clear: toe the party line or suffer the consequences.

Young Dieter understood the dangers of airplanes above Stuttgart. Barely five years old, he was once knocked off of a table during an air raid and needed stitches to close the gash on his head. While in the hospital, he managed to reopen the wound and needed more stitches. On another occasion, he was out fetching milk for his mother and was attacked by an American fighter plane. “The pilot fired at me with his machine gun, and I dove into a ditch to get out of his line of fire. I hit something hard and spilled the milk. When I got home, I had a bent milk can and my knee was bleeding. My

mother [spanked] me because I hadn't been paying good enough attention."

The Erwin Ruf family experienced several terrifying nights when the bombs landed in their neighborhood. One bomb actually hit the corner of their building but did not explode. Another raid left their entire street on fire. When Lydia and her mother emerged from their basement shelter, her mother said that they had to leave the area immediately or they would not survive. Only five of the eighteen people in their shelter left in time; the others perished. Lydia described what happened next:

The air was hot and thin. We stumbled over a couple of blackened, naked, hairless mannequins lying on the street. Timbers were falling and sparks threatened to ignite hair and clothing, so we wrapped our heads [with wet towels] and ran to the public shelter built into the mountain close by. Only later . . . did we realize that those were not mannequins but people who were not as lucky as we. When we returned the next morning, there was nothing. Not one stone above another. You could barely tell where the house had been.<sup>27</sup>

After her uncle's home was destroyed, Ruth Bodon went to live with her sister Charlotte, the wife of Kurt Schneider, president of the Strasbourg District. While in Strasbourg, she attended meetings of the branch with her sister's family. That French city was occupied by the German military, and the members of the small branch spoke both French and German. "We never talked about politics, Hitler, or the war," Ruth claimed.

Ruth was drafted into the national labor force, or Reichsarbeitsdienst, in the fall of 1944 and assigned to a factory in Kirchheim unter Teck, not far from home. She liked the factory work more than farmwork and enjoyed working at a manual knitting machine, making socks for soldiers. When that assignment ended after six months, Ruth thought she would be allowed to go home, but her term of service was not finished. Her next job was very unpleasant: she tested gas masks, putting them under pressure to determine if there were any leaks. "The gas made me deathly ill, but I only did that for

a month. One day, our lead girl came in and told us: "The war is coming to an end. Go home, but in groups. Don't go alone." Ruth decided to join her sister Charlotte, whose family had left Strasbourg when the American army approached and moved to a little town in the Black Forest.

Esther Ruf recalled that there were not many opportunities to enjoy life as a young teenager during the war: "I had the feeling that I couldn't really do the things that others my age did. Maybe that was because we weren't very well off. I could go swimming because there was a pool nearby. I remember reading two books every weekend. That was fun time for me. Every once in a while I could go to a movie, but we didn't go out that often."

In late May 1944, Kurt Ruf arrived in France with his tank division. A few days later, the Allies landed on the beaches of Normandy, but Kurt was as yet far from the action. He wrote to his father, Hermann (then the president of the Frankfurt Branch) on June 8 with very bad news:

You have probably heard from Maria or from somebody else that Alma was killed on March 14 at Nikolajew [Russia]. This is a very painful loss, but who knows what will happen to all of us? He has it really good now. He certainly doesn't want to come back to this world with all of these evil people. I know that he's in a better place now, and I wish him all the best in heaven.<sup>28</sup>



*Fig. 5. Kurt Ruf was a member of the crew of this tank when he was killed in France in August 1944. (L. Ruf Wright)*



Fig. 6. Members of the Stuttgart Branch.

But the action caught up with Kurt, who wrote to his father on August 6, 1944: “I am writing you a quick note in haste. All of a sudden, I was in combat against the Americans. I’m very well right now. I hope that you’re at least not any worse than before. I send you my best wishes. Your Kurt. Auf Wiedersehen!”<sup>29</sup> Four days later, Kurt was killed in battle.

