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MORMONISM IN GERMANY

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST
OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS IN GERMANY BETWEEN
1840 AND 1970

by
Gilbert W. Scharffs

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Presidency was sent to all mission presidents in Europe, signed by President Heber J. Grant and his counselors, which pointed out that there was not as much "land available with good irrigation possibilities as there had been in earlier days." Moreover, he reasoned that "it is hard to learn a new language when you are older, and thus you will not be as effective as you could be in your own country."²⁴

Now, letters were frequently printed in *Der Stern* from emigrants who wrote and told of their hardships in America. "You may have a leading position in the Church while you are in Germany, but don't be disappointed if you are only asked to do a lesser job in America," the saints were told.

Mormon scripture makes it clear that a world-wide Zion program should be the eventual goal. The passage that states, "gather ye together, O ye people of my Church, upon the land of Zion, all you that have not been commanded to tarry . . ." ²⁵ gives a definite affirmation that some would not be asked to gather. And further in the revelation it says "that the borders of my people may be enlarged, and that her stakes may be strengthened, and that Zion may go forth unto the regions round about."²⁶ "Where is Zion?" asked Brigham Young. Answering his own question, he said, "where the organization of the Church of God is. And may it dwell spiritually in every heart; and may we so live as to always enjoy the Spirit of Zion."²⁷ Speaking of the time just before the second coming of Christ, the Book of Mormon refers to the saints "who were scattered upon all the face of the earth: and they were armed with righteousness."²⁸

However, German LDS migration to the USA continued in significant numbers in the 1920s; it came to a stop before World War II, but it reached new peaks in the 1950s, and then declined abruptly in the 1960s.

²⁴Ibid., 74:345 (November 1958).

²⁵D&C 133:4.

²⁶Ibid., Verse 9.

²⁷Journal of Discourses, Vol. 10, p. 170.

²⁸Book of Mormon, 1 Nephi 14:14.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TWO predominantly GERMAN MISSIONS IN A GATHERING STORM (1925-1937)

Swiss-German Mission Continues in Western Germany

The year 1925 marked the formation again of two German-speaking missions, both of which had most of their members in Germany. The western part of the area formerly known as the Swiss-German Mission continued with the same name and the same president, Hugh Cannon. In addition to the two countries named in the title, Czechoslovakia, with a few members, belonged to this mission until that land became a separate unit in 1929. The second mission became known as the German-Austrian Mission.¹

Different proselyting approaches were being tried by the missionaries during these years. Tabernacle Choir records were played and slide-lecture presentations entitled "Archaeological Ruins in Latin America and the Book of Mormon" and "Utah's Scenic Wonderland" were given. The latter awakened much interest, but also had the effect of adding to the number of emigrants. A six-week missionary preparation school was established in Cologne, the first such formal effort to improve the effectiveness of the elders. Language was the main subject.

The fantastic rate of conversion in the early 20s did not continue, but steady progress was made in both missions, with a much higher rate in the German-Austrian unit. The only foreign language convert to attain the rank of apostle, John A. Widtsoe from Norway, was now serving as European Mission president. At this time the first six converts were baptized at Goettingen, Germany, where

¹The dividing line of the two missions started just east of Rostock on the shore of the Baltic Sea, ran west of Gastrow and Erfurt to the south, then curved below Hof to the German-Czechoslovakian frontier. Thence the German-Czechoslovakian and German-Austrian border constituted the dividing line, which continued from the most southerly point of the German-Austrian border directly southward.

this prominent Mormon scientist, Elder Widtsoe, had received his doctorate degree.

In the middle of 1927, Frederick Tadjé was transferred from the German-Austrian Mission to replace President Hugh H. Cannon. A missionary to Germany, Arthur Gaeth, was assigned to open the Czechoslovakian Mission in 1929.²

Celebrations of the Church's one hundredth anniversary were held throughout Germany in 1930 and President Tadjé reported, "Never have we received more favorable publicity from the German press." By this centennial year the number of districts had doubled to sixteen from five years earlier.³ Of the 164 missionaries, 149 were from the United States. The mission membership had increased from 5,305 at the time of division to over 8,000 even though emigration from Germany had reached an all-time high.

Francis Salzner replaced Tadjé as mission president in 1931 and missionary work was started in the towns of Gotha, Flensburg, Schleswig, Worms, Hildesheim, Wilhelmshaven, Celle, and Bremerhaven. In most of these new areas as well as in the established cities of Ulm, Munich, Bielefeld, and Regensburg, missionaries were once again arrested and banished.

Ominous clouds began gathering in 1930 as the great worldwide depression gripped Germany and the first (Communitistic and Nationalistic) street fights broke out with shedding of blood. To help ease the problem, the Hamburg District introduced an extra fast day each month in order to raise money to assist the members in want. The unemployment of Latter-day Saints, however, enabled many local brethren to accept missionary assignments for a year and receive unemployment compensation from the German government.

The first Mormon meeting broken up by Nazi officials was in 1933 in Minden, the year Adolf Hitler came to power. On August

²He later became a political commentator for the national radio network in the United States and was a U.S. reporter at the Nuremberg war trials.

³"Swiss-German Mission Manuscript History," December 31, 1930.

The thirteen districts in the German part of the Swiss-German Mission and their memberships were: Bielefeld 245, Bremen 174, Cologne 286, Frankfurt 503, Hamburg 1,094, Hanover 328, Kassel 81, Karlsruhe 386, Munich 258, Nuremberg 331, Ruhr 435, Schleswig-Holstein 279, and Stuttgart 396.

2, 1934, the German president, Paul Von Hindenburg, died and a new chancellor, Hitler, appointed himself to that position. After that, Mormon meetings could no longer be held during Nazi rallies, which became more and more frequent.⁴

Early in 1935 Philemon M. Kelly was appointed as the new mission president to replace Francis Salzner.⁵ Hitler's power was becoming stronger and "practically every branch president of the mission was called before the police for a thorough questioning about the faith of the Latter-day Saints. Warnings were given the branch presidents not to concern themselves with political matters."⁶ When the Hamburg District superintendent of the MIA wanted to send the new publication *Geh Voran* (Move Onward) and *Der Stern* to the men who were in the German Army, and applied to the authorities for the addresses, "he was questioned, immediately arrested, placed in jail and charged with high treason." After a few days he was given orders not to communicate with anyone and released. The district president underwent the same treatment.⁷

In July of 1937 Church President Heber J. Grant (the second president of the Church to visit Germany) arrived and meetings were held in Frankfurt. Members gave him an enthusiastic reception.

At the beginning of 1936 the attendance at meetings was about 35 percent. By the end of 1937 a reactivation program had increased average attendance to 85 percent. Baptisms for the year 1932 had been 331. From 1932 to the end of 1937 baptisms averaged only 130 a year. As Germany began to prosper, the Mormon message met more and more resistance. The youth programs were being stopped all over the mission; there was to be no more music, dancing, or recreation.

German-Austrian Mission in Eastern Germany

The German-Austrian Mission headquarters were established at Dresden. Former president Frederick Tadjé returned and became the

⁴"Swiss-German Mission Quarterly Reports," September 30, 1934.

⁵Philemon Kelly was born February 17, 1877, at American Fork, Utah, and had served as a missionary in Germany from 1900 to 1903.

⁶"Swiss-German Mission Quarterly Reports," September 30, 1935.

⁷"Swiss-German Mission Manuscript History," February 28, 1936.

first leader. He was soon transferred to the Swiss-German Mission, and another former president, Hyrum Valentine, returned to take the helm of the German-Austrian Mission.

On November 19, 1926, European Mission President and Apostle James E. Talmage, one of Dr. Maeser's students, unveiled a plaque located on the outside wall of the house in which Karl G. Maeser had lived. The saints were most impressed when Dr. Talmage read his message in German. A German flag hung on one end of the home and an American flag on the other. The American government was officially represented by the Hon. A. T. Haeberle, U. S. Consul-General. In 1928 the one hundredth anniversary of the birth of Karl Maeser was celebrated in Dresden with a mission-wide conference.⁸

As previously stated, when the Swiss-German Mission was divided, and the German-Austrian Mission created, the former decreased in the rate of conversions, but this mission continued to grow at a rapid rate. Nearly 600 baptisms were performed during the first year, 1926, with the Chemnitz and Dresden districts doing especially well. A new Zwickau unit was formed from the Chemnitz conference, which had reached a membership of 1,990—about a fourth of the mission. The town of Chemnitz now had two Mormon branches and owned its meeting hall.

