

EASTERN EUROPE 1939-1945: BERLIN

**Extract from a report by a British officer in Russia, 1944**

Catalogue ref: FO 371/46785

Enemy Dead

On a sector of about 4 kilometres I saw some 700 to 1,000 steel helmets mostly undamaged. Explanation was that a battalion had been caught by "Katushas". Clearing up parties collect bodies, but owing to their weight leave the helmets which are collected by other groups.

At Gatchina I saw a common grave, with excavator standing by, with about 200 German dead in uniform without caps. On 1st February I saw about 2,000 German graves, all carefully labelled and the Russians intend to respect them. They are burying their own dead individually where possible.

There were German signs and signposts everywhere, many new. Papers, food, etc. were left behind in large quantities. I picked up a Christmas postcard dated 12th December, 1943, from Dresden, bearing field post stamp of 31st December (this on 1st February).

German Prisoners

Saw about 140 in two groups marching towards Oranianbaum under a very light guard.

German Morale

Russians state that Germans have fought most stubbornly and well, wherever they have been ordered to make a stand. But once **away** from positions, or taken on a flank, they incline to panic.

German Material

The Recorder of Artillery Museum, Leningrad, who is making a special study of everything captured on this front, stated that in the last few weeks the Germans have used a new type of lemon grenade. This is larger than the old type and very effective. I could obtain no further details. The recorder added he considers all German clothing has greatly and steadily deteriorated. Technical clothing for scouts, snipers, etc. and camouflage has improved in design during the summer and autumn of 1943. Telescopic sights on rifles were as good as ever.

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### What is this source?

This is a report written by a British officer who was posted with Soviet forces in Moscow and Leningrad early in 1944.

The British officer was there to improve links between the allied forces. However, he commented at several points in his report that he was not always able to see everything he wanted.

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### What's the background to this source?

One of Hitler's key aims in WW2 was to invade and destroy the Soviet Union and build a German empire in Eastern Europe. He invaded the USSR in June 1941 and at first it looked like he would succeed. However, he was stopped by the Russian winter in 1941 and then by stubborn Soviet resistance in 1942–3. By the start of 1943 the tide began to turn against the Germans. By 1944 all German forces were driven out of the USSR. By 1945 the Red Army was moving into Germany and it took Berlin in May 1945.

The Germans almost reached Moscow at the end of 1941 but were halted by Soviet resistance and the Soviet winter. The Germans did reach Leningrad and encircled the city from September 1941 until January 1944. The fight for Leningrad was almost as deadly as the battle for Stalingrad. Estimates of Soviet military and civilian deaths range from 600 000 to 800 000.

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### It's worth knowing that...

When the Germans advanced on the USSR in 1941 they had the most advanced weapons and tactics. The Red Army was caught unprepared. This was partly because Soviet leader Stalin had executed many army officers because he feared possible opponents from within his own country.

The Soviets learnt quickly from German tactics and copied many of them. They also added their own tactics and proved very effective at producing massive amounts of equipment in terrible conditions. The Soviets were also supplied with vast amounts of equipment from Britain and the USA. Of all German soldiers killed in WW2, 90% were killed fighting the USSR.

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### How will you use this source?

1. What evidence is there that Soviet weapons and tactics were effective?

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2. How did the Russians treat the German dead?
3. What does the source reveal about German troops?
4. What does it reveal about German equipment?
5. Is this source useful for telling us about the importance of the Red Army in defeating Hitler?
6. Are there any parts of this source or the notes you could use in your script for your task using the starter source film clip?