The birth of a child in wartime Germany was an extraordinary challenge for many women—including Ute Auktor’s mother. Ute was born in a Stuttgart hospital on September 28, 1944, but there was nothing typical about the process. Her mother explained the situation, and Ute related the events as follows:

My mother was taken to the hospital for my birth. (My father was not there; he was out of town with the army.) Just as I was born, the doctor heard the air-raid sirens, which were going off all the time. I was 9½ pounds or something, a good-sized baby. And my mother was just a short lady, 4 foot 11, if she was that tall. They bundled me up, put me into her arms, and told her to go to the nearest air-raid shelter, which was down the street from the hospital, so she had to walk outside. She told me that one of the bombs landed not too far away from the building, and the force of it knocked her to the ground while she was still clutching me. A gentleman came up to her and offered to help. She was holding me so tightly that the poor man thought she was going to suffocate me. He had to finally just lift her up and get her to the air-raid shelter. And that was just about twenty or thirty minutes after I was born. It was kind of a rough entrance into the world.<sup>30</sup>

As a German POW in Alabama during the war, Walter Speidel had a rare treat—a visit from his sister. Elisabeth Speidel had married an American and immigrated to Utah before the war. When the Red Cross informed her of Walter’s presence in Alabama, she requested and received permission to visit him there. According to strict regulations, an officer was assigned to be with the siblings and listen to all that was said. As Walter recalled:

It was a little awkward at first, but Elisabeth handled the situation cleverly, putting the lieutenant at ease. . . . We talked and talked. First, about our parents and [my girlfriend], and Elisabeth’s acquaintances in Stuttgart. . . . The few hours were gone too fast. We met the next one or two days. Towards the end, Elisabeth asked me what I would like her to send me. I told her that we actually had everything we needed. Perhaps, some personal things, church literature, etc. It was very difficult to say good-bye. Afterwards, everything appeared so unreal to me, like a “mirage” that now had all of a sudden disappeared.<sup>31</sup>

Erika Greiner Metzner (born 1919) was expecting her second child in July 1944 when her husband, Heinz, came home one evening with the announcement that she and their son, Rolf Rüdiger (born 1942), needed to leave Stuttgart at once. He helped her pack for the long trip of six hundred miles east to Silesia, where his relatives were surprised to see her but pleased to take them in. As much as she wished to stay with her husband (he was not allowed to leave), she knew that the chances for survival were much greater in the town of Frankenstein. Once there, she found life so peaceful and comfortable that she had “a bit of a guilty conscience.”

Following the destruction of the branch meeting rooms on Hauptstätterstrasse, branch leaders spent a good deal of time seeking a suitable meeting place for this branch, which in the last two years of the war still enjoyed a large local population. An important document found among the papers of the Stuttgart Branch is remarkable:

October 11, 1944 no. A.5303

From the Lutheran Church Council in Grossheppach, Waiblingen County, to the office of the Lutheran Church District of Stuttgart: According to a report from your office, the representative of the Church of Jesus Christ (previously called Mormons) since their meeting hall in Stuttgart was destroyed and they cannot find a place to meet, has petitioned for the use of the hall in the Gaisburg Church each Sunday afternoon beginning at 3:00 p.m. until such time that they can find another place to meet. Although it has always been our practice to support churches that have lost their meeting places, the Lutheran Church District Office should consider declining this request, because allowing churches that are not solidly based on Christianity to meet in our buildings would send the wrong message to members of our church. Because this religious group is so small, it should be possible for them to find another location for their meetings.<sup>32</sup>

This is an important reminder that The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was generally not looked upon as a church (*Kirche*) anywhere in Germany at the time but rather as a sect (*Sekte*), a word that in the German language did not have a positive connotation.

Millions of German women gave birth during the war to children whose fathers were far from home in the service of their country. Erika Metzner was one of those women, but giving birth in a home or a hospital under planned conditions was one thing—going through the same process while trying to flee the invading Soviet army was quite another, as she recalled:

It took us nearly an entire day to go the first twenty-five miles to Bad Landeck. I was helping to get our baggage off of the train when my water broke. . . . My sister-in-law turned pale when I told her. She ran off to find some assistance, and they found a car to take me to the [women's hospital]. I was very scared, because I didn't know what would become of my relatives and my little boy. That very night—February 15, 1945—I gave birth to a healthy little boy [Heinz Peter].<sup>33</sup>

