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WINTER WAR

In August 1939 Germany and the Soviet Union signed a non-aggression pact, much to the surprise of western nations. In a secret additional protocol to this agreement, found initially by the Americans after the war, and then again in documents discovered recently in Russia itself, the small independent Baltic states were annexed to the Molotov-von Ribbentrop pact, effectively allowing the Soviet Union to seize them upon the German invasion of Poland. One of those countries unwittingly affected by this secret annexation was Finland.

Germany launched its attack on Poland on 1 September 1939, and within three weeks had gained control of the western parts of the country (see Aircraft of the Aces 21 - Polish Aces of World War 2 for further details). As agreed in the non-aggression pact, the Soviets Union occupied the eastern provinces of Poland, whilst at the same time forcibly demanding access to air and naval bases within the Baltic countries.

Only Finland remained defiant in the face of communist threats, and while the Red Army overly massed troops on the eastern border of the Soviet Union in an attempt to scare the Finns into submission, negotiations continued in Moscow between politicians from the two countries. The Soviets wanted large areas of Karelia (which included numerous military establishments) handed over in return for barren land given to Finland in the northern wilderness. All communist overtures were disguised under the ‘the safety of Leningrad’ banner, which the Finns correctly sus-
pected was a cover for the total conquest of their country – recent research in Russia has revealed a detailed plan which backs these suspicions up. Suspecting the worst, the Finnish armed forces carried out a full-scale mobilisation whilst the negotiations continued.

Throughout the build up to war, Finland (perhaps naively) trusted in its neutral status being recognised through its membership of the League of Nations, and so said ‘no’ to all proposals insulting its sovereignty. The USSR broke off negotiations following receipt of this answer on 28 November 1939, annulling the 1932 non-aggression pact between the two nations, and attacked 48 hours later. The Winter War had started.

**Fighter Defences**

In 1937 the Finnish Air Force issued a five-year development plan which called primarily for the acquisition of ‘interceptors’. It was correctly deduced that any enemy attacking Finland would rely heavily on the large-scale use of bombers, without fighter escort. With only limited funds available, the Finns would have to procure these interceptors from sources other than the major European powers, who could not spare military aircraft in the growing climate of political tension.

Eventually, the Finns struck a deal with Dutch company Fokker that saw them purchase seven D.XXIs outright, and an assembly license for a further 35 examples. As a result of being turned down by all major manufacturers, the Finnish Air Force had only received two-thirds of its new interceptors when the Red Army attacked. On 30 November 1939 some 36 D.XXIs were available for combat, these being divided between three flights in Lentolaivue (LLv) 24 and two in Lentolaivue 26, all of which were under the command of LLv’s 24 Capt Gustaf Erik Magnusson.

The remainder of the fighter force consisted of ten obsolete Bristol Bulldog IVs in LLv 26’s third flight, their use being limited to the defence of areas to the rear of the frontline and vulnerable towns and ports. Both LLv 24 and 26 were part of Lentarykennus 2, commanded by creator of the Finnish fighter arm, Lt Col Richard Lorentz.

According to Soviet sources, there were 3253 aircraft deployed to the
Finnish front, which stretched from the Gulf of Finland to the Arctic Sea. The bulk of these were concentrated on the Karelian Isthmus, which would become the key front line of the Winter War. This formidable armada would fly an average of 1000 sorties per day.

**Fighter Tactics**

Despite their paucity in numbers, Finnish fighter pilots were highly trained individuals who had been well indoctrinated in modern tactics by Richard Lorenz. As early as 1934, Maj Lorenz had discovered (flying Gamecocks at LLv 24) that the traditional fighter formation of a lead aircraft and two wingmen was less suited to aerial combat than was a pair of aircraft. The latter could adopt a more flexible approach to engaging an enemy due to their being one less aircraft involved, and their numbers could be increased when the need arose through the addition of a second pair, thus creating what the Luftwaffe dubbed a Schwarm.

Before assuming the command of LLv 24, Magnusson made visits to a number of other air forces which included included a three-month ‘tour’ with newly-created JG 132 ‘Richthofen’. As previously mentioned, the Germans had also given up the three-aircraft formation in favour of the ‘finger four’. This convinced the Finnish ‘top brass’ that the newly adopted basic formations were right, and that the tactics developed around them were sound.

