

Anna Dorathea Sophia Boek b. Rostock; Mecklenburg-Schwerin 12 Apr 1875; dau. of Wilhelm Boek and Marie Meyer; bp. 24 Apr 1926; conf. 24 Apr 1926; m. 11 Oct 1931, Wilhelm Brandt; d. 4 Dec 1941 (CHL, LR 7647 21, no. 50; IGI)

Anna Elisabeth Feustel b. Ostritz, Bautzen, Sachsen 5 May 1892; dau. of Heinrich Wilhelm Feustel and Ida Conradi; bp. 8 May 1926; conf. 8 May 1926; m. Triebes, Reuss j.L. 8 Jul 1911, Max Friedrich Hugo Keil; 1 child; d. cancer, Rostock, Mecklenburg 17 May 1941 (Geschichte der Gemeinde Rostock; FHL Microfilm 271377, 1935 Census; CHL, LR 7647 21, no. 88; IGI; AF)

Hildegard Magdalene Johanna Guethner b. Rostock, Mecklenburg-Schwerin 23 Aug 1884; dau. of Hermann Guethner and Ida Friebe or Triepe; bp. 23 Aug 1923; conf. 23 Aug 1923; m. 16 May 1908, Robert Sievert; d. heart attack 17 May 1944 (CHL, LR 7647 21, no. 24)

Herta Ida Just b. Schneidemühl, Posen, Preußen 13 Jul 1922; dau. of Heinrich Christoph Just and Bertha Freek; bp. 13 Jul 1936; conf. 13 Jul 1936; d. heart ailment 18 Aug 1944 (CHL, LR 7647 21, no. 147)

Ferdinand Friedrich Max Louis Lembke b. Gross-Klein, Warnemünde, Mecklenburg-Schwerin 6 Aug 1886; son of Carl Christian Friedrich Lembke and Elise Sophie Johanna Friederike Randow; bp. 11 Jul 1919; conf. 11 Jul 1919; ord. deacon 7 Oct 1919; ord. teacher 16 Sep 1920; ord. priest 16 May 1921; ord. elder 25 Jul 1926; m. 14 Jul 1913, Frieda F. E. Kreuzmann; d. illness 28 May 1944 (CHL, LR 7647 21, no. 5; IGI)

Frieda Rudolphine Sophie Pagel b. Malchow, Mecklenburg-Schwerin 17 Feb 1898; dau. of Ludwig Pagel and Caroline Priegnitz; bp. 23 Apr 1920; conf. 23 Apr 1920; missing (CHL, LR 7647 21, no. 58)

Hans Otto Hubert Eugen Sauer b. Chemnitz, Chemnitz, Sachsen 23 Mar 1913; son of Hubert Robert Gustav Sauer and Margarete Wilhelmine Marie Bornhagen; bp. 16 Jul 1921; conf. 16 Jul 1921; m.; engineer; k. in battle, Italy, 2 Sep 1943; bur. Futa-Pass, Italy (CHL, LR 7647 21, no. 93; www.volksbund.de; IGI)

Albert Otto Anton Zajek b. London, London, England 13 May 1911 or 1913; son of Otto Zajek and Anna Maria Johanna Ziems; bp. 17 May 1931; conf. 17 May 1931; ord. deacon 13 Oct 1932; ord. teacher 14 Aug 1933; ord. priest 19 Apr 1936; ord. elder 12 Apr 1939; m. Rostock, Mecklenburg, Preußen 12 Jun 1936, Amalie Margarate Sophie Petersen; d. asthma, 2 Mar 1944 (CHL, LR 7647 21, no. 71; IGI)

NOTES

1. Presiding Bishopric, "Financial, Statistical, and Historical Reports of Wards, Stakes, and Missions, 1884–1955," CR 4 12, 257.
2. Hans-Jürgen Schlüter, and Ursula Höhle Schlüter, "The Way Things Were," in *Behind the Iron Curtain: Recollections of Latter-day Saints in Germany*, ed. Garold N. Davis and Norma S. Davis (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2000), 247.
3. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Geschichte der Gemeinde Rostock*, [1893–1944] (Rostock, Germany); trans. the author.
4. The meaning of "N.A." is unclear but is apparently a reference to a province or a country.
5. Bodo Ruthenberg, interview by the author in German, Rostock, Germany, June 10, 2007; summarized into English by Judith Sartowski.

WOLGAST GROUP

Too few in number to be accorded the status of a branch, the Latter-day Saints living in the town of Wolgast on the Baltic Sea in 1939 were far from any city with a branch. Sixty miles east of Rostock, Wolgast was a fishing village. Church meetings there were held at Langestrasse 17 on the main floor.

