

TIMELINE OF...

FINLAND AT WAR

The easternmost Scandinavian country fought three separate defensive conflicts to preserve Finnish independence: two against Soviet Russia and one against Nazi Germany

THE WINTER WAR

In November 1939, nearly 1 million Soviet troops invaded Finland after the Finns refused to cede key territory to Joseph Stalin. Over four months, Finnish soldiers used the extremely cold winter to stop and destroy Russian columns.

November 1939-March 1940

1939-44

February 1940

March 1940-June 1941

THE BOMBING OF HELSINKI

The Finnish capital was first bombed on 30 November 1939, just three hours into the Winter War. Between 1939-44, Helsinki was bombed by the Russians 47 times, resulting in casualties of 342 dead, 906 injured and 164 buildings destroyed.

Left: The Soviet bombing of Helsinki, 30 November 1939. On the same day, 21 divisions of the Red Army invaded Finland

BREAKTHROUGH ON THE MANNERHEIM LINE

By early 1940, the Russians had been continually humiliated in battle. The Soviets reorganised and began a massive offensive on the Karelian Isthmus on 1 February 1940. The overstretched Finnish Army almost collapsed after a Soviet breakthrough on the defensive Mannerheim Line on 11 February and sued for peace.



Left: Red Army soldiers show off a captured Finnish state flag. Their triumphant pose belies the fact that they had not been able to conquer the country

ALLIANCE WITH NAZI GERMANY

After being forced to concede territory to the Russians, Finland entered an informal pact with Germany to defend itself against further Soviet attacks. German troops were permitted to make bases in Lapland in preparation for Operation Barbarossa.



“NEARLY 1 MILLION SOVIET TROOPS INVADIED FINLAND AFTER THE FINNS REFUSED TO CEDE KEY TERRITORY TO JOSEPH STALIN”



Finnish ski troops on patrol in northern Finland, 12 January 1940. Soldiers like these wrought havoc on the invading Soviet forces

THE KARELIAN ISTHMUS CONQUESTS

In July 1941, the Finnish Army launched a major offensive on the Karelian Isthmus and north of Lake Ladoga. The Finns managed to advance as far as the outskirts of Leningrad and as a result, their participation aided German maritime operations in the Baltic against Russia.



Finnish military parade in Viipuri (present day Vyborg) after its recapture from Russia on 31 August 1941

A destroyed Soviet T-26 tank at the Battle of Ilomantsi. This Finnish victory was the last battle of the Continuation War and led to subsequent peace talks



THE MOSCOW ARMISTICE

The armistice was a peace agreement between Finland and the USSR, with the Russians reconfirming the territory they had won in the Winter War. German troops had to be expelled from Finnish territory but the country avoided Soviet occupation.

June 1941-September 1944

July-September 1944

19 September 1944

September 1944-April 1945

CONTINUATION WAR

Finland joined the war against the Russians days after the commencement of Operation Barbarossa. Finnish armies eventually regained the lost territory on the Karelian Isthmus and halted their offensive 30 kilometres short of Leningrad. The Soviet armies responded by launching huge counterattacks, but the Finns fought them to a standstill.

Finnish soldiers during an alarm in a defensive line on the Karelian Isthmus, 16 June 1944



THE LAPLAND WAR

Following the Soviet demand for German troops to be withdrawn from Finland, fighting broke out between the former allies. The Germans were driven out of most of northern Finland but they devastated large parts of Finnish territory in revenge. The last German troops were expelled in April 1945.



The Germans put up a bitter sign for their former Finnish allies in Muonio. It reads: "As a thanks for not demonstrating a brotherhood of arms"

WAR IN THE NORTH

Finland's conflicts during WWII were fought at the extreme northern and southern parts of the country with the most intense fighting occurring on the Finnish-Russian border in and around Karelia

1 MANNERHEIM LINE 1939-40

To protect the south-east border of Finland, approximately 200 machine gun positions and shelters are built out of concrete. The Red Army is halted at this line for two months before breaking through in February 1940 after heavy bombardments.

2 MOSCOW PEACE TREATY 12 March 1940

The overwhelming threat from the Soviet Union pushes Finland to the negotiating table. Despite their military success against the Red Army, the Finns are forced to concede large areas of territory, including the Karelian Isthmus, Viipuri Bay, Salla, Hanko and some islands in the Gulf of Finland.

3 HITLER'S VISIT TO FINLAND 4 June 1942

In early June 1942, Adolf Hitler pays a brief visit to Field Marshal Mannerheim to ensure Finland keeps applying pressure on the USSR. Mannerheim personally dislikes the Führer and a conversation between them is secretly recorded. It becomes the only recording of Hitler speaking informally.



Hitler boarding his private aircraft after visiting Finland. The official reason for his visit is to celebrate Mannerheim's 75th birthday

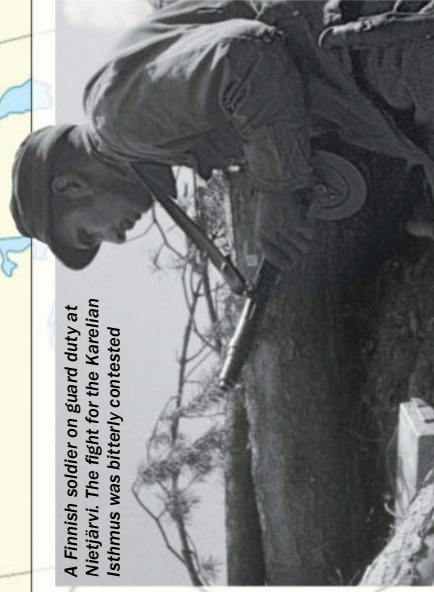
OPERATION NORDLICHT: THE GERMAN EVACUATION FROM FINLAND 4 OCTOBER 1944 - 30 JANUARY 1945 FINNISH LAPLAND

OPERATION SILVER FOX (SOVIET VICTORY) 29 JUNE - 17 NOVEMBER 1941 ARCTIC, LAPLAND, NORTHERN RUSSIA

BATTLE OF ROVANIEMI (GERMAN RETREAT) OCTOBER 1944 ROVANIEMI, LAPLAND

BATTLE OF PETSAMO (SOVIET ADVANCE) 30 NOVEMBER 1939 - 12 MARCH 1940 PETSAMO

BRITISH FLEET AIR ARM RAID ON KIRKENES AND PETSAMO (AXIS VICTORY) 30 JULY 1941 KIRKENES, NORWAY, PETSAMO, FINLAND



A Finnish soldier on guard duty at Nietjärvi. The fight for the Karelian Isthmus was bitterly contested

4 BATTLE OF NIETJÄRVI 15-17 July 1944

This is the Red Army's second attempt at a breakthrough in the Nietjärvi sector. Over the course of two days, the attacking Soviet division is partially surrounded before suffering 2,000 casualties and retreating in disarray.

