Introduction

The battle for Leningrad and the 872-day blockade of the city by German armies and their Finnish allies during the Second World War rank among the most horrific events in world history. Next to the Holocaust, the Leningrad siege was the greatest act of genocide in Europe during the Second World War, as Germany, and to a lesser extent Finland, tried to bombard and starve Leningrad into submission. No city ever suffered more over a comparable period of time than did Leningrad during its epic struggle to survive.[1] Among the Soviet population, somewhere between about 1.6 and 2.0 million perished within the city and in battles in the surrounding region between 1941 and 1944.[2] The lowest range of this estimate exceeds the total number of Americans, both military personnel and civilians, who have perished in all armed conflicts from 1776 through the current war in Afghanistan. The number of civilians who died from hunger, cold, and enemy bombardment within the blockaded territory or during and immediately following evacuation from it is reasonably estimated to be around 900,000.[3]

The siege of Leningrad is of historic significance for other reasons as well. Leningrad was strategically important for the USSR, especially during the first six months of the Soviet-German War.[4] If the German offensive toward the city had destroyed the Soviet capacity or will to put up resistance, Germany could have linked up with Finland, gained firm control along the Baltic, and committed additional hundreds of thousands of troops to the offensive against Moscow. In turn, had Germany then

quickly seized or encircled Moscow with these reinforcements, Soviet resistance might have ended. Germany then most likely would have stripped the USSR of industrial and military resources and turned its attention back to subduing Britain and at a minimum forcing Britain into a peace that would have recognized German hegemony on the continent.

Western studies of Soviet history have recently emphasized the profound and complex influences that the watershed experience of the war had on political and social life subsequently within the USSR.[5] In a general sense, the war's fundamental impact has long been recognized by survivors of the Leningrad siege. For many, it was the defining moment of their lives. How could the death of close to a million inhabitants not constitute a pivotal point in the life of a city? Practically every Leningrader lost a close relative in the siege. Untold thousands of wives were widowed, children orphaned, and lifelong residents of the city relocated thousands of miles away. Seemingly insignificant decisions had a long-lasting impact. Someone who shared a few ounces of bread during the starvation winter of 1941–42 became a friend ever afterwards. In the words of one *blokadnitsa,* the events of the siege were "driven into the life of our generation like wedges, splitting it into two halves: 'before the war' and 'after.'"[6]

In late autumn of 1983, when I was on the IREX academic exchange program in Leningrad, one evening my wife Nancy and I ate dinner in what was then the shabby Oktiabrskaia Hotel on Nevsky Prospect. It was a politically tense time. The Reagan administration had unveiled its Strategic Defense Initiative, NATO was in the process of deploying cruise missiles and Pershing IIs in Western Europe in response to deployed Soviet missiles, and Soviet air defense had recently shot down a South Korean jetliner, killing 269 people. General Secretary Yuri Andropov was convinced that the United States was planning for a nuclear first strike, and *Pravda* referred to the Reagan administration as the "second fascism." When we told the elderly coat check lady in the hotel's nearly empty restaurant that we were from the United States, she suddenly became very agitated, nearly hysterical, and repeatedly asked us through her sobbing why the U.S. government wanted war. She said that war was terrible, and she knew it first-hand. Her behavior was no act. The Soviet press had succeeded in thoroughly scaring a segment of the population, particularly those who had lived through the "Great Patriotic War." In postwar Leningrad, permanent reminders of the war abounded. Some were staggering in their enormity, such as the mass graves at the Piskaryovskoe Cemetery; others small and subtle—the flowers that were refreshed regularly at the simple sign along the north side of Nevsky not far from the Winter Palace that warned pedestrians that it was more dangerous there during an artillery attack than on the other side of the street.

The siege left its political and social imprint on the city in several ways. One's wartime record had a fundamental bearing on one's subsequent career possibilities and advancement.[7] In addition, Leningrad had become ethnically more Russian during the war after residents of German and Finnish descent were deported in 1941–42. Furthermore, it remained a predominantly female city until male evacuees and war veterans returned and people from other parts of the USSR moved in. The rebuilt city was decidedly more provincial and secondary to Moscow in importance, and this trend was accentuated following the execution of Leningrad's top political leaders in 1949–50 in what became known as the Leningrad Affair.[8] Moreover, in the rebuilt city, as elsewhere in the postwar USSR, new security measures were implemented to combat suspected espionage during the Cold War that might precede renewed aggression against the nation. For example, detailed maps of the city were no longer readily available. Maps of Soviet cities that were published for wide distribution after the war were deliberately falsified. Tourist maps of Leningrad from the 1980s distorted the contours of the harbor area.[9] Foreigners traveling to the USSR had to obtain visas for individual cities they wanted to visit, in contrast to less restricted travel that was possible at least up to late 1937.