One eyewitness of the Wolgast group has left a detailed autobiography that offers very candid observations. Gerd Skibbe (born 1930) was just the right age to be exploited for political purposes by the National Socialists. In school and in the Jungvolk, he was harangued by leaders who exalted Germany over every other country and war over peace. As he later confessed in his book *Schritte durch zwei Diktaturen* (Traversing Two Dictatorships):

I was too young to be a Nazi, but I was headed in that direction. My schoolbooks made it seem that a good German boy loved the swastika flag. That was clear to me by then anyway. My parents noticed all too late that I was being swept along by the spirit of the times. . . . I developed a National Socialist consciousness

and grew to be a gullible Hitler Youth who was thrilled by every new special announcement in the radio: Germany has won another battle! . . . *Deutschland, Deutschland über alles!*¹

Gerd's parents, Wilhelm and Julianne Skibbe, were devoted members of the Church who were not attracted by Hitler's programs. Brother Skibbe tried to help Gerd understand what was most important in life, but the nationalistic allure of the times was very strong. As Gerd later wrote, "It made me angry when [my father] said that Germany would lose the war because its aims were evil."²

At some point, apparently close to the time (September 1938) that the group was known to have been meeting at Langestrass 17, the Skibbe family moved to that street. According to Gerd, only one meeting on an evening during the week was being held from 1943 to the end of the war. Gerd recalled seeing missionaries for the last time in 1941, namely Arno Dzierzon and Rudolph Wächtler.³

Wolgast was not a target for Allied aircraft until the last few months of the war. When the first air raid came and bombs fell, Gerd's attitude about war changed a bit. "They were attacking me!" he realized. However, he did not understand what war was really about until the day when he and other Hitler Youth were ordered to report to the railroad station to help the Red Cross sisters with the occupants of a hospital train. Suddenly, war was no longer glamorous but bitterly serious. When the door opened, "the first thing that hit me was the terrible stench." Dead bodies and suffering soldiers crying for help robbed young Gerd of a bit of his nationalistic spirit. "Their sufferings seemed to be very much my own."⁴

On April 22, 1945, Gerd (barely fifteen years old) was drafted into the Volkssturm. With the Soviet invaders only a few miles to the east and approaching fast, this call could have been a death sentence, but his mother

intervened. Wilhelm Skibbe had been in uniform for several years already and was still far away, so Julianne Skibbe was in no mood to let her son be killed. She made it very clear to the local military authorities with one word that her son was not available for service: "Nein!"⁵

All through the war, Gerd had shown much more interest in the military and other worldly matters than in the Church. Even his father's serious Bible study and family prayers failed to impress and attract the young German patriot. However, the message of the gospel must have been sinking in to a small degree, as he learned during the last month of the conflict. He caught his mother listening to the forbidden BBC radio broadcast and instinctively began to yell at her. A crisis of conscience was tearing him apart, as he later wrote:

I was incensed and wanted to do my duty as a loyal German boy, to turn her in. There was so much conflict within me. There had to be a punishment for this deed. Thank heavens my better side prevailed at the moment. The words "Don't do it!" rang in my mind. I was shocked at my own reaction and could do nothing more than slam the door and run away.⁶

On the last day of April 1945, the Wolgast police fled the town. With the Red Army still a few miles away, the town became a moral and military no man's land. Recent bombings had shattered shop windows, and suddenly civilians emerged and began looting on a grand scale. Gerd was in the main business street at the time and readily joined in the free-for-all. Again, he heard the voice saying, "Don't do it!" but this time he disregarded the advice. He stole some candy and took it home. Returning to the main street for another run at looting, he suddenly realized how wrong it was when he saw his little brother, Helmut, rolling a large cheese wheel toward him. "That's theft!" he yelled. When he considered the matter of his

double standard, he decided, “I knew exactly what I was going to do from then on.”⁷

Another important lesson was learned when Gerd confronted a Soviet soldier for the first time. Nothing the man did confirmed the terrible rumors spread by German radio about the beastly enemies. Of course, in the days after the Soviet takeover of the town, crimes were committed against the citizenry, but Gerd learned that it was not the uniform that made the man. Some enemy soldiers did indeed enter the Skibbe home and steal things, but others came to play their piano, behaved themselves quite correctly, and left without harming persons or property.

A few days after the war ended, Gerd and his friends swam to a deserted island where they found a huge supply of rifles and ammunition. As foolish teenage boys are wont to do, they fired several rounds into the sky, only to determine that the ammunition consisted of warning flares in various colors. One such flare flew close to a Soviet observation plane, and within minutes, the boys were surrounded by very angry and heavily armed soldiers. Wearing only swimming suits, the boys seemed rather harmless after all and were fortunate to talk their way out of trouble.

By the late summer of 1945, Sister Skibbe was hosting Church meetings in her home on evenings during the week. Refugees from eastern German provinces were some of the attendees. Whereas Gerd remembered only one or two attendees as the war drew to a close, the Church appeared to be on its way now to a healthier condition in the town of Wolgast.

IN MEMORIAM

Only one member of the Wolgast group did not survive World War II:

Gerhard Alfred Weigand b. Stettin, Stettin, Pommern 19 Jul 1913; son of Philipp Weigand and Meta Katilius; bp. 31 Jul 1923; conf. 31 Jul 1923; ord. deacon 2 Feb 1930; missing as of 20 Oct 1948 (CHL, LR 10261 22, no. 15)

NOTES

1. The German national anthem, the title of which means “Germany, Germany over/above all.” Gerd Skibbe, *Schritte durch zwei Diktaturen* (Friedrichsdorf, Germany: LDS Service, 2004), 11, 13, 14.
2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid., 12, 15.
4. Ibid., 18.
5. Ibid., 18.
6. Ibid., 19.
7. Ibid., 22–23.



Fig. 1. These B-17F bombers used radar to attack targets in Germany in 1943. (U.S. Air Force Photograph 060517-F-1234S-004)