

## SUMMARY

### The Roulette of Honour – the Highest Finnish Orders to Foreigners 1941–1944

‘What has he done for us?’, asked Marshal Mannerheim when proposals for decorations to Germans were presented to him. This research answers Mannerheim’s question by examining in detail the processes of giving the highest Finnish honours to 317 foreigners – 316 men and one woman – during the years 1941–1944. This includes all Grand Crosses, the Crosses of Liberty First Class with Star, and First Class, as well as Commanders First Class of the Orders of the White Rose of Finland and the Lion of Finland, in total 329 awards. Their recipients represented 17 nationalities, but with 202 decorations the Germans’ share was over 60 per cent. Swedes received 35 of the highest honours, Romanians 25, citizens of the United States 19 and Hungarians 17.

The Crosses of Liberty were given by Commander-in-Chief Mannerheim, who was Grand Master of the Order of the Cross of Liberty for life since 1940. President Risto Ryti conferred as Grand Master of the Orders of the White Rose of Finland and the Lion of Finland their insignia. This dualism caused some internal discord between the administrations of the Finnish orders. Despite Mannerheim’s seeming personal dislike of Germans he adopted a pragmatic approach to the military-political use of the honours system. The problems relating to honouring high-ranking foreigners were one of the main reasons behind the foundation of the Order of the Lion of Finland in September 1942. The new order was used to counter the inflation the Grand Cross of Order of the White Rose of Finland had begun to suffer after having been the only Grand Cross available during the years 1919–1939.

The approach of the study can be characterised as a pointillistic ensemble composed of detailed miniatures. When crystallising, the details of the honours form a set of prisms which enable us to perceive even wider and more general questions, their backgrounds and the actions of the main political and military decision makers. For

certain parts, this research is a microhistorically detailed analysis of Finnish relations to some of the most important macrolevel decision makers of the Second World War era. Given the formalistic and authentic inclusion criteria, the study also brings into light many less-known figures, who held positions of high rank.

Methodologically this person-centred study of symbolic politics in warfare and interstate relations offers a new model to the research of the history of the Second World War, which is applicable to other countries as well. The study focusses on political and military history, but also incorporates aspects of cultural history of war and diplomacy by studying the rhetoric and courtesy culture associated with conferral of honours. No official citations for awards made to foreigners were published but, in some cases, they were referred to in speeches made at investitures and in letters accompanying some of the highest honours. The analysis of the media coverage given to the honours highlights the ways in which the different belligerent sides of the Second World War used them for various propaganda purposes.

In order to honour the various services rendered to Finland during the Winter War, 1939–1940, an unprecedented number of foreigners were decorated with the Finnish orders in 1940. Further awards on the basis of the Winter War were made in 1941 and even later. Besides war-related honours, decorations were continuously conferred for international civilian co-operation in different administrative sectors. During the Continuation War from June 1941 until September 1944, Finland fought against the Soviet Union in close cooperation with Germany. Finland was a small-power with limited resources, which aimed at greatness. The Finnish honours were a form of ‘symbolic capital’, which was used both as thanks for support received from abroad and as attempts to secure future assistance and goodwill from influential foreigners. It was believed that the honours conferred on foreigners would, in some way or another, further Finnish interests. However, it is extremely difficult exactly to estimate whether the orders had the desired effect. The insignia of orders serve as expressions of sovereignty of a state. In the context of the Second World War, the Finnish honours reflected the ‘small-power sovereignty’ of Finland as the Finnish leadership largely complied to the honorific wishes of the Germans.

The high-ranking decorations conferred on foreigners were kinds of indicators that expressed the emphasis of Finland’s foreign relations and the importance of the recipients to Finland. Although the focus of the Finnish foreign and military policy was on Germany during these years, the Finnish honours policy reflected strongly the ever-present importance of Sweden. As long as it was possible, Finland also tried

to maintain its traditionally good relations to the United States by honorific means. Thus, it was a question about 'multi-board chess' or rather roulette. The policy of a small country was to spread its fairly voluminous bets in the form of honours as widely as possible with the hope that even some of them would provide gains for Finland.

On a material level, the insignia of the orders also have their own interesting stories to tell. While the reception of the Finnish orders varied individually, many recipients held their decorations in high regard. This is witnessed by the replacement issues acquired by those, who had lost their badges during or after the war. None of the highest Finnish honours given to foreigners during the years 1941–1944 was forfeited. Thus, any recipient willing to pay the redemption fee was able to acquire new insignia.