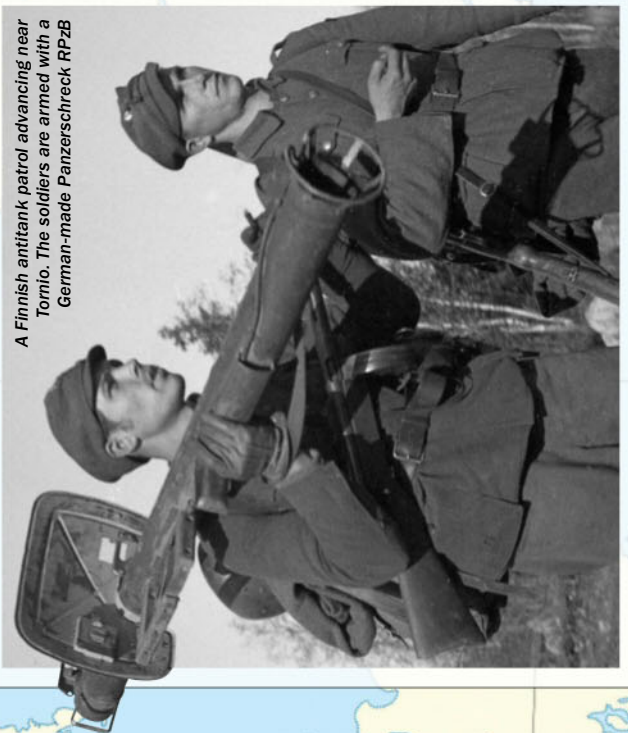
"THE ATTACKING SOVIET DIVISION IS PARTIALLY SURROUNDED BEFORE SUFFERING 2,000 CASUALTIES AND RETREATING IN DISARRAY"

5 BATTLE OF TALI-IHANTALA 25 July – 9 July 1944
With 50,000 Finns against 150,000 Soviet troops, Tali-Ihantala is the largest battle in the history of Scandinavia. In a defensive victory, Finnish troops fight the Soviets to a halt and partly encircle them, inflicting three times more casualties than they receive.

6 BATTLE OF ILOMANTSI 26 July – 13 August 1944
Despite previous defeats, the Red Army attempts a new offensive north of Lake Ladoga around Iloimantsi. Although they are superior in manpower and materiel, two Soviet divisions are encircled and virtually destroyed. Iloimantsi is the last major Soviet attack on Finland.

7 MOSCOW ARMISTICE 19 September 1944
After the end of the Continuation War, the territorial gains made during the conflict by Finland are returned to the USSR and the territory lost in the Winter War is re-confirmed. As well as heavy reparations, Finland is also forced to eject German forces, which leads to the Lapland War.

8 BATTLE OF TORNIO 1-8 October 1944
After the Soviets demand that German forces leave Finland, war breaks out between the former allies. The Battle of Tornio is the first major engagement of the Lapland War, which results in a German retreat, but hundreds of casualties are incurred on both sides.



A Finnish antitank patrol advancing near Tornio. The soldiers are armed with a German-made Panzerschreck RPzB

OPERATION PLATINUM FOX (SOVIET VICTORY)
29 JUNE – 21 SEPTEMBER 1941 LITSA RIVER, PETSAMO

FINNISH CONQUEST OF EAST KARELIA
1941 SOVIET EAST KARELIA

BATTLE OF KELJA (FINNISH VICTORY)
25-27 DECEMBER 1939 KELJA AREA, EASTERN KARELIAN ISTHMUS

BATTLE OF TOLVAJARVI (FINNISH VICTORY)
12 DECEMBER 1939 TOLVAJARVI

BATTLE OF KOILLAA (FINNISH VICTORY)
7 DECEMBER 1939 – 13 MARCH 1940 KOLLAA RIVER, KARELIA

BATTLE OF NIETJARVI (FINNISH VICTORY)
15-17 JULY 1944 LADOGA, KARELIA

BATTLE OF VUOSALMI (FINNISH VICTORY)
4-17 JULY 1944 KARELIAN ISTHMUS

BATTLE OF HONKANIEMI (SOVIET VICTORY)
25-27 FEBRUARY 1940 KARELIAN ISTHMUS

SOVIET BOMBINGS OF HELSINKI
1939-44 HELSINKI, UUSIMAA

BATTLE OF NERVA ISLAND (SOVIET NAVAL VICTORY)
19-20 JUNE 1942 NEAR NERVA ISLAND, GULF OF FINLAND

BATTLE OF HANKO (FINNISH VICTORY)
22 JUNE – 2 DECEMBER 1941 HANKO PENINSULA

BATTLE OF SUOMUSSALMI

This prolonged clash was a defining battle of the Winter War and set the tone for Finnish defiance against Soviet aggression

Between 7 December 1939 and 8 January 1940, the Finns fought a desperate battle to prevent the Russians from occupying their country. In early December 1939, elements of the Soviet 9th Army – some 45,000-55,000 men – advanced on the village of Suomussalmi with the intention of overrunning the Finnish-Russian border. The Soviet objective was to use the capture of Suomussalmi to then force the Finns to fight on two fronts. This would effectively cut Finland in half and lead to its inevitable collapse. However, the Red Army had not counted on the ingenuity and defiance of the 11,000 Finns pitted against them.

“THE SOVIET OBJECTIVE WAS TO USE THE CAPTURE OF SUOMUSSALMI TO THEN FORCE THE FINNS TO FIGHT ON TWO FRONTS. THIS WOULD EFFECTIVELY CUT FINLAND IN HALF”

1. 7 DECEMBER: SUOMUSSALMI FALLS

The village falls to Soviet forces with little resistance. Only one Finnish battalion is in the sector at Raate, just outside Suomussalmi. They destroy this smaller settlement to deny the Soviets shelter and withdraw to the opposite shores of lakes Niskanselkä and Haukipera.



