

The rape of Berlin

So it's nearly dusk and I've come to Treptower Park in East Berlin to see the massive monument to the Soviet war dead. I can see a man and he's holding a child. I'm Lucy Ash looking up at a 12 metre statue which depicts a Soviet soldier grasping a sword in one hand, a small German girl in the other and stamping on a broken swastika.

This is the final resting place for 5,000 of the 80,000 Soviet troops who fell in the Battle of Berlin between the 16th of April and the 2nd of May 1945. But some call this memorial the tomb of the unknown rapist. It's lit up inside, it looks like a sort of quasi-religious painting.

You can see Mother Russia in a red cloak looking down mournfully and it says this was a war that saved the civilisation of Europe from the fascists. In this programme I'll be asking why so many women suffered at the hands of the heroic liberators, the Red Army. On the BBC World Service this is of Berlin.

This is a storey which includes some graphic and disturbing material. Many Russians find all mention of the rapes offensive and they're regularly dismissed as a western myth in the Russian media. You certainly can't talk about what happened in Germany in 1945 in isolation.

To understand the background I've had to go to Moscow and go back in time because first there was the Nazi invasion of Russia or in Hitler's words the war of annihilation. I'm on my way to a suburb in northeast Moscow to meet a war veteran. To be honest I'm feeling a bit apprehensive and that's because the Duma or the Russian parliament recently passed a law which says that anyone who denigrates the Red Army or Russia's record in what's known here as the Great Patriotic War could face fines and up to five years in prison.

92 year old Yuri Vasilievich Lyashenko, covered in medals, has welcomed me into his cramped flat at the top of a tower block with boiled eggs and brandy. His dad was a stage performer and little Yuri used to dance on stage with him in a red cloak and a wooden dagger. He wanted to be an engineer but before he could enrol at university he was called up to the army.

Yuri Vasilievich just made a toast saying that they fought a very long difficult war to bring peace to Europe and that he hopes there won't be a third world war. Toast to peace were a Soviet era cliché and often feel rehearsed but Lyashenko's words are heartfelt. Together we take a brandy-fuelled journey back more than seven decades to the Ribbentrop-Molotov pact which made Hitler and Stalin into allies until one summer day in 1941 the Führer launched Operation Barbarossa, his shock invasion of the Soviet Union.

Do you remember what you were doing on the 22nd of June when the Germans invaded? Of course I do. I can picture it very clearly. Our commanders had gone off on a break, leaving us alone in our tents.

At 4am we heard the sounds of crackling and clicking then suddenly our tents were shaking. Bullets were piercing the canvas. One of his gang of four school friends found himself fighting in Byelorussia.

He later wrote to Lyashenko. He said when the Germans went through a place they destroyed it completely. Nothing was left, just chimney stumps where houses used to be.

And it was the same storey in Ukraine. Wherever the Germans went, people and villages were wiped off the map. Lyashenko survived the first month of Barbarossa.

Then he was wounded near the Ukrainian city of Vinnytsia and nearly had his leg amputated. After two years in a string of military hospitals he was back in action, fighting all the way to Berlin, where we'll catch up with him later. Three months on from the invasion of the Soviet Union, Hitler was lording it as the greatest battle in the history of the world, against an enemy not of human beings but of animals.

The Wehrmacht was supposedly a well-ordered force of Aryans who would never contemplate sex with intermension. But what really happened? One man who's researched this is Oleg Budnitsky, an eminent historian at the Higher School of Economics in Moscow, an archive rat as he calls himself. He's put his head above the parapet by writing about sexual violence on both German and Russian territory.

You know, formally it was prohibited for Germans to have sexual relations with local women. There were two reasons, one ideological, but the most important reason was the German generals, they were afraid of venereal diseases. Sexually transmitted diseases.

And theoretically it was prohibited. Practically, German soldiers did not pay any attention to this prohibition. They established a system of military brothels.

Brothels? Brothels, yeah. And some of local women were forced to serve in these brothels because they had no other means to survive. There were rapes also.

