

Surviving by Faith

German Latter-day Saints and World War II

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*Editor's Note: There were more than ten thousand Latter-day Saints in Germany before World War II. Lynn M. Hansen and Faith D. Hansen were sent in 2008 as missionaries of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to gather oral histories of Saints who had lived through World War II. They interviewed Church members in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and the United States. They published 314 accounts in German in *Der Glaube unserer Vorväter: Mormonen, die das Ende des Krieges Erlebten*. A selection of forty-three accounts were translated and printed as *German Latter-day Saints and World War II: Their Personal Stories of Survival (BYU Studies, 2012)*. Presented here is a small sample that conveys the devastation of the war, difficult years behind the Iron Curtain, and the faith that sustained these people.*



I am Wilford Zdunkowski. I was born in 1929 in Driesen [now Drezdenko in Poland] (Neumark), Friedeberg County, Pomerania. This small, peaceful town, formerly of 5,000 inhabitants, is located about 180 kilometers east of Berlin and has belonged to Poland since 1945. There we had a small but very active branch of the Church. I was baptized at the age of eight on May 26, 1937, along with Sister Rosemarie Jeske, in the Netze River. Since it was a long walk to the baptism site, only a few members were present. We had to walk so far to avoid being disturbed by fishermen and people taking walks.

My mother and my grandmother were baptized in 1924, and my father about two years later. Despite all our efforts, we have not succeeded in bringing more of our family into the Church to this day. But my father was very active in genealogical research. In later years, I helped with and

partially took over this part of his work. We learned to endure the biting sarcasm of our relatives because of our religion. In my class, I was always the only member of the Church. My membership has carried with it no apparent disadvantages for me other than scorn and ridicule.

My first calling in the Church came at the age of eight. With no knowledge of music, I became the Primary chorister. At the age of ten, I was called to be an assistant secretary in the Sunday school. The monthly reports, which always had to be prepared on Church premises, were an abomination to me. I had to calculate the percentage figures long before percentages were discussed in school.

My family moved to Stettin, Pomerania, in 1941. In Driesen, it took just over five minutes to get to the Church meeting rooms. It was much more burdensome to attend the meetings in Stettin. First, we needed forty-five minutes on foot to reach the train station in Stettin-Alt-damm. Then it was a fifteen-minute train ride and finally a twenty-minute walk to the church. There was no bus service from home to the station in Alt-damm. Nonetheless, we attended our meetings regularly. At a district conference in 1941, I was sustained to be a deacon and was at the time the youngest priesthood holder of the East German Mission.

After a heavy bombing attack on the city of Stettin, many were homeless, so the party seized our beautiful church meeting rooms. The furnishings of bombing victims were stored there to protect them from the weather. Another Christian denomination then shared their meeting rooms with us so that we and they could hold worship services at different times. We also had to hold our meetings in a member's apartment often.

My father worked in a plant called Pomeranian Motor Works that was critical to the war effort; several other branch members worked there as well. Because of this employment, he was exempted from military service. Many of our other brethren had to wear the uniform and defend the fatherland. The brothers who were not drafted carried extraordinary loads in the Church so that the different meetings and other activities could be properly implemented. One must also remember that the workweek was often more than fifty hours. My father was branch president in the town of Stargard, Pomerania. It was more than thirty kilometers from our apartment to the Stargard Branch. Father covered this distance using a combination of bicycle and train each Sunday. However, there were times when he sent his assistant because of his other obligations in connection with his work and the Church in Stettin. In our branch, an old brother blessed the sacrament, I passed it, and then I had to give a talk. When there were no other options, I also conducted the meeting.

The war intruded more and more into our lives. My grandmother, a war widow from the First World War, lived with us. However, for her safety and that of my brother, who was four years younger than I was, they were evacuated to Driesen. At that time, bombing attacks were still virtually unknown there, while we had to suffer many air raids in Stettin. My father was then called to be district president in Stettin. He had me do most of the paperwork, so I had very little free time. The typewriter we used from the Church was ready for the trash heap and practically unusable, so I had to borrow a typewriter from somewhere else.