2. SOVIET PROBLEMS ON THE ICE

Between 8-9 December, the Soviets make two failed attempts to attack across the frozen lakes to the west of Suomussalmi. They fail because the ice can support the Russian soldiers but not their tanks and heavy equipment. The Finns are reinforced by five battalions,

three separate companies and two reconnaissance detachments under Colonel Hjalmar Siilasvuo, who takes command.

3. THE FINNS' FAILED ASSAULT

On 11 December, the Finns make a bid to retake Suomussalmi. Over the next week, they launch several assaults to retake the village, with the main objective being the settlement's church. Finnish forces are unsuccessful and incur serious losses.

4. THE SOVIET COUNTERATTACK

On 24 December, the Red Army attempts to counterattack from Suomussalmi. Even though the Finns have been unable to take the village, they have assembled their own formidable defences and these prove too strong for the Soviets to break through.

5. THE FINNS RECAPTURE SUOMUSSALMI

The Finns launch a new assault on the village after being reinforced with two regiments. This time their attack is successful and the Soviets flee over the frozen lakes of Niskanselkä and Haukipera.

6. PURSUING THE RED ARMY

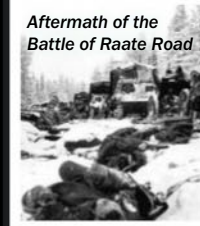
Now that Suomussalmi has been taken, Colonel Siilasvuo transfers all available forces to the Raate road area where the Soviets occupy the stretch between Kuomasjoki and Likoharju. Siilasvuo's strategy is simple: cut the Red Army supply lines to the border.

7. SIILASVUO'S PLAN

The Finnish commander aims to cut the fleeing Soviets' escape and supply route by dividing them into smaller segments (these are called 'mottis' by Finnish soldiers). The mottis are to be isolated and destroyed with the Finnish forces creating a parallel road in the Alanteenjärvi-Vuokkijärvi area, which is used to assemble troops, shelter and resupply between attacks.

8. BATTLE OF RAATE ROAD

From 1-8 January, Siilasvuo's plan is deployed along the Raate Road with the main thrust of the Finnish attack at Haukila. The Soviet troops are completely surrounded and wiped out at Sanginlampi and Eskola. They are also encircled at Karila, Tynnelä and Mattila.



9. ENDGAME AT HAUKILA

Between 5-8 January, three regiments of the Soviet 44th Division are squeezed into a small area at Haukila, with their escape route to the east closed. The 44th are turned into a big 'motti' and the Finns destroy them over three days. By 10 January, the Suomussalmi area has been cleared of Russian troops.

10. A HAUL OF ENEMY EQUIPMENT

After the battles on the Raate Road, the Finns capture a huge amount of discarded Russian equipment including dozens of tanks and artillery pieces plus thousands of rifles and other weapons.

'MOTTI' TACTICS

THE FINNISH VICTORY AT SUOMUSSALMI WAS LARGELY THANKS TO AN INGENUOUS LOCAL WAY OF FIGHTING AGAINST A NUMERICALLY SUPERIOR FOE

The Finns were always vastly outnumbered but they repeatedly triumphed against the Russians in battle through an enveloping tactic known as 'motti'.

'Motti' is a Finnish slang word that originally meant 'one cubic metre of firewood'. It was in this flammable context that the tactic was developed. To counter their numerical inferiority, Finns would attack Soviet columns by quickly bypassing their strong points and attacking from behind. The element of surprise was crucial and Soviet soldiers would find themselves cut off while trying to root out Finnish attacks in their rear. The Finns would call these doomed and isolated units 'mottis'. This was a wintry version of 'divide and conquer'.

Although Soviet mottis were often well defended, the Finns used a variety of tactics to destroy them. If there was a cluster of weak and strong mottis, the Finns would attack the

Soviet infantrymen on skis under fire from Finnish artillery during the Winter War. Motti tactics entailed cramming soldiers like these into isolated groups and then destroying them



weaker ones first and leave the larger ones to suffer with the blistering cold temperatures and lack of food. Troops would then chip away at defending positions by attacking at nighttime and tightening the perimeter. They would also assault the mottis 24 hours a day by rotating Finnish soldiers in the frontline to keep up a relentless bombardment. Suomussalmi was the largest motti clash of its kind during the Winter War and was a textbook case for future battles.



Above: A long line of Soviet tanks captured by the Finnish Army after the battle. Dozens of armoured vehicles were captured at Suomussalmi



ARCHAIC WEAPONS

With extremely limited resources, Finland managed to avoid a Soviet conquest by using an unlikely array of antiquated or improvised weapons and vehicles

Although mobilisation was at nearly 100 per cent in 1939, Finland's armed forces experienced severe equipment and munitions shortages. Both the army and air force fought with extremely outdated weapons that included some firearms and artillery pieces dating from the 19th century. Consequently, the fight for Finnish independence often relied on weapon improvisations. This did yield obvious failures but there were also notable successes.

ARMAMENT

BT-42s were armed with a QF 4.5-inch field howitzer that could rotate 360 degrees. The British government supplied them but the guns first entered service in 1910.

BT-42 ASSAULT GUN

The Finns had very limited numbers of armoured vehicles and improvised with bits of equipment they either already owned or had captured. The BT-42 combined a Russian tank hull and a British howitzer gun. Only 18 were manufactured and they proved to be unreliable and easy targets for Soviet T-34s.

ENGINE

The Mikulin M-17T engine enabled speeds of 53kmph, had an operational range of 378 kilometres and a 500 horsepower output. However, it was rather unreliable and strained under the weight of the tank's huge gun and turret.

TURRET

The turret was an original Finnish design but its weight put great pressure on the engine. Its distinctive look made it an easy target for enemy artillery and tanks.