Sister Metzner stayed in the hospital for ten days and was then sent to a mothers' home. This might

normally have been a very pleasant experience, with mother and baby under the care of a nurse for a few weeks after birth, but it became a tragedy. As that terribly cold winter came to an end, there was no fuel left to heat the building. "Every day they carried out dead babies. They just weren't used to the cold," she explained. Her son was only three weeks old when he too passed away on March 10, 1945. A few weeks later, Erika Metzner and two-year-old Rolf Rüdiger boarded a train for home. The Soviet army was approaching, and it seemed that every German civilian in Silesia was determined to flee to the west rather than wait and see what the conquerors would do.

Traveling with Erika Metzner and her son were a sister-in-law and three children. It seemed like a miracle when they found passage together on a train to Vienna, where the tumult at the main station was daunting; again it seemed that everyone was headed west. From Vienna, another train took the six west to Fürstenfeldbrück, Germany, a town just outside of Munich. Seemingly stuck there as the war neared a conclusion, Sister Metzner had no way to proceed, but managed to write a letter to her husband back in Stuttgart. After about one week in Fürstenfeldbrück ("where we had a bed and water!" she rejoiced), Erika answered a knock at the door and opened it to see her brother Lothar Greiner. Only sixteen, he had left Stuttgart with the sole purpose of finding his sister and his nephew and taking them home. In Stuttgart, Erika found that her home was still standing. She described her feelings at the time: "I was so pleased to be home again with my dear family. But best of all, my husband showed up just a few weeks later. We were reunited, and what a blessing that was! And I was so happy to attend church again with my branch."

One day in April 1945, Lydia Ruf heard shooting and looked out the attic window. Seeing tanks rolling across fields in the distance, she hurried downstairs to tell her mother that the Americans were coming; it appeared that they would be in town soon. Regina Ruf quickly issued an order: "Let's kill

the chickens!” The landlady was gone but had given instructions that the chickens in her coop should not fall victim to the invaders. According to Lydia:

Mother went out to kill the chickens, brought them in, and we cooked them, put them in mason jars, and buried them in the garden. The next day the tanks rolled in. There was a little shooting in the streets, so mother and I hung out a white sheet, while our neighbor still displayed his flag with the swastika on it. . . . That same day . . . soldiers were coming through all the backyards looking for things like rabbits, chickens, or food of any kind. We felt so smug, since ours were already buried! I think the inspiration that my mother in many instances had, came from living the gospel.<sup>34</sup>

During his stay in three different POW camps in Alabama and North Carolina from 1943 to 1945, Walter Speidel was kept busy at many simple tasks, but there was also time for entertainment and academic pursuits. Walter busied himself studying the English language and became fairly proficient. At one point, he was given a physical examination, and the German physician determined that he was suffering from what was called Schlatter’s disease. This meant that Walter could be classified as unfit for work, and soon he was put on a ship for transport across the Atlantic Ocean to France. He was fortunate to have the unfit classification, because many of the POWs who landed in the French port of LeHavre with him were taken by the French and put to work again; their “release” had been a deception.<sup>35</sup> Walter, on the other hand, proceeded to Marburg, Germany, where American military occupation officials gave him the necessary release papers and paid him \$92.75 for the work he had done as a POW.<sup>36</sup>

When the end of the war approached, Ruth Bodon was the guest of the Schneider family in Schönwald, a ski resort town in the Black Forest. She liked the setting, but the entry of French troops in April 1945 was more excitement than she had bargained for. As it turned out, the troops entering the town under the French flag were anything but French. Ruth described the terrifying situation:

I had never seen a Moroccan before. They were on horses and had turbans and big beards. They were awful-looking men, and we saw them through our window. All of a sudden, they came to a stop in the street right in front of our house. Apparently their officers were looking for quarters, and they stayed there for about a half hour. My sister was twenty-four, and I was eighteen. My sister said to her husband, “If they come in here, don’t try to protect me. I don’t want to be a widow, too.” My brother-in-law prayed nonstop while they were outside in the street. He never stopped praying. And then they left. In the next town they raped every woman from thirteen to eighty. That would have been our experience if my brother-in-law had not prayed so hard for us to be safe.