Then, as the Eastern Front approached the borders of the former Reich, my mother was forced to dig trenches as part of the so-called East Wall. After several unsuccessful attempts, I finally had the good fortune to obtain a place in glider school in Neumühlenkamp in Eastern Pomerania. There, I learned the rudiments of gliding in the training glider SG 38. Shortly after returning home from the glider school, American bombers completely destroyed the Pomeranian Motor Works in a violent daylight raid. Even though the factory was located in a forest and heavily camouflaged, it was discovered by enemy reconnaissance flights. My father and some other brethren survived the attack. The fact that my father escaped with his life borders on a miracle. Regrettably, the former district president, Brother Erich Berndt, lost his life in this attack. He was a wonderful brother, and his family missed him greatly.

The Pomeranian Motor Works assigned my father to remote outsourcing work, so he asked to be released from his position in the East German Mission as district president in Stettin. At the final district conference of the Stettin District, Brother Ernst Winter was called to be Father's successor. He directed the district during the difficult period just before the front reached Stettin. Members of the Church east of the Oder River had already fled to the West, hoping to find refuge in what remained of the Reich. Many people had the false hope that the lost territories in the East would be reconquered soon.

The government appealed to the German youth to volunteer for the armed service and defend our country. Neither the military nor the party in my home district attempted to compel anyone in my peer group (born in 1929) to join up, but we who were already fifteen years old created our own peer pressure. Anyone our age who was not prepared to join the army was branded a cowardly dog. So my family was not terribly surprised when, just before my family fled Stettin, I stood in front of them wearing my uniform as an army volunteer. I was really proud of my uniform and secretly hoped to be awarded the Iron Cross for the defense of the fatherland. This dream

did not come true. It was not until long after the war that I learned that I probably owe my life to the former head of the German General Staff, Colonel General Heinz Guderian. He had forbidden the use of soldiers born in 1929 at the focal point of defensive battles. Poorly trained and poorly armed, we would not have been able to prevail against the Russian veterans, change the course of the war, and prevent the destruction of Germany. We were, however, allowed to participate in our own self-defense.

The tank battle east of Stettin was won by the Soviets due to their greatly superior numbers, and the German front retreated westward beyond the Oder River. The German troops west of Stettin were eventually pushed further westward toward the Elbe. I was able to survive a large number of low-level aircraft attacks with the help of the Lord.

On May 3, 1945, one day before my sixteenth birthday, terrifying screeching noises woke me from a deep sleep. One of my friends, some other soldiers, and I had entered a barn to grab a few hours of sleep and rest from the rigors of the day. The sound of Russian tank treads were fast approaching our barn. We had hoped to make our escape with lightning speed but were forced by machine-gun fire to raise our hands. To my surprise, the Russian soldiers searched us only very briefly for weapons, but then very carefully for watches and rings. Only after those searches were finished were we thoroughly disarmed. Our captors then herded us with a larger group of German prisoners to an assembly point. There we were exposed to Russian uncouthness. To our horror, we had to observe what was done to the German women and girls without being able to intervene. I hoped that the Russian women officers would stop the wild goings-on, but I was disappointed.

My prayers to escape to the West without falling into Russian captivity were not answered. In my mind's eye, I could already see my birch cross in Siberia. As the prophet Enos, but softly and not in a loud voice, I prayed day and night. My prayers had only one main thought: "Father, show me how I can escape." Many Russian guards on foot and on horseback guarded us very effectively, and there was no apparent way to escape. Although I was desperate, I could still feel the Lord's protecting hand over me. In retrospect, it is quite clear to me that the Lord was very close, even if I sometimes believed him far away.

The daily hardships were terrible. The long marches with little or nothing to eat or drink had drained my strength considerably. I will be very brief. What I experienced is really true, not an adventure novel. After several days of exhausting marching and several nights of sleeping in wet meadows, we were housed in the former concentration camp at Neubrandenburg. The Russians cut my hair so I was quickly recognizable as a prisoner of war. Due to lack of nutrition, we shivered miserably in the cold nights of May.