Lack of funding for the Finnish Air Force of the 1930s not only affected its equipment levels but also pilot training. Therefore, a student destined for fighters would receive elementary flying training but no advanced tuition. This effectively meant that he was taught two, or maybe three, methods of attacking enemy aircraft, but no more. This was based on the discovery that a bomber could usually be brought down with two (or three at most) passes. These three methods, and associated gunnery, were rehearsed both in training and with the front-line units, and they served both doctrinal and economical limits.

To achieve success in three passes, guns were set to converge at 150 m, but pilots were trained not to fire until at 50 m distance. Closing to this proximity was a risky undertaking, but being that close to the bomber gave them two advantages:

1) they were immune to defensive fire, and
2) they could not miss.

When war broke out, Magnusson gave strict orders to avoid fighter duels, for the D.XXI lacked the manoeuvrability to turn with the Soviet Polikarpov I-15bis, I-16s and I-153s. However, it was more than suited to the role of bomber interceptor, and even if lacking outright speed, it had a good rate of climb and could always be pulled away in a dive.

**First Encounters**

30 November 1939 was a cloudy day, and on the few interception missions flown no enemy aircraft were met. Next morning, the Red Air Forces sent out a wave of around 250 aircraft to bomb Helsinki and other ports, a second formation to attack the airfields in south-eastern Finland and fighters to patrol midway along Karelian Isthmus.

Despite being comprehensively outnumbered, the Finnish fighter pilots were ready to repel the bombers, having been mobilised some weeks before. The first contact was made at 1145 when two Bulldogs were jumped by six I-16s of 7.IAP (fighter aviation regiment). The Finnish pilots were immediately separated from each other, and SSgt Uutu (flying BU-64) was left alone to fight the Russians. After scoring hits on a ‘Rata’, he himself was shot down, crashing at Muolaanjärvi and suffering injuries in the process. Uutu’s I-16 also came down, however, thus becoming the first aerial victory scored over Finland.

Soon after this initial engagement, LLv 24 scrambled D.XXIs in pairs, led by Capt Magnusson (in his regular FR-99). Between noon and 1500 the unit completed 59 sorties, destroying eight Tupolev SB bombers from 41.SBAP (fast bomber aviation regiment) and three from 24.SBAP between Lappeenranta and Seinäjoki. Lt Vuorela claimed two victories, while Capt Magnusson, Lt Ahola, Lt Laukkonen, Lt Räty, Lt Kokko and Ssgs Heikininen, Rissanen, Rautakorpi and Virta each got one apiece.

Poor weather and snow fall then stopped all flying until 19 December, when LLv 24 flew 58 sorties over the Karelian Isthmus and engaged in combat on 22 occasions between 1050 and 1520 hours. The Soviets lost seven SBs (six from 44.SBAP) and five Ilyushin DB-3s from other regiments. Ssgt Virta (in FR-84) was the first Finnish pilot to engage the enemy on this day, although he encountered 25.IAP I-16 fighters rather than bombers. Nevertheless, he quickly destroyed two of his opponents.

Four days later the luckless 44.SBAP was again attacked by the Fokkers, losing six SBs over the Karelian Isthmus at 1100 – Lt Sarvanto claimed...
two in FR-97. Some 21 engagements were fought on this date, and aside from the bombers, two I-16s from both 7./IAP and 64./IAP were also downed – SgT Tilli, flying FR-103, accounted for the former pair.

LLv 24 scored steadily throughout their first month of operations, downing an incredible 54 aircraft for the loss of just one Fokker destroyed and another damaged. On the ground, Finnish troops were also enjoying similar successes disproportionate to their numbers, having effectively halted the Soviet advances in all directions.

6 January 1940

During the morning of 6 January, 17 DB-3Ms of 6./DBAP (long-range bomber aviation regiment) took off in two waves from Ensimmäinen to bomb Kuopio, in eastern Finland. The first nine Ilyushins attacked their target as planned, but the second formation of eight drifted too far west and crossed the Gulf of Finland south of Uitti. Based nearby was 4./LLv 24, who had 1 Lt Sovelius (in FR-92) up on patrol. He attacked the DB-3s at 1010 at 3000 m, downing the outer aircraft at the left of the formation.