After the arrival of the American army in Stuttgart, Lothar Greiner set off to find and rescue his mother and his sisters Edith and Ruth in the town of Waldenburg. Part of the journey was accomplished with the aid of an old bicycle, and part of it in the company of Polish laborers heading home (“I hoped they wouldn’t speak to me.”). He made it to Waldenburg and was united with his mother and sisters, then successfully escorted them home to Stuttgart. “It was wonderful to be together again,” he explained.



*Fig. 7. Little Dieter Kaiser with American soldiers in postwar Stuttgart. The second GI from the left is Alan Fry, who later married Maria Ruf, a daughter of the Stuttgart District president. (D. Kaiser)*

Some of the first enemy troops to enter Stuttgart were French, as Dieter Kaiser recalled: “They were



French colonial troops, Moroccans. We used to bang on the lids of pots to cause distractions when those guys came around.” Dieter was only six years old at the time and could not have known what molestations the soldiers were committing, but he apparently understood that their presence represented a great danger.

Esther Ruf explained that her family was never in danger when the enemy invaded Stuttgart. “We still lived in our home at the end of the war and my father was still employed. [The soldiers] never came into our home to steal our belongings or anything like that. Our home and our neighborhood had not been bombed; we just had some windows broken.” Regarding her reaction to the news that Hitler was dead, she recalled: “I think that I was happy when I heard the news. Everything we had been told about him was a lie. I was glad to be a free person and not to live under a system of lies.”

For the Bodon family in the town of Waldsee, the war ended with the arrival of the French army. Brother Bodon wanted to spare the town any damage from senseless defensive action, so he went out at night to remove antitank barriers. To do so during the day could have meant execution as a traitor and a defeatist. At the same time, other local residents believed in resisting the enemy. Harold Bodon recalled that several Hitler Youth boys were ordered to go to the nearby forest and prepare to fight against the invaders. “Of course the French didn’t know that they were boys, so they started mowing down that forest and killed a lot of the kids.”

Just before the French arrived, Brother Bodon loaded a small Bollerwagen with supplies and walked with his family to a farm just outside town, according to Karl-Heinz: “In our family prayers we had always asked to have the Americans occupy our area, so we were disappointed when the French came first. My dad didn’t know if the enemy would come into Waldsee with guns ablazing or not. We hung out a huge white flag, and nothing happened where we were. But back in Waldsee there was a little damage done.”

When the French army marched into Waldsee, the spectacle was frightening, according to Harold:

The Africans came in on camels. They were the first blacks I’d ever seen [and they wore] turbans. The black men were very scary. They kept holding one hand on the little knives that they had on their belts. They would be walking down the street looking straight ahead, then they would suddenly turn and look at us and pull their knives out. I came close to fainting every time that happened.

With the French conquerors in town, Heinrich Bodon was most concerned for the safety of his wife and his daughter, Rosie. He quickly made a deal with the invaders that the family would cook and wash for them if the family were allowed to stay in their home. When it was all over, the worst losses they suffered were their radio, a camera, and a bicycle (all local families had to surrender such items to the French occupation forces). The Bodons lived in relative peace in Waldsee for seven more years.



*Fig. 8. Erna Lang Kaiser (left) of the Stuttgart Branch lost twenty-six close relatives (several of them LDS) during the war. Two of her relatives are shown here: Christian Lang (president of the Darmstadt Branch) and his wife, Anna Loeb Lang. Christian and Anna died in the firebombing of Darmstadt on September 11–12, 1944. (D. Kaiser)*

Dieter Kaiser’s mother did an excellent job in keeping her son fed, clothed, and sheltered while her husband was gone as a soldier. When the war ended, his whereabouts were not known, but eventually she learned that he was in a POW camp in Pennsylvania. She and Dieter were living in what

was left of the family's apartment house. According to young Dieter, "a huge bomb destroyed one-half of the home. We could heat only one room after that, but we stayed in the home." Sister Kaiser's losses were much greater than property. No fewer than twenty-six close relatives had been killed in the war, including her parents. Her father, Christian Lang, was the branch president in Darmstadt and perished in his basement in the firebombing of that city on September 11–12, 1944, along with his wife and several other family members.