Teenage programs received special emphasis at this time in the mission, and 1928 marked the beginning of LDS Boy Scout work in Germany. During this year the first mission-wide youth conference was held in Berlin, called *Freud Echo* (Echo of Joy), which enabled many young German saints to meet together for competition in music, drama, and athletics. This became an annual event and was revived in the post-World War II years as one of the great happenings each year in the German missions. Scouting had actually been done in that land for at least a year, but now the Mormon organization became part of the International Bureau of Scouting in England, one of only two such groups in Germany. During this time, German LDS Scouts attended international jamborees in England

⁸Karl G. Maeser was actually born in Meissen, Germany, but the celebration was held in Dresden where he was converted to Mormonism.

and Hungary. An effort to have the LDS women's auxiliary, the Relief Society, accepted into the national federation of German women's clubs, however, was to no avail.

The year 1928 also marked the construction of the first Mormon Church building in Germany, in Selbongen.⁹

Edward Partridge Kimball replaced Hyrum W. Valentine as president of the mission in 1929. Kimball was released in 1930¹⁰ because of his wife's illness. Kimball was succeeded by Oliver Budge, whose father had converted Maeser.¹¹

During 1930, the LDS centennial year, the Church took part in the "Dresden International Hygiene Exposition." At that time, Dr. John A. Widtsoe, one of Mormonism's foremost health exponents, was a Mormon apostle and president of the European Mission. Dr. Widtsoe devoted most of his time to the 1930 project, enabling him to present the Church's strict health regulation known as the "Word of Wisdom."¹²

Thousands of visitors manifested great interest and professional people from all over the world made favorable comments concerning this method of preserving youth and health. Invitations were received to furnish Word of Wisdom information in other countries. An average of 5,000 passed through the Mormon display each day with as high as 30,000 and 250,000 pamphlets were distributed.

The following year the exhibit was continued with about another 100,000 tracts given out, 2,252 names received wanting more information, 1,161 gospel conversations held, and 113 lectures given as a result.

⁹Further information on this branch is related in chapters 9 and 10. This chapel still stands today and is functioning as the only Mormon unit in territory now claimed by Poland.

¹⁰Edward Partridge Kimball was born June 2, 1882, in Salt Lake City, a grandson of Mormonism's first bishop, Edward Partridge. He graduated from Brigham Young University and received further musical training in Germany where he also served as a missionary from 1902 to 1906. He wrote the college song "Golden Blue" at the LDS college, was music editor of the *Deseret News*, and was a member of the Church Music Committee. For twenty-five years he was organist in the Salt Lake Tabernacle.

¹¹Oliver Budge was born April 3, 1868, in Paris, Idaho.

¹²D&C, section 89. Serious Latter-day Saints refrain from the use of tobacco, alcohol, tea, and coffee.

"One Hundred Years of Mormonism" was a slide-lecture given along with those presentations that had been started in the Swiss-German Mission. Hundreds of people attended.

By 1930 the elders were working in 103 cities in the mission (up from fifty-nine, five years earlier) and the number of districts had increased from eight to fourteen since the new German-Austrian Mission had been formed.

Missionaries at this time included 138 from the United States and 152 local Germans. This was the largest number of native missionaries laboring anywhere in the Church.¹³ This system of local missionaries had a significant effect on the success of the work at this time. One U. S. missionary serving his fourth German mission was eighty-three years old.¹⁴

When the two hundredth anniversary of the birth of George Washington was celebrated by the Americans in Dresden in 1932, the U. S. consul-general asked the mission president to be on a committee of four to organize the "American Colony" and present a program. Many missionaries took part in the production. Although relations improved with the U. S. officials in Germany, this mission now felt the effects of the rise of Nazism. In the towns of Magdeburg, Danzig, Brandenburg, Prenzlau, Schwarzenberg, and Potsdam the missionaries had a difficult time. In Hindenburg, while two elders were giving out tracts door to door, they were attacked by a member of the Nazi party who took a leather belt from his waist, which had a large buckle. "He proceeded to hit one missionary over the head, creating bad lacerations. The police refused to do anything about the incident."¹⁵

In the year 1929 the printing of *Der Stern* was switched from Dresden to Basel, and on February 3, 1932, the mission headquarters was moved from Dresden to Berlin.¹⁶

¹³In the United States, the part-time stake missionary system did not begin functioning Church-wide until 1936.

¹⁴This was Thomas Blesinger who was assigned to Prague, where he had been banished twenty years earlier.

¹⁵"German-Austrian Mission Quarterly Report," December 31, 1933.

¹⁶The Berlin address was Handelstrasse 3. This was facing the beautiful Tiergarten (city park). This office was destroyed during World War II. Berlin had been the headquarters of the brief second German Mission from 1898 to 1904.

Mission President Budge had to appear before the *Gestapo* "for the purpose mainly of ascertaining our position toward the National Socialistic Government."¹⁷ Many missionaries were arrested at this time, but were soon released.¹⁸ In Landsberg two elders were attacked by a preacher who surrounded himself with villagers who abused the elders and ran them out of town. In 1934 the government prevented the Church's distribution of the tract "Divine Authority," and by 1935 James E. Talmage's *Articles of Faith* was banned and all copies of the book were burned.¹⁹ The many references in this book to Zion and Israel were distasteful to the Nazis. Even songs about Utah and the Rocky Mountains had to be eliminated. In one town the police took Mormon song books and eliminated all songs about Zion. Elders in Hindenburg were also accused of being American spies and while spending a day in jail, had their living quarters searched. Another elder who failed to take a detour because "it was raining and he didn't want to get wet," accidentally came upon a large group of soldiers engaged in maneuvers. When they "noticed his foreign accent, he too was arrested, searched, and banished from East Prussia as a spy."²⁰

During 1934 permission to do scouting work stopped as the German government took control of all youth work. In 1934 Roy A. Welker arrived as mission president to replace Oliver Budge.²¹

American Consul-General Haeberle continued his friendship toward the elders, but he was not able to have any banishments of elders rescinded at this time. Although it would be another two decades before Mormonism would gain full recognition in Germany,

¹⁷On September 8, 1933, Dr. O. H. Budge was questioned by *Gestapo* and released. (Letter of O. H. Budge to David O. McKay, March 5, 1954, in Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.)

¹⁸One reason Mormonism was tolerated at this time and during World War II (even though an American organization) was because the Church's twelfth Article of Faith states "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers, and magistrates, in obeying, honoring, and sustaining the law."

¹⁹Ernst, p. 320.

²⁰*Ibid.*

²¹Roy A. Welker was born November 9, 1878, in Bloomington, Idaho, and had filled a mission to Germany from 1901 to 1904. He had been Bear Lake (Utah) Stake president from 1922 to 1930.

a 1936 tax case was won by the Church, which saved 10,000 marks a year.

During the Olympics in 1936, another successful mission-wide youth conference was held in Berlin. It was the largest Mormon gathering in Europe up to that time.

Most of the activity of the German-Austrian Mission was in Germany. There were fewer than one hundred LDS Church members in Austria. In Austria a number of Mormon publications were forbidden. One family of Latter-day Saints resided in Poland. When the elders asked for permission to work in that land, they were told by Polish officials that the matter would be taken under consideration. Before a decision was reached, Poland was invaded by Germany.

Adolf Hitler and Mormonism

Hitler apparently had an acquaintance with Mormonism. In the mid-1930s, elders were invited to visit universities and teach Germans the game of basketball. They also went to army camps and taught the sport.²² In the town of Gera, the missionaries played a local team and were introduced by the mayor, who along with other officials of the town watched the elders win. After the game, "which was well attended, the missionaries gave a slide-lecture to a large audience and the mayor of the city helped pass out LDS tracts." Another account stated, "Herr Hitler has sought the services of the elders to teach basketball to the teams he hopes will achieve victory in the Olympic games."²³ During the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, four American missionaries were asked to referee the basketball games.

The German-Austrian Mission records indicate that in 1936 European Mission President Joseph F. Merrill and mission head Roy A. Welker took advantage of the favorable attitude Nazis had toward Mormonism because missionaries had bolstered the German Olympic hopes. On June 11 the two Mormon officials sent a telegram to the German chancellor. It stated that LDS Church books

²²"German Mission Quarterly Report," December 31, 1935.

²³"German-Austrian Mission Manuscript History," January 25, 1936.

were being sent to all the high government officials.²⁴ Hitler also inaugurated the Mormon custom of a monthly "Fast Sunday" and a campaign among young people to refrain from smoking and drinking. (The German dictator himself abstained.)²⁵ The Church was treated relatively well in Germany during these years when one realized that the Nazi government banned some churches and denounced the Pope in 1937. Chapter 8 on World War II years, however, dispels any notion that Mormons received preferential treatment. The conclusion must not be drawn that Hitler was favorable toward Latter-day Saints. How much the similarities between some of Hitler's policies and LDS practices were influenced by Mormonism is open to question.