The remaining seven bombers continued to Kuopio, where they released their bombs at little effect before returning home along the same route, which followed a railway line. 1Lt Savanto had, meanwhile, taken off in order to meet the DB-3s on their return journey, and in his postwar memoirs, he describes the famous four-minute battle which ensued;

The clouds over Uitti had disappeared and the sun gleamed from the light bellies of the marvellous looking row of bombers. I counted them to be seven. On the left flew an echelon of three and to the right four almost in a row. The distance between the planes was hardly one aircraft.

I banked to the right and headed south, continuing to climb. For a moment I was in the sights of the nose guns, but facing the sun, they obviously did not see me. When I reached the altitude of the bombers, I was already 900 m behind them. At full power, I started the chase and selected the one at the extreme left of the formation, although the bomber third from the left was further behind the others, and the fire from its rear gunner felt dangerous. At a distance of 300 m it banged unpleasantly into my plane – I had flown into a stream of bullets.

I opened fire at 20 m with a short burst to the fuselage of the machine on the left. The tracers seemed to hit the target, and I quickly silenced the bomber’s rear gunner. I took aim again at the right engines of both bombers in formation, and with light touches on the trigger, both enemies were down in flames. I cheered, and then aligned my Fokker up with the bombers on the opposite side of the formation. Attacking as I had before, I set the engines of one bomber alight, before turning to the next aircraft in the formation, hitting it with gun fire at a very close range. This planes too burst into flames soon after I had hit it with two or three very short bursts. On the right I saw the first aircraft that I had attacked on this side of the formation diving as a fireball towards the ground.

I now set myself the goal of destroying all the remaining bombers in the formation. Some fell away like burning pages of a book after I had fired at them, whilst others pulled up steeply following the incapacitation of their pilot. The reddish January sun shone through the haze towards me throughout the engagement, except when the dark smoke of the burning planes cast a shadow across it.

The penultimate bomber was much tougher than the others to shoot down, for my wing guns were probably empty by then. It did, however, finally catch fire, and I in turn went after the last one. Its rear gunner had been silent for quite some time, and I went in very close. I aimed at the engine and pulled the trigger. The guns were quiet! I made a couple of charging attempts but without any result. I had run out of ammunition, and the only thing to do was to return home.

Despite this, Savanto had inflicted enough damage on six of the DB-3s to ensure that they crashed between Uitti and Tavastila – a distance of 30 kms. He thus became Finland’s premier ace in an action that lasted just four minutes. His D.XXI (FR-97) had received 23 hits, although none were serious, and it was flown to the repair factory. Once news of the action was released, foreign pressmen showed much interest in Savanto, for nothing like this had occurred in Europe up to this point in the war.

On 17 January ten DXXIs scrambled at 1355 hours and caught three formations of SBs (25 aircraft in total) from 54.SBAP returning from a raid via the Karelian Isthmus. Twenty-five minutes later, nine bombers had met their end, and several more were damaged.

Two days later both 1Lt Nieminen, flying FR-78, and S/Sgt Virta in FR-84 became the next aces by downing an SB each over the Karelian Isthmus. Following these reversals, Soviet bombers avoided the airspace over south-eastern Finland for almost two weeks. Other regions were still experiencing bomber activity, however, and on 20 January 1Lt Lukanlahti led the interception of SBs from 21.DBAP north of Lake Ladoga. They succeeded in destroying five bombers, with WO Pyöräni (in FR-110) scoring two and S/Sgt Tilli (in FR-107) one to both become aces.

Flygflottilje 19

Although performing well in the Karelian Isthmus region, the Finns had no aircraft spare to protect their barren northern border. Fortunately for them, however, Sweden was worried about its own position should Finland fall, and duly assembled a voluntary unit containing both infantry and air detachments. It was quickly deployed to Lapland upon its arrival in Finland, and on 10 January the flying unit, designated Flygflottilje 19 (comprising 12 Gladiators and four Hars), arrived at Kemijärvi and was stationed on the ice outside Veisiluoto. This small detachment then represented one-third of Sweden’s total fighter force.
Two days later F 19 flew its first mission when Harts attacked 145.IAP’s base at Mäkiäjärvi whilst Gladiators provided top cover. Bad luck struck during the return flight, however, when two Harts collided and one was downed by fighters. 2Lt Jacobi, in Gladiator F1, managed to destroy one of the attacking 1-15s for the first Swedish aerial victory.

