

## Helmuth Hübener

Helmuth Günther Hübener (1925–42), a member of the Church in Hamburg, Germany, was the youngest person of the German resistance to Nazism executed by order of the Special People's Court (*Volksgerichtshof*) in Berlin. <sup>1</sup> Beginning in early 1941, Hübener produced a series of anti-Nazi leaflets that included his own political commentary and transcriptions of Allied radio broadcasts. With the help of other teenagers, he distributed leaflets throughout Hamburg. In February 1942, the Court found Hübener guilty of “conspiracy to commit high treason and treasonable support of the enemy” and ordered his execution; the tribunal also convicted his three friends Rudolf Wobbe, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, and Gerhard Düwer of “listening to a foreign radio station and distributing foreign radio news.” Hübener was executed at the age of 17 eight months later. Wobbe, Schnibbe, and Düwer were sentenced to hard labor and remained in prison camps until the end of World War II. <sup>2</sup>

Hübener was born in Hamburg in 1925. His single mother, Emma Guddat Kunkel, worked to support Helmuth and his two older half brothers, Hans and Gerhard. As

a result, Helmuth and his brothers spent much of their youth with their grandmother Wilhemine Sudrow, who lived nearby.<sup>3</sup> In 1939 Emma married Hugo Hübener, a construction worker and Nazi Party member, who later adopted Helmuth. Emma's new husband disliked the Church, and, probably to appease him, her activity became intermittent after their marriage. Helmuth and his brothers, however, continued to attend church with their grandmother.<sup>4</sup>

Like their neighbors, German Latter-day Saints initially viewed the Nazi Party's promises of renewed economic stability and increased national pride with hope. Some Church members joined the party while others actively opposed the regime. Still others remained neutral.<sup>5</sup> Helmuth Hübener witnessed this spectrum of party participation firsthand. His branch president, Arthur Zander, was a Nazi Party member who compelled branch members to listen to the party's radio broadcasts, threatened to report members for anti-government activities, and, in 1938, posted a sign on the meetinghouse door informing Jews they were not welcome.<sup>6</sup> A handful of members wore their Nazi military and civil service uniforms to Church meetings. On the other hand, Otto Berndt, the Hamburg district president, preached against government policy from the pulpit, privately encouraged member resistance, and frequently walked to and from meetings with Jewish converts. Although Hübener initially participated in the local *Jungvolk* (the Nazi-organized group for children too young to join the Hitler Youth), he came to reject the party's ideology.<sup>7</sup>

In the spring of 1941, Hübener discovered a shortwave radio belonging to his brother Gerhard and used it to listen to nightly news broadcasts from the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)—a crime under Nazi law. Occasionally, two friends from church, Karl-Heinz Schnibbe and Rudolf (Rudi) Wobbe, joined him. Hübener soon began producing anti-Nazi leaflets that relayed information from the broadcasts alongside his own commentary. Using carbon paper and a pair of typewriters borrowed from the branch, Hübener made copies of these leaflets, which he, Schnibbe, and Wobbe tacked to Nazi Party bulletin boards, dropped on busy streets, and slipped into mailboxes.<sup>8</sup> Hübener soon recruited several other teenage acquaintances to help. Gerhard Düwer, who worked at the Hamburg Social Authority (*Sozialbehörde*), where he and Hübener were apprentices, helped to expand the distribution. Through an unknown connection, Hübener also arranged for a printer in Kiel to copy leaflets in larger numbers.<sup>9</sup> Over the course of 10 months, Hübener produced as many as 60 different leaflets challenging party rhetoric and disputing official accounts of the war. He also took direct aim at party officials. The Führer “will send you by the thousands into the fires in order to finish the crime he started,” Hübener wrote in one leaflet. “By the thousands your wives and children will become widows and orphans. And for nothing!”<sup>10</sup>

In February 1942, Gestapo agents arrested Hübener, Wobbe, Schnibbe, and Düwer on charges of various crimes under Nazi law, including “preparation to high treason.”<sup>11</sup> On August 11, during a trial lasting just over nine hours, the four were

tried before the three-member Special People's Court in Berlin.<sup>12</sup> All four were found guilty. Hübener was sentenced to death, while Wobbe, Schnibbe, and Düwer were sentenced to 4 to 10 years in labor camps. Hübener was put to death by guillotine on October 27, 1942.<sup>13</sup>

Shortly after Hübener's arrest, branch president Arthur Zander wrote "excommunicated" on Helmuth's membership record. However, district president Otto Berndt refused to countersign the action. Anthon Huck, a member of the European Mission presidency, provided a second signature. Several Church leaders later said they intended to distance the Church from Hübener to protect Latter-day Saints from the wrath of Nazi officials. After World War II ended, Hübener was posthumously reinstated in the Church and, in 1948, given temple ordinances by proxy.<sup>14</sup>

In the decades following World War II, Helmuth Hübener became a national hero in Germany. "Helmuth has become one of the best-known members of the German Resistance," Karl-Heinz Schnibbe remembered. "Hundreds of books and articles ... contain references to the Hübener Group, and Helmuth is a frequent character in major post-war German literary works."<sup>15</sup> Hübener was also memorialized by a youth center, school, and two streets in Hamburg, each bearing his name.<sup>16</sup> Since the 1940s, political, social, and religious groups have held various celebrations on January 8 (his birthday) or October 27 (his execution date) commemorating his

heroism. On January 8, 2020, the Plötzensee Prison, where Hübener was executed, now a reformatory school for boys, was renamed in his honor. <sup>17</sup>

## Church Resources

“Gedenken an Helmuth Hübener,” <https://presse-de.kirchejesuchristi.org/artikel/70-todestag-huebener>.