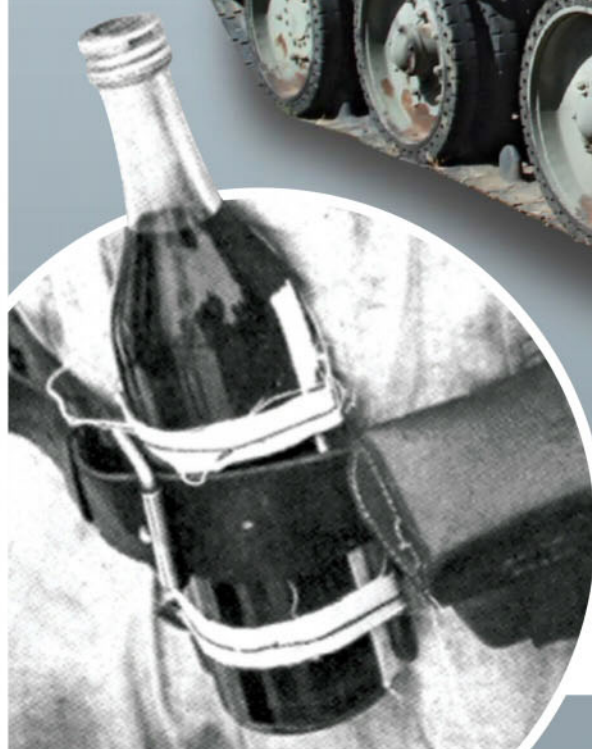
HULL

The body was made from the hull of a relatively well-armoured Red Army BT-7 light tank. Additionally, the Christie suspension system allowed for off-road cross-country travelling.

Left: Russian cluster bombs were nicknamed 'Molotov bread baskets' by the Finns, who in turn laconically invented the 'cocktail' as a 'drink to go with dinner'

MOLOTOV COCKTAIL

This legendary improvised weapon was immortalised in the Winter War. Simply made of a glass bottle filled with gasoline, alcohol (usually vodka), soap, tar and a lighted rag, the bombs were nonetheless very effective against the highly flammable Russian tanks. A Finnish state corporation called Alko produced 540,000 'cocktails' during the conflict.





Despite being obsolete, the CV remained in service with the Finnish Air Force until 1945

FOKKER CV

The Finnish Air Force was in poor shape in 1939 and operated a plethora of inadequate or antiquated aircraft. The oldest of these were Fokker CV biplanes, which were originally designed in 1924 but were used as night reconnaissance and bombing aircraft during the Winter War.

76MM M1902 GUN

The M1902 was a Russian light field gun first developed in 1902. It had a conventional design with a rectangular gun shield that could fire 12 rounds-per-minute at a range of 8.49 kilometres. Despite its age, during World War II it was not just used by the Finns but also by the Germans who captured many during Operation Barbarossa.

Right: The M1902's service was lengthy, ranging from the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 to the Vietnam War

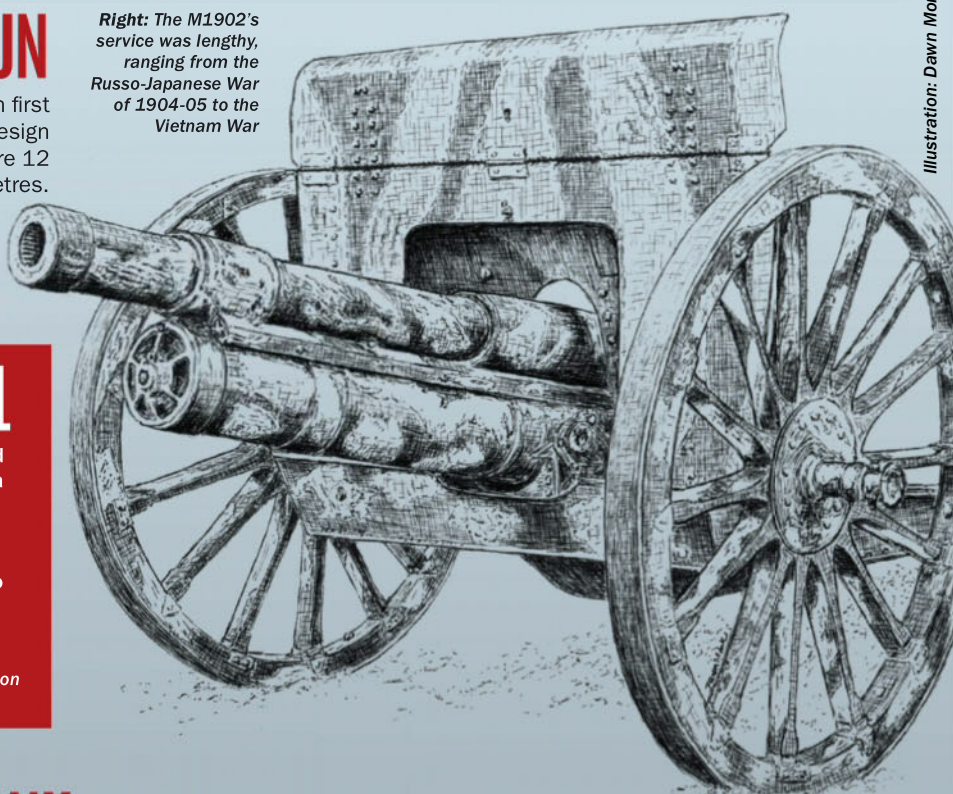


Illustration: Dawn Monks

MOSIN-NAGANT M91

Most Finnish (and Russian) infantryman carried a Mosin-Nagant M91 rifle, even though it was a 19th-century invention. The Finnish army was left with a surplus of these weapons after the Russian Revolution, and during the interwar period they simply traded other rifles to add to their existing stock.

Left: The Finns used their abundant supply of spare parts to adapt the rifle during the 1920s, in preparation for future wars

VICKERS 6-TON TANK

This light tank was designed and evaluated by the British but was rejected for service by the British Army. They were used as part of Finland's only tank attack during the Winter War at the Battle of Honkaniemi, which was a disaster. Out of 13 available tanks, only six were used and they were knocked out by dozens of Soviet tanks.

Right: Finnish 6-ton Vickers tanks were manufactured in Britain in 1939. This tank was upgraded with a captured Soviet 45mm gun in a T-26 turret during the war



HEAD TO HEAD



In 1939, hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops invaded Finland in an attempt to conquer the country but in the resulting Winter War, the Red Army received a severe drubbing from the outnumbered Finns

FINNISH ARMY SOLDIER

ACTIVE CIRCA: 1939-40

NUMBERS

The Finnish Army initially only numbered 180,000, supported by the volunteer White Guards. They were outnumbered in all areas, having only 32 tanks and 114 combat aircraft with which to fend off the Soviets.

