

The Eastern Front

**Produced by:
H. Clifford Chadderton**

**For:
The War Amps of Canada**

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*Some men pass away beneath a foreign sky
And some are men burned alive inside
And some come home with minds and bodies in pain
Where's the glory? NEVER AGAIN!*

(Singing in a foreign language)

*Never again stand by to see another baby lose a father
Never again the grieving of a wife*

*I never thought our last good-bye would be forever
You're gone from our home but not our hearts
But oh how we loved you
Your ship is on the river
Where's the glory? NEVER AGAIN!*

H.C. Chadderton:

The Second World War must seem to have been a long time ago to a youngster like Louis Leduc. It ended almost thirty years before he was born. But Louis has a connection that brings him in touch with that war. He is a member of The War Amps Child Amputee Program. As a Champ, Louis has met many war amputees, like myself, who have experienced first-hand the horrors of war.

I'm Cliff Chadderton, Chief Executive Officer of The War Amputations of Canada. We have a special message to pass along to Louis and all young people. War is not a game of winners and losers. It is a tragedy of suffering and death. No matter what peoples or countries are involved, everybody loses.

...September 3rd, 1939... newspapers and declarations that started World War II. Now, Louis, while you're here, I'd like to show you some of the war books that I've accumulated over the years. It's sort of a hobby of mine. These particular books, deal with part of World War II that's not well known. I'm talking about the battles on what is known as the Eastern Front – the war between Germany and Russia.

Louis:

When I think about World War II, I think of places like France and England, but not Russia.

H.C. Chadderton:

Well, Louis, it was a World War, and if youngsters like you are to understand just how bad it was, you're going to have to understand that it took place in many parts of this world. I think if we go to the globe I can give you a more graphic description of just how big that war really was.

Now Louis, the Canadian soldiers went to France, going by the map, right. Great Britain, that's right, and Holland, to join in the fight against Germany. This was called the Western Front, see that? That's right.

Now, while we were fighting The Western Front, the Russians, who were defending their homeland and who were our allies, were fighting the Germans on the whole eastern front. See if you can find that. That's correct. That was called the great patriotic war.

It all started back in 1939. Adolf Hitler was the leader of Germany. He had a plan to invade Russia and eventually to become the master of the whole world. To achieve this, he decided to conquer a number of European countries first, to clear a path east towards Russia. That's how World War II began.

Poland was the first to fall, along with Austria and Czechoslovakia. Next were Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Greece and Yugoslavia.

On May 10th, 1940, the Germans took control of France. Once these countries were under Nazi control, Hitler turned his attention to the massive assault on Russia.

The other impressive thing Louis, is that this fighting on The Eastern Front, between the Russians and the Germans, was probably the most brutal the world has ever known. I have some film footage of that war. Would you like to see some of it?

Louis: Oh, great, I love watching War movies!

H.C. Chadderton: When you watch this, some of the scenes, you'll see the cameramen fall back. You'll actually see the camera shot out of their hands. And I think we can conclude that they were killed, to get this war footage. Let's look at it.

Here, German troops are preparing for a surprise attack on Russia.

Louis: What was that battle called?

H.C. Chadderton: Operation Barbarossa. Early morning on June 22, 1941, Hitler's Germany unleashed one of the most vicious assaults in the annals of war. Thirteen thousand planes, tanks and guns and more than three million men crossed the Russian borders.

You can see here that Soviet planes and tanks were destroyed on the ground before they had a chance to fire a single shot. Look at these German tanks. They tore deep into Russian territory, scattering

Soviet forces in all directions. In a matter of days, thousands of Russian defenders were dead.

Louis: Why did Hitler want to conquer Russia in the first place?

H.C. Chadderton: Good question, Louis. Hitler had convinced himself, and his followers, that the Russians were inferior people who must be destroyed. He planned to save only a small part of the population to be used as slaves for German factories. Although it is not always recognized, much of the bloodshed of World War II was concentrated on the Eastern Front.

Louis, think of this: Russia lost 20 million people. Germany lost more than five million on the eastern front. Modern warfare did not occur on the battlefields alone either. It swept through villages and city streets, murdering old people, women and children along the way. But you know, Hitler underestimated the strength and courage of the Russian people. Joseph Stalin was the leader of the Soviet Union at that time and he called upon the Russians to defend their motherland. German forces headed for Leningrad first, a Russian port on the Baltic. Hitler gave the order to obliterate the city of three million people from the face of the earth. No one, he said, was worth saving. but the Russians had other ideas. Men, women and children worked desperately day and night to help troops build a defence zone around the city. Labourers, office workers and peasants, young and old, signed up for the home guard defence.

Eventually, the German forces surrounded Leningrad and bombed the city continuously. You can see here, they were literally fighting in the streets. Hitler tried to starve the Leningraders to death by blocking all food and supply shipments to the city. This bitter struggle lasted two and a half years.

Louis: What did the people do all that time?

H.C. Chadderton: Louis, a woman who lived in Leningrad during the blockade tells us what it was like. Listen to this:

Nina Agapitova: Although it's hard to recollect that time, even now, I was just a little girl when the bombs fell upon my city. My mother hid us all in a bomb shelter where we stayed for days at a time never seeing sunlight or breathing fresh air. The food rations were severe. We were given only a small bit of rotten, mushy bread to eat each day. I saw people die in the streets of hunger and disease. It was even worse in the winter. No fuel for heating or cooking. Our only lifeline was the frozen lake Lagoda. Trucks and tanks crossed this treacherous roadway bringing

supplies, but it was never enough. The Nazis never gained control of my city, but it cost the lives of a million of my fellow Leningraders.

H.C. Chadderton: While the siege of Leningrad was going on in the northern part of the country, Hitler tried to capture Moscow, which is the capital city of Russia.

Louis: You mean, over here?

H.C. Chadderton: You found it, exactly. And Hitler's strategy was that if Moscow falls, the whole country would collapse.

Louis: Was Hitler right?

H.C. Chadderton:: Let's just watch some of the film and see. You can see from this footage, Louis, the German soldiers were having a great time. Their leaders had convinced them that nothing could stop them from taking Moscow.

Louis: It must have been hard to fight in all that snow.

H.C. Chadderton: You better believe it! It was a nightmare for both the German and Russian soldiers. They just weren't equipped for the sub-zero temperature. Soldiers literally froze to death. You have to understand, Louis, that by this time Hitler's need to take Moscow was absolutely vital to his plans. He issued orders to his soldiers to fight to the last man no matter what the cost, but they couldn't beat the Russians. The Russians held them back. The losses in Germans were in the hundreds of thousands.

Louis: Wow, all that for nothing?!

H.C. Chadderton: I'll let you judge. Listen to this. It's from the diary of a German Officer Cadet written just before he was killed.

Oliver Daus: It is often extremely difficult to carry out orders. We have just had to raze an entire village to the ground. The poor people! For what terrible crimes are we being punished, even in our youth? Who is it all for? Is the war a big swindle after all? They've got to put a stop to this slaughter of the young people now, while there is still time. Farewell, it will soon be over.

Louis: I feel really sorry for that guy.

H.C. Chadderton: Louis, when you hear of a diary entry like that, from a soldier killed in the war, it tells you a lot about the uselessness and the tragedy that human-kind can inflict. Now, with regard to this Eastern Front, Hitler

wasn't getting too far. In the north in Leningrad, was a stalemate. As we've seen, he was badly beaten in Moscow, so he decided to turn southward.

Louis: To Volgograd?

H.C. Chadderton: Volgograd, exactly. In those days, the name of that city was Stalingrad, and Hitler felt that if he could crash through Volgograd, then called Stalingrad, and get into the caucuses, he could turn the tide again in favour of the Germans. You may have heard, Louis that Stalin and Hitler were bitter enemies. So they ordered total victory, no matter what the cost on the blood of their troops. The Battle of Stalingrad started in the summer of 1942 and lasted until February, 1943. Once again, the Russians were taken by surprise. No warning. No air raid sirens. At daybreak on the August 23rd, German planes flew over Stalingrad and the bombs started to fall.

Louis: That's awful. Look at all those people running. Just no place to go.

H.C. Chadderton: That's right Louis. And by night fall, 40,000 civilians lay dead in the streets. You know, Hitler came close to taking Stalingrad, but in November of 1942, the Russians struck back and trapped the German 6th Army. The German troops suffered from hypothermia, frostbite and their limbs were amputated right there on the battlefield.

Louis: Why didn't they surrender?

H.C. Chadderton: Louis, war being what it is, the German leaders ordered their men to keep fighting, even though the situation was hopeless. So, 140,000 Germans and 50,000 Russians were slaughtered.

Louis: Then what?

H.C. Chadderton: Hitler couldn't accept defeat so his planners poured over maps looking for a place to launch a final attack. They chose this area, near a small city south of Moscow and west of Stalingrad.

Louis: Kursk?

