

# Red Winter



## Diaries

### Part 5 – Thoughts From 'Assistant Researcher '

*My name is Vesa Teräs*

and I live in Finland, some 90 kilometers north of Helsinki, near the city of Lahti. I met Mark more or less by accident when he already had done very extensive background work for the game. I noticed some of his prototype pictures on the internet and made a reply correcting the spelling of some Finnish names. Then we exchanged a couple of e-mails. As a history buff myself, I agreed to help him research Finnish resources on the topic of Winter War.

Wargames, and games in general, have been my love for a few decades now, since I was a small boy. I also have a keen interest in history. Although my daytime job involves telecommunication technologies, I have also studied history at a university. So I have some tools of the trade and basic knowledge of conducting proper research, checking the reliability of sources, and cross checking what I've found with other sources whenever possible.

I have used mostly Finnish literature which is available in the public libraries here in Finland. There are also lots of Finnish web pages devoted to the subject, starting with an excellent Finnish Military Academy's essay highlighting the battle of Tolvajärvi as an exemplary defensive battle and ways to turn the tables against an overwhelming enemy. There are still some resources I have not been able to go after mainly due to the time limits set by family life and a full time job. However I'm looking forward to visiting the War museum and Military archives to complete my research for Red Winter and its probable sequels. It wouldn't be too hard to visit the actual battle sites behind the border nowadays too.



The best resources for OOB facts and details of the actual battle were found mostly in "Talvisodan Historia" series (it's a four volume encyclopedia about Winter War, edited by "Sotatieteen laitos", or Institute of War Science in English, and published by WSOY) and "Talvisodan taisteluja" (published by Karttakeskus). That latter book also has very informative maps about flow of the battles of Winter War. Also the memoirs of Paavo Talvela and Biography of Aaro Pajari have been valuable sources to get some insight on the morale of the certain troops and some interesting details. For example, when the first battalion of JR 16 arrived to defend Kivisalmi Bridge the Finns already there thought for a few moments that the Soviets had managed to hook behind them. The newly arriving Finns were shelled by Finnish mortars and momentarily fired upon by other Finnish weapons too. Fortunately there were no casualties as a result of this chaos. The soldiers of JR 16 were gathered from the Pirkanmaa region around Finnish inland city of Tampere and they were mainly factory workers or from offices and had little or no experience with surviving in the wilderness without electricity. With some poor company leaders on top of that, the first battalion of JR 16 that arrived at Kivisalmi Bridge were routed from their positions at the very moment the Soviets attacked them. They said they had received a 'command from somewhere' to retreat because the Soviets had supposedly managed to break through the northern lines of defense and the Finns were in danger of being surrounded in a 'motti'. The presence of Lt. Colonel Pajari (and later Colonel Talvela) and their well led counterattacks lifted the Finnish morale and eventually turned the tide to stop Soviet advance.

The Finnish sources in sum have provided more detailed information on the placements of

certain individual units than the English sources Mark has previously had available. Some examples include the presence of JR 16 mortars already at the first day of the battle and the addition of a machine gun Company of Er.P 9 that was previously missing altogether.

*Below: The missing MG unit. Playtest counter art by Michael Evans.*



Research for a Winter War series of games seems to be an ongoing task as there are lots of minute details to be found in different kinds of books. One example is the number of telephone and telegram lines passing through Tolvajärvi area (two lines). That information is not so important for Red Winter where the command and communication is abstracted outside of the game's scope, but it invokes some interesting questions. What locales in the area were wired for those two lines? Quite likely the tourist hotel was one of them. Research also brought up some interesting information about Lahti, my home town in the middle of the southern Finland. It was bombed by the Soviets rather heavily during Winter War, causing lots of damage and casualties, but only once during the Continuation War, a couple years later, with almost no damage at all. That's interesting because strategically my home town has barracks and a direct railroad extending all the way to Moscow via St Petersburg (or Leningrad at that time). One would think its importance hadn't changed that much between those two

outbreaks of WW II on Finnish soil.

The order of battle and similar basic information isn't about to change much as the research goes on but all those minute details give lots of opportunities for Mark to augment his beautiful game engine with a myriad of optional rules. Fortunately the game testing community is quite active in discussing things by e-mail and of course Mark is a brilliant designer who seems to understand how to create a masterpiece of a game without complicating it with needless details.

The complete list of the sources I have used will be included in the published rulebooks of the game.

*Below: A downed Soviet SB-2 bomber.*

**Next Time:** The frozen lakes and their effects on gameplay.