Sometimes such cases were treated by German military courts. According to one German judge, Slav women don't understand the concept of honour, so it's not a big deal to rape. The major reason of punishment was violation of military discipline.

Right, so the violation of discipline was much worse than the violation of the actual woman? Yes, exactly. This photo was taken by a German soldier, by a Wehrmacht soldier. And you can see his shadow in the picture, he looks like a cornfield.

It's hard to find direct evidence of how the German soldiers treated Russian women. Many victims never survived. Yet Jörg Mori, director of the German-Russian Museum in Berlin, has a picture he wants to show me.

It's a photo taken in Crimea from a German soldier's personal wartime album, showing a woman's corpse sprawled on the ground. It looks like that she was killed by raping or after the rape. Her skirt is pulled up and the hands are in front of the face.

And her stockings are pulled down. Yeah, it's a shocking photo. It's not talking about war, but showing it.

Sexual violence by German troops is not a talking matter in Russia, but it has occasionally surfaced. Babi Sarstva, or Kingdom of Women, a Soviet film from the late 60s, shows a 15-year-old village girl helping a German soldier learn Russian. All smiles in her cotton frock.

She's correcting his accent when he tries to rape her. An extraordinary state commission was set up by the Supreme Soviet in 1942 to investigate crimes perpetrated by the Nazi invaders. It contains some horrific accounts of rape and torture.

Yet afterwards, few talked about what happened, says Oleg Budnitsky. About 70 million Russian people lived on the occupied territories under German rule. 75% of them were women.

Perhaps for Russian men to admit that they left women under the power of German soldiers, it was also a kind of shame. Do you have evidence that soldiers, actually when they came into German territory through East Prussia, that revenge was a very important factor in the way they treated the women? Yes, of course, and I read such, as an example, a letter one Soviet soldier sent to his sister to Moscow, you know, when the Red Army came to Belorussia. When he saw with his own eyes burned villages, burned people, and he wrote, I think that we should kill Germans like rabid dogs.

The war is not a school of humanism. It's a school of cruelty. Captured orders instructed the German troops, when commandeering houses, to drive the population out to perish in the cold.

This Soviet propaganda film with an English voiceover from 1942 shows women in headscarves wringing their hands over piles of body parts in the snow. A certain amount of cruelty in carrying this order into effect is unavoidable, or the infraction. By 1944, the tide of the war was turning.

Soviet troops were liberating their own territory and then advancing westward into Germany. The Russian bear was crushing the Nazi eagle, inch by inch, mile by mile. Back in the flat in Moscow, I asked veteran Lyashenko whether he or his comrades in the Red Army thirsted for revenge.

He doesn't give me a direct answer, but says for him, there's no moral equivalence. Hitler instructed his army to kill off our entire population so there would be no Russia. But our political management worked with the civilians and army.

Rape and other crimes were dealt with in military units by the authorities. Technically speaking, the Red Army operated under stern rules, supposed to protect civilians. Human rights lawyer Maryana Muravyova at Oxford Brookes University is an expert in the history of Russian army regulations.

Armies rape not only enemy women, but their own as well. And that's why you usually have very strict military law and military discipline regulations prohibiting, first of all, any sort of male treatment of the civilian population, first of all, your own. During wartime, that would be a special law in place.

That's exactly what happened in 1941, which was the introduction of the emergency situation due to the war. All these offences started to be liable for prosecution in the military courts and military tribunals, they would be called. That is a death penalty in the war conditions.

The political department of the 19th Army also declared, when we breed a true feeling of hatred in a soldier, he won't try and have sex with a German woman because he'll be repulsed. But despite declarations, decrees and deterrence, we know that the Soviet troops took their revenge on women. What we don't know is the number of those assaults.

Soviet military tribunals during wartime remain classified. And we're talking about a period which is sacred in Russia's collective memory, according to World War II historian Anthony Beaver. The Russians, the Soviet citizens, had suffered so much since 1917, the Civil War, the famines, the Stalinist repression, the terror.

