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Review of *Vyborg 1944: The Last Soviet-Finnish Campaign on the Eastern Front* by Bair Irincheev

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historians and gender historians alike. Moreover, given its scope and readability, it will be an essential addition to many university reading lists on courses which cover Britain's Second World War or British social history for years to come.

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Bair Irincheev, *Vyborg 1944: The Last Soviet-Finnish Campaign on the Eastern Front*, translated by Kevin Bridge. Warwick: Helion, 2020. Index, 233pp, Bibliography. ISBN 978-1912390274 (paperback). Price £29.95.

On the wall of Marshall Carl Gustaf Mannerheim's wartime operations room in Mikkeli, Finland there was a large map of Western Russia. During what the Finns refer to as the Continuation War (1941-44), a member of Mannerheim's staff would periodically use a different coloured pencil to shade in the territory occupied by the German *Wehrmacht*. The summer of 1941 is represented by broad swathes of red, blue and green. As Barbarossa progressed so the gains diminished and the shaded areas around Leningrad and Moscow became a mess of different colours on the map. This important historical document serves as a striking metaphor reflecting the dilemma faced by the Finns following Germany's attack on the Soviet Union. Would it be best to invest in an alliance with Nazi Germany in the hope that territorial gains would ensue, or should a more nuanced position be taken, so that an accommodation with the Soviet Union could be reached in the event of Barbarossa failing? Opinions differ as to what Mannerheim's real intent was but, having pushed the Red Army back down the Kerelian Isthmus to the gates of Leningrad in September 1941, the Finnish High Command must have been increasingly anxious as the Axis forces faltered and then, in early 1944, began to retreat through the Baltic states. This book critically examines Finnish and Soviet responses to this reversal of fortunes.

After the Siege of Leningrad lifted in early 1944 Stalin offered the Finns a proposal which would have involved a reinstatement of the pre-Barbarossa border and a number of other concessions. Mannerheim refused and, on 10 June, the Red Army launched a massive attack which, upon the signing of a peace treaty three months later, resulted in a settlement which was not dissimilar to the one that had been proposed.

Irincheev presents a useful overview of this historical context before offering up a detailed account of the *Vyborg-Petrozavodsk* offensive operation. The book focuses on

the period 9 June to 13 July 1944, and the action takes place within the narrow confines of the Karelian Isthmus. The narrowness of the Isthmus and the fact that the flanks of the defending force extended to the shorelines of Lake Ladoga, enabled the Finns to deploy in strength along a series of fixed defensive lines. For the Red Army, manoeuvrability was limited and so costly attacks on well defended strongpoints were unavoidable.

Irincheev does an excellent job in describing the sophistication of Soviet tactics. During the 1939 *Winter War* offensives the poorly led Soviet aggressors suffered grievously when they used unsupported tanks to breach Finnish lines and, when successful, pushed columns into the densely wooded interior. The columns were invariably immobilised, segmented, surrounded and destroyed by the Finns in a tactic known as *Motti*. Fast forward to the summer of 1944 and, as Irincheev demonstrates, the Red Army's capabilities had been transformed, mainly through lessons learnt in fighting the *Wehrmacht* over the course of the previous three years. A combined arms approach had been adopted in attack, the weaponry was much improved (particularly armoured vehicles) and command at all levels was extremely effective. One of the strengths of this book is that it enumerates this transformation in a richness of detail.

On the Finnish side, Irincheev opines that the troops were well-led and highly proficient. Whilst they did not have much by way of heavy equipment, the Finns became highly skilled in using what artillery they did have and used German supplied *Panzerfaust* anti-tank weapons to best advantage. However, as Irincheev says, armoured vehicles like the T34-85 tank and the massive JSU-152 self-propelled gun posed much bigger threats than the highly vulnerable T26s which had formed the vanguard of Red Army attacks five years previously. There were some tactical errors in the defence of the main *Vammelsuu-Taipale* (VT) Line and Irincheev is particularly critical of Finnish delays in redeploying reserves from east to west as the Red Army forced its way up the main Leningrad to Vyborg highway.

The fall of Vyborg came as a shock to the Finns and served as something of a wake-up call to the Finnish General Staff. The planned Soviet breakout into the *Lake Saimaa* area was, however, thwarted. Indeed, as Irincheev concludes, the Battle of *Tali-Ihantala* can be seen as a defensive victory for the Finns in that it demonstrated to the Soviets that they would pay a heavy price for pushing on further. In the face of protestations from their German partners and a Soviet appetite to settle the matter, the Finns signed an Armistice a couple of months later.

As an appendix in this book, Irincheev has produced a table which compares the 4 September Armistice with the earlier Soviet Peace Proposal. Finnish historians in particular have argued that the original proposal, although roughly comparable with the final outcome, was lacking in scope and was probably unworkable. On the other

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hand, Irincheev reminds us that some of the later conditions marked a significant deterioration in the terms despite lower reparations. Whether Mannerheim was right in not settling earlier does become something of a moot point however when one considers the impact of this last offensive on those whose lives were shattered by it. As well as providing great insight into a fascinating theatre of war – accompanied by a selection of striking contemporary photographs, Irincheev has done an excellent job in describing what it was like to live, fight and die during this violent final stage in Finland's evolution as an emerging nation.

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S P MacKenzie, *Bomber Boys on Screen: RAF Bomber Command in Film and Television Drama*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019. 256pp. 8 bw illus. ISBN: 978-1350024847 (hardback). Price £85.

The history and memory of RAF Bomber Command has been overshadowed by concerns about the high number of casualties it inflicted on civilians during night raids over selected German cities in the later stages of the conflict. It has been more palatable to Britain's modern memory of the 'People's War' to concentrate on 'The Few' who fought in the Battle of Britain in the summer of 1940, rather than 'The Many' of RAF Bomber Command and their controversial commander Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris. While the Battle of Britain memorial in Capel-le-Ferne, Kent was unveiled in 1993 and another Battle of Britain monument in London in 2005, the memorial to RAF Bomber Command was not unveiled by the Queen until June 2012. The memorial to the 55,573 of its aircrew, from Britain and allied nations including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Czechoslovakia, and Poland, that lost their lives was vandalised a year later. During a service for the 70th anniversary of the bombings in Dresden, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Justin Welby, was heavily criticised for appearing to apologise for the actions of Bomber Command, and the BBC were also accused of presenting media coverage which was biased in favour of German victims rather than the British and Allied air crews who lost their lives during the conflict.

Over the last three decades there have been a number of histories examining how aerial warfare during the Second World War has been represented in film and on television. However, the on-screen treatments of the heroes of Britain's 'finest hour' have been favoured, with a relatively small number choosing to examine representations of Bomber Command. S. P. MacKenzie's book, *Bomber Boys on Screen*: