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Lieutenant Allen D. Young (November 1944). This photograph was taken in England several days before the young fighter pilot was shot down during his fifty-seventh mission over Germany. Courtesy Allen Dahl Young.

Prisoners of War: Minutes of Meetings of Latter-day Saint Servicemen Held in Stalag Luft 1, Barth, Germany

In spite of hardships and shortages, LDS prisoners of war faithfully held Church meetings and kept records of their religious activities.

Colleen Whitley

In the months following D day, June 6, 1944, as Allied forces increased their bombing raids into Germany, many aviators were shot down, captured, and confined in prisoner-of-war camps. The Allied prisoners held in Stalag Luft 1, Barth, Germany, on the edge of the Baltic Sea, were housed in wooden barracks, sleeping three deep and twenty-four men to a room.¹

Most of the men at Stalag 1 were Americans, primarily pilots and navigators. Among them were several Latter-day Saint prisoners, who individually and, when possible, collectively clung to their faith and the practices of the Church. One of the Latter-day Saint prisoners, Clare Oliphant, a former missionary, led their appeals to the Nazi guards that they be allowed to meet together to hold religious services. On February 18, 1945, a small group from Oliphant's barracks was allowed to congregate for prayers, hymns, talks, and the administration of the sacrament. In time, prisoners from other barracks and even other compounds were allowed to leave their own areas and join with them. Allen Young, who kept the minutes recorded here, said, "To my knowledge, we were the only group sanctioned to go from one compound to another to gather together as a group." He also added, "Meeting for services made life tolerable."²

The priesthood offices held among the Latter-day Saint prisoners ranged from deacon to elder, and none of the men were over

twenty-five years old. Most of them had very little experience in Church administration. While Oliphant, as a missionary, had been involved in several levels of Church government, most of the others could only draw upon their own experience, primarily as observers, in their home wards and branches. In Young's diary, he comments, "Went to church. We had 7 or 8 fellows out each Sunday. Sure wish I knew more about my church. I hope to do as much as I can in it when I get home."³

The men continued to hold meetings until April 8, 1945. By that time, Allied forces had recaptured most of Europe, and, though many Nazi commanders refused to concede defeat, most of the German officers and men realized that the Nazi regime was dying. In isolated prison camps such as the one near Barth, food was difficult to get; bread was hauled in on the same wooden wagons used to haul out garbage, and Red Cross parcels ceased to arrive. Mail did not come through at all. The Germans had moved all available men to the fighting front, and few were left to guard prisoners. (The prisoners themselves suspected that many of those guards were quietly slipping away to be found by the Allies as simple farmers.) Any privileges, including church meetings, were suspended.

Background to the Minutes

The secretary of the group, Allen Dahl Young of Salt Lake City, was a member of the 339th fighter group stationed at Fowlmere, near Cambridge, England.⁴ On November 18, 1944, while piloting a P-51 fighter on his fifty-seventh mission providing protection for bombers raiding Germany, Young was shot down near Metz. He describes the experience in the diary he kept secretly while a prisoner:

On the way out from a fighter sweep near Munich, Germany I was hit directly in the Belly of my ship by heavy flak. I was flying at 15,000'. I lost my oil and coolant but worst of all I had lost my elevator controls. I made my first attempt at getting out at about 13,000'. I believe, at that time, that I was traveling at an indicated 300 mph. The air stream was so strong that it threw me straight back upon the radio section. I couldn't pull myself free and it seemed an eternity

before I was finally thrown free of the plane. That is the last I remember until I came to to find myself practically on the ground. Whether I pulled my ripchord or my chute was torn open on the radio, I'll never know. I probably unconsciously pulled it after leaving the ship. I later had a large bruise on my left shoulder and neck and some sore ribs on my right side.

For the first 3 or 4 days I could hardly move my left leg or my head. To feed me in the mornings the Jerries ["Germans" is written above the line] would have to come in and lift me out of bed. Evidently the chute had been opened at an extremely high speed. I can hardly see how I got out of it all without hitting the tail of my plane or without breaking my neck or back when the chute opened. After hitting the ground (like a ton of lead) I got out of the chute as fast as I could and hid it in the water and mud of a trench that I had barely missed landing in. I couldn't run so I hid in a hedgerow a few yards away. I layed there for about two seconds before a shot whistled through the hedge. Whoever had fired shouted "stand up." I stayed where I was, hoping that I had not been seen. Another shot and this time it was much closer. I figured then that they knew where I was so I started to stand up. I guess I waited too long for he shot again, missing my head by inches. I hit the ground with a bang. He shouted again so I stood up in a hurry. There was as I remember now, about six soldiers and a mess of young kids out there and they had me pretty well surrounded. It seemed as though the world had come to an end for me. Here I was, a P.O.W. and unable to help myself. They searched me and took everything I had—which wasn't much—a lighter, watch, and knife.⁵

When he arrived at Stalag 1, Young was issued a Red Cross "joy box," which included essential toiletries such as soap and a toothbrush. His box also included two small notebooks (6.5 inches by 8 inches) from the Young Men's Christian Association. To augment these precious notebooks, like other prisoners who did not smoke, Young used the cigarettes given him to provide paper on which to write letters, notes, or diaries.