And 1945, the victory over the fascist beast was the one thing which every Russian, every Soviet citizen could really feel proud about. Many state archives are now closed, but there are other ways to recapture the past, says Oleg Budnitsky. There are a lot of unpublished diaries and memos written even in the Soviet period without any hope of publication.

Literally in every diary of a Soviet soldier who was in Germany at that period of time, it is possible to find a pretty frank description of atrocities or something like that. Remarkably, I've had access to the typescript of a wartime diary kept by Lieutenant Vladimir Gelfand, a Jewish teenager from Ukraine. He was a staunch Stalinist and member of the communist youth movement, the Komsomol.

Despite the ban on diaries as a security risk, he told it like it was throughout the war. I rang his son Vitaly, now living in Berlin, who found the diary when he was clearing out his father's papers after he died. Dad wrote the diary for himself.

He was young and fearless, only 18 at the beginning, not much more than a kid. With war going on every day, you don't think what you're writing could be dangerous for you. He wrote because he couldn't do otherwise.

He just had to get it all down. Vitaly reads to us from the manuscript an unvarnished picture of disarray in the regular battalions. 20th July 1942, Belinsky village.

The troops are clapped out. Many have changed into civilian clothes. Most have thrown down their weapons.

Some commanders have torn off their insignia. Such shame. Such unexpected and sad discrepancy with newspaper reports.

Gelfand describes the miserable rations allotted to frontline troops being ravaged by lice and men stealing their comrades' possessions, even their boots. As the Red Army advanced into what the Soviet press called the lair of the fascist beast, posters drummed home the message, soldier, you are now on German soil. The hour of revenge has struck.

The Red Army moved west with Strafbattalions at the front, made up of prisoners and other undesirables who could be sacrificed to minefields. Hundreds of thousands of German civilians fled before them, abandoning houses full of provisions that astonished, delighted, but also angered the Soviet troops. For the first time in their lives, eight million Soviet people came abroad.

The Soviet Union was a closed country. And what they knew about foreign countries is that there was unemployment, starvation, exploitation, and so on and so forth. And when they came to Europe, they saw something very different than Stalin's Russia.

And especially Germany, they were really furious, because they could not understand why, being so rich, Germans came to Russia. But anger at the Germans wasn't the only motivation for sexual violence. Anyone left behind was ripe for plunder.

The historian Anthony Beaver reads from a high-level Soviet report about the treatment of women who'd been freed from Nazi prison camps. And remember, this is talking about the treatment of Soviet women by Soviet troops. In the town of Bunzlau, there are over 100 women and girls in the headquarters, but there is no security there.

And because of this, there are many offences, and even rape of women who live in this dormitory by different soldiers, who enter the dormitory at night and terrorise the women. Maria Shapova said, I waited for the Red Army for days and nights. I waited for my liberation, and now our soldiers treat us worse than the Germans did.

I am not happy to be alive. On the night of the 14th and 15th of February, in one of the villages where the cattle are herded, a straff company under the command, or if it was a straff company, I'm afraid they were bound to be. They were like the punishment battalions? Yes.

They were sort of totally criminalised as a result of the brutality. I mean, they were forced to walk over the mines in front of the other troops. They were told that they had to pay their debt to that, pay their debt to the motherland through their own blood.

Beaver unearthed some more disturbing documents in the State Archive of the Russian Federation. They date from late 1944, and they were sent by the NKVD, the secret police, to their boss in Moscow. Now their reports to Beria, and these were passed on to Stalin, and you can actually see from the ticks whether they've been read or not, reported the mass rapes in East Prussia, and the way that German women would try to kill their children and kill themselves.

And the Nazis quickly exploited a chance to portray the enemy as bestial. The government's propaganda, of course, started with Namersdorf in the October of 1944, when there was that first incursion into Reich territory in East Prussia. There were storeys of women crucified to barn doors after being raped and so forth.