When Walter Speidel finally arrived home in Stuttgart after an absence of four years, he was surprised at the condition of the city, as he wrote:

The whole area around the Hauptbahnhof all the way up to Wilhelmsbau, actually all of downtown Stuttgart, the whole inner city, was in ruins, just rubble, only some walls still standing here and there. Streetcars didn't have any glass, except up front, of course. What had been glass before was now boarded up with wood panels. [Arriving at my parents' apartment house] I woke up [everybody in the building] when I stomped up the stairs with my heavy American boots and my oversized duffle bag. Now, finally I was home. Was I, really? Or did I just dream?

Asked to speak in church on June 8, 1946, Walter mentioned the blessing in which he was promised he would return "without harm to body or spirit." Those remarks engendered some poor feelings among branch members in attendance. Several wondered why he had been given a special blessing promising his survival when a number of men and boys of the branch had perished in the war. "They were asking, 'Why didn't our sons receive that blessing?' I realized soon that I shouldn't have mentioned the blessing."<sup>37</sup>

The Latter-day Saints of the Stuttgart Branch had suffered substantial losses in life and property. Nearly all had lost their homes and were compelled to leave the city for at least a short time. It would be months and even years before some of them could return and join with their friends and family for worship services again.

## IN MEMORIAM

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

**Georg Andreas Konrad Bibinger** b. Frankenthal or Gönkental, Pfalz, Bayern, 18 Apr 1884; son of Georg Bibinger and Anna Elisabeth Neufahrt; bp. 4 Jun 1921; conf. 4 Jun 1921; ord. deacon 29 Oct 1922; ord. teacher 23 Nov 1924; ord. priest 14 Oct 1928; ord. elder 2 Oct 1932; m. 28 Oct 1922, Rosine Fauser (div.); 2m. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 27 Jul 1931, Maria Luis Klink; d. heart attack Stuttgart, 10 Oct 1943 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 200; FHL microfilm 25723; 1930 census; IGI)

**Frida Luise Brosi** b. Hohenhaslach, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 24 May 1886; dau. of Gottlieb Brosi and Christina Frank; bp. 20 Jun 1918; conf. 20 Jun 1918; m. 2 Apr 1908, Gottlob Rieger; d. blood and liver poisoning 15 Sep 1939 (*Der Stern* no. 20, 15 Oct 1939, 323; FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 637; FHL microfilm no. 271403; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Emil Claude** b. Donaueschingen, Villingen, Baden, 2 Feb 1871; son of Maria Claude; bp. 9 Aug 1924; conf. 9 Aug 1924; d. cerebral apoplexy 25 Oct 1939 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 46; FHL microfilm 25741; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Dieter Werner Fauser** b. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 9 Sep 1935; son of Wilhelm Werner Fauser and Maria Barbara Katharina Soravia; d. diphtheria 15 May 1942 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 633; FHL microfilm 25765; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Maria Theresia Gommel** b. Mengen, Donaukreis, Württemberg, 26 Sep 1875; dau. of Johannes Gommel and Pauline Schuhmacher; bp. 25 Jun 1911; conf. 25 Jun 1911; widow; d. dropsy 20 Dec 1944 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 305; FHL microfilm 25775; IGI)

**Johannes Albert Heil** b. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 6 Sep 1912; son of Johann Wilhelm Heil and Friedrike L. Hohlweg or Hohlweger; bp. 17 May 1924; conf. 17 May 1924; k. in battle Italy 17 Sep 1943; bur. Cassino, Italy (CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, 544–45; FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 974; FHL microfilm 162780; 1935 census; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

**Otto Friedrich Hertfelder** b. Feuerbach, Württemberg, 8 Aug 1900; son of Ludwig Hertfelder and Berta Löffler; bp. 30 Apr 1921; conf. 30 Apr 1921; missing as of 20 Nov 1945 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 314; FHL microfilm 162782; 1935 census)