Young used one of the notebooks to keep a daily diary of the events in the camp and his own feelings about the war and his personal situation. He used the other to record the minutes of meetings held by Latter-day Saint prisoners of war from February through April 1945. Recently, he donated these minutes to the Church Historical Department. Richard Turley, director of that department, believes this document to be unique: the Church

holds nothing else like it, nor are any other LDS meeting records from prisoners of war in World War II known to exist.⁶

Aside from their singularity, the minutes are significant as an example of members not only holding to their faith in very trying circumstances, but holding to the organization of the Church as well. Cut off from any contact with the local or general authorities, they re-created the organizational pattern of the Church and conducted their own meetings. Since no higher authorities were at hand to issue callings, Oliphant became the leader of the group primarily because he had the most experience. Young says he probably became the secretary because, “It seems like I’ve always ended up being secretary to something.”⁷

The men had no scriptures except a copy of the New Testament obtained from an imprisoned chaplain.⁸ Together they were able to remember eleven of the thirteen Articles of Faith and to reconstruct the prayers and instructions for most of the ordinances of the Church. They recorded how baptism, confirmation, naming and blessing a child, laying on of hands for a healing, administering the sacrament, and a patriarchal blessing should be performed, even though they knew that under their circumstances they would not be called upon to perform most of those ordinances.

In addition to recalling the ordinances themselves, they were extremely careful to record changes necessary for performing the ordinance for a woman as well as a man, “brother (sister),” “servant (handmaiden)”⁹—a remarkably broad-minded view in light of the fact that no women were in the area. They recorded both the actions to be taken and the prayers to be said for each ordinance.

The summaries of the meetings held and the talks given sound very much as though they could have come from any Latter-day Saint ward or branch, which is exactly what those isolated prisoners wanted and doubtless needed. They created for themselves a piece of the homes they missed so greatly, and they worshipped, as nearly as they possibly could, according to the manner revealed through the prophets of the Church.

Membership and Minutes

Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints

Barth on the Baltic

Stalag Luft #1

Compound North

Members:	Priesthood	Home Address
1- S/Sgt Clare H. Oliphant	Elder	Silverdale, Washington
2- Lt. Paul R. Smith	Elder	Stafford, Arizona
3- Lt. Allen D. Young	Elder	Salt Lake City, Utah
4- Lt. Oral B. Birch	Elder	Salt Lake City, Utah
5- Lt. Donald N. Evans	Priest	Lehi, Utah
6- Lt. Alfred Cryer	Deacon	_____, Illinois
7- ____ Leroy Bair	Priest	Nyassa [<i>sic</i>], Oregon
8- Lt. Reece Robertson	Elder	Lovell, Wyoming
9- Lt. Lewis M. Webster		Rexburg, Idaho
10- Sgt. Budd C. Argyle		Bountiful, Utah
11- Capt. Kenneth D. Peterson	Deacon	Mesa, Arizona
12- Lt. Glen J. Rhodes	non-member	Boise, Idaho
13- Lt. Dave W. Thompson	Priest	Salt Lake City, Utah
14- Lt. Carl D. Larson	Deacon	Salina, Utah
15- Lt. Richard E. Plathow	Priest	Peru, Indiana
16- Lt. Clive O. Stevens	Deacon	Provo, Utah
17- Lt. Clifford G. McIlveen		Boise, Idaho
18- Lt. Paul P. Butler	non-member	Douglass, Arizona
19- F/O Ralph E. Weaver	Elder	Blackfoot, Idaho
20- Sgt. Hugh L. Lamborn	Elder	Laketown, Utah
21- Sgt. Allen B. Foutz	Teacher	Kirtland, New Mexico
22- Lt. William Hanson		San Francisco, Calif.
23- Lt. Lou Kearns	Elder	Salt Lake City, Utah
24- Sgt. N. R. Bishop	Teacher	_____, Utah
25- Lt. Jesse Moses	Elder	Blackfoot, Idaho
26- Sgt. Wayne M. Davis	Elder	Ogden, Utah
27- Rondo D. Edler, Sgt.	Deacon	Grantsville, Utah

A Short Summary of the Meetings Held

February 18, 1945

The members of the L. D. S. Church gathered together today for their first meeting in Prison Camp.

Clare Oliphant was chosen as our leader, Paul R. Smith, 1st counselor and Allen D. Young as secretary.

After the opening prayer by Donald Evans the members joined in the hymn "Onward Christian Soldiers."