Of course, Goebbels seized at the opportunity and brought in camera crews and still photographers and all the rest of it. In this episode of the Nazi Newsreel, Deutscher Wochenschau, members of the Volkssturm, the German Home Guard, look at mutilated corpses of women and children lying on the ground. And curiously, the first reaction in Germany was not to take it too seriously, because they felt this was probably, you know, this was the propaganda ministry.

The reality only really started to hit when the refugees from East Prussia started to arrive in mid to late January and early February 1945, with their storeys of what had been happening in East Prussia, Pomerania, and of course Silesia. And that is when I think that the women of Berlin started to realise what they were about to face. Standing in front of the rather tinny diorama of the Battle of Berlin, in Moscow's huge Second World War museum, I tried to imagine how Yuri Lyashenko felt after four years of combat.

Did you see them putting the flag on the Reichstag? No, when the flag was being put on the Reichstag, we were still fighting on all different floors and

rooftops. And how did you feel when you saw that red flag? Oh, we were all shouting, it's ours, it's ours, it's ours. There was such a feeling of, how can I put it, glee, pure glee.

Everything flew into the air. Soldiers shot into the sky from pistols, from machine guns, from rifles. Some were even shooting from cannons.

But they had to be careful because people could get hurt. Berlin was the final point. When British Prime Minister Winston Churchill announced victory in Europe on 8 May, he underlined the nation's gratitude to the Red Army.

Today perhaps we shall think mostly of ourselves. Tomorrow we shall pay a particular tribute to our heroic Russian comrades whose prowess in the field has been one of the grand contributions to the general victory. While the Allied leaders were clinking glasses of champagne, brandy or vodka, on the streets of Berlin it was anarchy.

Anthony Beaver says many battle-weary soldiers sought oblivion in drink, and he quotes from the Soviet Union's best-known war correspondent, Vasily Grossman. This desperation for alcohol even led them to drinking the formaldehyde, the stuff they found in laboratories. Even on the day of victory, Vasily Grossman describes how all these guys found these cans of chemicals in the Tiergarten in Berlin and started drinking it.

And they all went blind, mad and were killed as a result. The other aspect, of course, and one of the most horrific aspects, were the result of the alcohol. They often were not able to perform sexually and quite often they would therefore take or mistake their revenge on the women using a bottle instead or something horrific.

Some Red Army soldiers behaved very differently. Veteran Yuri Lyashenko remembers doling out bread, not revenge. We couldn't feed everyone, of course, but we shared what we had with children.

I remember the little children who were terrified. I remember the look in their eyes. It was awful.

I felt sorry for them. You've doubtless heard that many women were raped at the time by Soviet soldiers. I'm not sure.

Well, we didn't have anything like that in our division. But, of course, such things did happen. It all depended on the character of the people.

People were different everywhere. One man would help and another would abuse. Man's intentions aren't clearly written on his face, so you wouldn't know.

Red Army veteran Yuri Lyashenko. In a few minutes, we'll hear from the women's point of view in the city, where the worst of mankind was on display. So, in one of the art galleries on Fasanenstrasse, I met a very nice gallery assistant called Lynn.

And she said she's going to introduce me to a security guard who can tell us where these basements were. Go on. Some red brick steps.

In this special programme, The Rape of Berlin, on the BBC World Service, I'm investigating the sexual violence of 1945, when the Red Army conquered Germany and its capital, Berlin. It's a storey that many women were never able to tell, and it contains some disturbing material. There were metal doors here, like bunker doors, which you could close all the way.

The walls are sort of brick and blackened, and you can see why it was like dwelling in a cave. What happened in this cellar? What secrets does it hold? I could picture it thanks to a diary kept by one woman in Berlin throughout the period of liberation, which survived and later became a bestseller, although for decades nobody knew her name. She eyes herself and her fellow cave dwellers in the bomb shelter with a wry detachment.

The young man in grey trousers and horn-rimmed glasses, who on closer inspection turns out to be a young woman. Three elder sisters, all dressmakers, huddled together like a big black pudding. Then there's me, a pale-faced blonde, always dressed in the same winter coat.