Suddenly some soldiers from the overcrowded barracks dragged out the bug-infested beds and made a huge fire. The Russians did not stop them. For a few minutes, many of us were able to warm at the fire after a long wait. I was lucky enough to stand there with my back to the fire. Total exhaustion caused me to lose consciousness. If an unknown soldier hadn't seen me as I was beginning to falter, I would have fallen backward into the fire. He caught me at the last moment, said something, and disappeared. I am sure that the Lord had his hand over me. My own prayers and those of my relatives drew the attention of the Lord to me.

After some time in the Neubrandenburg prison camp, we continued our eastward march. A few days later, we crossed the Oder River near Greifenhagen [now Gryfino], where a temporary bridge was built. I was not very far away from my former home in Altdamm near Stettin, where my family had planned to meet after the end of the war. When we parted, we did not anticipate that this would not be possible. Our former home was given to the Poles, who in turn had to cede part of their eastern territories to Russia.

The march to the east continued. My escape plans collapsed because of the effectiveness of the Russian guards. Still I prayed day and night very fervently and promised the Lord I would serve him the rest of my life if he would enable me to escape. However, this had to happen while we were still in what was then Germany. I was, of course, very much aware that with the Lord nothing is impossible. Whenever our route took us close to a section of forest, it seemed that we were particularly carefully watched. My strength was already severely depleted due to far too little food and water. Other prisoners fared similarly, and some collapsed at the roadside. Despite the pace the Russians tried to set, the march slowed the farther eastward we got. One evening the Russians could not avoid herding the long columns of German prisoners through a wooded area. The road was uncommonly wide, and we prisoners were allowed to use only the middle of the road so as to reduce the possibility of escape. During this particular night march, we were unexpectedly overtaken by a convoy of trucks loaded with Russian soldiers. Apparently returning from a victory celebration, the half-drunken Russians were singing army songs, and they shouted at us, "Gitler kaputt!" (Hitler is dead!) The monotony of our marching was interrupted, and we all looked up at the Russians. Where the trucks drove, the prisoners were forced closer to the edge of the roadside. I was marching on the far right edge, watching the Russian truck; because of my weakness, I gave no thought to escaping.

Then a miracle happened that I cannot explain, even today. I felt as if someone pushed me in the back. With no further thought whatsoever, I immediately ran into the woods. No shouts resounded behind me, and there was not even a shot! All of a sudden I realized I was escaping. After a

while, I stopped to just breathe. I saw no pursuers, just heard faint sounds, as I was by then far removed from the highway. Then I kept running into the woods, stumbling over roots. I picked myself up and ran on until I fell down from exhaustion and fell into an unconscious-like sleep. This had to have lasted several hours. It was very early the following morning when I was awakened by a barking dog. I saw a Russian soldier on a bicycle just a few steps away from me on a forest path. My heart stood still with fear. The dog had certainly seen me; with its leash, it pulled the bike with the lurching, drunken Russian toward me. He must have thought the dog had caught the scent of a rabbit or a deer and wanted to chase whatever it smelled. The Russian just yelled at the dog, jerked at its leash, and drove on.

Finally, my mind began to work again. I had to get out of there! I soon found a hiding place in a heavy spot of woods. The sleep that I desperately sought would not come. Slowly I began to mull over what had happened. I poured out my heart to the Lord and thanked him for my escape. I will never know what really happened at the edge of the forest when I found the sudden courage and strength to escape. The fact that the Lord had his hand in the game was evident to me. But it was not clear why I deserved to have the Lord intercede on my behalf. Without his intervention, I would have missed the opportune moment to flee. Only much later did I realize that because I was able to escape, I was able to avoid long and painful captivity somewhere in Russia. Years later, I read stories of many prisoners of war who returned home, and I realized how good the Lord was to me. Then, I return and thank the Lord again!