Both Germany under Hitler and Mormonism promoted genealogical research, but this also was probably only a coincidence. Actually Germany's interest in genealogy occurred because Germans were anxious to prove they had no Jewish blood. The quest for this life-saving knowledge of one's ancestors by most citizens helped German saints get access to heretofore unavailable records. Consequently they were able to do their duty in regard to this significant principle of Mormonism, too.

A basic fundamental belief of Mormons is that all mankind, both the living and the dead, must have certain ordinances performed, such as baptism (John 3:5), in order to return to God's presence. For this reason Latter-day Saints build temples. Mormons teach that this work for the dead must be done by proxy in these edifices. Even before German members had access to a temple of their own, they accomplished the preliminary steps for such ordinances through genealogical research.

Germany was potentially a fertile area for this kind of study, because this highly socialized country kept abundant records. Because the Mormons were unpopular and severely opposed in Germany, access to vital statistics was denied members of the

²⁴*Ibid.*, June 11, 1936.

This is probably the basis of the oft-repeated story among LDS missionaries and members in Germany that Hitler read the Book of Mormon.

²⁵*Church News*, December 9, 1933, p. 6.

Church prior to Nazism. During the 1920s genealogical work in the Church had been organized and encouraged on a more formal basis. During the Jewish persecution under Hitler prior to World War II, the needed records were suddenly made available. A government order decreed that all Germans should have access to these documents. Said one Mormon official who was arrested and charged with being Jewish: "I had to prove that I was an Aryan. I only needed to show the investigating officers my lines for three generations. Were they surprised when I showed them my family group sheets going back eight generations. I passed with flying colors." Another report said, "With the necessity of having to prove that one's grandmother was not a Jew, the old record books have been dusted off and stand ready and waiting for our use. The saints, instead of being refused, have in some cases received letters of patriotism because of their research."²⁶ The Church was on the verge of purchasing many records prior to the war but was denied this right. Many branch presidents were questioned about the LDS attitude toward Jews at this time. Some German officials even proposed rewriting the New Testament "to show that Jesus was not a Jew."

Two Missions Become Three

Following Church President Heber J. Grant's visit to Germany in 1937, the Swiss-German and German-Austrian missions that had been created in 1925 were divided on December 31, 1937. The resulting three missions served the German-speaking areas for over two decades before further divisions were made. The German part of the German-Austrian Mission became the new East German Mission, with headquarters remaining in Berlin. The Austrian part was combined with Switzerland to form the Swiss-Austrian Mission, again headquartered in Basel. The German part of the Swiss-German Mission became the new West German Mission, with new headquarters at Frankfurt am Main.²⁷

²⁶"West German Mission Manuscript History," December 31, 1945.

²⁷The address of the West German Mission headquarters was Schauman-Kai 41, an attractive residential area next to the Main River.

Alfred C. Rees became the East German Mission president, replacing Philemon M. Kelly who was transferred to the West German Mission at Frankfurt. Thomas E. McKay, who had been a president of the Swiss-German Mission prior to World War I, returned to be president of the new Swiss-Austrian unit.

Hopes were still high that a war might be averted. On August 4, 1937, the Mormon Church's first counselor, J. Reuben Clark, Jr. was sent to Berlin as a representative of the Committee for International Loan Contracts of the League of Nations. American bankers wanted to get money they had loaned to German banks. This was one of the last efforts to negotiate with every European power represented. President Clark's constant attention was with the daily diplomatic sessions, but he was able to take time out to tell the saints "to have harmony and to build up the Kingdom of God."²⁸

Less than five months later, Germany annexed Austria (April 10, 1938). Because of this political development, it was found expedient to assign Austria to the West German Mission on November 1, 1938. This realignment of the mission remained in effect until the end of World War II when that land was again made part of the Swiss-Austrian Mission. Each of these missions had about eighty elders in 1938.

In June of that year, M. Douglas Wood arrived to preside over the new six-month-old West German Mission, succeeding Philemon M. Kelly.²⁹ President J. Reuben Clark Jr. returned to Berlin once more at this time and held meetings with all the European mission presidents.³⁰

Prior to the last full year Mormon missionaries labored in Germany before World War II (in 1938), there were about one

²⁸"West German Mission Manuscript History," August 4, 1937; August 13, 1937.

The group Clark represented was called the Foreign Bondholders Protective Council Incorporated. Clark who was called into the Church's First Presidency in 1934 had previously been U. S. Ambassador to Mexico and Undersecretary of State for his country. At that time he had written the *Clark Memorandum on the Monroe Doctrine*, which is a significant document stating U. S. foreign policy in the western hemisphere.

²⁹Myron Douglas Wood was born May 3, 1903, in Salt Lake City. He had been a missionary in Germany, 1925-1927. He was also student body president of the University of Utah in 1929. He and his wife later founded the Evelyn Wood Reading Dynamics.

³⁰"East German Mission Manuscript History," June 24, 1938.

hundred baptisms annually in each of the three missions. During the year the only conference of the new West German Mission before the war was held in Frankfurt. Over one thousand people attended; some saved for six months to travel as far as three hundred miles from Kiel.

Church members at this time, however, lived in constant fear and reported that Gestapo agents were spying on Church activities. Some German saints feared naive missionaries would cause them problems. When one young missionary from the U. S. gave a speech during a district conference in which he discussed the causes of World War I, "the mission president had to make him stop and then spend his entire time extolling the German government."³¹

Two other missionaries had their pictures taken disrespectfully draped in a Nazi flag. The missionaries were so pleased with the photo that they had extra copies made. The second processor of the film reported the incident to Nazi officials. "The mission president was able to evacuate the two out of Germany, but their friend who developed the film in the first place was sent to a concentration camp."³² Soon all LDS missionaries from America had to be evacuated from Germany and all of Europe.

³¹Joe Dixon, paper in author's files of speech delivered August 30, 1968, to a joint meeting of the Pacific Coast Branch of the American Historical Association and the Mormon Historical Association of Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California.

³²*Ibid.*

CHAPTER EIGHT

Mormonism holds on during The world war II years

Last Minute Missionary Evacuation

Long before most observers believed a world war was imminent, American missionaries received their first notice to leave Germany. On September 16, 1938, word arrived from the First Presidency of the Church through the American ambassador "to have the missionaries move immediately to Denmark and Holland."¹ Temporary mission headquarters were established across the Dutch and Danish borders. However, the war did not start for almost another year, and soon the missionaries were back in Germany.

In October 1938 Britain's Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain delivered a message of hope resulting from the Munich conference. Conditions continued quietly in early 1939. The baptismal font of the Hamburg District was dedicated. Some 126 branches of the Church were functioning in Germany including five each in Berlin and Hamburg. The Church building program continued and new classrooms were added to the Hamburg District House. Several of the branches had their own orchestral and theatrical groups. Packages were being sent by the members to those "brethren who were serving in the *Wehrmacht*" (armed services of Germany).

The mission conducted intensified training programs for local members in the event of national emergency. In Salt Lake City, J. Reuben Clark Jr., former Undersecretary of State and now a member of the First Presidency of the Church, was in daily contact with the U. S. State Department in Washington, being appraised of the changing situation.²

¹"West German Mission Manuscript History," September 16, 1938.

²James B. Allen and Richard O. Cowan, *Mormonism in the Twentieth Century* (Provo, Utah: Extension Publications, Brigham Young University, 1964), p. 41.

In July 1939 Mormon Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith toured parts of Germany, including Berlin, Koenigsberg, and Chemnitz. As the crisis intensified, Apostle Smith waited in anticipation. On August 24, 1939, a week before the invasion of Poland, the First Presidency of the Church ordered the second evacuation.

Some of the members had been critical of the first missionary withdrawal. They hadn't been able to see the value of this "false alarm." Even some of the elders wondered why "leaders of the Church had been wrongly inspired when everyone knew there wasn't going to be war." When this second evacuation instruction was issued, within a week of the invasion of Poland, some felt the exodus of American elders might have failed if they had not benefited from the mistakes they made the year before. One missionary summed up the feelings of several of the elders: "Now we understand why we were asked to leave the first time."³

The East German Mission President Alfred C. Rees had just been released on August 16, 1939, and President Thomas E. McKay, who had replaced him, presided only a few days before he too had to leave Germany. (President Thomas McKay directed both German Missions during the war from Salt Lake City until all communications were terminated.)