“Helmuth Hubener,” Latter-day Saints Channel: Legacy, episode 42, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/inspiration/latter-day-saints-channel/listen/series/legacy-audio/helmuth-hubener-episode-42>.

## Bibliography

*The following publications provide further information about this topic. By referring or linking you to these resources, we do not endorse or guarantee the content or the views of the authors.*

Karl-Heinz Schnibbe with Blair R. Holmes and Alan F. Keele, *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth against Hitler: The Story of the Helmuth Hübener Group*, 2nd ed. (Provo, Utah: Stratford Books, 2003).

Rudi Wobbe and Jerry Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 1992).

## Related Topics: Germany, World War II

### Notes

1. Erin Blakemore, “Meet the Youngest Person Executed for Defying the Nazis,” *History Stories*, Aug. 31, 2018, <https://www.history.com/news/meet-the-youngest-person-executed-for-defying-the-nazis>. Rudi Wobbe and Karl-Heinz Schnibbe published memoirs on their experiences resisting the Nazi regime alongside Hübener; see Rudi Wobbe and Jerry Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 1992), republished as *Three against Hitler* (American Fork, Utah: Covenant Communications, 1992); Karl-Heinz Schnibbe, Alan F. Keele, and Douglas F. Tobler, *The Price: The True Story of a Mormon Who Defied Hitler* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1984). Countless other books (fiction and nonfiction), articles, and essays have been written about Hübener.
2. People’s Court, Verdict, Document 52 in Blair R. Holmes and Alan F. Keele, eds. and trans., *When Truth Was Treason: German Youth against Hitler: The Story of the Helmuth Hübener Group*, 2nd ed. (Provo: Stratford Books, 2003), 219–20; District Court Hamburg, Arrest Warrant, Document 16 in Holmes and Keele, eds. and trans., *When Truth Was Treason*, 174–75; Rudolf Wobbe, Statement, Document 66 in Holmes and Keele, eds. and trans., *When Truth Was Treason*, 259–62; Wobbe and

- Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal*, 14. See also Topic: World War II.
3. Wobbe and Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal*, 14; Richard Lloyd Dewey, *Hübener vs. Hitler: A Biography of Helmuth Hübener, German Teenage Resistance Leader*, 2nd ed. (Provo: Academic Research Foundation, 2004), 1–2; Schnibbe, Keele, and Tobler, *The Price*, 20.
  4. Schnibbe, Keele, and Tobler, *The Price*, 20; Dewey, *Hübener vs. Hitler*, 5–6.
  5. See Dewey, *Hübener vs. Hitler*; David Conley Nelson, *Moroni and the Swastika: Mormons in Nazi Germany* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2015), 99–104. While Nelson claims that Church members’ support for party ideology went beyond “mere protection,” most eyewitnesses described a “reluctant participation” brought on by the desire to protect themselves, their families, and the Church from government intrusion, imprisonment, or worse. For example, see Otto Berndt, Statement, Document 65 in Holmes and Keele, eds. and trans., *When Truth Was Treason*, 257.
  6. Wobbe and Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal*, 28–32; Schnibbe, Keele, and Tobler, *The Price*, 22–24.
  7. Dewey, *Hübener vs. Hitler*, 23–24, 27–28, 61, 71–73; Wobbe and Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal*, 15, 31–32, 39; Schnibbe, Keele,

and Tobler, *The Price*, 16, 22.

8. Wobbe, Statement, 259; Schnibbe, Keele, and Tobler, *The Price*, 25–27; Wobbe and Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal*, 34–39.
9. Holmes and Keele, eds., *When Truth Was Treason*, 336n8.
10. Helmuth Hübener, “I’ve Calculated for Everything,” Document 42 in Holmes and Keele, eds. and trans., *When Truth Was Treason*, 208.
11. District Court Hamburg, Arrest Warrant, 174–75; Wobbe and Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal*, 66–67. “Gestapo” was short for *Geheime Staatspolizei* (“Secret State Police”).
12. Wobbe and Borrowman, *Before the Blood Tribunal*, 69–76; Schnibbe, Keele, and Tobler, *The Price*, 51–54.
13. People’s Court, Verdict, 219–31; Attorney General’s Office of the People’s Court, Report of Execution, 27 Oct. 1942, Document 62 in Holmes and Keele, eds. and trans., *When Truth Was Treason*, 241–42.
14. Berndt, Statement, 258–59. Otto Berndt explained: “This was done to avoid further difficulties with the [Nazi] party. The Saints who believed in the ideals of the New Germany ... did what they did because they believed it to be in the best interest of the Church and the country. Repentance and forgiveness has been manifested by all concerned after

repentance and forgiveness has been manifested by all concerned after the war” (Berndt, Statement, 258–59). See also Dewey, *Hübener vs. Hitler*, 174.

15. Schnibbe, Keele, and Tobler, *The Price*, ix. For other accounts relating to Hübener, see Holmes and Keele, eds. and trans., *When Truth Was Treason*. Hübener’s story has also appeared on stage, film, and television and in fiction written in German (for example, Günter Grass, *Örtlich Betäubt: Roman* [Berlin: Hermann Luchterhand, 1969]) and English (Susan Campbell Bartoletti, *Hitler Youth: Growing Up in Hitler’s Shadow* [New York: Scholastic, 2005] and *The Boy Who Dared* [New York: Scholastic, 2008]).
16. See <https://helmuthhuebener.de> .
17. Schnibbe, Keele, and Tobler, *The Price*, ix; “Schule der Berliner Jugendstrafanstalt wird Helmuth-Hübener-Schule,” <https://presse.de.kirchejesuchristi.org/artikel/schule-der-berliner-jugendstrafanstalt-wird-helmuth-huebener-schule>.