Now I had to find my way home to where my family and I had planned to meet. Under normal circumstances, the walk would have taken just two days; but I had to avoid being seen by anyone and consequently arrested. Many times I had to take the long way around. To regain strength, I certainly needed something to eat and drink. Also, I had to exchange my tell-tale uniform for civilian clothes. But how could I do that? At that time of year, there were no berries or mushrooms in the forest, so I continued to go hungry. After the sun had crept a bit higher in the sky and I had warmed up a little in a small clearing within my hiding place, I crept to the edge of the forest on all fours like an Indian, being as silent as possible, and tried to orient myself. The trees on the edge of the forest were pretty sparse, so I might easily have been seen there. As far as I can remember after sixty-three years, I did not dare to leave my hiding place during the day. The event with the half-drunken Russian and his dog that early morning indicated that Russian troops were nearby.

I prayed very seriously for divine guidance, and I felt myself being told not to leave my hiding place until darkness had set in. On a forest path,

which was probably used occasionally by farmers with teams of horses, I caught a glimpse of an old wagon that had been used by refugees. After making sure no one was around, I approached it and found that it had been completely plundered; however, I found an old tattered jacket that was too big for me. I traded it for my uniform jacket. Finally, I was ready to leave the forest. In the moonlight, I saw a large clearing and some peasant farms, but they were very dark. I wanted to see if I could find something to eat but did not dare look further. I decided to bypass all the farms and to keep moving. I returned to the forest and found the walking very tiring. Every cracking twig made my hair stand on end. In the distance, I saw an occasional campfire. Because I did not know who might be there, I avoided them totally.

When crossing a field in the dark, I tripped over a half-filled pail without a lid. I tasted the contents and found to my great joy that it contained syrup. With two fingers, I got more and more of the harsh but tasty liquid and carried the bucket with me until dawn. When in the light I realized that the top layer was composed of dead flies that had been attracted by the sweetness, I threw the bucket away. But the nauseating meal had a positive impact. My diarrhea-like problems were cured almost immediately. After days of marching at night, sleeping in hiding places, drinking from streams, and washing without soap, I finally arrived at the house in which my family had lived.

Accustomed to being very careful, I took time to watch the house and the entire area while lying on my stomach like an Indian. Our house was less than fifty meters from the edge of the forest, so I was able to get a good view. The two-family houses were only slightly damaged by gunfire, and the remains of curtains fluttered from the windows. Though I could see no one, I did not dare approach the house before dawn. Not a soul was in sight. The doors had been removed and probably used by German soldiers as fortification material. The only edible items in the house were the winter potatoes, which had already begun to sprout. I ate some of them raw because I did not dare to make a fire. The smoke from the chimney would have attracted unwanted visitors rather quickly. I dragged some mattresses into a closet, where I hoped to rest quietly.

In the morning, I watched from the woods as Russian soldiers and Polish civilians ransacked all the houses to search for useful things. At night, it was again quiet, so I returned to the house to make fire in the stove and cook some potatoes. I had found salt the previous evening, as well as some old clothes. An old straw hat hid my closely shorn head. This unpleasant life of hiding and living on potatoes went on for a number of days. I became aware that I could not always count on my luck. Eventually I would be caught, and what then? My prayers had only one request: "Show me, Lord, what I should do next." Again, the Lord did not fail me.

One day, from my hiding place behind the trees and bushes, I saw two people at some distance whom I recognized as two schoolmates a little younger than I was. From a distance, they thought I was a Pole, but I shouted at them and told them who I was. They told me that all the Germans had to move to a less damaged part of Altdamm. All able-bodied persons were registered under Polish control and put to work. I was able to blend into the populace and work like the others. No one was paid for the work done, because there was no currency; but we received a bread card, which we could exchange for a small amount of bread. The first work I had to do was eliminating tank traps and repairing roofs.

More and more Poles moved to Altdamm. In vain, we waited for friends and relatives, but they did not return. Since we had no newspaper or radio, we knew nothing of the new political realities.

