

Finland's Heroic Resistance Surprises the World

To the surprise of the outside world, but not of the Finnish people themselves, Finland succeeded in putting up a prolonged and desperate resistance to the Russian onslaught. A most effective ally was the winter weather.

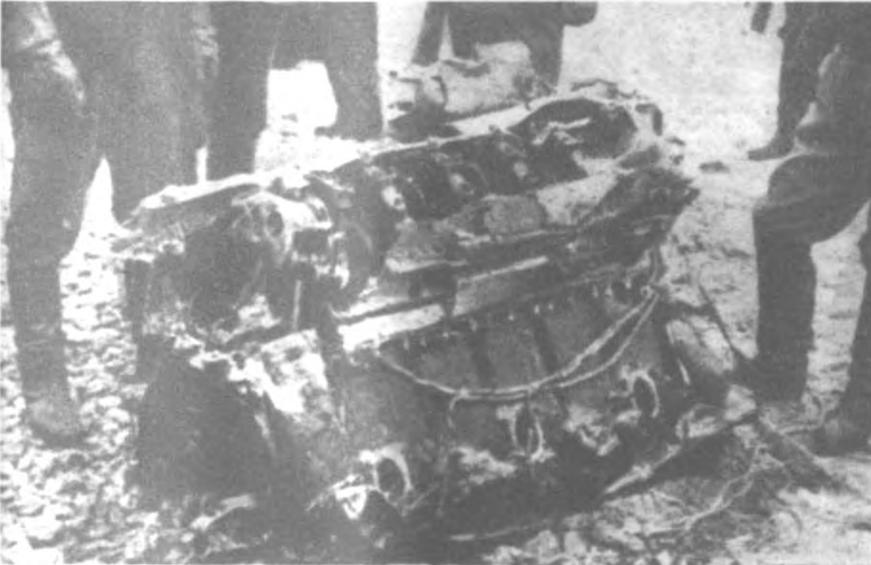
WHEN the Russians invaded Finland at the beginning of December they expected a "walk-over." According to a report current in Moscow, it was anticipated that Helsinki would fall in four days, and that the campaign would be over in little more than a week. So confident, indeed, was the Kremlin that the Finns would put up no resistance that M. Molotov, days after the hostilities began, persisted in declaring that there was no war.

Weather and the Finnish will to resist played havoc with the Soviet plans. Long after "President" Kuusinen had hoped to remove his government from Terijoki to Helsinki the bayonets of his supporters had hardly passed the frontier. Nowhere, claimed the Finnish General Staff, did the Russian advance exceed 20

miles, and the Soviet troops were being held all along the line.

In the far north Petsamo was still the scene of a bitter conflict. The weather conditions were terrible. Frost, snow, and ice hampered the attackers, many of whom, so reports ran, were drawn from the warm open regions of central and southern Russia. Miserably clad and ill-equipped, the Red conscripts were blinded by the snow and terrified by the perpetual gloom of the winter forests. As they huddled together for company in the open glades they were mown down by the Finnish machine-gunners, who took advantage of every inch of cover; and when they clustered about their camp fires in the long winter night, they presented an easy target for the Finnish airmen. The Finns for their part were used to such Arctic conditions and they moved across the ground with easy speed on their skis, stopping every now and then to pick off a Russian straggler or to decimate with their automatics little groups of Soviet soldiery.

In central Finland the Russians were able to make some progress by sheer weight of numbers, and fierce fighting developed on the line Kuolajaervi-Suomussalmi-Kuhmo. Here again the Finns had the advantage of defending country whose every inch they knew, and much of the line, too, was based on a string of lakes which proved impassable barriers to the march of the Russian armoured forces. Farther to the south, in the neighbourhood of Lake Ladoga, the Russians made repeated efforts to carry the Finnish positions and so permit of a flanking movement against industrial regions and Helsinki itself, but



In the first two days of war Helsinki suffered heavily from attacks by Russian bombers, but the Finnish anti-aircraft fire was so steady and accurate that the raiders soon desisted. At a conservative estimate they were said to have lost forty aircraft either from anti-aircraft fire or from the activities of the Finnish fighter planes. Some of the Russian casualties are illustrated in this page; all the photographs are of Russian bombers brought down in flames in or near Helsinki. Finland's first line air force numbered only 230 warplanes in peacetime, but those included Fokkers, and British Blenheims and Gladiators. Photos, G.P.U. & International Graphic Press



