The Elizabethan qualities of the Russian people have made a profound impression on IRIS MORLEY who, as war correspondent, has spent a year among them. She here presents the horrors of war in that stoic country. But her main theme, almost lyrical in tone, is the poetry, vitality and innate love of beauty which to-day are living characteristics in

RUSSIA – *Legend of This Century*

(Broadcast in the BBC's Home and Overseas Services)

This is Marshal Rokossovsky; he could well be the Red Army officer "of tremendous natural authority" described in this article

THERE are two things that I shall remember as long as I can remember anything; first, what the war has meant in Russia, and, secondly, the tremendous vitality and vigour of the people—that curious sense you get in Russia of living among characters out of the plays of Shakespeare or Marlowe—that quality, hard to define perhaps, which we mean, I think, when we say Elizabethan.

Since I have come home, several people have asked me questions about how the Russians live—what their houses and clothes and food are like, their schools, and that sort of thing. Some people have even asked me, "Are the Russians human?" But no one has said, "What is the war like there?" And that would seem a strange omission to a Russian, because, for the last three years the war has been the one terrible and fundamental fact of life for every Soviet man, woman and child.

Just over a year ago, when I had been in Russia exactly two days, we correspondents were taken to Leningrad. It seemed very exciting. This city had withstood the most terrible siege in history, and we were going there. It was bitterly cold, and as we drove through the squares, vast and deserted, I saw the snow lying like blocks of tumbled masonry. I suppose, till then, I had kept a sort of romantic picture in my mind of what an heroic city is like when it is freed, imagining that people rejoice. No one was rejoicing in Leningrad.

There was no traffic to disturb the the buildings, that seemed tremendous and sombre in the winter light, and the few people in the streets looked as if they were still withdrawn in the world they had lived in for two years behind those empty windows. I realised, then, that without any experience of my own to act as even an elementary measuring rod, it was impossible for the imagination really to grasp how they *had* lived—the starvation, the darkness, the cold—but, ever afterwards, when I have seen the sea-green ribbon of the Leningrad medal on anyone's bosom—perhaps a girl in a cotton dress walking in a Moscow park—I have looked at him or her with more respect than I would at the wearer of any other decoration in the world. I can imagine what it means.

Buildings Blackened and Gutted

You have heard how the palaces of Peterhof and Tsarkoye Selo were destroyed Imagine if Hampton Court, Windsor Castle, the Tower of London—in fact, all our historic buildings—were compressed together in one area, as were the palaces of Leningrad, how great would be our loss if they were totally destroyed. And one could picture how lovely they had been; how the rose red, and deep blue, and yellow, and white of their baroque extravagance, the groves and parterres, the water theatres and pavilions had been, in that icy air, like the mirage of a fairy story. And now they are blackened and gutted, the fountains ripped up, the trees cut down.

That is one city. Three months later I was in the Crimea. It was May and very beautiful; rather, if you can imagine it, like a mixture of Greece and North Wales. The lilac was out, and up in the mountains primroses were growing near the last of the melting snow. We had been driving all day in jeeps, and it was afternoon when we crossed the gloomy chalk hills near Sevastopol, where the historic battles for the Crimea have always been fought.

It was strange to hear familiar names like Mackenzie Heights and Inkerman, and to see dead horses still lying on the field of Balaclava—as if something had gone wrong and we had got back into the past by mistake. Then we reached the coast and looked across to Sevastopol.

At first sight, it looked as one might have expected: a great port, a great city, lying between the hills and the water, with its buildings silhouetted against the sky. And then, as you looked again, you saw that it was not that at all. You remember those Edgar Allan Poe stories; how someone looks at a beautiful human face, and beneath their eyes the flesh withers, and it is nothing but a skull. Well, it was like that.

When the fighting is over these partisan girls of the Soviet are interested in feminine clothes, says Iris Morley

A city can turn to a skeleton as well as a human being and that is what had happened to Sevastopol, which is ninety-seven per cent. destroyed. We explored the ruins, and there is literally nothing but the shells of the houses. Grass was growing deep in the streets, and the whole place was silent and abandoned, rather as I imagine the Roman towns in Britain must have looked when the Saxons found them.

The Theatre Still Flourishes

Devastation in Russia is on this scale. Over vast areas people are living in the earth in dug-outs. When one talks of reconstruction one has got to see it against that background. Shelter against the winter, water, heat—if the people can get these going, then that is reconstruction. And given priority with these things—considered as important—are libraries, schools, music, dancing, the theatre—the things that make people want to live.

The one thing in Russia which war economy has not touched, no matter how cold and hungry people were—and a year ago most Russians were hungry—the one thing that is maintained in all its glory, is the theatre. People have needed something like that.

This winter, people are getting the full amount on their ration cards, and there is enough to eat. Last winter they were not always fulfilled, and people were hungry. Then, black bread, a little American egg-powder and a very small amount of fat—not butter or margarine—helped out with scanty vegetables, were all that the average adult had to live on.

As there were no cafes or restaurants open in Moscow at that time—there are a few now—this diet could not be supplemented by even so much as a cup of tea. Small things like vitamin pills, cod-liver oil, aspirin, the sort of things we can buy at our chemists—you just cannot get. Soap was very scarce, and there was not—and still is not—any basic clothes ration. People went on wearing what they had, and those who literally had no shoes or coat would be given a permit to buy where they work.

Nothing Unfeminine About Girl Partisans

Growing children and women mind most. I remember talking to a girl partisan who had come to choose a garment from a wonderful selection of clothes sent out by a British relief organisation. There were some lovely Harris tweed coats which I thought she might like, but she said, "Do English women really wear such coarse, ugly stuff?" Then she said, sighing. "This is what I really want," and she pulled out a green and gold tissue evening dress, which incidentally shows, I think, that there is nothing unfeminine about being a partisan!

But these are minor sufferings, not really suffering at all compared with what has happened to many Russians. Once at a Suvorov Academy—and I may say that Suvorov Academies are not the old cadet schools revived, but free Government schools, mainly staffed with women teachers, for the education of war orphans or the sons of men and women of all ranks in the Red Army—well on one occasion at one of these schools we spoke to some children who had actually been partisans.

One cherub-faced child of about fourteen and a-half had, himself, killed several Germans, though he had never had any fire-arms. When we asked him, "How do you kill them then?" he said with a grin, "Oh, we had knives, and we always strike straight in the eye." Many children in the Soviet Union have been forced to live that kind of life by the Germans.

Suffering Degrades People

There are other things, too. I will not tell you anything about the concentration camp at Lublin, though I have seen it, because that is outside the Soviet Union. But near Tallinn, in the Estonian People's Republic, I saw something which, I might say, is one of my most vivid memories of the last year. This was the small concentration camp at Klooga, just one of many where the Germans, before they retreated, slaughtered all but forty of the three thousand inhabitants.

It consisted of some big white houses rather like a girls' school, standing in very pleasant country. Inside one of these houses the Germans had machine-gunned several hundred people; the bodies were still there. And still living in the house next door were the forty who escaped.

Have you any idea what survivors from a concentration camp are like? Do you know that—except for the iron few whose spirit nothing can break—suffering on this scale degrades people, so that

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