The anonymous author was a well-travelled journalist in her early 30s. She started writing on April 20, 1945, just ten days before Hitler's suicide. It's implied that she'd supported the Nazi regime.

I breathe what was in the air, she reflects, and so it would seem hard to identify with her. Yet I found myself drawn in by her honesty and her flashes of gallows humour. As the cave dwellers are awaiting the arrival of the Red Army, they joke better a ruski on top than a yank overhead.

Rape is preferable to being pulverised by bombs. But they're scared stiff when soldiers appear and try to haul women out. They plead with the anonymous diarist to use her Russian language skills and complain to a Soviet officer, and she manages to find one.

Apparently Stalin has declared that this kind of thing is not to happen. But it happens anyway. The officer shrugs his shoulders.

One of the two men, being reprimanded, voices his objection, his face twisted in anger. What do you mean? What did the Germans do to our women? He's screaming. They took my sister and... The officer calms the men down and gets them outside.

The baker's wife asks hoarsely, Are they gone? I nod, but just to make sure, I step out into the dark corridor. Then they have me. Those men were lying in wait.

The diarist is brutally raped and nearly strangled. The cave dwellers, to save their own skins, had shut the basement door against her. Finally, the two iron levers open.

My stockings are down to my shoes. I'm still holding on to what's left of my suspender belt. I start yelling, You pigs! Here they rape me twice in a row and you shut the door and leave me lying like a piece of dirt.

Meanwhile, on the outskirts of Berlin, our 22-year-old Red Army diarist, Lieutenant Wladimir Gelfand, was whirling around on a bicycle, the first time he'd ever ridden one, when he came across a group of German women carrying bundles. He described the encounter in his own equally evocative and shocking diary. 25th of April.

I asked the women in broken German why they'd left their home and they told me with horror about the first night of the Red Army's arrival. They poked here, explained the beautiful German girl, lifting up her skirt. All night.

They were all spotty ones and they all climbed on me and poked, no less than 20. She burst into tears. They raped my daughter in front of me, her poor mother added, and they can still come back and rape her again.

This thought horrified everyone. Stay here, the girl suddenly threw herself at me. Sleep with me.

You can do whatever you want with me, but only you. Gelfand's description of the traumatised girl and her mother corroborates the woman diarist. She realises that she needs to find one high-ranking wolf to stave off gang rape by the male beasts and the relationship between aggressor and victim becomes more transactional and more ambiguous.

By no means could it be said that the Major is raping me. Am I doing it for bacon, butter, sugar, candles, canned meat? To some extent, I'm sure I am. In addition, I like the Major and the less he wants from me as a man, the more I like him as a person.

The diary powerfully shows how new relationships emerge in the rubble of a broken city and political loyalties are jettisoned as Hausfrau's snip swastikas out of red flags and replace them with the hammer and sickle. When the author's fiancée returned from the Eastern Front, she handed him her pile of notebooks. I could see that Gerd was taking a back.

With every sentence, he grew colder. For him, I've been spoiled once and for all. You've all turned into a bunch of shameless bitches, every one of you in the building.

It's horrible being around you. And she got the same reaction when the diary was published in German in 1959. Her candid account of the choices she made to survive was attacked for besmirching the honour of German women.

No wonder the author wouldn't allow the book to be republished until after her death. But how far can we trust her version of events? I needed to find someone who could tell me face-to-face about what happened in the German capital. Of course, most of the women who were raped at the end of the Second World War are no longer alive, but we have managed to track down one victim.

She's now living in Hamburg, and so I've taken a train two hours north of Berlin to meet her and to hear her story. Ingeborg Bullert, a sprightly woman wearing a big gold brooch with a surprisingly firm handshake, has welcomed us into her apartment, and she's making us coffee. Her living room is lined with photos of cats and books about the theatre.

