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KARL-HEINZ SCHNIBBE, with ALAN F. KEELE and DOUGLAS F. TOBLER. *The Price*. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984. 126 pp. \$6.95.

Reviewed by Richard H. Cracroft, professor of English and dean of the College of Humanities at Brigham Young University.

The Price is a moving and very readable book about idealism, about suffering, and endurance, and surviving—and about Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, now a resident of Salt Lake City, who experienced all of this during his and Germany's darkest years. The price which Schnibbe and his companions, all teenagers, had to pay for their idealism amounted to a very real nightmare fraught with horrors which ranged from prison, slave labor in Germany and the USSR, and unbelievable depths and heights in human cruelty and kindness, to near-starvation and, for Helmuth Huebener, execution by decapitation. Schnibbe survived to tell the gripping story.

“Helmuth Huebener is the hero of this book,” declares Schnibbe in his preface. But while Huebener's bright, bold, even audacious spirit is the catalyst which stirs the book's events to a boil, the book is not so much the story of Helmuth Huebener as of Karl-Heinz Schnibbe. Schnibbe impulsively stumbled into the intrigue-*cum*-adventure

masterminded by the courageous and idealistic seventeen-year-old Huebener and participated with him and Rudi Wobbe, both fellow Mormons, along with Gerhard Duewer, in listening to forbidden BBC broadcasts and in distributing throughout Hamburg carefully prepared anti-Nazi leaflets (produced on the LDS branch typewriter, duplicating machine, and paper) packed with statements and sentiments generally based on those broadcasts.

The group was arrested by the Gestapo in February 1942, incarcerated in the Alt-Moabit Prison in Berlin, tried before the *Volksgerichtshof* for treason, and given multiyear prison sentences, with Huebener receiving the death penalty. "You kill me for no reason at all," said Huebener on hearing his sentence. "I haven't committed any crime. All I've done is tell the truth. Now it's my turn—but your turn will come!" (54).

Huebener, excommunicated from the LDS church by a branch president who feared Nazi reprisals on members of the Church, was beheaded on 27 October 1942, in Ploetzensee Prison in Berlin (his body was turned over to medical scientists for experimentation). His excommunication and execution raise the age-old question of loyalties to principles or principalities, and two recent plays about Huebener have touched deeply on these questions and sensibilities. (Incidentally, Huebener was posthumously reinstated to membership in the Church on 11 November 1946, with "Excommunication Done By Mistake" written across his membership record.)

But if *The Price* is the story of Helmuth Huebener, then it is too soon told and, unfortunately but necessarily, in too little detail, primarily because most of the court records, the letters from Huebener to relatives and friends, and even the relatives themselves were destroyed in devastating Allied bombings. *The Price*, a title which sits uncomfortably on this book, failing as it does to weave the title image into the narrative, becomes of necessity the story of the nightmare which collaboration with Huebener produced in the life of Karl-Heinz Schnibbe. Indeed, it is the simple, even matter-of-fact, manner in which Schnibbe (with the assistance of BYU Germanists Alan F. Keele and Douglas F. Tobler) tells his engrossing narrative that startles the reader to awareness that, in the words of Huck Finn, "Human beings *can* be awful cruel to one another," and reinforces a determination that humanity must never again be subjected to such nightmares.

Although the account avoids reciting much of Schnibbe's inner drama and skips over years at a time of prison ordeals, the authors have packed into the too-few pages some tantalizingly rich detail about the life of a political prisoner in Glasmoor and Graudenz prison camps. For

example, the book tells vividly of fish soup with “sixty thousand eyes” (a grisly concoction full of intact minnows), of kindly prison camp doctors, of vicious and senseless beatings, of frozen prisoners in forty-five degree below zero weather (Schnibbe slept by one man, grumbling at the fellow’s lack of sociability, only to find he had frozen to death several days before), and, increasingly, of harrowing Allied bombing raids.

Four weeks before the end of the war, Schnibbe was drafted into the army (Wobbe and Duewer remained in prison) and was sent, without uniform or weapons, to the Russian front. He arrived with his ragtag unit at the front just in time to surrender to the Russians, who shipped the POWs deep into the Soviet Union to Bokhvisnevo and, later, Yablonka. There Schnibbe lived through four additional years of hard labor on a daily diet of one pound of bread, malt coffee, and some occasional frozen potatoes. When he was released in 1949 (only after his buttocks had disappeared, the ultimate signal for repatriation), he weighed 104 pounds, on a six-foot-two-inch frame. Broken in health but bolstered by some unexpected and heartwarming human relationships with his Russian captors, Schnibbe made his way back to Hamburg and hospital rehabilitation, which gradually healed his body but did little for the emotional scars of seven years of physical and mental torture.

The story ends as happily as one could hope for a man so nearly destroyed. One puts down the book wishing for more: more specific detail about Huebener, Wobbe, and Duewer; more about the relationship of these events to major events in Germany, the Soviet Union, and the world; more insight into Schnibbe’s feelings; more understanding about how he steeled himself emotionally and spiritually against the daily terrors of his prison experience. It would be interesting, for example, to probe Schnibbe’s lack of reference to his religious faith in God until very near the end of his ordeal. Unfortunately, it is only at the end of the book that we are permitted a glimpse into Schnibbe, to see that his emotions were indeed ravaged and his ability to function as a human being permanently scarred. Too often, the authors’ attempts to conceal emotion behind Hemingway-like terseness succeed all too well in concealing and not in revealing, and the reader longs for more detail than Bookcraft–Deseret Book-type packaging will allow. But it is, after all, a kind of compliment when readers wish for more, instead of less, and the authors deserve praise for wedging so much engrossing material into so little space.

A friend of mine recounts how World War II took on a more personal and terrible meaning when his friend, a Mormon trained as a

commando, decapitated a German guard, only to find a copy of the Book of Mormon in the dead man's pocket. By recounting his remarkable story, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe has created a similar effect for the sensitive reader, transforming as he does (albeit implicitly) the twelfth article of faith into a question, and explicitly making personal sacrifice for a cause come unforgettably to life. *The Price*, well worth the slight monetary price, gives Mormons some new heroes and brings us into the fray in unaccustomed but very respectable ways, ways of which we may be very proud. Helmuth Huebener, who died in the nightmare, and Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, who endured it, have created a significant memorial before which each of us should lay a wreath of honor.