Blockade Historiography

There is no shortage of books on the siege; however, the great majority of them, approximately four hundred, were published under strict censorship in Leningrad.[10] The first Soviet depiction of the siege was a documentary film from the summer of 1942, entitled *Leningrad in Battle*. This film marks the origin of the divergence between the evolving official view (often referred to as "myth") and popular memory.[11] Leningraders who viewed the film were overheard complaining that it did not sufficiently depict the hardships of life during the starvation winter (Document 58). The film did not lead directly to printed accounts of the siege. In fact, very little scholarly research was published in the Soviet Union on the topic until after Stalin's death. To Stalin and his Kremlin comrades the blockade was likely an embarrassing reminder of their inability to better defend the city, prevent mass starvation, and break the enemy's hold until early 1944. Following the purge of Leningrad's wartime leaders Aleksei Kuznetsov, Pyotr Popkov, and others, their Kremlin rivals and executioners were not about to draw attention to the role they played in the siege or the fate of the city they defended. The most important bit of information about the blockade that came to light prior to 1953 was a summary statement on mortality. At the Nuremburg trials in 1946, the Soviet government stated that 671,635 people had perished in the blockade zone.[12]

As part of his cultural "thaw," Nikita Khrushchev called for the publication of historical works that emphasized the decisive role of the popular masses in winning the war. In the words of historian Lisa Kirschenbaum, individual accounts of courage and suffering were "well suited to one of the chief aims of the state-sponsored war cult: impressing upon the postwar generation the sacrifices and heroism of their elders as well as the legitimacy of the Soviet state that engineered victory."[13] Victory in the war became perhaps the most common theme in Soviet publishing. Between the end of the war and the end of the Soviet Union, an estimated seventeen thousand books were published in the Soviet Union on the war experience, or an average of more than one book per day.[14] During the early Khrushchev years some document collections on the siege in party and state archives were opened to researchers and the first scholarly works appeared. D. V. Pavlov, who was in charge of food supply in Leningrad from the beginning of the siege to the end of January 1942, published *Leningrad v blokade* in 1958, albeit in a small number of copies. Using archival files and his own notes, he described the starvation of the winter of 1941–42, blaming it on mismanagement of food reserves during the summer of 1941, and defended the Nuremburg figure for deaths. (In several later editions of the book, he added further details and stood by his mortality figures against critics who claimed that they were too low.) In 1959 the first general study of the Leningrad blockade based on archival sources appeared: A. V. Karasev's *Leningradtsy v gody blokady, 1941–1943*.

Some of the state and party archival documentation that had been opened during the Khrushchev years was reclassified after his death, and few important archival-based studies of the siege period (with some exceptions)[15] were published in the Soviet Union after the mid-1960s. The most pervasive theme in scholarly works on the blockade as well as in popular accounts and memoirs was that of heroism. *Geroicheskii* was probably the most common adjective in the titles of Soviet-era blockade books. To be sure, true acts of heroism abounded during the siege. If no city ever suffered greater loss of life over a comparable period, perhaps no city ever witnessed more examples of resilience, courage, and self-sacrifice. Memoir literature includes many examples of strangers taking in orphans for the duration of the war. Mothers fed their own rations to their starving children. Svetlana Magaeva, a prominent medical researcher who survived the blockade as a child, described a mother and baby who had been found in a deserted flat: "The mother, emaciated by starvation, had bled profusely, having opened a vein in her arm. She had no milk, but had put her baby's mouth to the wound and it had greedily sucked its mother's blood. Help had arrived in time, and both mother and baby were saved."[16] Such examples could be multiplied many times over. Not long after Vladimir

CHAPTER 4

The Struggle to Survive: The Dying City

On 24 June 1941, a workshop cafeteria in the Kirov factory delayed serving lunch for over an hour because its shipment of bread had not arrived. An informant for the Kirovsky *raikom* overheard one worker say to another: "It's only the second day of the war and already there is no bread. If we fight for a year, we'll die of hunger."[1] The off-hand comment would become an eerie prophesy for many in half that time.