**Elise Anna Keller** b. Buch, Frauenfeld, Thurgau, Switzerland, 28 Dec 1861; dau. of Johannes Keller and Barbara Leumann; bp. 21 May 1914; conf. 21 May 1914;

m. Ossweil, Ludwigsburg, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 26 Oct 1884, Johann Friedrich Kahl; 6 children; d. senility Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 23 Mar 1940 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 280; FHL microfilm 271376; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Regine Karoline Klink** b. Alfdorf, Welzheim, Jagstkreis, Württemberg, 17 Dec 1873; dau. of Matthaeus Klink and Katharina Mueller; bp. 15 Apr 1922; conf. 15 Apr 1922; m. — Loos; d. lung ailment 13 Dec 1944 (CR 375 8 2451, no. 379; FHL microfilm 271388; 1935 census; IGI)

**Max Franz Knecht** b. Schwäbisch Gmünd, Württemberg, 19 Feb 1910; son of Gottlieb Knecht and Christina Joos; ord. priest 1935; k. in battle. (M. Ruf Fry; FHL microfilm 271380; 1925 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Christine Kurz** b. Gniebel, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 24 May 1865; dau. of Christian Kurz and Rosine Barbara Schäfer; bp. 4 Dec 1918; conf. 8 Dec 1918; m. Gniebel, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 28 Nov 1895, Jakob Scholl; d. cerebral apoplexy Stuttgart, Württemberg, 27 Aug 1941 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 541; FHL microfilm 245258, 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; AF)

**Karoline Friedrike Lombacher** b. Marbach or Steinheim, Neckarkreis, Württemberg 20 Dec 1864; dau. of Thomas Lombacher and Friederike Märtziner or Märtyrer; bp. 9 Aug 1924; conf. 9 Aug 1924; m. 28 Sep 1889, Johann Friedrich Osswald; d. old age 24 Mar 1945 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 42; IGI)

**Horst Walter Lutz** b. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 10 May 1924; son of Karl Wilhelm Lutz and Elisabeth Lutz; bp. 29 Mar 1935; conf. 29 Mar 1935; k. in battle Neustadt/Haardt, Pfalz, Bayern, 21 Mar 1945 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 606; FHL microfilm no. 271390; 1935 census; IGI)

**Pauline Auguste Neugebauer** b. Schweidnitz, Schlesien, 27 Apr 1866; dau. of Pauline Neugebauer; bp. 18 Sep 1926; conf. 18 Sep 1926; m. — Reicheneker; d. old age 29 Sep 1942 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 201; FHL microfilm 271400; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)

**Hildegard Rieger** b. Fellbach, Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg 6 Sep 1908; dau. of Gottlob Rieger and Luise Frida Brosi; bp. 24 May 1932; conf. 24 May 1932; m. Stuttgart, 18 Jun 1932, Willy Fritz; d. meningitis Stuttgart, 21 May 1943 (FHL microfilm 68807, book 2, no. 539; FHL microfilm 25770; IGI)

**Alma Helmuth Erwin Ruf** b. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 22 Nov 1920; son of Hermann Otto Ruf and Regina Honold; bp. Stuttgart 30 Jun 1929; conf. 20 Jun 1929; ord. deacon 4 Oct 1934; ord. teacher 3 Dec 1939; ord. priest 29 Dec. 1940; radioman; k. in battle by Oktabriska sixty km east of Nikolajew, Russia, 14 Mar 1944 (L. Ruf-Wright; CHL CR 375 8 2451, no. 642; FHL microfilm 271407; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI)



Figs. 9 and 10. Brothers Kurt and Alma Ruf were both killed in battle in 1944. (L. Ruf-Wright)

**Kurt Walter Ruf** b. Stuttgart, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 10 May 1923; son of Hermann Otto Ruf and Regina Honold; bp. 30 May 1931 Stuttgart; conf. 30 May 1931; ord. deacon 22 May 1938; Waffen-SS lance corporal; tank crew; Iron Cross Second Class; k. in battle Noans or Alenson, France, 12 Aug 1944 (L. Ruf-Wright; CHL microfilm 2458, form 42 FP, pt. 37, district list 218–19, district list 1947, 544–45; FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 818; FHL microfilm 271407; 1930 and 1935 censuses; IGI; AF)