Ingeborg was 20 in 1945 and dreamt of becoming an actress. She'd passed her audition in the regime's Reichstheaterkammer and got a grant, but she was also pregnant by a married man who was fighting on the Eastern Front. What was your situation? You were living with your mother? On 11 April 1945, I had my baby and I had to leave the hospital right after delivery to give space to people that were hurt by the Russian bombs.

I still see myself walking along the street with a tiny baby in my arms and when I arrived home, I directly went down to the cellar. There was no water, there was no electricity and I remember when we were going to the toilet, emptying the buckets out of the window. Ingeborg lived in Fasanenstrasse, an upmarket street in Charlottenburg.

Suddenly, in this civil neighbourhood, there were panzer troops and there were many, many corpses lying around from Russians and Germans. You know the Stalin pipe? The special noise of flight bombs from the Russians? It sounded like... When Ingeborg got back from the hospital, her neighbours glanced disapprovingly at her newborn son and said they didn't think he'd survive down in the bomb shelter. In comparison, the enemy seemed benign.

I remember the first Russian that came into the cellar was a female soldier. I had the baby in a basket and she was very warm-hearted and asked how old it was. Ingeborg's second encounter with the Red Army wasn't so pleasant.

She'd left the cellar to run upstairs to look for a piece of string to use as a wick. Suddenly, there were two Russians. Well, if I would have stayed in the cellar, this wouldn't have happened to me.

And they were pointing with their pistols at me, the Russians. I was looking good at that time, I was young. And one of them forced me to expose myself and he raped me.

And then they changed places and the other one raped me as well. But they did not hurt me in a sadistic way. They only followed their sexual desire.

I still remember I thought I would die, they would kill me. Ingeborg tried to forget about what happened to her and get on with life. She's just turned 90 and has a taste for Mozart and pralines.

How did you feel later about what had happened? It was more this outrage that this wasn't prevented in a big city like Berlin. I was accusing the German army, the Wehrmacht, that they didn't protect me and they didn't protect the women and they didn't prevent this. You kept it secret almost all your life.

My mother was even running around boasting that her daughter hasn't been touched. It was kind of difficult to tell anybody or her about what had really happened. Did you realise that other women and girls in Berlin were also being raped? It was a citywide known fact.

All women between 15 and 55, around that, had to go to the doctor to get this certificate and test it on sexually transmitted diseases. If they didn't have the certificate, they didn't get the food stamps. I remember well that all the doctors doing the certificates, they had full waiting rooms.

What was the scale of the rape? The most often quoted figure is a staggering 100,000 women in Berlin and 2 million on German territory. And it comes from the feminist filmmaker Helga Sander, who started research for a documentary in the 80s. I meet her in a cafe in Charlottenburg.

My primary concern was to find out what is a mass rape, because in all the literature about the Second World War and after was always the hint that there were the mass rapes. I hoped that I'd get some money from the different television stations, but every television station sent me away without interest and they also didn't want to disturb the good relationship to Russia. Listening to Helga, I could understand why the rapes had been ignored for so long.

Besides the social stigma, in East Germany it was sacrilegious to criticise the Soviet heroes who had defeated fascism, while across the wall in the West, the guilt for Nazi crimes made German suffering untouchable. Helga persisted. She dug out some of the few surviving hospital records and took these to a statistician to extrapolate.

Her conclusion may be controversial, but what can these documents tell us? I've come to the very imposing red brick building that used to be a

munitions factory, but it's now the Landesarchiv, the state archive of Berlin. I'm met by archivist Martin Luchterhand, who's going to show me a cache of documents from Neukölln, just one of Berlin's 24 districts that miraculously survived intact. Many of the German women who were raped chose to have abortions, and these provide some actual numbers.

But even these come with a warning. As long as we only have the light in that area here and the rest of the area is dark completely, we can't really say something about Berlin in general. In front of us on the table here, there are three blue cardboard folders.

Letters from July 1945 until October, I think. On the first page here, there is a long list of names with numbers against them. First they give the address and then how long the pregnancy lasted until that time.

And then they had the date when they got the allowance to abort. The third person on the list here, Frau Simon. It says that she was six to seven months pregnant.

