

special recognition being given to veterans from the Korean and Vietnam wars. The keynote speaker was Hartman Rector Jr., a Seventy emeritus. He expresses a hint of his almost “Catch-22” conversion story during the Korean War in these words: “They’re trying to kill me out there. And if they do, I’ll bear testi-

mony against you at the last day that you kept me out of the Church!” (142) Then he records a vision he had as a pilot bombing North Korean railroads. But I’ll let you read that story.

Opening the Fiery Portals: World War II and the Saints

Donald Q. Cannon and Brent L. Top, eds., *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saints Church History. Vol. 4: Europe* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, Department of Church History and Doctrine, 2003), 207 pp., index, \$19.95.

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Not long after learning of the cancer that would ultimately take his life, my father faced a difficult course of experimental radiation and chemotherapy. As I drove him to the hospital to take his first treatment, I asked him if he was frightened. “Yes,” he admitted, “and I have only been this scared once before in my life—June 6, 1944.” D-Day in Europe.

If I hadn’t known it before, our conversation confirmed that, like the Vietnam War for my generation or the Great Depression for my grandparents, World War II was the defining moment for my parents’ generation. Over the years we have called it the “Good War” and characterized those who fought it and defeated Fascism as the “Greatest Generation.” Without the efforts of

that generation, no doubt the world would be a far different and much worse place. Yet despite our hopes that the world would emerge from that terrible war free of conflict, we still know all too well the suffering and costs in human life, resources, and psychic trauma that war brings.

For Latter-day Saints, World War II presented a unique set of challenges. After a century of missionary efforts in Europe, it was inevitable that Mormons would be involved on both sides of that conflict as civilians and combatants, and would feel, especially in Germany, but elsewhere as well, the horror of war personally.

The four essays dealing with World War II in this volume of *Regional Studies in Latter-day Saints Church History*, edited by Donald Q. Cannon and Brent L. Top, help us better understand those realities and the impact they had on the people involved. The topic makes this volume especially appropriate for review in this issue of *Dialogue*. In addition, Cannon and Top have included in this eclectic volume excellent studies of the Mor-

mon Tabernacle Choir's European tours; missionary work in difficult fields like Iceland, Estonia, and France; and temple building in Germany and Switzerland. Scholars and general readers alike will gain from these other essays as well.

Drawing on the letters her father wrote while serving a 1935–38 mission in Germany, Jessie L. Embry explores an important question: was Adolf Hitler a “deliverer or oppressor”? In the 1930s, Mormons, both leaders and rank-and-file members, held differing views. While Bertis Embry had a negative view of Hitler, saying he was against religion and had introduced “a day of the anti-Christ” in Germany, Jessie Embry found that some missionaries had a more favorable impression. They pointed to Hitler's oratorical skills, commitment to order and efficiency, efforts at political stability, and support for marriage, motherhood, and the family. He even emphasized genealogy, which seemed to parallel Mormon concerns, although they seemed unaware that it was used for the sinister purpose of identifying those of Jewish descent. Other missionaries, however, recognized the reality of the Nazi regime noting the arrests, suppression of free speech, and general fear that permeated German society. As Embry's father expressed it, the German people were held down “by an iron hand” (56) and hesitated even to take a tract from missionaries. As much as he loved the German people, he anticipated returning to his homeland where people “don't

have to be scared to death all the time” (56).

Still, missionaries and Church officials, both locally and from Utah, tried to make the best of a difficult situation. Seeing the “troubled times” as conducive to spreading the gospel, General Authorities like John A. Widtsoe and Richard R. Lyman, and even President Heber J. Grant urged missionaries to avoid politics in favor of purely religious discussions.

Clearly, as Jessie Embry realizes, our more “complete picture of history” validates those missionaries who saw Hitler negatively, even though for “those missionaries who grew to love the German people and wanted to share the gospel with them,” tolerating Hitler may have “seemed the best course of action at the time” (60). Such tolerance may have been a useful policy for those American missionaries; but as war loomed on the horizon, they were evacuated to the States, while local Latter-day Saints were left to deal with the reality of war.

