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of Leningrad by Alexander Werth, New Republic, November 13, 1944.

New Republic
The City of Peter and Lenin

Leningrad, by Alexander Werth. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 189 pages. \$2.50.

IT IS A RARE THING to read a book about the siege of a great and classical city and to find upon finishing it that the city, as a city, together with the author writing of it, have receded into the shadows, leaving in their places a picture of the unconquerable spirit of free men. Werth flew into Leningrad in September, 1943, after it had been under siege more than two years, and remained five days. In February of the present year, after the Nazis were on the run before the armed forces and civilians of Leningrad, he returned with a group of correspondents. His position was unusual because he had been born in Leningrad when it was called St. Petersburg, and had lived there for the first sixteen years of his life. His father, a Russian, and his British mother appear to have fled with him to England during the Revolution, and this fact, combined with his childhood memories, perhaps accounts for the undercurrent of love and humility that flows through the book.

The story he tells of the Gethsemane of his native city is both appalling and inspiring, and one's constant thought while reading it is what an American city of equal size, say

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Chicago, might do under similar circumstances. In the first desperate winter of 1941-42, the Nazis and Finns threw an unbroken steel ring about it. Their planes destroyed heating and water systems and food stores, so that for months the civilian population worked and lived on nothing but 125 grams of bread a day while the Red Army fought on 350 grams. The soldiers were forbidden to share their inadequate supplies with civilians, and the civilians refused any offers.

As the Nazi armies first approached Leningrad, the city organized nine full divisions of workers, taken directly from their jobs. These divisions, together with the Red Army and the sailors and marines of the Baltic fleet, fought desperate rear-guard actions on the plains to the east—and few of the workers' divisions survived. Women and girls took their places in the factories; 65 percent of the workers in the Kirov munitions plant were women, mainly young girls. The plant was under constant bombardment from Nazi fortifications two miles away. While the armed troops fought in the approaches to Leningrad, 400,000 women, girls and children built the gigantic network of fortifications around the city. The Red Army finally cracked the Nazi blockade in the Lake Ladoga sector in the spring of 1942, and built a railway across its frozen waters to transport food to the starving city.

Werth has told his story by facts, statistics, dates, interspersed with talks with soldiers, teachers, writers, librarians, factory workers, children, architects, hotel maids and officials. Some people talked quietly, others with cold, level voices filled with unmitigated hatred. Werth once questioned a roomful of thirteen-year-old boys, asking one where he thought the Germans would retreat to, since, at the time, Smolensk had fallen. The boy replied: "They will retreat all the way to hell!"

This hatred on the part of its children was typical of all of Leningrad. No one cowered before the Nazis. Skilled workers who had previously been evacuated to the new munitions plants in the Urals kept asking to be permitted to return to the Kirov munitions works. Blue-eyed Ukrain-

ian and Siberian soldiers who had fought throughout the siege had become proud Leningraders. Out of this spirit arose songs of liberation. Shostakovich attempted to capture this spirit in his Seventh Symphony, written during the siege. Because of the paper shortage, only 10,000 copies of Vera Inber's poem, "Pulkovo Meridian," also written under the siege, were published. These were sold out in two days, after which the "black market" price for a copy ranged between 400 and 500 grams of bread.

Leningrad, Werth writes, has a peculiar share in Russia's glory, but also a human greatness peculiarly its own. Many of its citizens told him, with a touch of regret and apology, that the city might be liberated by a Red Army driving to the Baltic from Nevel and Vitebsk. There is great poetic justice in the fact that the city was finally liberated by the troops of the Leningrad front.

With the possible exception of Sevastopol, Werth believes that Leningrad soldiers and civilians were more completely united in their struggle and common fate than in any other place. Considering Moscow and Stalingrad, and the thousands of towns and villages whose people burned their homes and took to the forests as partisans, it might be said rather that Leningrad became the embodied spirit of the Soviet people.

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