Yes. She just said she was raped by some Russians. And that's enough for the doctors to decide.

That shows how severe the situation was and that they really wanted to help them. Because before this special situation, how easy was it to get an abortion in Germany? Was it quite straightforward or not? In a way, it was impossible. The article 218 of the Strafgesetzbuch says that it is illegal to do an abortion.

In the time of the Nazis? In the time before the Nazis, in the time of the Nazis, in the time after the Nazis. There was a small window for those women because of that special situation of the mass rapes in 1945. Altogether 995 pleas for abortion were approved by this one office between June 45 to 46.

It's quite overwhelming. The files contain over a thousand fragile scraps of paper, all different colours and sizes. A litany of misery in childish round handwriting or old-fashioned spiky German.

What's that storey? Eiderstadt. I swear. I swear that I have been raped on the 20th of February 1945 by Russian soldiers.

So it was the flat of my parents at the same time they were in that room. So they witnessed the rape? They witnessed the rape, yes. Historian Atina Grossman took her magnifying glass to these cases and points out that the women were using Nazi terminology.

They didn't say I was violated by an occupation soldier. They very clearly recruited National Socialist language, racial language. It was as if they were describing a scene that they had already seen in a movie because this is

what Nazi propaganda had told them was going to happen, that the Soviets were marauding Mongols, sort of coming like Genghis Khan barbarians across the steppes of the East and would penetrate into Germany and vanquish women.

And here is a mezzanine detail. That says Russian. Russian.

Another Russian. Severely drunk. Americana.

Ah, an American. What does that letter say? There was a small party in September 1945. They also drank a bit and then she was raped by an American and the evening had consequences.

But, yeah, there it seems like she had gone willingly to a party that had been thrown by the American soldiers. And so the doctors have to decide whether they believe her or not. The drunk Russian was accepted as a reason, but what about the other soldier in Berlin? So what about those other soldiers? Here's BBC correspondent Richard Dimbleby reporting from Berlin in July 1945 as the Western Allies were moving in.

The people move about in apathy, as though they can't take in all that has happened. Only the younger girls seem to have the energy to smile at American and British soldiers, but then somehow they always do. Rape was not limited to the Red Army.

All of the Allied troops were involved. Bob Lilly is a historian at Northern Kentucky University who grew up listening to his father's war storeys around the dinner table. But when he accessed records for US military trials, he had to put family feelings aside.

His book, *Taken by Force*, was so controversial that initially no American publisher would touch it and it came out first in France. Lilly estimated there were 14,000 rapes committed by American soldiers in England, France and Germany between 1942 and 45. The rapes that took place in England were very few, but once the soldiers crossed the English Channel, you saw a spike in rapes.

The rapes became a problem for public relations as well as for discipline for the army, and Eisenhower said, execute the soldiers where they committed the crime and publicised the executions in such publications as the military's newspaper called *Stars and Stripes*. There was a great, huge spike in Germany. And were any soldiers executed for rape alone? Oh yes.

But not in Germany? No. No soldier was executed for raping or murdering a German citizen. Lilly puts a conservative estimate of rapes committed by US troops in Germany in 1945 at 11,040, and new research is still emerging.

But at the time, it was nobody's business to care about the Germans. They're just Germans, said one American defence attorney, Atina Grossman.

There were indeed many people, including Jewish women, who themselves had to fear rape by Soviet soldiers, who said, look, they deserved it.

Who cares what happened to those people after what had been done? So the sexual violence, although it had been the stuff of water pump conversations among women in Berlin, slid under the official radar. Few reported it, and even fewer would listen. It wasn't until 2008, when many victims had already died, that psychologist Philipp Kuvert was the first to conduct scientific research into the post-traumatic stress disorder caused by wartime sexual violence.

Sometimes in the papers they wrote that it was a taboo, but it was not a real taboo, I find, because a real taboo is something you almost don't know. As a child, I knew that there were mass graves. It was not hidden, so to speak.