H.C. Chadderton: Right on, Louis. The Battle of Kursk. Hitler called it "Operation Citadel." It has gone down in history as the largest tank battle ever fought. You see, Louis, the armoured tank was the new war machine. German and Soviet tanks rolled off the factory lines so fast, that some actually went into battle with the paint still wet. The Russians drove their powerful T-34 tanks. The Germans fought back with their killing machines called Tigers, Panthers and Ferdinands. The Ferdinand was supposed to be a deadly enemy tank destroyer. But it turned out

to be a slaughter house for the men inside because it was so vulnerable to attack from Russian soldiers. Look at that! They just blasted away at each other at point-blank range.

Louis: Wow, ever neat! Look at that tank blow up!

H.C. Chadderton: Hold on, Louis. Don't forget, when those tanks got hit, the young men inside were roasted alive. In just four days, 60,000 men from both sides were murdered. The Battle of Kursk was the turning point of World War II. Hitler realized that his plan to conquer Russia had failed. So, he ordered his troops to retreat.

Louis: Lucky for the Russians.

H.C. Chadderton: Yes, but their suffering wasn't over yet. The Germans left a trail of death as they retreated. You finding this interesting, Louis?

Louis: Oh, very. Thank you for inviting me over.

H.C. Chadderton: Anytime Louis. You know, there's a wealth of information in these films and these war books, and I think it's important for youngsters your age learn about this.

Now, while this war with Russia was waging, Hitler also was inflicting suffering in many other countries in Europe, including Yugoslavia. And just to show you how he felt about the Yugoslavians, he called what he was going to do there, "Operation Punishment."

On April 6th, 1941, German planes bombed the Yugoslavian capital of Belgrade. It became one of the most devastated cities during the entire war. Ten days later, Yugoslavia's leaders surrendered.

Louis: Was it over that fast?

H.C. Chadderton: Not at all, Louis. The partisans of Yugoslavia; led by Marshall Tito; recruited thousands of university students, peasants, men and women from all walks of life, in an armed uprising against the German oppressors. You can see how young they were. Most were under 25, many were women. It was truly an army of the young. They had extremely dangerous jobs, like laying mines, sabotaging communications, blowing up bridges, railways, and even infiltrating into the German camps and blowing them up. Believe me, Louis, there was nothing glamorous about being a partisan fighter. They lived off the land and rarely had time to eat or sleep. The wounded were operated on without anesthetics and hacksaws were used to amputate limbs.

Louis: Did Hitler stop them?

H.C. Chadderton: Well, he tried, by imposing violence and cruelty upon the Yugoslavian people generally. Hitler ordered his troops to slaughter one hundred Yugoslavians for every dead German. Villages burned. Innocent people were dragged from their homes and killed. Hundreds of thousands of women, children and old people tried to escape, but they soon died of hunger, cold and disease. Eventually, Russian troops joined the Yugoslavians to fight off the Nazis. The allied forces of France, Britain, the United States and Canada were sent to support the eastern front.

Louis: So, Hitler lost at the end?

H.C. Chadderton: Yes, he certainly did, Louis. His mad dream to conquer the world failed. And incidentally, he committed suicide himself on the April the 30th, 1945.

Louis: The people look so happy when the war was over.

H.C. Chadderton: For the Russians and Yugoslavs, the suffering continued long after the war ended. Their villages were burnt to the ground. Farms were destroyed. Thousands of families were left homeless. It would take years for reconstruction.

Hey Louis, before we close, I wanted to share with you some rather rare photographs I have of action on the Russian front during World War II. Look at this. Here's a youngster in the Russian army, who could be not more than a year or so older than you are. Talk about youth, hm! These are members of the 'Hitler Jugand' or 'youth core.' Some of these youngsters can't be more than 14 or 15. I think the main message here, you know, they can talk about the machines of war, Louis. They can talk about the technology, but as the saying goes, behind every gun, there's a man – usually a young man, and that young man is the one who is going to pay the cost not only for himself, but also there's the cost in terms of the suffering of those he leaves behind.

You'd be interested to know, Louis that I had been to many of the cemeteries in Russia, cemeteries that mark the graves of the soldiers and civilians who died during that horrible period in their history. When you think about it, Russia lost more than twenty million citizens in those four years. No one wants to see that again. All over Russia, you will see engraved on the panels in their cemeteries and on their memorials, a promise to all Russians of the future. That promise states: "Remember you who look upon these stones, that no one and nothing is forgotten."

Well Louis, for your sake, and for the sake of the youngsters in our Champ Program, to who this series is dedicated. And for all mankind, let's hope to God the world never forgets again.

(Singing in a foreign language)

NEVER AGAIN!