TACTICS

Using 'motti' infantry tactics, Finnish soldiers would encircle and destroy enemy units. Methods included jamming vehicle tracks with logs and using Molotov cocktails to detonate fuel tanks.

EQUIPMENT

Finnish equipment was mainly obsolete and soldiers often relied on antiquated rifles, but they also had light machine guns like the Lahti-Saloranta M/26, and also collected discarded Soviet weapons such as the PPD-40.

SURVIVABILITY

Thanks to their tactics, local knowledge and skilful adaptability to the harsh Scandinavian climate, Finnish losses were comparatively light during the Winter War. The total casualties were around 26,662 dead and 39,886 wounded.

TOTAL



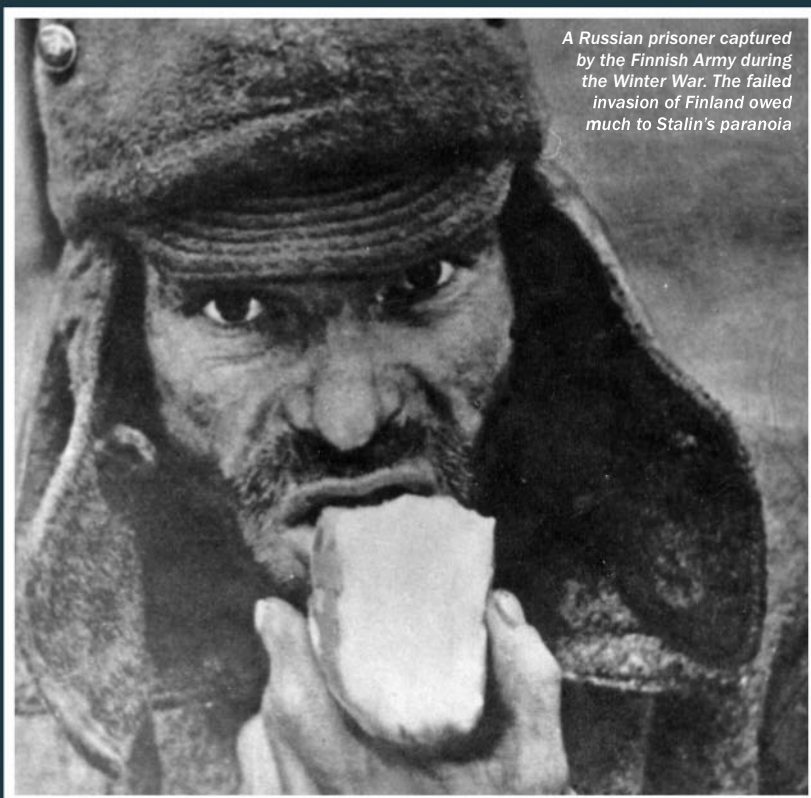
WARFARE ON ICE

Finland has a relatively flat landscape with forests, swamps and thousands of lakes. This was not ideal terrain for moving heavy weaponry in winter as the Soviets would discover but for the Finns, the frozen topography was ideal for defence. Finnish troopers wore white uniforms and camouflage to blend into the terrain and used skis, sledges and horses (often captured from the Russians) to speed through the countryside. They took every opportunity to outmanoeuvre and attack the Red Army, which stubbornly stuck to roads and rigid formations, and consequently inflicted huge damage on the invaders.

"FINNISH TROOPERS WORE WHITE UNIFORMS AND CAMOUFLAGE TO BLEND INTO THE TERRAIN"



Finnish soldiers travel through the wintry landscape. Although this photograph dates from 1942, the earlier Winter War was characterised by this mobile warfare



A Russian prisoner captured by the Finnish Army during the Winter War. The failed invasion of Finland owed much to Stalin's paranoia

"HAD THE SOVIET COMMAND STRUCTURE NOT BEEN LIQUIDATED, IT IS ARGUABLE THAT FINLAND MIGHT HAVE BEEN CONQUERED"

Illustrations: Jean-Michel Girard / The Art Agency

BROKEN CHAIN OF COMMAND

The poor Russian performance during the Winter War was largely a result of Stalin's paranoid purge of the Red Army's high command in the late 1930s. Beginning in 1937, tens of thousands of officers, including theoreticians and senior commanders, were executed to fit Stalin's personal view of a docile military that bent

to his will. This deliberate destruction of talent was a self-inflicted wound that later manifested itself in Finland when 1 million men were stalled for months with heavy casualties before a thinly defended Finnish line. Had the Soviet command structure not been liquidated, it is arguable that Finland might have been conquered.

RED ARMY SOLDIER

ACTIVE CIRCA: 1939-40

NUMBERS

Numerically far superior, the Russians massed 1 million men along the Finnish border and invaded in November 1939 with 450,000 men, 6,451 armoured vehicles and 3,880 aircraft.

EQUIPMENT

Although they possessed more hard equipment like vehicles and artillery, the Soviets were hampered by a lack of camouflage. Their darker uniforms made them easy targets in the snowy landscape for Finnish snipers and machine gunners.