Leningrad had experienced food shortages prior to the German invasion, and food and livestock had been diverted from the city in the war's first months. As a result, Leningrad had only seventeen days of bread and grain on hand when the blockade began (Document 4). Germany targeted Leningrad's food supply. A recorded 700 incendiary bombs hit the Badaev food warehouses on 8 and 10 September at the beginning of the air blitz. The same month enemy aircraft sank several food-laden barges bound for Leningrad. However, in October divers were able to save 2,800 metric tons of sprouted grain, which were dried out, remilled, and mixed with good flour. The salvage effort was important, because, overall, little food arrived in the city by ship across Lake Ladoga before it froze over in November.[2] Stalin refused to authorize a massive airlift of food to the beleaguered city in the autumn, although between 14 and 28 November, during the month that Germany held Tikhvin, he improved the situation somewhat by authorizing thirty to fifty cargo planes per day to fly in a total of 1,200 metric tons of high calorie food. Nevertheless, the city was left in a desperate state by the start of winter.[3] The food shortage was compounded by similarly diminishing levels of coal and oil, which limited the use of machinery and generation of electrical power inside the blockade zone.

Daily bread rations were cut five times between 2 September and 20 November (see Appendix A). By the time of the last reduction, the *rabochii* ration had dropped from 800 to 250 grams, with office workers, dependents, and children receiving only 125 grams. Rations for bread and other foods (Appendix C) should have been reduced in August to save food in anticipation of later shortages. Another mistake was that food was sold in unrestricted quantities in as many as fifteen commercial restaurants until 11 November; those resources should have instead been directed into the rationing system.[4] The experience of food shortages during the Winter War should have made Leningrad's leaders more concerned during the summer of 1941 over the impending crisis and better trained to deal with it.

According to the distribution system, in addition to the daily bread ration, the population was supposed to receive monthly allotments of meat, cereals and macaroni, fish, sugar and candy, and fat. (Appendix B.) In reality, however, during the winter people rarely received anything except bread until the middle of February 1942. With few exceptions, meat was unavailable between the latter part of October and 14 February.[5] In late November informants reported that people stood on line for many hours for food products such as sausage, butter, and vermicelli that never arrived (Document 40). According to an NKVD report: "Beginning with the last ten days of December 1941, food ration cards are not issued. Aside from bread . . . the population receives no other products."[6] And, the bread that was available was in very short supply. From the start of the blockade, the city was scoured for untapped grain sources and for edible substitutes. In early September about 5,000 tons of oats used to feed army horses were remilled for bread. Around the same time some 8,000 tons of malt were removed from breweries that were shut down and given to the flour mills, which ground it up for bread filler. (At the Stenka Razin brewery, aside from malt, 100 tons of grain, almost five tons of sugar and molasses, and six tons of rusks were discovered by the NKVD between 28 November and 8 December.) The malt gave the bread a distinctly unpleasant taste. By early November barley flour was exhausted and the malt additive was running low. Workers at the city harbor suggested using cottonseed oilcake, which was used for ship fuel. It had never been used as food as it was believed to contain a poisonous substance, gossypol. However, baking the oilcake eliminated that problem. After being milled, the oilcake became a major additive.[7] Leningrad's rumor mill quickly seized hold of and circulated the secret information on oilcake, as revealed by party informants in Document 40.

By mid-November, the VSLF had to confront the grim reality of the dire food shortage. On 13 November, it cut bread rations for the first time since 1 October, and then had to reduce them again exactly one week later. On