President Wood of the West German Mission and President Joseph Fielding Smith were in Hanover holding a missionary conference when the evacuation orders arrived. An hour and twenty minutes later the mission president was at mission headquarters in Frankfurt to direct the missionary evacuation. The plane taken by the Woods was the last civilian flight made by this aircraft before being sent to the Polish front.⁴

There were about 150 American missionaries in the two German missions and telegrams were sent to each pair to rush to Holland. The Dutch consul in Frankfurt agreed to allow the missionaries to enter the Netherlands.

³Semi-Annual Conference Report of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City, 1939), p. 73.

⁴Church News, June 15, 1940, p. 5.

"We had never imagined the excitement would be like this," reported Mission President Wood, adding,

The German people couldn't say much, but the feeling of unrest and impending trouble was everywhere present. There was none of it present the previous year when we went out of the country. Everything was tightening up all over. We had always felt it would not be such a job to evacuate the country, especially after the "fire-drill" of a year ago. We figured we could always use the public utilities, but everyone else figured the same thing.⁵

After sending the telegrams, which took most of Friday afternoon, President Wood waited for the replies that he had requested. "We wondered if the missionaries had received our messages," said the president later. "We tried to telephone them, but were unable to reach anyone—all the lines were clogged. We tried to send more telegrams and were told that no more could be accepted for the time being."

Early Saturday morning, the 26th, one of the elders, Burt Horsley, called by phone from the Netherlands border. He said, "President Wood, we have been here for six hours and the Dutch will not let us in. We haven't a dime between us. What shall we do?" The Dutch had recollections of the previous war and didn't want anyone entering their country who would have to be fed.

President Wood said, "Brother, I will get some money to you immediately." The mission leader was able to phone the money order to the telegraph office shortly before this service was discontinued. About the same time, a radio announcement was made by the government stating that "after Sunday night at midnight, August 27, the German government would not guarantee anyone his destination on German railways." The German Army was being mobilized. "I shall never forget our feelings at this time," said the mission president, and continued, "we had no telegraph, nor telephone facilities and railways were not available to us. We were not able to contact our missionaries, and we knew that most of them would be heading toward the closed Netherlands border."

⁵Ibid.

Although the Dutch consul in Frankfurt had given permission for Mormon missionaries to enter Holland, he didn't know that higher officials in his country had changed their minds. "We know they would arrive there without enough money to buy tickets for Denmark," said Wood. Time was against the missionaries, because all of the railroads would be used for troop transportation within forty-eight hours. Later the president related the way some of the missionaries were rescued:

About this time a big former football player came into our office who weighed over 200 pounds. I said, "Brother, did you ever carry a message to Garcia?"

He said, "No, I haven't, but I'm willing to try."

I said: "Elder, we have 31 missionaries lost somewhere between here and the Dutch border. It will be your mission to find them and see that they get out."

This elder set out for his destination with five hundred marks and tickets for Denmark and London. The president had heard that a person could get into Holland if he had tickets for Great Britain. Wood continued his account of the experience of this elder:

After four hours on the train he arrived at Cologne, which is about half way to the Dutch border. We had told him to follow his impressions entirely as we had no idea what towns these elders would be in. Cologne was not his destination, but he felt inspired to get off the train there. It is a very large station and was then filled with thousands of people. There were many students returning to England, and many people returning from vacation before the train service was to be stopped. There were so many people that to find anyone would have been next to impossible. This elder started to whistle our missionary song—"Do What Is Right, Let the Consequence Follow."

Down in one corner of the station was an elder, with an old couple who were also on a mission from America. They were stranded at the Cologne station and couldn't call the mission office because no more calls were being accepted. These three were able to pass through Holland with their tickets.⁶

The elder continued toward the border and stopped in those towns where he "felt the urge and gave the 'Mormon whistle call'."

⁶"West German Mission Manuscript History," August 26, 1939.

He found several more missionaries in that manner. At the Dutch border eight missionaries had been locked in the station house all night. The Dutch officials had decided not to allow even those with tickets for London to enter their country. The missionaries were elated to see the elder from the mission office, but just then a border guard stepped up and asked the former football player how much money he had. When the missionary told him, the policeman demanded it. The elder answered, "I was sent here to relieve these boys, and I will not give up the money." At that moment an event happened that permitted the missionaries to escape.

In the other corner of the station a man was arrested for being a spy. It attracted everybody's attention. The moment this officer turned the elders dashed out to the station platform. By this time the trains had stopped running on a regular schedule. These missionaries got on unscheduled trains, traveled for 15 or 20 minutes, and then would get out at the next station. There they would stand until they felt impressed to get on another train.⁷

Meanwhile, President Joseph Fielding Smith and his wife had left Hanover for Frankfurt by train. When they arrived, President Wood had left them a message and tickets for London via Holland. President Smith was one of the last to enter that country. He had President Franklin J. Murdock of the Netherlands Mission wire President Wood to have all missionaries go to Denmark.⁸

The reason many of the missionaries were caught short of cash was because they knew they couldn't take money out of the country. Some elders had mailed their money back to some of the needy members in the towns where they had served or purchased cameras before they arrived at the border.

One such incident involved a missionary from Holland, John Robert Kest, who was able to save a group of American elders who were stranded at the German border town of Bentheim. They had been unable to go in any direction. "Within the mission home there was tension—and activity," reported Kest and added:

⁷*Ibid.*

⁸*Ibid.*, August 27, 1939.

Elder Joseph Fielding Smith . . . was speaking with President Franklin J. Murdock of the Dutch Mission. Intermittently throughout the day the telephone had relayed messages from various parts of the continent. From Switzerland, Denmark, and Germany the calls came. . . . "Yes," Elder Smith was saying, "all the missionaries must be moved out of Germany, and immediately."⁹

Sometime after 10:30 p.m. on August 26, President Murdock received a call from President Wood in Germany informing him that a number of missionaries were arriving in Holland by way of Oldenzaal, a tiny village on the eastern border of Holland near Bentheim.

Because of this phone call and the help the elders at Bentheim obviously stood in need of, Apostle Smith and President Murdock decided missionary Kest was to go to Oldenzaal with sufficient funds to conduct the stranded missionaries from that point to the Netherlands Mission home. They assumed there would be no trouble transporting the elders across the border. It was thought they had been refused entry because of lack of funds and not having through-tickets to England in their possession. "I would be able to guarantee the government officials their passage to England, and would be carrying enough money to assure these same cautious officers the young men would in no way be a burden to the Dutch government while in Holland," stated Kest.¹⁰

There were innumerable delays in the missionary's rescue mission. The train trip, which could usually be made in two hours, took well over four, and it was after 11 a.m. when the train finally arrived in Oldenzaal. "'Yes,' said the station master, 'a number of young American missionaries were sent back to Germany late last night and have not crossed back into Oldenzaal since,'" reported Kest and continued, "This was upsetting news, for we had fully expected the brethren to be waiting at Oldenzaal. . . . Already a good twelve hours had lapsed since they had been returned to Germany. Something must be wrong." Attempting to call Bentheim in order to

⁹*Improvement Era*, 43:753 (December 1943).

Missionaries of the stranded group were Elders Ray Packer, William Thayne, Clayton Larsen, W. Haws, Frank Knutti, and Ellis Rasmussen.

¹⁰*Ibid.*

learn the whereabouts of the elders proved of little value and after three hours, Kest gave up the job as hopeless. Telephone connections with Germany had been severed. The elders in Bentheim were also unable to call the LDS office in The Hague. Kest phoned President Murdock in The Hague and told him that it had not been possible to contact the elders. The station master had told him that the young men had been almost without funds and had nothing except cameras to declare at the Dutch border. President Murdock told the Dutch missionary that the elders must be helped at any cost and added, "Do your best and use your judgment as to what should be done, Brother Kest."

The young missionary phoned The Hague, the American Consulate, and the Dutch Embassy, asking if a visa might not somehow be arranged. They all said it was impossible. Hundreds of phone calls had been received begging them to take care of stranded Americans and other Europeans who were desperately attempting to get out of Holland, and some of whom were begging help to extricate relatives and friends from Germany.

Kest used the three hundred guilders President Murdock had given him and bought ten tickets from Oldenzaal to Copenhagen and boarded the 2:30 a.m. train for Bentheim in Germany.

"Why the Dutch authorities allowed me to board the train, never asking for a visa, is a mystery; it was most irregular," said Kest and continued:

[Soon] there was a sharp clicking of heels. German Blackshirts stepped quickly through the car, their eyes cold as steel, taking in at a glance the occupants of each car. Handing the leader my passport, the inevitable question was asked, "Why is there no visa stamped on the proper page?" . . . I explained in exasperatingly slow and deliberately incoherent English that some of my friends were in Bentheim and knowing that railroad and train transportation was being curtailed, wanted to visit them while possible. Suspicion shone from the cold eyes of the officers; I rambled on, deliberately, on utterly pointless tangents, hoping all the while they would have great difficulty understanding me, which they did.