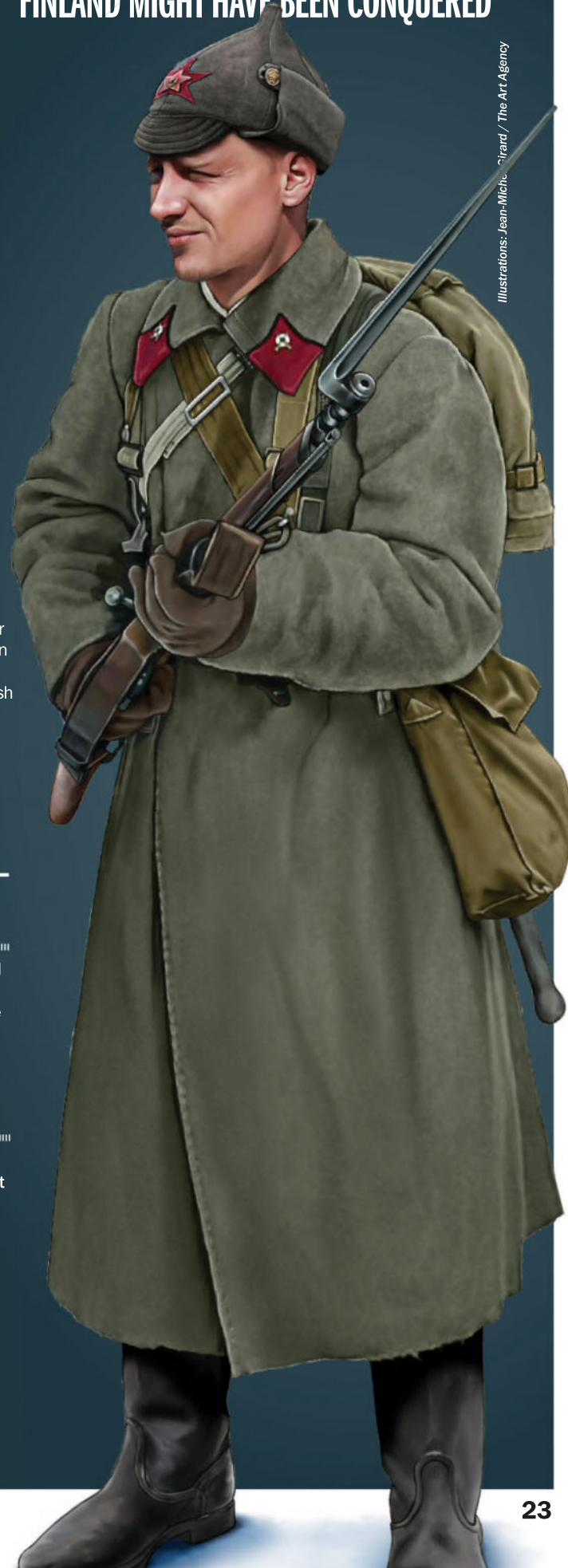
TACTICS

Although borne out of revolution, the Red Army's tactics were rooted in the tsarist past. This included traditional large-scale frontal attacks, which had little effect against the Finns' guerrilla warfare.

SURVIVABILITY

Although the Soviets eventually beat the Finnish, their poor performance cost them dear. At the hands of the Finns, Red Army losses were approximately 126,875 dead, 264,908 wounded and 5,572 captured.

TOTAL



Field Marshal Mannerheim and Hitler.
Despite fighting alongside the Germans,
Mannerheim protected Jews stating,
"While Jews serve in my army, I will not
allow their deportation"

DUPLICITY AND COLLABORATION

In trying to hold on to its freedom, the country see-sawed between protecting Jews from Nazi persecution to establishing concentration camps to punish their Russian enemies



Left: A possibly staged photo of Russian children at a Finnish-run concentration camp in Petrozavodsk. The sign declares, in Finnish and Russian, "Entry to the camp and conversations through the fence are forbidden under penalty of death"

A Finnish Air Force aircraft. During the Lapland War, it was swastikas against swastikas as the Finns fought to expel Nazi Germany from their country



The swastika is still used on flags by the Finnish Air Force. The pictured flag represents the Air Force Academy and has been in use since 2005



The story of Finland's role during WWII is arguably the most unique and ambiguous of the whole conflict. The roots for this lay in the country's desire to retain its independence despite being surrounded by totalitarian regimes. Against all the odds, and with a population of only 3 million, the country managed to maintain its freedom. However, in order to achieve that, there were many moral compromises made between 1939-45 that have since been largely forgotten and that sit uneasily with the popular view of Finland being a plucky underdog against external aggression.

Finland was a young country in 1939. Originally part of Sweden – albeit with a different language and culture – from 1809, Finnish territory had been surrendered to the Russian Empire and run as a semi-autonomous 'grand duchy'. The Finns declared independence after the Russian Revolution and established a democratic republic in 1919. The new country was vehemently opposed to Bolshevism and actively resisted coming under Russian rule again, let alone the Soviet rule threatened in 1939. For the next five years, Finns fought tooth and nail to maintain independence from their neighbour to the east but in order to achieve that, Finland made a Faustian pact with Nazi Germany.

After fighting the Winter War alone, an informal Finnish-German agreement was formalised in September 1940 and led to the stationing of increasing numbers of German troops in Finland. Now an ally of the Third Reich, they launched an offensive to recover lost territory that coincided perfectly with German aims in Operation Barbarossa. Finnish participation helped to blockade the Soviet Baltic Fleet, tie down Russian troops and put

pressure on Leningrad, then under German siege. However, it would be wrong to assume that Finland was a typical ally. Unlike Italy and Japan, the Finns never signed the Tripartite Pact and therefore were not an official member of the Axis Powers. This made Allied feelings towards Finland deeply ambivalent.

The Allies had great goodwill towards the Finns because of the stirring defence of democracy in the Winter War, but that was now compromised by the vital need to support the Soviet Union after 1941. Consequently, Britain half-heartedly declared war on Finland during the Continuation War but there were no hostilities with the USA. The Allies could also not entirely condemn the Finns, as they remained democratic and held presidential elections throughout the 1939-45 period, which was unprecedented for a Nazi ally.

Above all, despite the close co-operation with the Nazis, Finland did not persecute Jews. There were around 2,000 Finnish Jews, including approximately 100 refugees from Central Europe, and like all able-bodied males, 200 Jewish men served in the Finnish armed forces as conscripts. This led to a bizarre situation where Jews in the Finnish Army fought on the same side as the Nazis, however, these soldiers saw themselves as fighting for their homeland, not Hitler. Despite the presence of Waffen-SS troops on Finnish soil, official

government policy dictated that there was 'no Jewish question'. Although eight foreign Jews were handed over to the Gestapo in 1942, the resulting public outcry meant there were no more deportations. This was extremely at odds with Nazi policy, but the Finns themselves were guilty of appalling acts against the Soviets.

