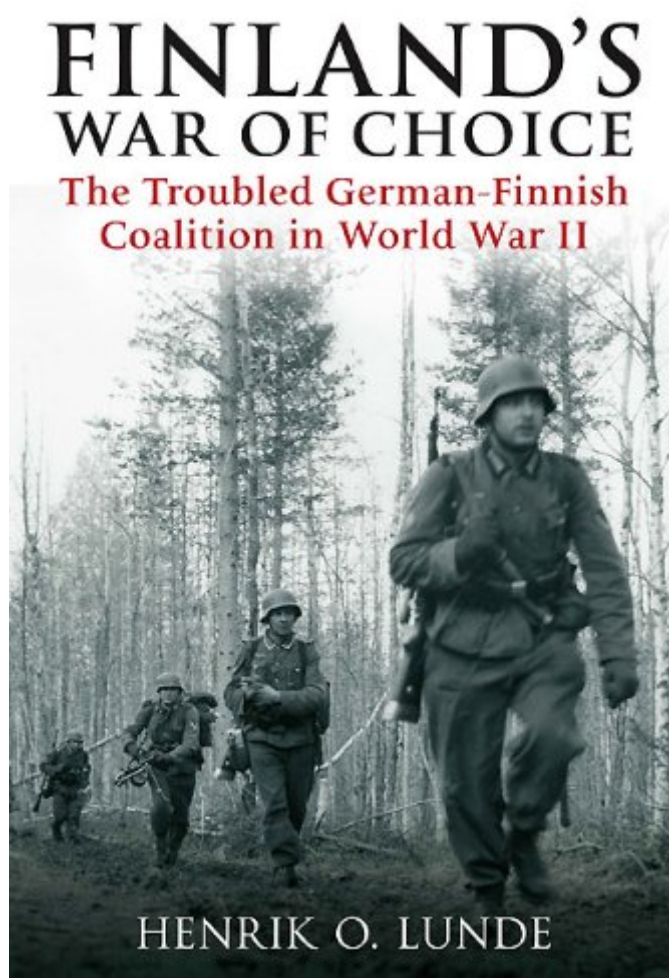


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Finland's War Of Choice: The Troubled German-Finnish Coalition In World War II



Synopsis

A selection of the Military Book Club. This book describes the odd coalition between Germany and Finland in World War II, and their joint military operations from 1941 to 1945. This is a topic often missing in English, though in stark contrast to the numerous books on the shorter and less bloody Winter War. That conflict represented a gallant fight of a democratic "David" against a totalitarian "Goliath" that caught the imagination of the world. The story of Finland fighting alongside a "Goliath" of its own has not brought pride to that nation and was a period many Finns would rather forget. The prologue of this book brings the reader up to speed by briefly examining the difficult history of Finland, from its separation from the Soviet Union in 1917 to its isolation after being bludgeoned in 1939-40. It then examines both Finnish and German motives for forming a coalition against the USSR, and how "as logical as a common enemy would seem" the lack of true planning and preparation would doom the alliance. This book posits that it was mind-boggling how the highly professional German General Staff allowed itself to accept the militarily unsound and shaky coalition that resulted. The war aims were not discussed or harmonized, there were no campaign plans with tasks and missions spelled out past the initial assault, no effective main effort established, inadequate force levels, and an unsound command structure with various headquarters. Practically every rule in the book was broken. The objective of linking up with the Finns in the Leningrad area was an important factor in Hitler opting for three main drives into the Soviet Union rather than an earlier OKH plan that called for only two. After describing the operations during and after Barbarossa, this book describes how the Finnish theater became a blind ally for the Germans. Their strongest and best army was trapped both operationally and geographically in central and northern Finland, making virtually no contribution to the war effort. The Germans could not bring to bear enough forces to accomplish their objectives without substantial Finnish assistance, and that was not forthcoming. The final chapters deal with the Soviet counteroffensive against the Finns in 1944. The Finns lost all their gains and quickly concluded a separate armistice. This left the German forces in Finland to simply vacate the territory, fighting between the Finns and Soviets alike as they tried to return to the main war. Jointly suffering 291,000 casualties, the only consolation was that the coalition had inflicted some 830,000 on the Soviets. In this book, Henrik Lunde, a former US Special Operations colonel, and the renowned author of Hitler's Pre-emptive War: The Battle for Norway, 1940, once again fills a profound gap in our understanding of World War II.