**Werner Hermann Widmar** b. Stuttgart-Untertürkheim, Neckarkreis, Württemberg, 3 May 1921; son of Friedrich Widmar and Luise Frieda Rüdle; bp. 19 Jul 1930; conf. 19 Jul 1930; ord. deacon 4 Aug 1935; rifleman; k. in battle Naljiwajka (near present-day Trojanka Naljiwajka, Uman, Ukraine) 6 Aug 1941 (L. Ruf-Wright; www.volksbund.de; CHL CR 375 8 2451, no. 451; FHL microfilm 68807, book 1, no. 451; IGI)

## NOTES

1. Stuttgart city archive.
2. West German Mission branch directory, 1939, CHL LR 10045 11.
3. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," 257, CR 4 12.
4. Erwin Ruf, "Denkschrift zur Feier des 40 jährigen Bestehens unsrer lieben Stuttgarter Gemeinde" (unpublished); private collection; trans. the author.
5. Walter Speidel, interview by the author, Provo, UT, February 23, 2007.
6. The other two branches were Hamburg-St. Georg and Essen.
7. Ruth Bodon Andersen, telephone interview with the author, August 13, 2009.
8. Esther Ruf Robinson, telephone interview with the author, April 13, 2009.

9. Dieter Kaiser, interview by the author, Salt Lake City, March 5, 2006.
10. Lydia Ruf Wright, "There Will Always Be Lilacs in August" (unpublished, 1992), 10; private collection.
11. Ruf, "Denkschrift."
12. Maria Ruf Fry, telephone interview with Jennifer Heckmann, December 8, 2008.
13. Walter Speidel, "Lebendig Gewordenes Gedächtnis" (unpublished), 123; private collection. The name of the young woman is withheld by request.
14. Lothar Greiner, interview with Jennifer Heckmann in German, Markgröningen, Germany, August 17, 2006, summarized in English by Judith Sartowski.
15. Stuttgart District records, 175, CHL MS 13360; trans. the author.
16. *Ibid.*, 177.
17. Walter told a humorous story involving his father after the reunion in 1946: "My father told me he had seen a newsreel in the theater showing that it was so hot in Africa that German soldiers could cook an egg on the armor of a tank. I told my dad that the scene was only a trick, that there was actually a soldier underneath the tank with a blow torch to heat up the metal. My dad insisted that it was true because he had seen it on an official government newsreel. I had a hard time convincing him that it was all a ruse, a joke."
18. Speidel, "Lebendig," 153.
19. Wright, "Lilacs," 10.
20. Speidel, interview.
21. Karl-Heinz Bodon, telephone interview with the author, July 22, 2009.
22. Speidel, "Lebendig," 184–88.
23. Kurt Ruf, diary, July 6, 1943; used with permission of Lydia Ruf Wright.
24. Wright, "Lilacs," 11.
25. Wright, "Lilacs," 10.
26. Kurt Schneider (the husband of Harold's half-sister Charlotte) was the district president in Strasbourg, France, at the time. He enjoyed the use of a company car and traveled extensively in southwest Germany for church purposes.
27. Wright, "Lilacs," 11–12.
28. Kurt Ruf to Hermann Otto Ruf, June 8, 1944; used with permission of Lydia Ruf Wright.
29. Kurt Ruf to Hermann Otto Ruf, August 6, 1944; used with permission of Lydia Ruf Wright.
30. Ursula Auktor Augat, interview with the author, Salt Lake City, December 1, 2006.
31. Speidel, "Lebendig," 191. Walter's copy of the Book of Mormon had been taken by French guards when he was captured.
32. Stuttgart District records, 176.
33. Erika Metzner, "A Report of My Flight in the War Year of 1945 from Silesia to Stuttgart," (unpublished, 1981); used with permission of Rolf Rüdiger Metzner.
34. Wright, "Lilacs," 12–13.
35. Many thousands of German POWs (including several LDS men) were released by the Americans and British under the ruse of being sent home, only to be transferred to other POW camps in Belgium and France, where they stayed another year or more.
36. Speidel, "Lebendig," 199.
37. Speidel, interview.