David Boone explores the story of these historic evacuations. During 1938 and 1939, missionaries were first removed from Germany, but over time they also left other places in Europe and Scandinavia. Ironically, by the time of Pearl Harbor, the only missionaries laboring outside of the continental United States were in Hawaii.

Two other important topics are explored. Robert Freeman examines the experiences of German Saints during the war, while Dennis Wright dis-

cusses the role played by LDS servicemen on D-Day.

As Freeman notes, when war broke out in Europe in 1939, the Church “had a strong presence in Germany” (89), ranking third in total membership behind the United States and Canada. As missionaries were evacuated, local leaders confronted a situation where the Church’s presence was problematic. Finding it difficult to communicate and facing suspicion, indigenous leaders balanced loyalty to country and church. Such a balancing act was not without irony. In Hamburg, for example, local German Saints commemorated the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Relief Society, an event canceled in the United States because of wartime restrictions. A month earlier three brave young Latter-day Saints—Helmuth Huebner, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, and Rudi Wobbe—were arrested by the authorities for distributing anti-Nazi propaganda. Eventually Huebner became a martyr for freedom, beheaded in prison. Schnibbe and Wobbe served lengthy prison sentences. Simultaneously, Salomon Schwartz, a local Jewish convert, was sent to a concentration camp, while his branch leaders posted a sign over the branch building proclaiming, “Jews are not allowed” (91). Such signs were found throughout the land, but the ironic combination demonstrates some of the difficulties of wartime life.

Even more problematic, hundreds of German Saints “wore the uniform of the Third Reich during the war” (91). Nearly five hundred were killed; many

more were wounded. Civilians also faced privation and death daily as well. More than one hundred Church members died, including mission and district presidents; many were left unaccounted for, while even more became homeless. The German Saints, both combatants and civilians alike, reached out to each other, relied on their faith, and hoped for a better day. And like their fellow Mormons in Europe and North and South America, their lives were never the same again.

The lives of those young Latter-day Saints who found themselves at D-Day were never the same either. As Dennis Wright chronicles, they were there as soldiers, sailors, and airmen. Some landed on the beaches, while others flew support in the skies above. They witnessed death, acts of unselfish heroism, even small acts of kindness from local civilians. Many evaded capture; others did not and spent months in German prison camps. More troubling, perhaps, young German Latter-day Saint men faced young American Mormons on the field of battle. Each was motivated by patriotism and love of homeland. Would loyalty lead a German Saint to kill an American or vice versa? Probably.

As Wright notes, the invasion was chronicled in the *Deseret News*, which reported that the news was received calmly: There were “no noisy receptions in Salt Lake” (125). The paper included a photo of Mrs. Samuel W. Jones, reading her scriptures, under “three stars in her window indicating the number of her sons serving in the

military.” One son, Private Sherwood Jones, had participated in the invasion. His mother said, “I do not care to read the headlines today. . . . I pray for the safety of my son, but that is not all I want. I want him, under any test, to be true and truly brave. Also I want him to pray” (125). The paper also contained the comments of one observer that, while D-Day represented the beginning of the final stage of a long and terrible war, for the time being “let’s temper our enthusiasm with caution” (125). Wright’s article captures and preserves the recollections of a score of Latter-day Saint veterans of that decisive day in June 1944, and our understanding of that event is richer for it.

With the benefit of hindsight, we can fault those missionaries who did not recognize the evil of the Nazi ideology and the personal hold Hitler had over the populace. Such a judgement would be somewhat unfair, since we would be asking them to be more prescient in their analysis at age nineteen or twenty than much older individuals,

including British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and aviator Charles Lindbergh, who also believed the world could work with “Herr Hitler.” Today we celebrate the martyrdom of Huebner and the courage of Wobbe and Schnibbe. But the measure of respect we now have for their action developed only after years of controversy.

War, the poet William Stafford observed, despite our views to the contrary, really produces two losers. Even in victory, even in a cause as noble as defeating Fascism, the world is never the same. The suffering lasts for generations. Perhaps Willy Deters, a district president in Germany, said it best in journal entries toward the end of the war. Faced with death, destruction, and despair he notes: “Hell has opened its fiery portals. . . . No rest can be found at night. . . . Reasoning now has changed to madness” (96–97). It is a sobering thought worth considering at this time of history as well.