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A Frozen Hell: The Russo-Finnish Winter War Of 1939-1940

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A FROZEN HELL

THE RUSSO-FINNISH WINTER WAR OF 1939-40

Helsinki, 10:30 A.M., November 30, 1939. Soviet bombers drop from a cloud bank to unload their bombs on the capital city of Finland. In the weeks to come the world will watch admiringly as the tiny army of a small Baltic republic wages the kind of war that inspires legends against the invading military might of the Soviet Union. A forgotten war, until now.



WILLIAM R. TROTTER



Synopsis

In 1939, tiny Finland waged war-the kind of war that spawns legends-against the mighty Soviet Union, and yet their epic struggle has been largely ignored. Guerrillas on skis, heroic single-handed attacks on tanks, unfathomable endurance, and the charismatic leadership of one of this century's true military geniuses-these are the elements of both the Finnish victory and a gripping tale of war.

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Customer Reviews

I have read both William R. Trotter's "A Frozen Hell" and Engle & Paananen's "The Winter War: The Soviet Attack on Finland 1939-1940". In addition to these books I am in the process of reading 2 books by Max Jakobson, one of which is specifically on the Winter War, as well as a number of academic journal articles on Finland between 1937-1945.Trotter has done a great job of recounting the Winter War from both the Finnish and Russian political and military perspectives, using available documents. I am an American-Finn who is very proud of my Finnish heritage, yet I was not insulted by Trotter's treatment of the Russian perspective at all - it was very enlightning. I prefer to understand ALL the "why?"s surrounding an event as momentous as the Winter War. It is nice to have some idea what the Russian reasoning and motives were, even if I don't agree with them. Life is rarely black and white as we would like it to be.The short biography of Marshall Mannerheim in the beginning was especially useful. Understanding the man sheds light on his actions and opinions. It also explains a bit of the history of Russian-Finnish relations as well.Improvements: More maps would be very helpful. Also, as a Finnish speaking American I can appreciate Trotter's attempt to make understanding easier for non-finnish speakers, however the occasional reference

to places in Finn-glish was a slight annoyance. An example would be "... east of Lake KuokjÄrví" where the word "Lake" is redundant because the name of the place says it is a lake. This is a very picky detail and does not detract from the content. Overall I thoroughly enjoyed reading "A Frozen Hell". The more balanced and objective view taken by Trotter does not take away from the heroics and Sisu of the Finns. I also appreciated inclusion of a more detailed explanation on the surrounding political climate/situations.

Unfortunately, the Russo-Finnish war is usually given short shrift in most histories of WWII. This, in spite of the fact that it resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties, in spite of the fact the Finns performed some of the most brilliant feats of arms in modern history, and, in spite of the fact that the Western Allies sacrificed the Finns on the alter of political "necessity". The courageous, remarkable defense of their homeland by the Finns in the face of insurmountable odds is no less inspiring or intriguing for its ultimate futility. With an even hand, Trotter guides the reader through the ferocious Finnish winter, and takes us into the minds of both Russian and Finnish soldiers as they fight in some of the most appalling battlefield conditions ever. In conclusion, my sympathy for the Finns is obvious, as is Trotter's, but don't doubt that this is a serious work of history. Trotter deals judiciously with all parties to the conflict based on fact; popular mythology plays no role in this work.

This was a fun read. I didn't know much about this conflict apart from Souomussalmi, and precious little about that either. Trotter does an excellent job portraying the Finns struggle against overwhelming odds, and is careful not to over-romanticize characters such as Mannerheim. Only a few nitpicks keep this from being a five-star recommendation. It would have been nice if there were more maps--I found myself often looking to the maps for where Trotter was talking about, only to find the places weren't on the maps at all. A map of Finland after the war (and during the Continuation War) would have also been helpful. Also, I felt the Soviet perspective often was neglected in favor of the Finnish one--more accounts of the decisions made by Red Army officers and politicians would have been helpful in understanding some of the battles better. Moreover, I felt that more first-hand accounts would also have helped. Otherwise, however, this is a fantastic book, and I recommend it to anyone interested in one of the more fascinating campaigns of early-WW2.

This history book is probably the most breathtaking I've ever had the pleasure to read. Being from Scandinavia myself, I was pleased to see how unbiased this book is. Mr Trotter has great sympathy for the Finnish struggle and the hopeless odds against them, but also shows us the tragical fate of

the ordinary Soviet soldier: Cold, exposed, sent out to die for Stalin, which almost 300,000 of them eventually did. Other readers have already explained the thrilling contents of this book and its eye for detail, so I would like to underline here Mr Trotter's impressive ability to tell even such a dramatic story with a brilliant touch of irony. Just take a look at these two examples: 1. "At 9:20 a.m., November 30, 1939, the first Russian planes appeared over Helsinki.... () .. On their way out, the planes took time to strafe a complex of working-class housing units and to drop their last few high-explosive bombs on the inner city, some of which severely damaged the front of the Soviet Legation building" 2. "To head the new puppet regime, Stalin dragged out O. W. Kuusinen and set him up as "president". Kuusinen was the most influential of all the old-guard Reds who had fled Finland in 1918... ().. Broadcasts were soon made in the name of this new government, telling the captive proletariat of "plutocratic Finland" about all the wonderful reforms that would be promulgated after the Red Army had finished liberating them. (Kuusinen) promised the workers an eight-hour day. The workers were not impressed. The eight-hour day had been legislated in Finland twenty five years earlier... Kuusinen had certainly kept up with things". Admittedly, I, being a non-native English speaker, for obvious reasons will perceive written English in another way than would a native speaker. But I certainly like Mr Trotter's style. Thanks to the author for a magnificent account of this dramatic piece of Scandinavian history.

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