

Hunger and War: Food Provisioning in the Soviet Union during World War II. Ed.

Wendy Z. Goldman and Donald Filtzer. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015. xvii, 371 pp. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Figures. Tables. \$35.00, paper; \$85.00, hard bound.

The superb essays in this collection explore the greatest internal challenge that the Soviet Union faced in its total war with Nazi Germany: how to feed itself after the enemy occupied its best farmland. Massive death by starvation occurred not only in besieged Leningrad, where perhaps 800,000 perished. In their introductory essay, the editors, who are two of the most prodigious scholars of the Stalin era, note simply: “Most of the country went hungry” (17), although the extent of hunger in unoccupied territory varied considerably. This work is the first major study in English based solidly on Soviet archival sources to describe the extent of the starvation, how the food-supply system worked, and popular reactions to the functioning of that system. Each of the five formidable essays, which average sixty pages in length, articulates original themes in cutting-edge research.

Wendy Goldman’s essay on civilian food supply develops one of the book’s core themes: the food situation was far worse than historians have previously recognized and that although the state provided most of the available food to urban dwellers, the rations by themselves could not sustain life. The state had to supplement the highly centralized rationing system with a “decentralized system of subsidiary farms, local purchasing, gardens, and collective farm markets” that relied on “individual participation” (46–47). Her interpretation modifies the central thesis of William Moskoff’s book, *The Bread of Affliction: The Food Supply in the USSR during World War II*, which was published in 1990 before Soviet archives opened and which placed more emphasis on the state simply handing over some responsibility to civilians to feed themselves. Goldman contends that the decentralized components of food supply were actually “carefully planned and implemented by a powerful organizational network of party, soviet, and union organizations” (55). Moreover, she asserts that even though “unofficial markets popped up everywhere,” and “food theft was ubiquitous,” the state’s overall food policy “proved remarkably effective in organizing scarce resources and promoting popular support” (45, 83, 84). One question that her conclusion prompts is whether this perceived effectiveness suggests a partial *post facto* justification of the brutal imposition of collectivization in the 1930s.

Donald Filtzer’s chapter is a sophisticated examination of starvation mortality in unoccupied industrial regions of the Russian republic (RSFSR) of the USSR, especially the Urals. He demonstrates that while food consumption was lowest in 1942, the number of starvation deaths (not counting those in Leningrad) did not peak until 1943, due to the delayed effects of prolonged hunger. Among other things, he shows that infant mortality was “astronomically high” in 1942 (269); relatively few women died of starvation; the state tried to disguise starvation as a cause of death in its record-keeping; and that tuberculosis was the disease most closely associated with starvation. He provides a very rough estimate of up to 340,000 starvation deaths in urban areas of unoccupied territory of the RSFSR, excluding Leningrad. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of Filtzer’s essay is his attempt to assess the significance of Lend-Lease food aid. He states that nearly two-thirds of it arrived after July 1943 and calculates that it fed the entire Red Army for 509 days. He contends that from the latter part of 1943, the Red Army “could not have fed its soldiers adequately” without the allied assistance (327). In 1944, urban civilians began to benefit significantly from Lend-Lease food, and during the latter half of that year, it helped to end starvation among them almost entirely. Filtzer concludes that the state faced “agonizing dilemmas” in allocating limited food resources, and that millions of industrial work-

ers who persevered in manufacturing munitions demonstrated “enormous heroism” (332–33).

Alexis Peri has mined a treasure trove of 100 unpublished and twenty published diaries to illumine the inner thoughts of Leningrad’s emaciated *blokadniki*, in particular as they waited in food lines or ate in canteens. Her findings are deeply disturbing. The diarists almost uniformly emphasized social enmity, not camaraderie. Leningraders sized up each other in crowded settings and heaped scorn in their journals on food workers, local party officials, and anyone else nearby who appeared to have some food advantage that they lacked. Peri’s most important discovery is that a significant disparity exists between diaries and memory-based accounts of the blockade. The latter contain examples of social animosity but also include many instances of altruism and cooperation, which are rarely found in the diaries. Peri’s forthcoming book promises to make major contributions to our understanding of the popular mood of besieged Leningraders as well as the function and utility of the diary as a primary source.

Rebecca Manley’s contribution focuses on the term “nutritional dystrophy” (*distrofiia alimentarnaia*), which was introduced in Leningrad in December 1941. She argues that “the term represented not an obfuscation of . . . ‘starvation,’ but rather a new understanding of that condition” (208) because, although she acknowledges that starvation remained a sensitive political subject, it drew attention to the source of the people’s affliction. She traces how the new term spread quickly (and even acquired a popular pejorative meaning as in “moral dystrophy”) and became the heading under which medical experts could classify starvation victims and treat them.

Brandon Schechter illustrates in great detail how the Red Army was supplied with food from soup to kasha to vodka, although he leaves discussion of Lend-Lease food to Filtzer. Soldiers generally received rations that were larger and of better quality than those of civilians; however, like civilians, soldiers depended on local food supplies and in rear areas often worked as farmers. For civilians and military personnel, the size of the ration was pegged to their importance to the war effort, and food supply in both sectors was plagued by widespread theft.

Hunger and War broadens our horizons on a crucial dimension of the Soviet-German War. Indiana University Press has done an admirable job in producing the book, which will prove valuable to researchers and as assigned reading for students.

RICHARD BIDLACK

Washington and Lee University

Stalingrad: The City that Defeated the Third Reich. By Jochen Hellbeck. Trans. Christopher Tauchen and Dominic Bonfiglio. New York: Public Affairs, 2015. viii, 500 pp. Notes. Index. Illustrations. Photographs. Maps. \$29.99, hard bound.

Compared to twenty-five years ago, today’s historian of the Great Patriotic War has access to a large volume of rich personal testimony of the experiences of Soviet soldiers—from the many candid memoirs and diaries published from the late 1980s onwards in Russia, to the vast library of personal testimonies collected by Russian historians such as Artem Drabkin. A growing body of this material has been translated into English. Jochen Hellbeck’s *Stalingrad: The City that Defeated the Third Reich* adds to this bank of testimony. In this work, Hellbeck has edited and collated personal testimonies collected by a Soviet historical commission working in Stalingrad towards the end of the fighting there in early 1943 and in its immediate aftermath. Ten