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Michael Jones, *Leningrad: State of Siege*. New York: Basic Books, 2008. Pp. xxii, 322. ISBN 978-0-465-01153-7.

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In *Leningrad: State of Siege*, British military historian Michael Jones mainly recounts the effects of the German siege on the people of Leningrad. Beginning in September 1941, it caused the starvation of hundreds of thousands of Leningraders, especially during the winter of 1941–2. For seventeen months, until mid-January 1943, the Germans succeeded in blockading the city, cutting it off—except for an “ice road” over Lake Ladoga—from the rest of the country. Even after the blockade was broken, the siege continued another year, until late January 1944, when Soviet troops pushed the Germans back far enough to end it. Jones suggests that the total number of Leningrad deaths caused by the 872-day siege exceeded one million.

Although Chapter One, of eleven chapters plus an epilogue, deals with the German advance, readers hoping to learn much of German and Soviet military plans and operations regarding this long siege will be disappointed. And despite Jones’s mention of the effect on morale at Leningrad of the Soviet success at the Battle of Stalingrad, in general he does not write much about the larger German–Soviet conflict and the role played by changing military supplies, weather, or other factors. Readers wishing more detail on such aspects, especially military operations, should turn instead to previously published works like David M. Glantz’s *The Battle for Leningrad, 1941–1944*.¹

To mention what the book does not focus on, however, is not meant as a negative criticism; for Jones does well what he sets out to do. As displayed in his earlier work on the Stalingrad campaign,² his main strength is in describing the experiences of those being attacked or besieged, whether soldiers or civilians. Here we read mainly about civilians. Supplementing the narrative are maps, a timeline, endnotes, a bibliography, and thirty-five illustrations, including drawings done during the siege. The author’s main sources are Leningraders he interviewed, published personal accounts, and various materials from the Blockade Museum—established in 1989, before the city had reverted to its old name, St. Petersburg. Jones frequently quotes the Leningraders themselves (and occasionally the German besiegers). The following is from a citizen’s diary entry:

February [1942] has begun—the sixth month of the siege. Everywhere people are dying: cold and hunger are paralyzing the will to live. There are no means of transport or communication and such conveniences as light, water, electricity and gas have passed into the realm of legend. If you stay on the streets for a couple of hours

¹ Drexel, PA: Casemate, 2007.

² *Stalingrad: How the Red Army Triumphed* (Lawrence: U Pr of Kansas, 2002). For an excellent brief account of the siege in many of its aspects, see W. Bruce Lincoln, *Sunlight at Midnight: St. Petersburg and the Rise of Modern Russia* (NY: Basic Books, 2000), 268–308, available online at [Tours-SPB <www.miwsr.com/rd/0914.htm>](http://www.miwsr.com/rd/0914.htm).

you come across dozens of dead people, lying, solitary in the snow, and cartloads of corpses. The prices for foodstuffs on the black market are astronomical, and people are eating the most appalling filth, from joiner's-glue jelly to cuts from the soft parts of corpses. The emaciated inhabitants of the city, driven by utter despair, are turning into savages (212).

Savage behavior there surely was among Leningraders—cannibalism, theft, hoarding, murder, and other atrocities. No surprise under the appalling conditions, but there were also numerous acts of self-sacrifice and quiet heroism—an old professor, weak and frail from lack of food, giving half his bread ration to a small girl; starving people avoiding the temptation of snatching loaves of bread from an overturned cart because a young girl tells them she is taking the bread to a hospital; a woman weak from hunger dragging her heavy double bass on a sledge through the snow to participate in a concert recital to cheer up hospital patients.

Less excusable than the Leningraders' acts of savagery was the behavior of Hitler and German strategists who proclaimed that "Leningrad must starve to death" (157), deliberately targeted hospitals, kindergartens, a Red Cross boat, and civilian apartments, and planned to kill Leningrad civilians, including women and children, rather than let them surrender to German forces. As so often happened in the mass killings of the twentieth century, such behavior was first justified by dehumanizing the enemy, depicting them as subhumans (*Untermenschen* in Nazi propaganda). Hitler's racist ideas and linking of communists with Jews led to the designation of the Soviet enemy by such terms as "vermin."

Jones also provides many examples of dastardly or incompetent behavior on the part of Leningrad military and civilian leaders, especially Marshal Voroshilov and Communist Party head Andrei Zhdanov. While most hungry and starving Leningraders were open targets of German shells and bombs, Zhdanov obsessively camouflaged his Smolny Institute headquarters and kept it abundantly supplied with food: even during the terrible winter of 1941–2, there was "for top party officials ... a plentiful stream of bread, sugar, cutlets, small pies and other cooked dishes" (196). Zhdanov, with help from the NKVD (political police), also diligently worked to quash Leningraders' criticism of himself and other city leaders.