. . . Inside the little cubicle, in the station where they had taken me for questioning, they searched me thoroughly. What would they do to the precious tickets which I had in my suit coat pocket? . . . In my possession was

a folder in which were MIA lessons written in English, which we were translating into Dutch to be used the coming winter season. These they read over thoroughly, finally they were judged harmless. They started going through each pocket in both coat and vest. I took 10 tickets out of my pocket and placed them on the table before me. No one seemed to see the tickets.¹¹

The officer in charge gave Kest a receipt for all his personal effects, and said, "you have 40 minutes to catch the return train to Holland." Taking the tickets from the table, Kest stuffed them in his pocket. "Not an eye flickered. I had the strong impression that the action had been entirely unobserved." Hurriedly he left the station, "my knees weak, my palms sweating." Nobody on the street seemed to know where any American boys were staying but finally someone directed Kest to the Hotel Kaiserhof. There the elders were trying to determine what course they should follow. "I gave the tickets to them and ran to the station to catch the last train for Holland," reported the elder.¹²

After catching several different trains, the missionaries arrived in Hamburg, but because of their many delays, the forty-eight hours had expired and all trains were on an irregular basis. The elders caught several trains, slept in depots, but eventually arrived in Denmark and sent a telegram to Copenhagen specifying "that the lost were found."

Another group of elders who were stranded were walking down a street when a stranger came up to them and stated "that he knew they were Mormon missionaries. He said that he had been called to the Polish front and had 50 marks which he knew he would not need and asked if they could use the money." The missionaries were able to buy tickets to the town where one of the elders had worked. Just before leaving, he had given his landlady some money for needy members. The train had a fifteen-minute wait, and he was able to dash to his former residence to get the money back. It was just enough to pay their expenses to Copenhagen. President Joseph Fielding Smith also left Holland. "On arriving in The Hague . . .

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²"West German Mission Manuscript History," August 31, 1939.

I saw that I too would have to find my way in some fashion to Denmark." reported the Mormon apostle and continued:

To go by train back through Germany was out of the question. To go by boat seemed to be equally impossible under the circumstances. We therefore sought passage by air but were informed every seat was taken for days. But on Sunday, August 27th, the following morning, we were able to take advantage of a cancellation. I had been given 24 hours to get out of Holland.¹³

When President Smith arrived in Denmark, most of the elders were still in Germany. President Wood arrived in Copenhagen on August 28, along with his wife, two daughters, and twenty-one missionaries.

All but thirty-one out of 150 elders were accounted for when President Wood arrived. That afternoon a telegram came from President Murdock stating that fourteen more elders had arrived in The Hague. That left seventeen to worry about. Soon another telegram arrived "from the 'football-playing elder' stating that he was bringing the remaining seventeen on the 7:30 p.m. train."

The missionaries still had a long ocean voyage ahead of them, filled with the dangers of German mines and submarines, but one of the elders commented: "That will be child's play after the things we've gone through getting out of Germany. I don't think after all the trouble the Lord went to there, that He is going to let us down in the middle of the ocean."¹⁴

On September 1, Germany invaded Poland, and two days later England and France declared war on Germany. Within eighteen days Poland surrendered and Germany's plans to conquer the world were well under way.

Many tears had been shed when the missionaries and saints parted. It was the first time in over a century that Europe was without American elders. A total of 697 missionaries, including sixty-three lady missionaries and dependents of mission presidents, departed from the Old World. "The first group landed in New York on September 7, and the last group, accompanied by Elder

¹³*Improvement Era*, 43:752 (December 1943).

¹⁴"West German Mission Manuscript History," August 26, 1939.

and Sister Joseph Fielding Smith, landed November 7, 1939." These missionaries had returned in twenty-three ships, all accounted for with no loss of life. "The bulk of them, 446 who had not fulfilled a full-term mission, were given assignments in the United States—228 were released," reported President J. Reuben Clark Jr. at the Church's annual conference in Salt Lake City in April 1940.¹⁵ Many of the elders were soon back in Europe when the USA entered the war.

President M. Douglas Wood speaking at the same conference in Salt Lake City, describing one departure said:

About 150 saints gathered at the station to say "goodbye" to their missionaries. A wonderful trained chorus sang and members placed garlands of flowers on each missionary's neck. As the train pulled out, the saints sang "God Be With You 'Til We Meet Again." I just cannot tell you how we all felt. Those saints will carry on in Europe.¹⁶

West German Mission During World War II

The day Germany invaded Poland, September 1, 1939, the Bremen Branch House was confiscated by the Nazis; however, the Church building program in Germany continued through 1940. Members were working on the Hamburg-Altona building "when the brethren were quite surprised as the first air-raids began" which eventually led to the destruction of their city.

At the start of the war, Mormons in Germany who were Jews became victims of the anti-Jewish atrocities. Brother Salomon Schaward, a deacon in Hamburg-Barmbeck Branch, who had been a faithful member of the Church . . . was arrested and taken to Theresienstadt, one of the largest concentration camps, where he was presumably killed." In fear of further difficulties, the Barmbeck Branch posted a sign over its door during the war, until the branch house was destroyed in 1943, with the inscription: "Jews Are Not Allowed." Signs like that were common throughout Germany at

¹⁵Conference Reports of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 1940, p. 15.

¹⁶"West German Mission Manuscript History," August 26, 1939.

this time. A number of LDS members who were partly Jewish were left unharmed in Hamburg throughout the war. One Jewish man joined the Church in 1944. At this time anyone who was friendly to the Jews in Germany was endangering his life. After this man was dressed in the special clothing, the branch president "didn't want to baptize him because he was Jewish." However, the mission president intervened and the ordinance was performed.¹⁷

When President Wood had left Germany in 1939, Friedrich Biehl was appointed West German Mission president until he was called into the service.¹⁸ On January 31, 1940, Christian Heck was appointed mission president.¹⁹

A few of the Church leaders in Germany were strong supporters of the Nazi Party, especially in the West German Mission. After some of the men had given their lives for the German cause, the following statement was made in a Hamburg Branch: "It is wonderful and easy to die for the Fatherland if we love it, and it is easier when we know through our testimony that there is life after death." Another report also indicated such Nazi sympathy. "The presiding brethren in the West German Mission tried to preach National Socialism instead of the Gospel of Jesus Christ when they visited the branches," said Max Zimmer, who was president of the Swiss Mission during the war. He added:

The saints were asked to pray for the *Fuehrer* in their meetings and in their homes and regard him as a divinely called man who would prepare the world for the "United Order." Attempts were made to harmonize Hitlerism with the Church doctrine and even to prove that the Nazi party was organized after the pattern of the Church. . . . It was a good thing to have [some leaders] there who could not be converted to Nazism.²⁰

However, many incidents showed a Mormon dislike for the German leadership during the war. In the Hamburg area, early in

¹⁷*Ibid.*, May 4, 1941.

¹⁸Friedrich Biehl was born February 26, 1913, at Essen. He joined the Church December 14, 1924. He was killed at the Russian front March 3, 1943.

¹⁹Christian Heck was born in Frankfurt, Germany, March 31, 1902, and was baptized into the Church in 1912. He died of wounds received on the Russian front April 19, 1945.

²⁰Church News, November 24, 1945, p. 3.

1941, after another Nazi statue had been erected, a member of the Church, Heinrich Worbs "remarked to someone that they had built another monument for one of their butchers." After this statement had been reported to German authorities, Worbs was arrested and sent to a concentration camp. Hamburg District President Otto Berndt later said: "In 1941, Worbs was stripped naked, his hands were put in a vice and cold water would constantly fall down on his hands and freeze. Every three or four hours a guard would come and knock off the ice with a rubber hose and say, 'this will keep your hands warm'." After six months of torture Worbs was released but he soon died.²¹

In the Hamburg area at this time three young men of the Church, fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen years of age, rebelled against Nazism. Their names were Helmut Huebner, Rudolf Wobbe, and Karl Schnibbe. "This incident caused more fear and anxiety among the members than I had ever experienced in my life," related Otto Berndt. In the spring of 1941 Helmut Huebner's brother had brought back from France (while on leave from the army) a short-wave radio. Young Huebner and his friend Wobbe began to listen to the British Broadcasting Company (BBC). The news from England (to which Germans were forbidden to listen) was almost the opposite of what the German radio was transmitting. Since the London broadcasts contained more detail, the boys reasoned that they must be true. They decided to do as the announcer of BBC in London urged and they printed the information on a mimeograph press in the Church's Hamburg-St. George meeting hall. Huebner had access to this machine because he was the branch clerk. The boys had been disappointed because all their lives they had looked forward to becoming Boy Scouts. Just as they became of age, this organization was dissolved by the Nazis, and they had been forced to join the Hitler Youth. They were further angered when a woman brought a leaflet with propaganda that had been dropped by a British bomber and the branch president threatened to report her to the police if she ever brought British pamphlets to Church again. "I just couldn't understand such an attitude. All these things

²¹"West German Mission Manuscript History," December 31, 1941.

increased our dislike against the party and even some of the brethren in our Church," said Wobbe.²² The three youths wrote articles such as "Hitler the Murderer." Wobbe recently said: "We placed the bills in mail boxes, telephone booths, and even in the entrance halls of the large apartment houses. I also put them in the mail box of the local Nazi Party branch office." These three Mormon boys were soon arrested while sitting at their desks in school.