There was little pity for captured Red Army soldiers. About 19,000 Soviet POWs died in Finnish prison camps, largely due to malnutrition and disease. This number was about 30 per cent of the total prisoners and the Finns also carried a mini-version of Lebensraum in captured Russian territory. When Eastern Karelia was conquered, plans were enacted to deport Russians to German-occupied Russia. 24,000 Russian civilians were interned in concentration camps and 4,200 died from malnourishment during 1942, including more than 3,000 inmates at Petrozavodsk camp. This was a death toll of almost 14 per cent and it is hard to escape the conclusion that in this regard, Finnish nationalism proved as toxic as that of its unsavoury allies.

Perhaps the most potent symbol of Finland's ambivalent stance to outsiders was the use of the swastika. Adopted by the Nazi Party in Germany in 1920, the swastika was actually a common motif in Baltic folk art as a symbol of luck. The Finnish Air Force actually introduced a blue swastika as its emblem from 1918 – two years before the Nazis popularised it – and it remained in use until 1945. The symbol's blackened reputation under the Nazis confused Finnish intentions during WWII to the outside world. Although it fought alongside the Third Reich, Finland's overriding aim throughout the conflict was to remain independent and democratic. It ultimately achieved these aims, although arguably at a great ethical price.

"ABOUT 19,000 SOVIET POWS DIED IN FINNISH PRISON CAMPS, LARGELY DUE TO MALNUTRITION AND DISEASE"

HEROES & LEADERS

Despite its small size, Finland produced many daring generals, soldiers and pilots who successfully took on the might of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany

CARL GUSTAF EMIL MANNERHEIM

THE MILITARY STATESMAN WHO PRESERVED FINNISH INDEPENDENCE DESPITE ENORMOUS EXTERNAL PRESSURES

YEARS OF SERVICE: 1918-46 RANK: FIELD MARSHAL

Born into a wealthy Finnish family of German-Swedish descent, Mannerheim is often referred to as the 'founding father' of modern Finland, but he began his career in the Imperial Russian Army in 1887, when his native country was still under Romanov rule. He was promoted to colonel during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-05 and became a highly decorated general during WWI. However, after the Russian Revolution in 1917, he formed the first army of a newly independent Finland and during the 1930s constructed defence lines along the south east part of the Finnish-Russian border known as the Mannerheim Line.

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Mannerheim became commander-in-chief of the Finnish armed forces at the age of 72. During the Winter War, the troops he commanded wreaked considerable damage on the Soviets against all expectations, but Mannerheim was concerned that Finland should not be perceived as pro-German and built up a unique political style that was neither explicitly pro-Axis or pro-Allies.

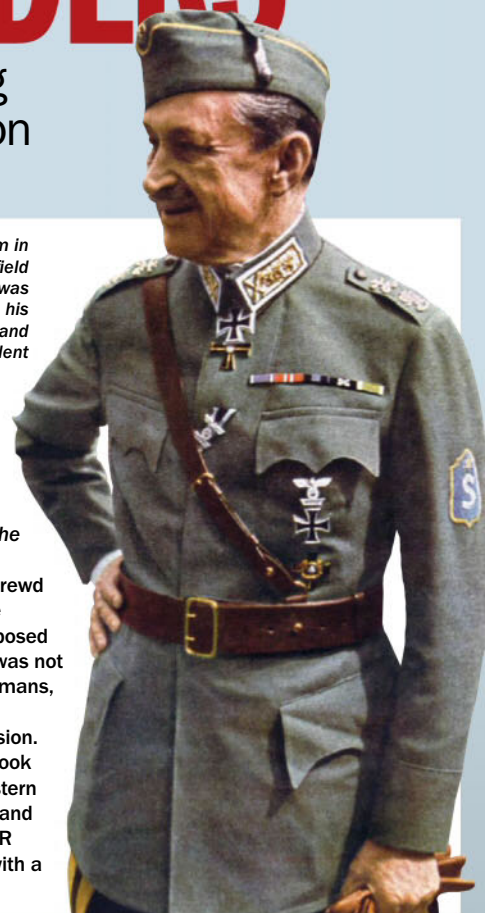
Mannerheim viewed Finland as fighting virtually alone for its independence and emphasised this to his soldiers saying:

"Fortifications, artillery, foreign aid will be of no value unless the ordinary soldier knows that it is he guarding his country."

Despite this patriotic call, Mannerheim was shrewd enough to understand that Finnish independence involved concessions and although the terms imposed on Finland by the USSR were harsh, the country was not occupied. Although Mannerheim disliked the Germans, his pragmatism drove him to make an unofficial alliance with the Nazis to stave off Soviet aggression.

During the Continuation War, his troops even took Soviet territory with the intention of annexing Eastern Karelia. Mannerheim became president in 1944 and managed to negotiate a settlement with the USSR that kept Finland independent, democratic and with a market economy.

Right: Mannerheim in the uniform of a field marshal in 1942. It was largely thanks to his leadership that Finland remained independent



AARNE JUUTILAINEN

THE DEFIANT EX-LEGIONNAIRE HERO OF KOLLAA

YEARS IN SERVICE: 1925-28, 1939-45 RANK: CAPTAIN

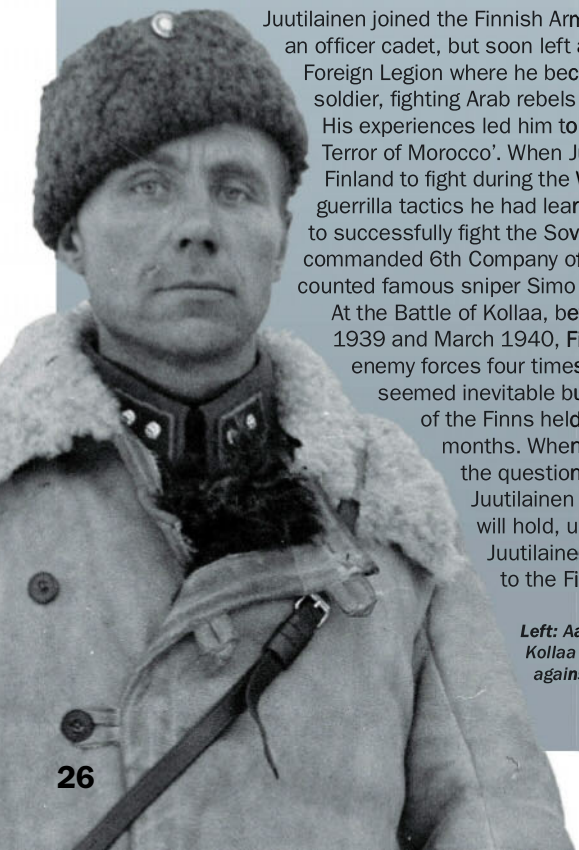
Juutilainen joined the Finnish Army in the 1920s as an officer cadet, but soon left and joined the French Foreign Legion where he became known as a bold soldier, fighting Arab rebels in the Atlas Mountains. His experiences led him to be nicknamed 'The Terror of Morocco'. When Juutilainen returned to Finland to fight during the Winter War, he used the guerrilla tactics he had learned in the Foreign Legion to successfully fight the Soviets. As an officer, he commanded 6th Company of the 34th Regiment and counted famous sniper Simo Häyhä among his platoon.