But on the other side, there was never a possibility to give the survivors an official acknowledgement somehow. Yet in 2008, there was a movie adaptation of the anonymous Berlin woman's diary called *Anonyma*. It didn't quite capture the unsentimental tone of the book, but it had a cathartic effect in Germany, encouraging many women to start talking, because this time people were prepared to listen.

It was a mainstream movie. The main actress, for example, Nina Hoss, is one of the most famous German actresses so far. And I decided that when we want to reach the women, then this was a good chance, and it was a last chance somehow.

We made a kind of press conference, and then the next day I sat here in this room and the phone rang and rang. In his clinic at the University of Greifswald, surrounded by a leafy park, Philipp finally assessed just 27 elderly patients. Social acknowledgement is, he says, the big step in the healing process.

But as with many families in Germany and Russia, the trauma was closer to home than the psychologists realised. What I find extremely touching and also difficult is last year I had a meeting with my eldest brother in Berlin where we had some wine, and then he suddenly told me that my father, as a boy, during their flight from Western Prussia, had to witness the rape of his mother by a Russian soldier. I was somehow shocked.

My brother said, Oh, Philipp, I thought that you conducted the study because you knew it. Across the old Soviet Union, the 9th of May was celebrated as Victory Day in the Great Patriotic War, as it still is today, with the intensity of a religious ritual. Vera Dubina, a young historian at the University of Humanities in Moscow, says she knew nothing of the rapes until a scholarship took her to Berlin.

Nobody speak about it, so I try to explain it's a very important topic. Vera Dubina wrote a paper in 2010 about the discourse around the wartime

rapes, or lack of it, but her editors retuned it to put the emphasis on German guilt. Nobody wanted to print my article, and the Russian media reacted very aggressively to this.

It's not true, and so on and so on. And it's still this collective trauma. There's still a Russian inside, and also in Germans, but the Germans speak about it, and the Russians not.

I just think that the new generation, they're just victims of this new ideology about Second World War. It's just a myth. Nobody make an investigation anymore.

They're just praising our victory. Mythologising. Yes, mythologising.

And I just think that they should know it. It's the fate of history to be rewritten to suit the agenda of the present. That's why first-hand accounts are so valuable.

From those who brave the subject now in their senior years, like veteran Lyashenko and Ingeborg Bullit, and from those younger voices who put pencil to paper on the spot. Vitaly Gelfand, son of our Red Army diarist, Lieutenant Vladimir Gelfand, doesn't deny that many Soviet soldiers showed great bravery and sacrifice in World War II. But that's not the whole storey.

People weren't marching around in iron clothes. They didn't face death with stern smiles and songs about their motherland. There was everything.

Cowardice. Meanness. Hatred.

Looting. Betrayal. Desertion.

Theft among soldiers and officers. Alcoholism. There were rapes, murders.

There were military awards given to those who didn't deserve them at all. Recently, Vitaly did an interview on Russian radio, which triggered some anti-Semitic trolling on social media, saying the diaries are fake and he should clear off to Israel. He's trying to get it published in Russia, but that could be a long way off.

If people don't want to know the truth, they're just deluding themselves. The entire world understands it. Russia understands it.

And the people behind those new laws about defaming the past even they understand it. We can't move forward until we look back. I'm Lucy Ash and you've been listening to The Rape of Berlin.

The producer was Dorothy Fever. One final scene. Lilienthal's Trasser Cemetery.

Tucked away here is the only public inscription I can find that mentions the rapes. I'm with Elfriede Muller from Berlin's Public Art Bureau. Very close to the gate, there's a granite stone and there's a big wreath with cream and yellow and red flowers and a ribbon with the German flag.

Can you read me the inscription, Elfriede? Against war and violence for the victims of expulsion, deportation, rape and forced labour. Innocent children, mothers, women and girls. Their sufferings in the Second World War should be unforgotten to prevent future suffering.

And you could quite easily walk past it, couldn't you? I think it's not really a memorial, it's a kind of collective grave.

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