

WINGS



THINGS

GREAT PLAINS WING - COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE

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3rd Quarter 2023

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Photo: From the Web



Fighting for the other Swastika

Mix a Russian leader who believes in restoring the boundaries of the old Empire for security and a small country resisting those demands and you have a depressingly similar situation in 1938 to the situation currently on-going. In our modern case the small country in question is Ukraine, in 1938, the small country was Finland. In both cases, parts, or the whole of the territory of the small country had once been part of Russia. In both cases, Russia had attempted to subvert the smaller country and failed.

“Lest We Forget”

As today, Russia granted Finland Sovereignty, then sided with Finnish Communists in the subsequent Civil War. Finland was supported by Sweden and Germany and the Finnish Communists were defeated in March of 1918. As in Moldova and Ukraine today, Russia had attempted to establish a zone under Russian influence and failed. As in Ukraine today, the final result of demands for territory and 'negotiation' was a Russian invasion.

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania did not fare as well as the Finns and were forced to accede to Russian demands, which later aided Finland, because the Finns were able to form a secret alliance with Estonia, through which some foreign aircraft purchases were possible when no other country would sell to the Finns.

Stalin and several high-level politicians and strategists expected a quick victory. Russian troops, for example, were warned not to cross the border into Sweden. There were Generals who advocated for more preparations, and more and better troops. Exacerbating the Russian issues were the military purges of the 1930s which led to half the professional officers being replaced by more compliant and political ones.

The terrain in Finland was unforgiving and unsuited to quick maneuver. The Russians also managed to start their invasion in late November, which proved to be a further issue as the Russian Army was in about the same position for clothing and Winter equipment as the Germans were in their later invasion of Russia.



Gloster Gladiator

Various figures are available for the strength of the Finnish Air Force in November, 1939, from around 115 to 170 total aircraft of all types. Fighter aircraft available consisted of 36 Fokker D XXI, 10 Bristol Bulldog IV and around 60 Fokker C.X and C.V. Additionally, there were Bristol Blenheim bombers and liaison aircraft. The Swedes sent a volunteer squadron equipped with Gloster Gladiators and Hawker Harts. The Winter War lasted from October, 1939 to March, 1940.

The main Russian fighters were the I-16 and I-153 and the main bombers were the twin engine DB-3 and SB-2 and the four engine TB-3.



Fokker XXI

The Finns dispersed their fighters to many small fields to make Russian attacks more difficult. Additionally, the Finns practiced hit-and-run tactics, concentrating on bombers and ignoring engaging fighters. Also, the Finns had moved to the tactically more versatile 'finger-four' formation, while the Russians still used the three aircraft Vic.

The final result of the Winter War was a defeat for Finland and a Pyrrhic victory for Russia. Russia achieved the goal of gaining additional territory to protect Leningrad, and the Finns ceded about 13% of their territory. Around 450,000 Finns were removed from the conquered territory and lost their homes. Finnish casualties were about 26,000 dead and missing and about 45,000 wounded. In 2013, a Russian historian used the Russian State Military Archive to report Russian casualties as about 168,000 killed and missing. This would project to 300,000 to 500,000 wounded giving normal casualty rates. Again, these figures echo the current on-going situation in Ukraine.



Fiat G-50

The Finns lost 30 to 50 aircraft in the Winter War, while shooting down around 200 Russian aircraft, with an additional 300 Russian aircraft lost to Finnish Anti-Aircraft fire. About 500 additional Russian aircraft were lost to non-combat casualties (which, interestingly is about the same

ratio experienced by all air forces throughout World War II, where more aircraft were lost in Operational Accidents than in combat.)

There were 7 Finnish Aces in the 3-month Winter War, accounting for 48 confirmed kills.



Curtis Hawk-75

The Continuation War began 3 days after the German invasion of Russia in June, 1941. The Russians bombed Helsinki, which prompted a Finnish Declaration of War. The Finns had regained the territory lost in the Winter War by September and had expanded beyond that and isolated Leningrad.

Many aircraft ordered by Finland had not arrived in the Winter War but were available a year later for the Continuation War. The Finns had a diverse array of fighters available, having purchased or otherwise obtained such types as the Brewster Buffalo, Hawker Hurricane, Moraine-Saulnier MS-406, Fiat G-50, Curtiss Hawk-75. Various damaged Russian Fighters were repaired and pressed into service and Germany supplied Me 109G6s.

The Continuation War lasted from 1941 to 1944, when the Finns were forced by reality to accede to Russian Demands and force the German withdrawal from Finland into Norway in the Lapland War. Finland also lost all the territory gained from Russia in the Continuation War.

During the Continuation War, The Finnish Air Force produced 96 Aces, who accounted for 1,436 kills. The top Ace was Ilmari Juutilainen with 94 Kills. This made him the top scoring non-German ace of the War. 3 Finns were above 50 kills and 19 Finnish Aces scored more than 20.



Moraine-Saulnier MS.406

Most interesting is the list of destroyed enemy aircraft by Finnish Fighter type.

Aircraft	Kills	Aces in Type
BF-109	592	38
Brewster Buffalo	432	36
Fokker D.XXI	116	8
Curtiss Hawk-75	106	16
Moraine-Saulnier MS-406	70	8
Fiat G.50	66.5	4
Gloster Gladiator	19	2

Overall, the Finns reportedly destroyed over 1,600 Soviet aircraft for a loss of 210. The much-maligned Brewster Buffalo had a kill-to-loss ratio of 32 to 1, with over 400 kills and only 15 losses.

Aircraft	Top Ace	Kills
BF-109	Ilmari Juutilainen	58
Brewster Buffalo	Hans Wind	39
Fokker D.XXI	Jorma Sarvanto	13
Curtiss Hawk-75	Kalevi Tervo	15.5
Moraine-Saulnier MS-406	Urho Lehtovaara	15
Fiat G.50	Oiva Tuominen	23
Gloster Gladiator	Oiva Tuominen	6.5



Messerschmitt BF 109 in Finnish Service

Great Plains Wing
COMMEMORATIVE AIR FORCE
Council Bluff Iowa Airport
16803 McCandless Road
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2023 CALENDAR OF EVENTS

AUGUST

Aug. 5 GPW Open House & Fly-in/Walk-in Pancake
Breakfast - GPW Hangar
Breakfast 8:00 - 11:00 AM
Open House 8:00 AM - 4:00 PM
Aug. 19 Wing Meeting 11:00 AM GPW Hangar
Aug. 19-20 Kansas City Airshow New Century Air
Center - Gardner, KS
Aug. 26-27 Lincoln NE Airshow Lincoln Airport
Lincoln, NE

SEPTEMBER

Sept. 16 Wing Meeting 11:00 AM GPW Hangar

OCTOBER

Oct. 21 Wing Meeting 11:00 AM GPW Hangar

NOVEMBER

Nov. 18 Wing Meeting 11:00 AM GPW Hangar

DECEMBER

Dec. 16 Wing Meeting 11:00 AM GPW Hangar

MONTHLY EVENTS

Council Bluffs Airport - Great Plains Wing hosts a monthly cookout on the 3rd Wednesday of each month from April to October - 5:30 - 7:00 p.m.

York, NE Airport: EAA Chapter 1055 hosts a fly-in breakfast on the 1st Saturday of each month from 8:00 to 10:00 a.m.(free-will offering)

Crete, NE Airport: EAA Chapter 569 hosts a fly in breakfast on the 3rd Sat. of every month from 8 to 10 a.m.

If you would like to put a event on this calendar, please send an email with the necessary information to Terry Helphrey at terry.helphrey@outlook.com