Panel: “Heresy and War”

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Title: “Leningrad Under Siege: The Will to Survive the Nazi Onslaught”
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My name is Alex Welker. I am a sophomore majoring in History at IPFW and presenting at this conference is the first honor of note I have received with any school relevance that was not made during an arts and crafts portion of the day. I really enjoy studying history, especially war and battlefield strategies, and I hope to present several more papers at future conferences.

Abstract

The perfidious Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 led to some of the deadliest battles seen throughout the entire Second World War. One such conflict was the siege of Leningrad, which began on September 8, 1941 when Leningrad was completely surrounded by German and Danish troops. While the Soviets managed to create a small opening in the siege by January 1943 and supplies were able to slowly trickle in, the siege itself was not fully lifted until January 27, 1944. For almost 900 days, the civilian population endured some of the worst living conditions imaginable. From weeks of constant bombardment to rationing so severe that “non-essentials” were subsisting on merely 300 grams of bread each day, life during the blockade was truly difficult. The Soviet officials in charge of the defense of Leningrad severely mismanaged the situation with failed evacuation attempts that led children of Leningrad directly into the path of the Germans, inadequate preparations for a siege when the inevitability of the siege became apparent which led to major stores of food being destroyed, and lack of supplies or warning about the siege to prevent the appearance of concern in the capabilities of the Red Army. Despite the seemingly endless hardships they experienced during the siege, the people of Leningrad never gave up and kept going despite mass starvation, constant bombardment, rumored cannibalism, and one of the coldest winters ever seen in Leningrad. Soviet propaganda claimed the population endured because their true Soviet spirit gave them the strength to carry on, which pointedly ignores the numerous anti-government protests that occurred in response to allegations that Soviet officials were hoarding food while the people starved. It is hard to say whether the people of Leningrad endured the terrible siege because they had a deep love for their Motherland, or because they were stuck in the surrounded city with no other options. They did not know whether they could survive the siege, but one thing was certain: to surrender was to die at the hands of the Nazis, to survive was to have the Nazis die by the hands of Leningrad.

Bibliographical Note

Goure’s The Siege of Leningrad while being fairly old still contains very useful information and was often cited in several other sources I used for the project. Two other sources that provided very important views of the siege were Leningrad in the Days of the Blockade by Aleksandr Fadeyev and A Book of the Blockade edited by Ales Adamovich and Daniil Aleksandrovich Granin. These two sources were incredibly important for looking into the differences one would
find in a memoir versus something written and published either during or immediately after the siege. All of the sources were useful for filling out a completed picture of the siege and a special note should be made that had I not had access to the IU library system, I would not have had access to most of these sources and the paper may have not been possible.