The youths were charged with high treason on January 25, 1942. Being juveniles they were told that according to German law they would probably receive nothing more than a severe reprimand and possibly a light sentence. When the trial was transferred to Germany's highest court in Berlin, it was determined that Huebner, who had been a Mormon from birth, was "highly intelligent and his writings could well have been written by a thirty-year-old professor." The court thus reasoned that they should be tried and sentenced as adults. "The judges were dressed in blood-red robes that had been embroidered with a large emblem of the German Reich which was often referred to as the 'blood-tribunal'," reported Wobbe, who was sentenced to ten years.²³ From prison he wrote to his mother, "I wouldn't blame you if you would denounce me as your son."

But Helmut Huebner's plight was even more despairing. On October 27, 1942, he was beheaded with an axe by the Gestapo. In his final letter to his family he wrote: "I have only two hours left, then I must appear before my God."

District President Berndt was questioned for three days about the printing incident, but was released when he convinced the Gestapo that the Church was not involved in this crime. The books of the branches were constantly investigated by the Nazis.²⁴ Members of the Church in the entire Hamburg area were in a state of near panic, fearing arrests at any moment because members of the court had said that these boys must have been inspired by their parents and leaders. On the Sunday following Huebner's execution,

²²*Ibid.*, December 31, 1941.

²³Rudolf Wobbe, statement on file in the Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁴"West German Mission Manuscript History," July 19, 1942.

the mother and the grandmother of the slain Mormon deacon attended a service in one of the Hamburg branches. District President Otto Berndt said, "I had cautioned the brethren not to mention the name of the boy in the meeting. However, one of the members said, referring to Helmut Huebner, 'If I had a rifle, I would have shot him myself'."²⁵ The young Huebner boy was excommunicated from the Church shortly after his death by worried Hamburg church officials.

In 1948 the First Presidency of the Church in Salt Lake City heard of the case and upon investigation found irregularities in the excommunication procedures and rescinded the 1942 action of the German LDS leaders. Huebner was posthumously reinstated as a member of the Church.

A number of German books appeared after World War II condemning the war and blaming in part the perverted German justice. "Teen-age members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints were brought to the chopping-block for no greater crime than to be opposed to the Hitler War," said one such work.²⁶

As the Russians neared Berlin, the two surviving Mormon boys were transferred to Hanover. In the last desperate days of the war, Karl Heinz Schnibbe was sent to the Russian front with a battalion of prisoners. He was captured and held for three years. Rudolf Gustave Wobbe was liberated from his prison by Allied Forces and returned to Hamburg. Said Wobbe: "As soon as I attended the meetings of the Church . . . I was greeted with open arms by my brothers and sister in the Gospel. . . . Since then I have been a missionary for the Church."²⁷

Raids intensified in 1943; Hamburg was bombed 104 times in ten days of August. It became customary during every meeting for a member of each branch presidency to listen to the radio for information on coming air raids. On one particular Sunday, Elder Herbert Baarz, the branch president, had heard no information, but felt "inspired to tell the saints to leave the meeting and go to the

²⁵Otto Berndt, statement on file in the Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah.

²⁶Willi Bredel, *Unter Tuermen und Masten* (Schwerin, Germany, 1960), p. 355.

²⁷Wobbe, April 17, 1961.

air raid shelter, a ten-minute walk. The members had no sooner arrived at the shelter when bombs hit the area near the meeting house."²⁸

On September 8, 1943, Italy surrendered and most of Hamburg was destroyed during that year, including four Mormon meeting halls. Only the Altona Branch hall survived. Prior to the destruction of the other buildings, District President Berndt had brought the entire supply of clothing and food to Altona. Other branches in the mission were destroyed, including Kassel, and many members became victims of the war. In Hamburg, thirty members lost their lives in one night. "Everything is driving to a climax," said Willy Deters, district president of the Bremen area and added:

The stress of body and soul is gigantic. The air raids are increasing with unbelievable fury. The cities of Bremen, Wesermunde, and Wilhelmshaven are just ruined. In spite of all the trials, our meetings are still being held, even if they have to be interrupted frequently by air raids. The faithful saints are meeting in homes each with eight to 10 members present. So closes the year of trial, 1944, but we still know that God lives and that the restored gospel is the truth.²⁹

The Bremen Branch, which the Nazis had returned to the church, was again confiscated, but soon it also was destroyed. Ninety-five percent of the members also lost their homes in that town.

On March 3, 1943, Friedrich Biehl, the first West German Mission president after the American missionaries had left, was killed on the Russian front. Christian Heck, who succeeded him, was wounded a few days before the end of the war and died on April 19, 1945. Then Anton Huck assumed the position of West German Mission president.³⁰

²⁸Werner Schmidt, statement on file in the Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah, December 31, 1943.

²⁹"West German Mission Manuscript History," December 31, 1944.

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 390.

East German Mission During World War II

Before leaving Europe, President Thomas E. McKay had appointed Herbert Klopfer as acting mission president of the East German Mission,³¹ with Richard Ranglack and Paul Langheinrich as counselors.

Klopfer was often requested to appear before the Nazi officials to explain the teachings and purposes of the Church. In 1940 he was called into military service but was stationed in Berlin, with a private room and telephone, and was able to take care of the mission business from his military office. He had constant phone communication with the mission home, where his counselors and four native lady missionaries worked. At the end of 1939 there were still twelve German elders engaged in proselyting in Germany, even though the war was four months old.³²

Twenty-three of the sixty-five branches in the missions that had been led by American missionaries were now directed by local saints. The turnover in leadership was rapid as more and more of the "young brethren were drafted into the German Army." Six hundred Mormons were in the German Army by 1940. At the annual conference in Salt Lake City on April 5, 1940, Thomas E. McKay was able to report that the German "saints understand the gospel and are well qualified to carry on, [led] mainly by brethren born into the Church. They have faith and are not discouraged because as they say, they have the gospel."

"The faithful servants of the East German Mission fully understand the steps taken by the leaders of the Church last summer," wrote President Klopfer's wife for her husband (who could not safely correspond) to the Salt Lake City Church headquarters and continued,

³¹Herbert Klopfer was born April 14, 1911, in Werdau, Saxony, Germany. His parents and their entire family joined the Church in 1922. He was an organist and an outstanding student of French and German. In 1928, at the age of seventeen, he planned to emigrate to the United States. The trip had been paid for when President Hyrum Valentine called him to serve a mission in Germany. In 1929 he translated for Apostle John A. Widtsoe, who toured the mission. Klopfer was married in 1934 while he was a translator in the Berlin Mission office. In 1937 he and his family wanted to emigrate to the United States, but the laws prevented young men of his age from leaving Germany.

³²"East German Mission Manuscript History," December 31, 1939.

The German saints know with certainty that the authorities of the Church are inspired. . . . Meetings are held regularly and are well attended. . . . Spring conferences are being held in all districts. A good number of investigators are visiting our meetings. . . . Everyone is doing his duty. . . . May God bless our leaders of this country and of His Church.³³

During these early years of the war, the Germans did not suffer and the army provided well for the servicemen's dependents. "Germany is just as safe, no much safer now than it has ever been before," stated one letter to Church headquarters in Salt Lake City and continued, "The parks are filled with jolly people. . . . The children go to school. The theaters and opera houses are filled to capacity every night." "All is well here," said another letter from Germany, "awaiting a speedy victory." Most German saints felt they were fighting a just cause at this time. A letter dated 1941 urged the Church to use its influence to keep America out of the war, but statements condemning the Nazi activities had already been made at the Church conferences in Salt Lake City.

After two issues of *Der Stern* were printed in 1940, this publication was stopped. In Berlin the mission issued a small mimeographed four page paper called *Der Sonntagsgruess* (Sunday Greeting).