19 November, the VSLF under the signatures of Zhdanov, Kuznetsov, and Khozin ordered city bakers to use "edible cellulose as an admixture for baking bread" to replace diminishing grain reserves.[8] *Gorkom* secretary P. G. Lazutin coordinated a group of scientists who endeavored to use a hydrolysis process to make the cellulose from wood and cotton edible.[9] In short order, they claimed to have conquered the task.[10] The processed cellulose added to the volume and weight of the bread; it helped fill people's stomachs, and was therefore deemed "edible." The filler, however, had no nutritional value and was not digestible. After triggering the sensation of having eaten something, the cellulose passed through the digestive tract, producing some abdominal discomfort, before being eliminated from the body. By the end of 1941, 6,059 tons of malt, 4,511 tons of oil cake, and 490 tons of "edible" cellulose from wood and cotton were among the substitute ingredients baked into the bread. During the second half of November and the first half of December 1941, the city's bread consisted of 60 percent rye, oat, and barley flour and 40 percent of the various additives. At this time, oilcake made up 15 percent of the bread and cellulose 5 percent.[11] Yelena Kochina, a mother in her mid-thirties who managed to survive the hungry winter with her husband and infant daughter, wrote in her diary on 20 November: "The bread contains all kinds of junk and only a little flour."[12]

Never before in history had so many people in one city depended so heavily on one source of food. Yet, Leningrad had many people who had previously survived starvation during the Revolution and Civil War era (19,516 died of hunger in Petrograd between 1917 and 1923),[13] in the widespread famine of 1932–34, the smaller famines of the winters of 1936–37 and 1940–41,[14] or in any of a number of forced-labor camps. The more experienced and savvy among the populace divided their meager rations into small parts and ate them slowly, turning the bread around in their mouths for a long time before swallowing it. In this way, they took nourishment, as minuscule as it was, at even intervals and created the illusion of eating larger portions.

Starving people imagined the foods they would like to eat. Valia Chepko wrote down her food fantasy:

· Document 47 ·

The fantasy menu of one starving Leningrader, Valia Chepko, during the winter of 1941–42, GMMOBL op. 1, d. 7.

My dream. If I don't die, but live to a good life: I will never alter this menu, because I have learned of starvation by bitter experience. Menu after starvation, if I remain alive.

First course.

Soups. Potato with mushrooms
Oat
Pearl barley
Fermented cabbage soup with meat

Second course.

Kasha: Oats and butter
Millet
Pearl barley
Buckwheat
Rice
Semolina

Meat dishes: Cutlets with purée
Sausages with purée or with kasha

I don't even dream about this, because I won't survive to it!

Chepko died in February. Bread itself became the object of fantasy and extreme endearment as the starving referred to it in diminutive form. Kochina wrote in her diary on 2 January:

Bread!

We almost never talk about it, but we think about it constantly.

Bread!

Soft, fragrant, with a crunchy crust. The thought of it drives us crazy.

It tastes better than chocolate, it tastes better than cakes, it tastes better than sweet rolls.

We don't want anything the way we want bread.

If only we could eat our fill of it!

If only we could just once more plunge our teeth into its redolent warmth, its fragrant body, and tear it, chomp it, eat it without stopping, feel it move down the gullet, distend the stomach, and fill the body with a blissful satiation.

Bread!

We dream about it passionately, we dream night and day, we dream with every cell of our bodies.

Why don't I have a cow's stomach? I could chew the same crust all day—belch, chew, and belch again. That would be wonderful!

Bread!

The Russian's strength is contained in it. No, even more—life itself is contained in it! The Russian peasant understood this. That is why he called it *khlebushka*.[15]

We have only now realized the full meaning of *khlebushka*.

It sounds like music to us now.[16]

V МАРТ 1942

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пятница

— Родился С. М. Киров, верный ученик и соратник товарища Сталина (злодейски убит троцкистско-бухаринскими бандитами, агентами фашизма, 1 декабря 1934 г.).
— Взятие Красной Армией Новороссийска.
— лет со дня открытия XI съезда РКП(б), последнего съезда партии с участием В. И. Ленина. Товарищ Сталин по предложению Ленина избран генеральным секретарем ЦК РКП(б) (1922).

XXV МАРТ 1942

31

вторник

1727 — Умер Исаак Ньютон, английский математик, астроном и физик (род. в 1643 г.).

XXV АПРЕЛЬ 1942

3

пятница

60 лет со дня казни царским правительством С. Н. Халтурина, одного из выдающихся русских революционеров-рабочих (1882).

In his diary, Nikolai Vasiliev tersely described his mother's decline and death.

"The authors succeed in producing a unique and interesting appreciation of the lives of Leningraders while subject to the siege, largely because of the unprecedented breadth and depth of their source materials, their refreshingly candid and balanced treatment of the subjects they address, and the well-chosen documents they use to illustrate their points."

DAVID M. GLANTZ,
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