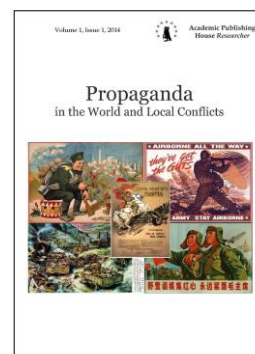


Copyright © 2018 by Academic Publishing House Researcher s.r.o.



Published in the Slovak Republic  
 Propaganda in the World and Local Conflicts  
 Has been issued since 2014.  
 E-ISSN 2500-3712  
 2018, 5(2): 65-71

DOI: 10.13187/pwlc.2018.2.65  
[www.ejournal47.com](http://www.ejournal47.com)



## Military Propaganda in the Baltic Fleet during the Soviet-Finnish War of 1939–1940

Dmitry V. Liventsev<sup>a, \*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Voronezh Institute of Federal service of execution of punishments of the Russian Federation, Russian Federation

### Abstract

The article deals with the organization of the military propaganda in the Baltic fleet during the Soviet-Finnish war 1939–1940. The author analyzed the propaganda spread in the Navy along with the objective difficulties related to the clarification of the goals and objectives of the war with Finland.

The author of the article used materials from the funds of the Russian State Archive of the Navy (RSA Navy), the city of St. Petersburg. Publications and rare editions of the political department of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet were used.

In this work, traditional and general scientific methods were used with the historical-situational method in respect to the Red Banner Baltic Fleet and its political management.

In conclusion, the author notes the reasons for the effectiveness of military propaganda among officers and sailors of the Baltic fleet. At the same time little-known questions of the Soviet – Finnish war of 1939–1940 are investigated.

**Keywords:** Baltic fleet, propaganda, political governance, the USSR, Finland, sailors, officers.

### 1. Introduction

During the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939 - 1940, the political administration of the Baltic Fleet was to set to the personnel of the naval units the goals and objectives of military operations (RGA VMF. F. 92. Op. 2. D. 496. L. 4). During the conversations with officers and sailors, political leaders emphasized in every possible way that the outbreak of the war was “just, non-predatory and liberating” (Just war, 1939). They constantly called the Finns “bold provocateurs” and brought the following arguments:

1) From the very beginning of coming to power, the Finnish reactionary bourgeoisie was closely connected with the British militarists.

2) In 1920, the Finnish government wanted to support General N.N. Yudenich in his march to Petrograd

3) Before the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939-1940, the Finnish side committed numerous provocations at the border (Ataka istrebiteley, 1939).

At the same time, a thesis on the USSR’s peace-loving policy towards Finland was widely spread.

1) The Soviet government offered the Finnish rulers to move the border several tens of kilometers to the north of Leningrad, since Leningrad was the largest and most important political,

\* Corresponding author

E-mail addresses: [liva2006i@yandex.ru](mailto:liva2006i@yandex.ru) (D.V. Liventsev)

industrial and cultural center of the Soviet Union. It was located at a distance of a modern artillery gun shot from the border.

2) The Soviet government offered to lease a small area at the northern mouth to the Gulf of Finland for the construction of a naval base. It would be in the interests of both states, since the entrances to Leningrad as well as to the Gulf of Finland would be closed for any aggressive neighbors.

3) The Soviet government was ready to give Finland in return two times more territory than Finland demanded in Karelia.

4) The transfer of the named Soviet territory united the Finnish and Karelian peoples ([Just war, 1939](#)).

Further political leaders said that the Finnish government, at the suggestion of British friends, hadn't revealed the lucrative offers of the USSR from its own people. At the same time, the Finnish ruling circles in every way aroused hatred of the Soviet people. On November 26, 1939, their artillery shelled the territory of the neighboring state. After which V.I. Molotov made a strong protest on behalf of all Soviet people. As a result, on November 30, 1939, the Red Banner Baltic Fleet, together with other armed forces, entered war with Finland ([Finnish provocateurs, 1939](#)). ([Figure 1](#))



**Fig. 1.** Soviet propaganda poster "Beaten on the Mannerheim Line"

## 2. Materials and methods

The author of the article used materials from the funds of the Russian State Archive of the Navy (RSA Navy), the city of St. Petersburg. Publications and rare editions of the political department of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet were used.

In this work, traditional and general scientific methods were used with the historical-situational method in respect to the Red Banner Baltic Fleet and its political management.

## 3. Discussion and results

The main task set before the political management of the Baltic Fleet was to prove the justice of the new war from the Soviets. Political leaders said that in the war imposed by the USSR, the struggle was not for the seizure of foreign territories and peoples, but for the security of the Motherland and for the freedom and happiness of the Finnish people. It was well known that according to the plan of the Soviet leadership, after a quick and victorious war, Finland was to

become the next republic of the USSR. Hence, the happiness of the Finnish people became an indispensable component of military propaganda in the Baltic Fleet. (Figure 2)



**Fig. 2.** Soviet poster “A White Finn lurking in the woods”

It was emphasized that the Red Army did not come to Finland as a conqueror, but as the liberator of the Finnish working people from the oppression and exploitation of landowners and capitalists (Just war, 1939).

