ST. PETERSBURG MARKS 75 YEARS SINCE NAZI SIEGE OF LENINGRAD

-   28.01.2019

Deutsche Welle (27 January 2019)

More than 2,500 soldiers and 80 military units paraded through St. Petersburg's Palace Square on Sunday as the city marked 75 years since the end of a devastating siege by Nazi German forces during World War II.

World War II-era Soviet vehicles including the iconic T-34 tank rolled through the city alongside several modern weapon systems as snow fell and temperatures hit -18 degrees Celsius (0 Fahrenheit).

Nazi leader Adolf Hitler ordered the siege of the city, then called Leningrad, which began on September 8, 1941. At least a million residents a third of the population of disease, cold, starvation or in aerial bombardments.

The Soviet army ousted Nazi forces on January 27, 1944, on its way to defeating Germany in May 1945.

Leningrad was under siege for nearly two and a half years by the Wehrmacht: from September 1941 until January 1944. Only during the two extremely cold winters was there a way in and out: across frozen Lake Lagoda. Food was brought into the city across the ice and more than one million people were able escape. Lake Ladoga was the "Road of Life" and at the same time a dangerous journey.

Germany's pledge

Germany has pledged to donate €12 million ($13.7 million) to the siege's remaining survivors.

The donation "not only shows that we are aware of our responsibility, but it is also a signal that this must never happen again," said German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas.

Some of the money is expected to be used to modernize a hospital for Russian veterans, where some of the 108,000 war veterans and siege survivors receive treatment. The German government wants to use the rest to finance a German-Russian culture center.

"We're confident that this voluntary action will improve the quality of life of the survivors," Maas said.

Accepting the donation, Russian Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakhareva said that the

donation "does not close the issue" of Germany providing individual compensation to all remaining siege survivors.

Celebrations in Red Square

Every year on May 9, Russia celebrates the victory of the Soviet Union over Nazi Germany. At midnight on this day in 1945, the German act of capitulation was signed. The other Allied forces, such as France and the UK, celebrate Victory Day one day earlier on May 8. Russian Minister of Defense, Sergei Shoigu, presided over the parade as it rolled through Moscow's Red Square.

St. Petersburg native

Russian President Vladimir Putin was not present at the parade, but he is expected to visit a nearby cemetery and attend a memorial concert.

The Russian leader's older brother died during the siege and his mother almost died of starvation.

To mark the anniversary of the end of the siege, soldiers are also scheduled to conduct a gun salute on Sunday evening.

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