The Sacrament was presided over by Leroy Bair and Oral Birch.

Clare Oliphant gave the first talk: A Rock of Offense and a Stumbling Block will I plant in Zion. By the weak and foolish things of creations among mankind God confounds the wise, Mathew [*sic*] 11:25, 13:54-58, Acts 4:13. The Last shall be first and the first shall be last.

Principles of the Gospel so simple and precious causes confusion among men who are unenlightened by the Spirit of God. There were few who saw the virtue of His Plan of Salvation. Of the Apostles He chose the majority from the poor, relatively ignorant classes. He chose those in whom he saw a ray of uncomplicated faith, those who would be most susceptible to His Doctrine. The many times the righteous cults of the Jews listened to and were astonished at His Doctrine, they demonstrated increasing antagonism toward Him. They sought occasion to trap Him in His Teachings, to the end that they might legally imprison Him. In all instances the Lord turned their cunning to their own confusion. Jesus Christ is the Rock of Offense and the Stumbling Block to the Jews. He commissioned His Apostles to carry his Gospel to all the world, and prophesied that those to whom the Gospel was presented first would be the last to accept it, and those who heard it last would accept it first. The Jews, among whom the Gospel was preached first will be the last to come to the Faith, while the Gentiles, who were last in order of hearing it are the first to whole heartedly believe and take upon them the Spirit of the Faith.

Allen Young gave the second talk and a discussion on the Spirit of Giving. St. Mark 12:41-44 After teaching in the court of the Gentiles, Jesus sat down near to the treasury in the court of the women, He watched those who came to contribute. As (a poor widow)

brought her last coin as an offering to God, she received high praise from Jesus. A love which can give up all, ranked in his eyes as the highest wealth a man can win. Jesus admired both the generosity and the faith of the woman. Trusting God she could surrender all she had. Jesus pronounced poverty blessed in so far as the poor stand always nearer to genuine sacrifice than the rich, who may give largely of their superfluity, of that which costs them little.

Paul Smith closed the meeting with prayer.

February 25, 1945

Followed by the hymn "Jesus Savior Pilot Me," Allen D. Young opened the meeting with prayer.

The Sacrament hymn was "How Gentle Gods Command." Sacrament was presided over by Leroy Bair and Donald Evans.

Oral Birch gave the next talk on Faith. Our best example of Faith was the Faith of Jesus. Some of the points touched upon were: Christ's stilling of the waves—Math. 8:3-27, Moving of mountains—Math. 21:21-22, the Faith of the Romans—Mathew 8:5-10. Another example of Faith was that of Joseph Smith.—Math. 7:7-8 "Ask and it shall be given you; seek and ye shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.

Due to such a short period for our meeting we were unable to have the second talk that was scheduled for today.

Followed by the hymn "Praise God From Whom all Blessings Flow" Reece Robertson closed with prayer.

March 4, 1945

Clare Oliphant opened the meeting by welcoming the L. D. S. members from the South Compound. The first song of the meeting was "Master The Tempest Is Raging." Prayer was given by Brother Larson.

The Sacrament song was "The Lord is My Shephard" and [administration of the sacrament] was presided over by Brothers Davis and Weaver.

Each man introduced and said a few word about himself.

Paul Smith gave the first talk. God's plan of Salvation and the things we can do to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. By living up to

the teachings of our parents and through living the Articles of Faith, the Word of Wisdom, and loving thy brother as thyself we may attain this glory. Be careful of thy talk—not taking the Lord's name in vain, by not swearing, and keeping out of heated arguments. By our works and faith we will be judged and be saved.

Leroy Bair gave the next talk. "Accounts of The Apostles." The gift of tongues was the work of the Lord. Among the people Jesus was the proof of God. The people gladly accepted Peter's word and repented and were bapitized for the remission of their sins. This was at the time of the crucifixion of Christ.

The closing song was "Bethany" followed by brother Argyle with prayer.

March 11, 1945

Today's meeting was opened by singing "Come Thou Almighty King" followed by Oral Birch with prayer.

The Sacrament Song was "The Green Hill" and [administration of the sacrament] was presided over by Donald Evans and Paul Smith.

Wayne Davis gave the first talk of the meeting—Restoration of the Gospel and the Story of Joseph Smith. The second talk was by [Jesse] Moses. The principles of the L.D.S. Church. With the talk was much discussion concerning the Word of Wisdom.

The closing song was "Rock of Ages"

Closing prayer was by Reece Robertson.

March 18, 1945

The members from the South Compound were able to be with us again this afternoon. When it is possible for their being with us, our attendance is near the twenty mark.

The opening song was "Onward Christian Soldiers" followed by prayer by Brother Leroy Bair.

Sacrament theme was "More Holiness Give Me" and [administration of the sacrament] was officiated by Lewis M. Webster and Allen D. Young.