One day the call came for all Germans to leave their apartments within minutes. I quickly stuck my few belongings into a potato sack and smeared my shoes with dirt from the road so they would not appear attractive and awaken any envy. Then I was ready to leave. I had only my bread card as identification; everything else had been lost when I was captured by the Russians. We were forced to walk in a southwesterly direction. The German refugees from the East were to some extent free booty. Every Pole or Russian could seize German property with impunity. Eventually we arrived in Greifenhagen, where we were sent to a specified area to be assigned a place to stay. Most accommodation was composed of empty apartments. We lay on the bare floorboards and rested from the fatigue of the long forced march. Nobody gave us anything to eat, but we could get water from wells along the way. If we had not taken some bread and cold boiled potatoes with us, we would have starved. That would not have bothered our liberators a bit.

Then came the word that all young men had to report for work in the mines in Silesia. All would be well there, we were told. Being suspicious from the experiences I had gone through, I hid myself with my few belongings to avoid once again being a captive.

What happened next is to me an even greater miracle than my escape from the Russians. Without valid documentation, it was virtually impossible to cross the bridge over the Oder River to the West. From the attic of an inoperative railroad guard shack, I saw that everyone, no matter in which direction he crossed the Oder Bridge, was carefully checked for valid documents. Any attempt for me to cross the bridge with a bread card would have necessarily led to my arrest. To try to swim across the Oder at night was a reckless idea, since the river was mined. In addition, the eastern side of the river was carefully guarded by Polish guards. From the upper window

of the crossing guard shack, I saw a large group consisting of several thousand German prisoners of war being herded eastward. The half-starved characters looked pathetic. For me there was only one vital question. How would I cross the river? Should I try taking advantage of the darkness of night to cross the bridge? The numerous lamps made it clear, however, that at night the bridge was lighted, so a secret crossing was hopeless. I suddenly became very restless in the rail guard shack. If someone entered the place, there was no way out; so I stealthily left the shack and hid in the high weeds that surrounded it. I felt that the Spirit was leading me, and I said the most fervent prayer I had ever spoken. I cannot remember all the words, but I again promised the Lord I would try to serve him all my life if he would show me the way out of my predicament.

Then something happened that I will never understand as long as I live. A feeling of calm and peace came over me that I had never felt before. It was almost as if I were walking in my sleep. I left my hiding place. Without really knowing what I was doing, I crossed the bridge at an unhurried pace without being stopped by the guards. They looked at me but paid no real attention. After I had German ground under my feet and looked back, a terrible feeling of fear suddenly came over me. In a few moments, my clothes were soaked with sweat.

After overcoming some additional difficulties, I visited my relatives in Babelsberg near Berlin. There I learned that my family had found refuge in the British sector of Berlin and that they shared a tiny basement apartment with another family.

We belonged to the Berlin-North Branch, where I performed my duties as a deacon. It was difficult for me at that time to partake of the sacrament. For a long time, because of the war, we had no small drinking glasses. Before the war, each member would receive a sacrament cup filled with water that was passed in a carrier. But at that time in the war, two large drinking glasses were passed around, from which the members each took a sip of water. The two deacons were the last to receive the sacrament, when half of the ward had drunk out of the glasses and they were almost empty. It took a lot of self-control for me to drink out of that almost-empty glass.

At that time, the Church in Salt Lake City still had no official contact with the mission office in Berlin. Occasionally, however, members of the Church in American military uniform came to the branch in order to gain an impression of the state of the Church. They probably wrote reports. I can still remember a high-ranking American officer who was driven to the meetings in a jeep. He observed how our sacrament meeting progressed. When I passed him the sacrament in a half-full glass, he declined with thanks. A few weeks later, he came back carrying a case with small

sacrament glasses. From that time onward, we were once again able to partake of the sacrament from small glasses. We were very grateful to this brother for his help.

The time in Berlin and elsewhere after the war was very difficult. In the cold winter of 1945–46, we shivered miserably in church and at home because there was no fuel for heat. Members of the Church, like almost all others, suffered terribly from hunger. Because of the cold and the poor food, many people did not survive. My grandmother did not survive this terrible time. I found this very unfair, because she had been very committed to the Church and the missionaries, and deserved a better end.