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Customer Reviews

Well researched historical explanation of why Finland wanted Hitler's help to recover the territory lost in the 1939/40 Winter War to the Soviet Union and --1) the misjudgments of Finland about advancing beyond the old borders lost to Russia and, 2) how and why Finland (Marshal Mannerheim!) avoided Soviet occupation after the Armistice in 1944. After 50 years of study of the War, I learned a great deal of NEW information about the diplomatic back-and-forth between Finland and Molotov. After the conclusion of the Winter War (1939-40) Finland felt betrayed by the empty promises of the Western Democracies (i.e. Churchill) and others, to assist Finland to resist the Soviet Union. When German "Barbarossa" began in '41, Finland sought a partner to revenge and to restore the barbarous theft of 10% of Finland's best farmland by Russia. Mannerheim, thankfully!, was able to play Finland's dire straits in '44 perfectly by secret negotiations with the US --and, in effect saved Finland from occupation of the country, as had happened to Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia. PS I was there! The attitude toward the Wehrmacht in 1941-42 Finland was mixed, Germans were admired for their discipline and Barbarossa successes but always chuckled at for their "Zu Befehl" compliance to orders, however counterproductive. Wehrmacht was out of its depth in winter fighting, essentially in snow and swamps! My Uncle Ben started out in '41 as a

youngsub-Lieutenant soon after the Winter War with an idealization of Germany; but he, too, began to see the buttons falling off Hitler's coat before Stalingrad. Finland's 'Peace Objective' was national survival! The advance beyond Finland's pre-1940 borders was perhaps inappropriate but politically important. In any case it provided a bargaining chip for an Armistice in 1944 with Stalin (with the refusal of Finland to invest Leningrad!) that helped keep Finland sovereign!) -- Unlike the Baltic States! Mannerheim gets much too little credit for his diplomacy and realism -- he always was a noble Englishman, never a Nazi!

This was another one of the books that encouraged me to buy my kindle. I was always fascinated with Finland during the second world war and while you can find many books on the winter war, the events after it are a lot harder to find books on. In fact, this is the first and so far the ONLY book that I've read that gives a political and military history of Finland post Winter War. (If anyone knows of other good English books on this period, please let me know!) Mr. Lunde gives you a great military operational breakdown of the fighting on the Finnish front. So many tantalizing what if's emerge to me. But in addition to the military history, you get what I feel is a very good political history of Finland in that time. As the title says, after the Winter War Finland had a choice. They choose to work with Hitler's Germany in order to reverse the outcomes of the winter war. And how quickly they regretted it and tried to minimize their involvement and figure out a way to save themselves from destruction by both German and Russian forces. Shows you the complications when working with allies for a "common" goal. Germany and Finland may have been fighting the same enemy, but they each had very different goals and apparent ideas on how to execute their campaigns. If you have any interest in Finland after the Winter War, this is a must read. If you have any interest in the eastern front in World War Two, I think this book is also a must read. It's a fascinating side show that illuminates coalition warfare in the modern age. In addition, I love the low price of the audible download to sync with the kindle version. While many books are in that program, most try to charge you over 10 dollars for the audio book. I loved the value with the cheap audio to pair with it.

Written a bit unevenly, it does highlight the problems Finland faced when, abandoned by the West (who should have helped, but hey that's 20/20 hindsight) they allied themselves with Nazi Germany to throw the Soviets (a true bully of a nation) out of their country. A decent read, but a more chronological writing would have made this better.

Finland's War of Choice is a tour de force of military history. It describes an obscure and

complicated front in WWII, skillfully linking operational details with the broader political, diplomatic, and strategic context. It also give vivid sketches of the Finnish and German leaders involved and of the difficult environment in which all three armies -- German, Finnish, and Soviet -- fought. The author is clearly (and rightly) sympathetic to the dilemma faced by the Finnish government - caught between German pressure to cooperate, Soviet capacity to punish, and domestic desire to reverse the losses of the much better known "Winter War." But but it avoids romanticizing Finland or its leaders, and is brutally direct in countering post-war efforts to white wash the degree of active collaboration between democratic Finland and the Nazis.

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