At the Battle of Kollaa, between December 1939 and March 1940, Finnish troops held back enemy forces four times their size. Collapse seemed inevitable but the tenacious fighting of the Finns held the Soviets back for months. When a Finnish general posed the question, "Will Kollaa hold?"

Juutilainen famously replied, "Kollaa will hold, unless we are told to run."

Juutilainen's leadership contributed to the Finnish victory in that battle.

Left: Aarne Juutilainen's bravery at Kollaa symbolised Finnish defiance against Soviet aggression



ILMARI JUUTILAINEN

THE OUTSTANDING FIGHTER ACE OF WWII OUTSIDE OF GERMANY

YEARS IN SERVICE: 1932-47 RANK: WARRANT OFFICER

The younger brother of Aarne Juutilainen, Ilmari was the highest scoring fighter ace of WWII outside of the Luftwaffe. Juutilainen joined the armed forces in 1932 for his compulsory military service and became a pilot in the Finnish Air Force with the rank of sergeant in 24 Lentolaivue (Squadron) from 1935. When the Winter War broke out, Juutilainen scored his first victory in December 1939, but he came into his own during the Continuation War in Brewster Buffalo aircraft. Although this American plane was obsolete in other theatres, it performed well in Finland and Juutilainen claimed 34 aerial combat victories during this period.

Juutilainen's total war record was outstanding. During 437 sorties, he accumulated 94 official combat victories and finished the war without a single hit to his aircraft from enemy fighters. He also never lost a wingman in combat and he intriguingly refused an officer's commission because he feared it would prevent him from flying.

"HE FINISHED THE WAR WITHOUT A SINGLE HIT TO HIS AIRCRAFT"



On 30 June 1944, Juutilainen shot down six Soviet aircraft. On top of his already impressive record, this made him an 'Ace in a Day'

SIMO HÄYHÄ

THE WINTER WAR'S EXCEPTIONALLY DEADLY SNIPER

YEARS IN SERVICE: 1925-1940 RANK: CORPORAL

Nicknamed 'White Death', Häyhä is widely regarded to have been the most skilled and successful sniper in any major war, with more than 500 kills to his name. As a member of the Finnish Civil Guard, Häyhä rigorously trained in target practice and in his spare time. He could eventually hit a target 16 times per minute at 152 metres.

From 1939, he served on the Kollaa River, where the Finns would hide off the roads in the wilderness and attack Soviet forces from behind. Häyhä would dress in white winter camouflage, carry a few days' supplies with him and kill any Russians who crossed his path. Remarkably, Häyhä used his rifle's iron sights instead of a scope and in a 100-day period managed to kill 500 Russians at an average rate of five kills a day. He only stopped when he was seriously wounded in the jaw by an explosive round from a counter-sniper (see image inset below).



In later life, Simo Häyhä summarised his skill as a sniper in a single word, "practice"



Hjalmar Siilasvuo (right) had a short temper and could be standoffish, but he was among Finland's most successful generals

HJALMAR SIILASVUO

THE SCOURGE OF SOVIET RUSSIA AND NAZI GERMANY

YEARS IN SERVICE: 1918-47 RANK: LIEUTENANT GENERAL

Born in Helsinki, Siilasvuo fought as an officer in WWI with Finnish volunteers in the Imperial German Army. As a colonel during the Winter War in 1940, troops under Siilasvuo's command captured hundreds of cannon and trucks, dozens of tanks and thousands of horses, light weapons and ammunition from the Red Army. Notwithstanding the additional death of thousands of soldiers, the loss to the Soviets was so great that the Soviet High Command executed a number of generals in its aftermath.

Siilasvuo was later given command of Finnish forces fighting in the Lapland War against the Germans between 1944-45. His task was to drive German forces out of the country in the far north into occupied Norway. At the first major engagement between the Finnish and German forces, the Finns won a hard-fought landing at Tornio on the Swedish border. From that point on, the Germans felt the Finns had betrayed them and Siilasvuo continued to lead the successful campaign to eject them from Finland.

"SIILASVUO'S COMMAND CAPTURED HUNDREDS OF CANNON AND TRUCKS, DOZENS OF TANKS AND THOUSANDS OF HORSES, LIGHT WEAPONS AND AMMUNITION FROM THE RED ARMY"

LAURI TÖRNI

THE MORTAL ENEMY OF THE SOVIET UNION SERVED IN THREE ARMIES TO FIGHT THEM

YEARS IN SERVICE: 1938-44 RANK: CAPTAIN

Törni was a daring officer whose lifelong fight against the Soviet Union saw him fight for three countries: Finland, Germany and the United States. He joined the Finnish Army in 1938, but received training as an SS volunteer before returning to Finland as an officer. During the Continuation War, Törni became famous as a commander of an infantry unit that was nicknamed 'Detachment Törni'. Otherwise known as the 'Lightning Bolts', this unit would penetrate deep behind enemy lines and inflict such damage on the Red Army that the Soviets placed a bounty of 3,000,000 Finnish marks on Törni's head.

For his bravery, Törni was awarded Finland's highest decoration, the Mannerheim Cross, but after peace was made with the Soviets in 1944, Törni rejoined the SS and led a detachment of German marines until the war's end. He was awarded the Iron Cross and later immigrated to the United States where he joined the US Army. He died fighting in the Vietnam War, but not before receiving a Bronze Star and five Purple Hearts.

Right: Lauri Törni as a Finnish lieutenant during the Continuation War. He was the only Finn that the Soviets placed a bounty on between 1939-44