At the same time, they paid attention to the fact that the Finnish ruling circles were threatening to expand their borders even to the Ural Mountains. The war against Finland was not fighting against the Finnish people, but directed against class enemies, i.e. capitalists and militarists. The Finnish people did not need a war against their class brothers, i.e. Soviet workers (Finnish provocateurs, 1939).

The political administration of the Baltic Fleet accused the following government officials of the Finnish government in fomenting anti-Soviet propaganda:

- 1) Chairman of the State Council (Government) of Finland Kayander Andrio Carlo.
- 2) Finnish Foreign Minister Erkkko Juho Elyas.
- 3) Finnish Finance Minister Tanner Väino Alfred.
- 4) Ambassador of Finland to Sweden Paasikivi Juho Kusti.
- 5) Commander of the Suojeluskunta (Finnish military militia – auth.), Lieutenant General Carlo Lauri Torvald.
- 6) Commander of the Finnish army, Lieutenant-General Osterman Hugo Victor.
- 7) Commander of the Finnish naval forces, Major General Valve Väine (Just war, 1939) (Figure 3).



**Fig. 3.** Finnish leaflet “Tens of thousands of Red Army soldiers”

All the above-mentioned persons, according to Soviet military propaganda, were industrialists and capitalists and were closely connected with the business and political circles of England. Moreover, the Finnish government set a course for the destruction of workers' organizations from the first days of its existence. (RGA VMF. F. 92. Op. 1. D. 287. L. 15). Propaganda of the Finnish counterrevolutionaries against the leaders of the labor movement was especially notable for propagandists: “The executioners committed horrible acts. With four-inch nails, they nailed membership books of the working society to the foreheads of the Red Guards. They gouged out their eyes, drove rifle cartridges into the eyes of the Red Guards, cut off their ears and noses” (Finnish provocateurs, 1939). It was impossible to ignore the active participation of the White Finns in the events of the Civil War. When in 1919 their detachments attempted to cut the railway in the Leningrad-Petrozavodsk area and capture Petrozavodsk, they could hardly be defeated by the Red Army detachments.

The political officers of the Baltic Fleet told officers and sailors about the difficult internal situation in Finland. Since 1928, the main branches of the Finnish economy were on decline. The standard of living of the working class was constantly declining. Unemployment rates were growing along with the ruining of peasantry. The sharp fall in government revenues forced the Finnish government to cut their spending on all budget needs, but military. Finland spent huge sums on military needs. The Finnish army had about 300 thousand people and cost the state budget 50 million marks a day. It necessary to add the organization of a mass enlisting into the army together with the industry fully transferred to military needs. (RGA VMF. F. 902. Op. 4. D. 76. L. 18). That gave the impression that the Finnish government was consistently preparing for war with the USSR.

The separate idea that the USSR would not interfere with the choice of the political regime of the Finnish people after the war was highlighted. The peoples of the Soviet country were always ready to help the Finns on their choice of an independent path of development. Actually, the last thesis implied that the new independence in any case passed through the creation of a Soviet republic. By the way, a genuine historical fact was mentioned: on December 31, 1917, the Council of

People's Commissars adopted the decree on the independence of Finland, personally presented to the representatives of the Finnish side by V. I. Lenin. That is why the USSR never interfered in the internal affairs of a neighboring state. (RGA VMF. F. 1598. Op. 4. D. 44. L. 107).

However, despite the Soviet peace-loving, naval propagandists introduced the personnel to the goals and objectives of the "People's Government of Finland" created in Moscow. This government was proclaimed in the first claimed city of Finnish territory, Terioki, on December 1, 1939. (RGA VMF. F. 1598. Op. 6. D. 51. L. 79).

The People's Government of Finland published its political program:

- 1) The overthrow of the bankrupt government of the "Finnish political gamblers" and the defeat of its armed forces.
- 2) Sign of the Mutual Aid and Friendship Pact between Finland and the Soviet Union. By the way, a similar document was signed with the "People's Government" on December 2, 1939.
- 3) The reunification of the Finnish and Karelian peoples within the Finnish Democratic Republic.
- 4) Settlement of border issues with the USSR, especially with regard to the security of Leningrad.
- 5) The creation of the people's Finnish army.
- 6) Establishment of state control over large private banks and industrial enterprises.
- 7) Introduction of a mandatory 8-hour working day.
- 8) Confiscation of landed estates and their transfer to the peasants. State aid to low-power farms.
- 9) With the consensus of the Finnish people, the establishment of the Soviet power (Just war, 1939). (Figure 4)



**Fig. 4.** Finnish poster "Political instructor is worse than the enemy"

Practically we have a program of “Sovietization” of Finland. As the political administration of the Baltic Fleet stated: “There is no doubt that the Finnish people, with the help of our heroic Red Army and Navy, will in the near future completely destroy the White Finnish hirelings and live a happy life, relying on the bonds of close friendship with the Great Soviet Union” (Finnish provocateurs, 1939).