I would like to relate another event. When an old sister in the branch died, the branch president asked me to act as his assistant at the cemetery. There were at the time no coffins, and the dead were buried in paper bags in mass graves. Besides me, only the Relief Society president was there; the branch president, who was to speak, was missing. Since there were only five to ten minutes available for a funeral, we could not wait for him. So I, as a sixteen-year-old deacon who was quite unprepared, gave my first graveside talk. The Relief Society president said a prayer. It was not the branch president's fault that he was not there. At that time, because of the lack of fuel, there were numerous power outages, and he was stuck in the U-Bahn [subway].

Brother Günther Waldhaus, another deacon in the Berlin-North Branch, and I received a tough assignment from the mission. We were to take a small wagon all the way across Berlin from Moabit to Karlshorst to a Russian butcher shop. The mission leadership had somehow arranged to get two bags of bones from the Russians, which we had to transport to the mission office. The bones were distributed to members of the Church, who could then boil a broth from the bones. The broth helped people to survive. After the long journey on foot with the cart, we were completely exhausted. The early pioneers must have felt the same. During a special meeting in the spring of 1946, Elder Benson announced that members of the Church would receive food, clothing, and shoes from the Church's welfare plan. It did not stop at the announcement. Faster than expected, but too late for some, the goods were actually delivered. This alleviated the plight of many members, for which everyone was extremely grateful.

After I graduated from high school with the Abitur exam, I was surprised to receive a call to go on a mission in the Eastern Zone. At about the same time, Sister Inge Benicke from our branch was called to the same mission. Many people, including members of the Church, fled from the East to the West to seek a fresh start under better conditions. But we were to leave the western sector of Berlin to perform missionary work in the

Eastern Zone. This meant giving up our much-appreciated Western documentation for an Eastern document. No one had ever indicated that I would one day be expected to go on a mission. Therefore, the call came unexpectedly and at a very inopportune time. I wanted to prepare for my future career, but that was sidelined by my mission call. How much better it is today, where every young man in Primary starts to prepare for a mission. He then knows exactly what is expected of him. At that time, I thought of my promise to serve the Lord all my life if he would lead me out of captivity. I knew that I would fulfill this promise. Now, many years have passed, and I have realized that my account with the Lord is far from balanced. The Lord has done much more for me than I can ever return.¹



My name is Karl Heinz Zepp. I was born on June 6, 1924, in Mannheim. My mother was Barbara Zepp. She did not marry until after I was born, so I was in the care of foster parents for many years. At age nine, I went to live with my mother and enrolled in school. We were Evangelical Protestants [Lutheran]. When I was confirmed, I was not yet aware of other churches. That changed over time.

When the war broke out, I was drafted and then wounded. At the time, I was between the ages of eighteen and twenty. I was taken to a hospital in Seesen near Hannover. There I regained my health to some extent and was sent by the army to Russia. I had been there before. When the retreat began, we were in Tilsit in East Prussia, which was then part of Germany. We moved west to the city of Königsberg [Kaliningrad], where I was severely wounded again and almost buried. Fortunately, my comrades did not have time to fill in the grave in which they had put me. I woke up in a circumstance that could almost be described as a resurrection.

As I lay in the grave, I was in the spirit world. Everything around me was the same beautiful green color. When I looked down, I could see the ground under my feet. Others came to me, but I saw them only when they turned their faces toward me. Everything was bright and different colors—but only when they faced me. They were glad I was conscious. I did not know all of them, but I think I had a connection with some. Then two of them approached me; they had a very bright white light about them. I saw them, and they explained that I had to go back. I was not able to argue with them; the way they looked at me and how they spoke told me I had no choice.

1. Brother Zdunkowski passed away on October 2, 2009.

When I awoke, I was still lying in the hole. There was a sergeant lying next to me whose skull had been shot off. I thought to myself, "I'm lucky that the grave was not filled in." My comrades were retreating and didn't have time to do that.