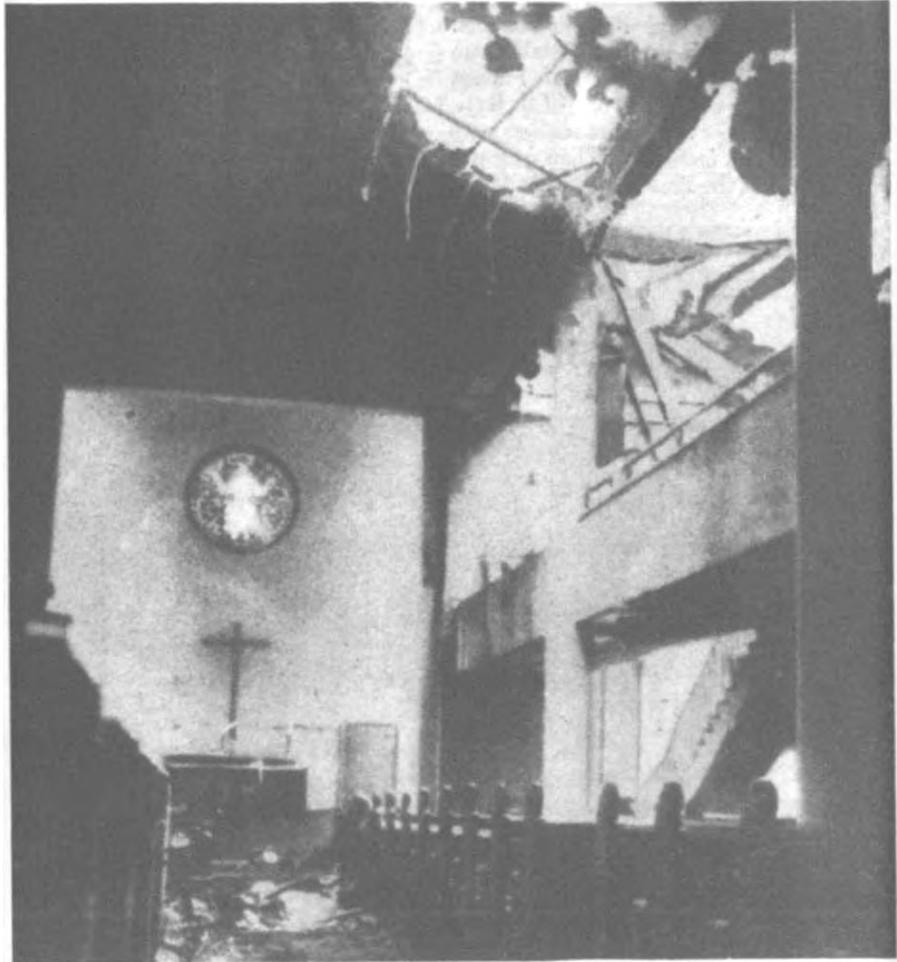
This map shows the physical features of the southern half of Finland, and in particular shows how truly it is called the Land of the Thousand Lakes. The central plateau of the country has an elevation of from 300 to 500 ft. Off the southern coast are many islands of widely differing sizes. Both the rivers and lakes are frozen from December to May.

Specially drawn for THE WAR ILLUSTRATED by Felix Gardon

the most violent assault was delivered against the Finnish "Maginot Line,"—the Mannerheim line of defence stretching across the Karelian Isthmus from the Gulf of Finland to Lake Ladoga. Based on some twenty lakes and numerous rivers, this presented a whole series of problems to the Russian tacticians, and so strong was the resistance put up by the defenders that the Russian onset was definitely halted. Far in front of their main defence lines the Finns had constructed a range of movable obstacles which were let down until the tanks had passed, when they were raised so as to cut off their retreat. The tanks were then surrounded and destroyed piecemeal, while the infantry following some way in the rear were dismayed at the loss of their tank supports.

In the course of a few days' fighting more than 100 Russian tanks were put out of action. The Russian infantry attacked time after time in mass formation, but despite their overwhelming superiority in numbers they made little progress. So desperate was the conflict that the Russians were alleged to have used gas in the fighting on the banks of Lake Ladoga, a form of warfare for which the Finns were unprepared. Hurriedly a supply of 60,000 gas masks was ordered from Britain, and it was a distinct relief to find that the snow and cold so condensed the gas as to make it ineffective.

In the air there was no repetition of the attacks on Helsinki, but the Finns—who were now believed to have obtained delivery of a number of British



This photograph adds one more piece of evidence to that given in pages 496 and 497 that Russians bombed Helsinki with complete indifference to where the bombs fell. Here is a small church that has been half-wrecked by a bomb through the roof. *Photo, G.P.U.*

and Italian warplanes—bombeded Lenin-grad with leaflets stating the Finnish case, and also dropped bombs on the Soviet aerodrome at Murmansk and on the newly established base at Paldiski in Estonia.

On the air there was a fierce battle between Helsinki and Moscow. Russians were adjured “not to believe what your Bolshevik leaders tell you. Eighteen years ago Lenin promised to respect our frontiers, but Stalin has broken that

on because they know they are fighting for their independence, for the lives of their dear ones, and for their whole future.”

While her armies were contesting stubbornly on every front Finland appealed to the League to take notice of the unprovoked attack that had been made upon her by another member of the League. Special sessions were held at Geneva, and from the representatives of almost every State there came expressions of sincerest sympathy.



promise.” Swift came the reply from the mouth of Moscow’s woman announcer: “Give yourselves up, Finnish soldiers. Revolt against the tyrants. Stab them in the back. Destroy them.” Then across the ether came the voice of M. Ryti, Finland’s Premier: “Soviet soldiers may kill women and children. They may use poison gas, but the Finnish people will fight

The baby seen top right is being carried into an air shelter during one of the Russian raids on Helsinki, while above, children are huddled together as bombs explode outside. Right, is a typical Finnish woman with children evacuated from Helsinki.



The Russian pretence that they were not making war against women and children is shown to be yet another “Red” lie by the photographs in this page. In that immediately above, people of Helsinki, chiefly women, are seeking some sort of protection from the bombs by standing close to a creeper-clad wall. The position they have taken up is probably as safe as any that could be found in the open. Russian airwomen were stated to have taken part in the bombing of the women and children of Helsinki.
Photos, Associated Press and Topical