In June 1941, Germany attacked Russia, and the Germans soon boasted of more quick victories. However, rationing of food, clothing, and fuel was introduced to Germans and "church bells were melted for munitions." A few German saints were released from their Church assignments at this time because of the pressure applied by the Nazi party, which threatened to take their jobs from them if they continued to officiate in the Church. By the end of 1942 many of the branches were struggling, and the Germans who had been defeated in the battle of Stalingrad were retreating.

In the year 1943, more and more men were sent to the front. President Klopfer had been stationed in Berlin as long as possible because his commanding officer wanted to keep him, but late in the year the mission leader was sent to France. The air attacks became more frequent. Twice a night the Germans in large cities had to go to air-raid shelters. "The conditions in the branches were becoming

³³*Ibid.*, April 5, 1940.

more difficult. Now only the most faithful saints are attending their meetings," wrote Bremen District President Willy Deters.

Later, President Klopfer received orders for the Russian front, but was granted a furlough to visit his wife and children, who continued to live in the mission home across from the beautiful Tiergarten.

On the night of November 22, 1943, the mission home was completely destroyed during an air raid. The entire Klopfer family was away visiting friends.

One hour after the bombing President Klopfer and his wife arrived at the demolished home. "There was not one stone left upon the other. We lost our possessions," reported Erna Klopfer later and continued,

Everything was destroyed. I can still hear my husband saying, "We will have to start over again. We have to be grateful that we are still alive and that our children are in safety." At last we discovered the safe. It had to be removed from its position. It was hard work, but in vain. The heat had penetrated through the metal, the papers and records were burned, and the coins were melted into one piece.³⁴

Late in 1943, with Mission President Klopfer away, first counselor Richard Ranglack took over the leadership of the mission.³⁵ Shortly before this time the Ranglack home and the hotel where he had worked had also been bombed. "We walked through the city aimlessly for several hours until a family took us in, and we slept on their basement floor that night," he reported. Paul Langheinrich and his family had Ranglack and his family move in with them. Ranglack and Langheinrich next visited the Czechoslovakian Mission to "ordain two brothers as elders. This brought the higher priesthood again to this land."³⁶

In June 1944 the mission was able to have copies of the pamphlet "The Joseph Smith Story" printed. In addition, part of James E.

³⁴*Ibid.*, November 22, 1943.

³⁵Richard Ranglack's mother had joined the Church in 1903 in Braunschweig, along with her family. The American elders were frequently hidden in the Ranglack home during the days of many banishments. During World War I, Ranglack had also served in the mission presidency.

³⁶Ernst, p. 372.

Talmage's Mormon classic, *Jesus the Christ*, was translated and published in the German language.

On June 27, 1944, the branches in Germany held a memorial in honor of the one hundredth anniversary of the martyrdom of Joseph Smith. This year also marked the loss of their own East German Mission leader.

Before being sent to the Russian front, Herbert Klopfer was assigned for a short time to Denmark, where he visited the Mormon branch at Esjberg. The strange feeling of having an enemy soldier in their midst was described by a young Danish Mormon girl who wrote to the mission leader's wife the following:

Last night I visited the branch. There was a German. And even though we hated all Germans, we learned to love this man. He spoke to the congregation in English, because we could not stand to listen to German and William Orum Petersen from Copenhagen, who was present, translated. Your husband related how only a month ago he lost everything he had and the mission home had been destroyed, but that he was thankful that his wife and children were in safety. He then gave testimony of the truthfulness of the Church. It was wonderful to see a man in the uniform we hated, who spoke with so much love for us. He was happy to be among the saints.³⁷

Since the East German Mission home was destroyed, headquarters were moved into the Langheinrich home. President Klopfer's family was residing there on July 22, 1944, when news arrived that the company to which Herbert Klopfer belonged was trapped on the Russian front, and he was reported missing. Two and one-half million Germans were killed during a six month period in 1944.

"I have the difficult task to tell you that your husband has been missing since July 22, 1944, when our unit tried to break through the surrounding Russian army near Brody," wrote President Klopfer's commanding officer on September 27, 1944, and continued, "We do not know if your husband reached the other unit, but it was destroyed. . . . There is hope that he can return home after the war is over. But despite your sorrow I hope you will be strong and firm and endure the struggle for the existence of our beloved nation."

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 380.

The letter concluded, "I remain with sincere sympathy, Heil Hitler, First Lieutenant . . ."

One of the first letters written after the war by Thomas E. McKay from Salt Lake City to Colonel John R. Barnes, an officer among the U. S. occupation troops in Berlin, stated:

I wish you would do everything possible to find out all you can about Brother Herbert Klopfer who we left in charge of the East German Mission when we left Europe in 1940. I would like you to visit his wife and do what you can to comfort her. We have heard that he is a prisoner in Russia. The Church will do everything possible to back you up in securing his release. He was one of the five most valuable young members of our mission. I became very fond of him because of his loyalty, his ability, and his humble, willing spirit. He was the last one to whom I said goodbye when I left Berlin in September 1939.³⁸

In 1948, three years after the end of the war, Erna Klopfer, wife of the war-time East German Mission President, learned that her husband had died March 19, 1945, in a Russian hospital.³⁹

Struggle of the German Saints to Survive

One of the oft-told Mormon stories is how Latter-day Saints in America were prepared at the end of the war to send aid to suffering Germany. Almost forgotten is the fact that the members in that land engaged in many heroic acts of self-help not only to fellow-Germans, but also to their enemies when the opportunity presented itself. "I wish to express my thanks to my brothers and sisters in Duesseldorf, who in such a loving manner helped several of our young members of the Church both spiritually and materially," wrote Paul J. Devignes, the Mormon leader in Belgium, on December 23, 1944. Hitler's occupation troops had deported many young people to perform forced labor in Germany. Members of the Church had made it a point to help these Belgian prisoners in whatever way they could.

³⁸"East German Mission Manuscript History," September 17, 1945.

³⁹Erna Klopfer, statement on file in the Historian's Office, December 1957.

After Erna Klopfer emigrated to America her two sons returned to Germany as missionaries.

The most crucial years were just before the end of World War II. "We began our real Relief Society assistance in 1943 during the greatest destruction when many members lost all their possessions," stated one report. It continued, "In two months there was so much donated that we were forced to write to the members to stop sending clothes and household supplies to the mission." Most of the items contributed by the saints to the East German Mission were stored in three buildings located in small villages. In 1945, two of them were still filled with necessities which were being used to help destitute members. Nor was the quality of the contributions of an inferior type with almost all either new or in perfect condition."

After the missions had collected all the items they could handle, the districts conducted their own assistance programs. All five branches in the Hamburg area, for example, had their own welfare storehouses in each meeting hall, in which clothing was collected and kept. In 1943 the Hamburg saints were also asked to take part in *Loeffelspende* (spoon contributions), which meant they were each to bring one spoonful of sugar or flour to every meeting they attended. This small amount seemed almost ridiculous to members at first, but soon

this one spoon multiplied by 200 was sufficient to bake a cake for a young couple for their wedding, or to give a mother who was expecting or nursing a baby. After the war when some of the brethren returned undernourished and sick from the prisoner camps, the *Loeffelspende* was most welcome to help restore their health. Later, food from this source was sent to the saints behind the Iron Curtain.⁴⁰

A week before the final destruction of Hamburg, "a big shipment of clothing had been sent to the Ruhr District where many of the saints had lost all their belongings." After Otto Berndt found himself bombed the second time and homeless, he called the members of the Church in Hamburg together who could be contacted to determine the losses sustained and the relief and rehabilitation needs of his flock. It was learned that of the three hundred members of

⁴⁰Berndt.

the St. George Branch, more than sixty had been killed. The other four branches suffered proportionate losses. Nearly all were without shelter and many had lost all their possessions.

It was mutually agreed that insofar as possible all should share alike the things which were yet remaining in the possession of the saints. Family after family brought their entire supply of clothing, food and household supplies and shared them with their brethren and sisters who were destitute. The Relief Society then collected money and brought some material to patch clothing which had been unusable. . . . [Altona, the only remaining hall] was used as a temporary barracks for a large number of the homeless families and the remainder were housed in the homes of members whose property still permitted habitation. Groups of brethren were sent out and made purchases of small plots of land in the suburbs upon which they built hastily constructed homes for members, using what materials that could be salvaged from the bombed ruins.⁴¹

One night, thirty-five Mormon families in Koenigsberg were made destitute; the Relief Society provided adequate care in the shortest time possible. "Some members who had contributed clothing during the preceding years received it back when they lost all they had."

In the city of Danzig the branch president, Willi Horn, found that the younger members were living on "weeds, cats, dogs, and other animals, and that the older people were not even able to get items such as these." At a special meeting the members agreed to give 10 percent of their meager rations to those who had nothing. The report stated that "this saved the lives of many members, but four saints did die of starvation at this time."

A week before the conflict ended, District President Otto Berndt was riding his bike along the street in Hamburg and happened to look in a cellar and noticed about fifty swastika flags that obviously had been left there by the former owners, who did not want to suffer because they were in possession of them. "I didn't hesitate one minute and took all these flags and turned them over to the Hamburg Relief Society," said Berndt, "so it wasn't just a

⁴¹Ezra Taft Benson, *Church News*, July 6, 1946, p. 3.

coincidence," he added, "that all our girls in Sunday School wore red skirts the following month."⁴²

The Last Days of the War

By the end of 1944 the situation became desperate throughout the mission. "The members of the Church on account of the extension of the war are scattered in every direction, yet we maintain connections with them," stated one report and continued, "We have not heard from our beloved ones in America since the war started. . . . What do you think, when shall we again see each other, and when shall the desires of our hearts be fulfilled?"

"Life is now most difficult," wrote a district president in 1944 and continued, "The last energies are being offered to the war god. Life in the branches is becoming more difficult. The brethren must work night and day and can't find time to visit the meetings." At this time almost every item in Germany was rationed. "The attendance at our meetings has been drastically reduced, but the spirit has not suffered," continued the same report. A few months later the same leader wrote, "The fiery gates of hell are open. It is almost impossible to visit the branches. Many of the brethren over fifty and under fifteen are being called to save the Fatherland. Reason is now insanity."

Early in 1945 the Germans decided to make Hamburg a fortress and to do everything possible to defend the city. The members in the Hamburg District, under Otto Berndt, worked out an evacuation plan for the saints. The city was divided into districts, "with a faithful brother responsible to see that all the saints in his particular area would leave together." A boy who had a bicycle was also available to the person in charge. This plan never had to be used because the commanding general of the city of Hamburg surrendered to the British forces. "They [the members] had prayed for this to happen." By March 1, 1945, all connections with the mission office in Frankfurt and the branches were disrupted, and the Americans had captured that city.

⁴²"East German Mission Manuscript History," April 29, 1945, April 30, 1945.

The last meeting before the end of the war in the Hamburg-Altona hall was on Sunday, April 8, 1945. Otto Berndt and some other members whose homes had been destroyed had been living there. "The afternoon meeting closed with the hymn, "God Be with You 'Til We Meet Again," said Berndt, and continued,

On the last verse there was not a dry eye. A strange feeling came over all of us and with a sudden impulse, we took hold of the hand of the person next to us, forming a chain that included all in attendance. This was probably the most solemn hour in the history of the Hamburg District. We all felt that something would happen that would separate us for some time. During the night our hall was so badly damaged that no meetings could be held for four months.⁴³

"I felt the German victory was doubtful," said the Chemnitz District President Alfred P. Schulz, at the end of 1944. "We held an LDS conference in Berlin and I spoke about immortality and eternal life. These were very difficult times."⁴⁴

A few days later, January 5, 1945, Russian troops entered Germany. They were preceded by refugees who told stories of killings, rape, and arson. By February 6, Chemnitz was almost completely destroyed by air raids. A bomb dropped in Schulz's front yard but fell in soft dirt and didn't explode.

However, death might have been preferable to the tortures Schulz endured. By April 28, 1945, the Russians had overrun the last outpost in Germany. Along with every other available person he was given a gun and told to die for the Fatherland. "I was ordered to advance as far to the front as possible to shoot from there," Schulz later related. He used the opportunity to escape after finding a suit of civilian clothing in an abandoned house. Together with a group of refugees, he headed to Berlin to find the mission home. Before reaching their destination, they were surrounded by Russians and all were shot. The memoirs of Schulz read:

Potsdam was still burning. We heard the Russians were hanging all men in uniform on trees and killing them by cutting open their stomachs. Towards

⁴³"West German Mission Manuscript History," April 8, 1945.

⁴⁴Alfred P. Schulz, "Alfred P. Schulz Journal," MSS in the Historian's Office, Salt Lake City, Utah. December 31, 1944. This translation into English by Justus Ernst.

9 p.m. the Russians had us cornered. I was shot through the neck and throat. I blacked out. When I regained consciousness I was lying on my back, blood had stained my clothing. I must have been left as dead.⁴⁵

All died but Schulz, who remained in the field helpless for six days. Finally a Russian nurse in charge of a burial party noticed that Schulz was still alive, and he was put into a concentration camp. During the next twenty-one days he lost fifty-five pounds.

The Russians thought he was a Nazi agent and tried every means they could to get him to sign a statement admitting he belonged to the Nazi party.

He was whipped on many occasions. Once the guards stepped on his hands and legs and opened his mouth to see if his teeth had gold fillings they could plunder. On another occasion a revolver butt was smashed against his mouth, and he lost several teeth. Another time he was shot through the knee, for no apparent cause. Once his hand was nailed to a plank; and later he was pinned to the floor as a rusty nail was driven through his big toe. Lighted cigarettes were extinguished on his body. Once he was given solitary confinement and forced to stand in a pit of ice-cold water up to his neck—having a choice of standing upright or sagging and drowning.⁴⁶

Schulz attributed his survival to his membership in the Church. "I received little to eat," the Mormon district president recorded, "but some of the members found out about me through a letter I had been able to smuggle out to my wife and they brought me fruit, especially cherries, which kept me alive." When a Russian soldier offered Schulz a cigarette and he refused it, the officer demanded to know why. The officer was so surprised to find someone upholding his religious convictions that he arranged for Schulz's release.⁴⁷

Arriving at the Berlin Mission home, Schulz found refuge. "In the evening the brethren gave me a blessing. It was wonderful and shortly after I improved considerably." Schulz was then called as a missionary for the Church.⁴⁸

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, April 29, 1945.

⁴⁶ZC*Mirror* (Salt Lake City) May 1945, p. 3.

⁴⁷"East German Mission Manuscript History," April 29, 1945.

⁴⁸Schulz, April 29, 1945.

The LDS losses in Germany were staggering during this tragic war. Almost every meeting hall of the Church was destroyed. Frankfurt, unlike its Berlin counterpart, survived the raids. The acting mission president, Richard Ranglack of the East German Mission reported: "There are at present in the mission 12 districts, 65 branches, and 221 elders, and 410 members of the Aaronic Priesthood, and 7,610 members. . . . There are . . . four missionaries serving." In the East German Mission about 400 LDS soldiers and fifty civilians were killed. In the West German Mission, 150 members lost their lives, most of them soldiers. Three acting German Mission presidents were among the more than six hundred Mormons who died during the war in Germany. Included were also three district presidents: Martin Hoppe of Breslau; Carl Goeckeritz, Chemnitz; and Erich Behrndt, Stettin. About 5 percent of the members lost their lives. Yet the total number of Mormons in Germany decreased only slightly during the war years, with 12,000 saints remaining. There had been about sixty baptisms a year during the first half of the 1940s.⁴⁹

With an unconditional surrender on May 8, 1945, the most dreadful of all wars ended, but the greatest ordeal was yet to come for the defeated Third Reich. Many long months of starvation, death, and suffering awaited the Germans in their land of almost total ruin and utter chaos.

⁴⁹"East and West German Mission Manuscript Histories," 1940-1945, *passim*.

CHAPTER NINE

The Aftermath of World War II (1945-1949)

Post-War Tour by German Mission Leaders

After the fighting ended, members had to wait almost another year before the aid from the Church in the United States could arrive. German Mission leaders found approximately 85 percent of the members had lost their dwellings. "I found 10 persons occupying the mission home," said Max Zimmer when he arrived from Switzerland to take over the West German Mission leadership in 1946 and continued: "I had to sleep under my desk in a blanket thus being very close to my work." Since the plumbing was broken, these members built an outhouse in the back yard. There was not enough material to build a door so they used an old rug for that purpose. "To the embarrassment of all the tenants, the rug was stolen and for a while an umbrella was the only means of protection," said Zimmer.

During this time acting President Richard Ranglack and Paul Langheinrich of the East German Mission toured their area twice during the summer of 1945. They found several persons ready for baptism. On their way to Cottbus their bicycles had two punctures and they were stopped sixteen times by Russian soldiers. A Russian commander, however, gave them permission to kill an ox, a pig, and a calf which were divided among the members. Before arriving in Chemnitz, Polish robbers took the bicycles of the mission leaders in spite of their strong protests. In Chemnitz they were able to gain repossession of the meeting house that had been confiscated. In Zwickau two separate meetings had to be held because of the loss of the large building that had previously been used by the Church. During this trip many members were helped on their way to refugee camps. On the way back to Berlin Ranglack reported, "We were looted of our remaining possessions by four Russian soldiers. The passengers on the train were plundered,