Summoning all my strength, I got out of the grave. I turned around with my back against the wall and fell backward over it. There was something there that I used to help raise myself up and out of the grave; I do not know what it was. Then I began to move as quickly as I could. As I ran, I had the feeling that someone had taken me under each arm and was helping me. As I walked over the bridge that the Russians had built, the Russian soldiers just looked at me. I was covered with blood, and I wondered why they did not do anything. When I reached the German lines, I learned why. There was a lieutenant in the trenches who said, "Man, where did you come from?" I answered, "You saw where I came from." He said, "Man, that whole area is full of mines." I knew then that the Russians had wanted to see the spectacle of me being blown up. Obviously I wasn't.

When I reached the German lines and asked for the paramedics, I was told that if I went a little further I would find Schönstrasse number ten. When I got there, everything suddenly went black, and I fell down the basement stairs. When I awoke, the doctors had already operated on me.

When I came to, I thought a lot about what had happened earlier. I am certain I was in the spirit world, for when I fell into unconsciousness in the basement, I had no memory of anything. This knowledge, however, remained in my head. I thought a lot about that but did not really delve into it. The truth only dawned on me after I was at home and my mother-in-law spoke to me about the Church and the gospel. This truth confirmed the experiences I had. For a time, the experience occupied my mind. Her wish was that I should be baptized. I intended to be baptized anyway, because the gospel had somehow seized my soul.

Now I can say that I am not afraid of death, because I know what it is. I would only be afraid if I were to get a disease that would be very painful or one that would cause mental illness. Death is normal, something like a transformation. Sometimes I have the feeling that those who listen to me tell about my experience in the spirit world think I am fantasizing. Nevertheless, it really happened, and for me it is definitive. That is why I changed my life. It was hard and has taken many years.

The war was almost over when I became a prisoner, and I went through a period of near starvation. We were taken to Marienburg [Malbork], where there was a castle also called Marienburg. Approximately two hundred thousand prisoners of war were held there. The majority of them died of starvation. Once again, I was lucky that I survived. As prisoners of war, we

were treated poorly; eventually we were taken to five different cities, where we were forced to clean bricks from buildings that had been destroyed and to do other heavy work. I was sick again and had nutritional edema caused by a long period of hunger. The swelling started in my feet. Medical treatment helped a bit, but not much. After a while, the swelling began at the top of my body. Often we heard rumors that we would be sent home. That was, of course, what we hoped for, but it took much longer than I thought it would. I was a prisoner for three years.

When I got home, I came down with nutritional edema for the third time. For the third time I got over it, while most of the others who had this illness died. The fact that I survived has always caused me much introspection. I was 100 percent disabled and had to receive medical attention again. Before the war, I had apprenticed to be a baker and had earned my apprenticeship diploma, but now that all came to naught. I could not work at baking anymore because I could not stand the heat. Nevertheless, I took almost any job I could find. At that time, I was paid seven marks a week. One could not live on this paltry sum. As a disabled war veteran, I received a small pension, but I still had to work. After I got work, I had to travel to Heidelberg to be evaluated. I was classified as being only 50 percent capable of working.

Then I met my wife. We agreed that we wanted to get married—but only if I were willing to join the Church. So I did. I was baptized. Over time, I realized how important it is to know the commandments and the laws of the Church. I have grown to appreciate them and have kept them. I quit smoking and never drank alcohol, so my health gradually improved. However, I have never been very healthy. When I became acquainted with the Church, I really tried to be a caring human being again. In captivity one never felt like a man—the distrust I felt toward other people was so great. I had to change completely. My wife has helped me, supported me, and been very patient with me. I have also tried my best to live the gospel. I have learned a lot, and I try to do what is right. Today we are a happy couple at peace with the world, and that is what counts.

Lynn M. Hansen earned a PhD in German at the University of Utah. He served twenty-three years in the U.S. Air Force, retiring as a full colonel. Subsequently, he fulfilled many appointments, including arms control negotiating ambassador in the Reagan and Bush administrations and serving six years in the CIA. While raising seven children, Faith found time to serve as ward Relief Society president four times. Brother and Sister Hansen presided over the Germany Hamburg Mission from 2001 to 2004.