Although Jones emphasizes that Marshal Zhukov, who took over military command in Leningrad from the incompetent Voroshilov in September 1941, was a more effective leader, he also made some costly mistakes before soon being sent to command the defense of Moscow. According to Jones, only General Govorov, who oversaw the offensive that broke the German siege, displayed consistent first-rate military leadership. Of Stalin's role we read little, and the book leaves the impression that ending the Leningrad siege was never his top military priority.

One of the most heartening aspects of this often depressing account of great suffering is the importance of the arts and humanities to Leningraders during the siege. In the midst of our contemporary economic crisis, when the "value" of these disciplines is being questioned anew on university campuses, Jones often shows how vital they can be for sustaining people in the hardest of times and enriching their lives in all seasons. Although the Soviets tried to control culture for political purposes, Leningraders' deep love of worthwhile music, drama, and literature often lifted their spirits. On one occasion, as people were hud-

dled in a bomb shelter that “reverberated and shook” from German bombs, “all of a sudden, one ... old man got out his violin and began to play He conjured up the most beautiful melody.” A woman observing the scene “was utterly entranced, and she recaptured the moment for her diary: ‘He is a really courageous person, and now I don’t feel frightened either. There are explosions all around us, and he is playing the violin as if he is leading us to safety The terror was somehow less powerful—it had lost its grip on us. It was *outside* us now; and inside we had our music, and everyone felt its power. There was a most extraordinary sense of belonging” (151).

Another woman recalled that many people “used to read *War and Peace* in besieged Leningrad Tolstoy had said the last word about courage, about people doing their bit in a people’s war And no one doubted the adequacy of Tolstoy’s response to life. The reader would say to himself: ‘Right—now I’ve got the proper feeling about this. So then, this is how it should be” (215).

Leningrad poets such as Anna Akhmatova and Olga Berggolts, both of whom spent the early part of the siege in their beloved city, inspired Leningraders with their poems carried over Radio Leningrad. About Berggolts’ poetry Jones writes: “It was read to the city as an act of love, and it touched Leningrad’s inhabitants deeply. It took them away from the unremitting hardship of the siege, however briefly, and gave a vision of something greater in its place. ‘Her voice united us,’ Alexei Pavlovsky said, ‘She invoked the courage of Leningrad, a courage that could counter the deaths of hundreds of thousands of our citizens” (233–4).

Leningrad actors put on plays not only in theaters but also before soldiers and sailors at various locations. The director of the Musical Comedy Theater observed that after the siege had begun attendance at his theater rose despite the appalling conditions of late 1941. One actress in a production of *The Three Musketeers* recalled that in the freezing building one of the musketeers, weakened by hunger and cold, died, leaving only two musketeers to finish the performance.

Future opera star Galina Vishnevskaya recalled attending Tchaikovsky’s opera *Queen of Spades* in a cold theater: “The thrill I felt was not simply the pleasure of the performance—it was pride in my resurrected people, in the great art which compelled those human shadows—the emaciated musicians, singers, the audience—to come together in that great opera house, beyond whose walls air-raid sirens wailed and shells exploded. Truly, man does not live by bread alone” (253).

The most famous musical performance, however, occurred on 9 August 1942: Dmitri Shostakovich’s *Seventh* [Leningrad] *Symphony*. The story of its Leningrad debut—it had been performed earlier in Moscow and other cities, including London and New York—has often been told, but Jones recounts it well, mixing in quotations from participants.

The Philharmonic Hall blazed with light “We were stunned by the number that had turned out,” trombonist Mikhail Parfionov said. “Some were in suits; some had come straight from the front. Most were haggard and emaciated. And we realized that these people were not just starving for food, but starving for music” The conductor [Karl Eliasberg] lifted his baton—and the symphony began. In the city’s apartments and along the front-line trenches, civilians and soldiers gathered around their transmitter dishes relaying the radio broadcast of the concert [At

the end] “people just stood and cried,” Eliasberg recalled, “They knew that this was not a passing episode but the beginning of something. We heard it in the music. The concert hall, the people in their apartments, the soldiers on the front—the whole city had found its humanity. And in that moment, we triumphed over the soulless Nazi war machine” (260–1).

In summary, *Leningrad: State of Siege* emphasizes not war aims, strategy, tactics, and battles, but the struggle of Leningraders to survive under incredibly harsh conditions. Although many of them did not, others did, often demonstrating the great depths of the human spirit.