

4. From War and Remembrance, by Herman Wouk (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1978), 2:612, 617-618:

Yevlenko stood up and offered his left hand. "I'll let you know. We'll probably go first to Leningrad, where—I may say—no correspondent, and I believe no foreigner, has been for over a year. It is still under siege, as you know, but the blockade has been broken. There are ways through that are not too dangerous. It is my birthplace, so I welcome a chance to go there. I have not been there since my mother died in the siege."

"I'm sorry," Pug said awkwardly. "Was she killed in the bombardment?"

"No. She starved."

Starved.

It may have been the worst siege in the history of the world. It was a siege of Biblical horror; a siege like the siege of Jerusalem, when, as the Book of Lamentations tells, women boiled and ate their children. When the war began, Leningrad was a city of close to three million. By the time Victor Henry visited it, there were about six hundred thousand people left. Half of those who were gone had been evacuated; the other half had died. Gruesome tales persist that not a few were eaten. But at the time there was little outside awareness of the siege and the famine, and to this day much of the story remains untold, the records sealed in the Soviet archives or destroyed. Probably nobody knows, within a hundred thousand people, how many died of hunger, or the diseases of hunger, in Leningrad. The figure falls between a million and a million and a half. . . .

Vera began to talk about the siege. The worst thing, she said, had been when the snow had started to melt last spring, late in March. Bodies had begun to appear everywhere, bodies frozen and unburied for months, people who had just fallen down in the streets and died. The garbage, the rubble, and the wreckage, emerging with the thousands of bodies, had created a ghastly situation, a sickening smell everywhere, a big threat of an epidemic. But the authorities had severely organized the people, and a gigantic cleanup had saved the city. Bodies had been dumped in enormous mass graves, some identified, many not.

"You see, whole families had starved," Vera said. "or only one would be left, sick or apathetic. People wouldn't be missed. Oh, you could tell when a person was getting ready to die. It was the apathy. If you could get them to a hospital, or put them to bed and try to feed them, it might help. But they would say they were all right, and insist on going out to work. Then they would sit or lie down on the sidewalk, and die in the snow."