Reece Robertson and [Rondo] Edler gave their talk in conjunction with one another. The first coming of Christ and the second coming of Christ. Many occurrences and signs were cited

upon the second coming of Christ and a group discussion was carried on.

Clare Oliphant, during the week, had written down the Ordinances of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and presented them to us. It is hoped that we may all obtain a copy while we are here.¹⁰

The closing song was "How Firm a Foundation" and closing prayer was by Brother Lamborn.

March 25, 1945

The meeting was opened by singing "The Lord is my Shepherd," followed by prayer by Allen Young.

The Sacrament Song was "How Gentle Gods Command" and the Sacrament was officiated by Brothers Thompson and Plathow.

The first lesson was given by Brother Webster on the Crucifixion of Christ and the events leading up to the Crucifixion—Math. 26-27.

Brother Evans gave the second talk on the resurrection of Christ, telling of the Burial of Christ and a description of the tomb and events from the time of Burial and Resurrection. Ref.—Cor. 21-22, Math. 28:2-8, John 20:17, Luke 24:36-51. The talk was summarized by giving a few points or things we can live up to for a full righteous life.

The closing song was "Jesus Savior Pilot Me" followed with prayer by Brother Foutz.

April 1, 1945

Opening song of the meeting was "There's a Green Hill Far Away" followed with prayer by Brother Edler.

The Sacrament song was "Joseph Smith's First Prayer &" was officiated by Brothers Birch and Argyle.

The first Sunday of the month being both Easter Sunday and Fast Sunday. Brother Oliphant led us by bearing his Testimony and encouraging us all to do so. The following is the members who gave their Testimony: Brothers Davis, Larson, Weaver, Birch and Plathow.

The closing song was "Jesus, The Very Thought of Thee." and closing prayer was by Brother Larson.

April 8, 1945

Due to lack of a meeting place we have had to discontinue our meetings. We hope that in the near future we will be meeting in our own respective wards.¹¹

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NOTES

¹The camp was liberated by Russian troops on May 1, 1945. The prisoners remained under Russian control for several days until transport could be arranged to take them west. During that time, Morris Roy collected funds from the other prisoners to produce a book detailing their experiences. One of the prisoners, Allen Young, used the paper carefully culled from a cigarette to create a personal check to help fund the project; he was delighted when his bank in Salt Lake City honored it. The book was published as Morris Roy, *Behind Barbed Wire* (New York: Richard Smith, 1946). Allen Dahl Young, interview by author, tape recording, Salt Lake City, spring 1995. Most of the background information about this document comes from these interviews and from the diary Young secretly kept while a prisoner.

²Young, interview.

³Allen Dahl Young, Diary, March 11, 1945, in possession of Allen Dahl Young, Salt Lake City. Since his return, Young has taught various priesthood quorum classes and Primary classes and served as a scoutmaster, stake clerk, ward librarian, president of a ward Sunday School, secretary of priesthood quorums and groups, and on the Sunday School General Board.

⁴The day before he was shot down, Allen received word that his wife, Betty, had given birth to their first child, a son. Allen did not see his son until his return to the United States seven months later. The boy was named by Bishop Kenneth Lake of the Salt Lake Highland Park Ward where Betty was living with her parents. She remembers it as a very sad meeting because in the congregation were two widows who had recently learned of their husbands' deaths and two other women whose husbands were POWs. At that time Allen was simply listed as "Missing in Action." Betty eventually learned from ham radio operators on the east coast of the United States, who intercepted propaganda broadcasts, that Allen was a prisoner in Germany; the Air Force sent official notification to her later.

⁵Young, Diary, introduction, December 17, 1944.

⁶Richard Turley, interview by author, Salt Lake City, 1995.

⁷Young, interview.

⁸"Padre" Clarke was a U.S. Air Force chaplain who felt he could not counsel the men adequately unless he had flown a mission with them, so he persuaded the crew of one plane to let him go along. The flight was shot down, and

Clarke was imprisoned with the rest of the men. In Young's words, "He should never have been off the ground." Young, interview.

⁹The prayers and instructions for the ordinances were recorded by Allen D. Young, along with the minutes of the meetings. The minutes have not yet been cataloged. The probable listing will be Service Men's Group, Stalag Luft 1, Archives Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City.

¹⁰Copies would, of course, have to be handwritten.

¹¹The camp was freed on May 1, 1945. Young's diary entry for that day reads in part:

Learned this morning that the camp came under Allied control about 1:30 this morning. There is no activity at all here today. No planes no nothing except that a few delayed action demolitions are still going off. . . . Berlin has fallen. Straslund also. . . . Germany announces Hitler's Death and then the Russians arrived at a quarter to eleven tonight. This is one day that I'll never forget. What a day. (Young, Diary, May 1, 1945)