The Baltic Fleet seafarers were informed that the Finnish navy consisted of 2 coastal defense battleships, 5 submarines, 6 patrol ships, 6 minelayers, 7 torpedo boats, 18 motor boats, 15 patrol boats, 6 icebreakers and 7 gunboats, and light motor Suojeluskunta fleet of about 300 units. (RGA VMF. F. 92. Op. 1. D. 938. L. 28).

Possible bases of deployment of the Finnish fleet were Koivusaari, Viipuri, Hamina, Kotka, Helsinki and Hanko. Coastal Finnish batteries were located in the Helsinki, Viipuri, Kotka and Hanko areas (Pietarin, 1931). (Figure 5).



**Fig. 5.** Poster “Sea approaches to the USSR can only be protected by the Red Fleet”

This was followed by the assertion that the Red Banner Baltic Fleet, like all the Soviet armed forces, would do everything necessary to defeat Finland. To raise the morale of the officers and sailors of the Baltic Fleet, the political instructors told them about a number of examples of heroism and courage during the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939-1940.

Thus, a link of Soviet aircraft, under the command of Comrade Baranov, skillfully shot down a column of white Finns on a low flight, and put them to flight (Ataka istrebiteley, 1939). The bomber navigator Zhdanov made an exact bombing at the Finnish lighthouse and completely destroyed the enemy strategic object (Bombili vrazheskiye obyekty, 1939). During the combat mission, Captain Dolsky’s aircraft received 97 holes, but an experienced pilot was able to bring it to the airfield and successfully land it (Boyevyye epizody, 1939). The junior lieutenant Pruntsov during his combat mission fell under heavy anti-aircraft and artillery fire. The plane refused steering control. The aforementioned pilot was able to bring the combat vehicle to the airfield (Boyevyye epizody, 1939). Junior Lieutenant Knyazev was swooping down on a white Finnish battery. Seeing the pilot’s maneuver, the enemies fled, part of them was killed. Together with the battery, the machine-gun nest was also eliminated. However, the plane got a hole in the gas tank,

but the brave pilot was able to land the plane on the last drops of fuel. ([Boyevyye epizody, 1939](#)). Finally, the electrician Sergeyev having high temperature escaped from the infirmary to the battle post. When the political officer began to persuade him to return to treatment, he gave him an application to join the Communist party ([Samootverzhennyiy boets, 1939](#)).

#### 4. Conclusion

Covering military propaganda on the Baltic Fleet during the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939–1940, it is necessary to note its competent construction by the political administration. Political leaders talked about the hostile intentions of the Finnish bourgeoisie against the USSR, stressing Finland's economic and political ties with the British capitalists and militarists. They called the names of Finnish politicians responsible for the outbreak of hostilities. At the same time, the peace-loving Soviet policy towards the Finns was explained and the fact of the creation of an independent Finland by the Council of People's Commissars on December 31, 1917 was pointed out. Information was given on the plight of the workers and peasants in Finland and the details of the atrocities committed by Finnish counterrevolutionaries against the leaders of the labor movement. Separately praised the activities of the Finnish "People's Government" and its political program, which was to lead to the "Sovietization" of the state. At the same time, officers and sailors of the Baltic Fleet received objective information about the naval forces of the enemy. For them, examples of the heroism and courage of Soviet soldiers during the war were specifically cited.

All of the above measures helped the political management of the Baltic Fleet to create among the personnel a sense of justice in the Soviet-Finnish war of 1939–1940 and its necessity for the continued happy and free life of the working people of Finland.

#### References

- [Ataka istrebiteley, 1939](#) – Ataka istrebiteley. Krasnoznamennyy Baltiyskiy flot 1 dekabrya 1939. [Attack of fighters. Red Banner Baltic Fleet December 1, 1939]. 4 p. [in Russian]
- [Boyevyye epizody, 1939](#) – Boyevyye epizody. Krasnoznamennyy Baltiyskiy flot 1 dekabrya 1939 [Combat episodes. Red Banner Baltic Fleet December 1, 1939]. 4 p. [in Russian]
- [Bombili vrazheskiye obyekty, 1939](#) – Bombili vrazheskiye obyekty. Krasnoznamennyy Baltiyskiy flot 1 dekabrya 1939 [Bombed Enemy Objects. Red Banner Baltic Fleet December 1]. 4 p. [in Russian]
- [Pietarin, 1931](#) – *Pietarin, K.K.* (1931). Finland and its armed forces [Finland and its armed forces]. M., 64 p. [in Russian]
- [RGA VMF](#) – Rossiiskii gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Voenno-morskogo flota [Russian State Archive of the Navy]. [in Russian]
- [Samootverzhennyiy boets, 1939](#) – Samootverzhennyiy boets. Krasnoznamennyiy Baltiyskiy flot 1 dekabrya 1939 [Selfless Fighter. Red Banner Baltic Fleet December 1, 1939]. 4 p. [in Russian]
- [Just war, 1939](#) – Just war. To help the propagandist and agitator. Kronstadt, 1939. 12 p.
- [Finnish provocateurs, 1939](#) – Finnish provocateurs of the war. To help the propagandist and agitator. Kronstadt, 1939. 16 p.