F 19 served till the end of hostilities, and although it claimed only eight aircraft downed during 600 sorties, its presence in Lapland effectively prevented the bombings of towns in the northern region.

**Test Pilots at War**

Finland’s State Aircraft Factory was located at Tampere in the southern central region of the country, and the airfield at this site was shared with the air force’s Koelentie (Koolen - Test_flight). Pilots assigned to this unit carried out acceptance flights on new or repaired aircraft leaving the factory, which became a prime target following the outbreak of war.

On 13 January 1940, Koel, leader, Capt Ehrensoo, scored the first kill to fall to the test pilots whilst flying Fiat G.50 SA-1. He destroyed an SB bomber south-east of Tampere, and two days later another SB fell to the guns of a Fokker on a check flight following repairs.

As mentioned previously in this chapter, 20 January 1940 proved to be a costly day for the Russians, with 35.SBAP in particular suffering major losses. Six of its SBs were downed by three LLv 24 D.XXIIs scrambled to intercept them, four falling to the guns of FR-91, flown by 1Lt Itävuori. Later that same day the high-scoring Fokker was again in action when LLv 24 pilot 1Lt Huhanantti bounced three SBs of 36.SBAP whilst attempting to rendezvous with the rest of his unit. He quickly destroyed two bombers before wisely breaking off when five F-15s appeared on the scene. The latter aircraft were now equipped with drop tanks, which allowed them to patrol in large formations over southern Finland.

The final Koel kill came on 2 March 1940, taking their tally to nine victories. On that same day the unit’s only loss occurred when WO Hetikala, piloting FR-84, was downed by a DB-3 gunner.

**Foreign Help Arrives**

Aside from the Fokker fighters purchased by the Finns, an order for 25 Fiat G.50s for LLv 26 was also placed with the Italian manufacturer on 23 October 1939. To ensure their speedy arrival in Finland, the initial delivery route for these aircraft called for them to be sent by rail through Germany and then across the Baltic Sea by ship to Sweden, where they would be assembled and flown to Finland. Two aircraft arrived via this route in late December 1939, and six more had reached the German port of Stettin, on the Baltic Sea, before the Germans turned them back to Switzerland. These G.50s, plus the remaining aircraft, were then sent by sea from Italy, causing their arrival to be delayed until 15 February 1940.

Soon after the Soviet invasion, the British government donated 30 Gladiator IIs to the Finns, and the first of these arrived on 18 January – others followed four weeks later. LLv 26 was thus temporarily equipped with the Gloster fighter until 1 March, when they were handed over to Lentokoulu 1’s LLv 12 and 14.

New units were also formed to operate these foreign ‘donor’ aircraft, although when LLv 28 was created on 8 December 1939, its pilot had no idea what aircraft they would be. Then at the beginning of 1940 France donated 50 Morane-Saulnier MS.406 fighters, which were duly issued to the unit. Again, their delivery took place by sea to Sweden, where Swedes and Finns worked side-by-side assembling the aircraft. The first French fighters arrived in Finland on 4 February and went straight to the unit, and with the end of the month some 30 had been flown in.

A hectic attempt to purchase America fighters led, on 16 December 1939, to a deal that saw the Finns buy 44 Brewster Model 239s at a competitive price. These aircraft had originally been intended for the Navy, but Brewster had sold the last customer improved F-2A-3s instead. Delivery of the new surplus Model 239s took place by sea, with assembly in Sweden – six arrived on 13 March, just prior to the end of the Winter War. These aircraft were issued to the new LLv 22.

Also arriving too late to see action were ten (of twelve) ex-RAF Hurricanes bought from Britain, which flew in during the second week of March. France also ‘gifted’ 80 surplus Caudron-Renault CR.714 Cyclone lightweight fighters to the Finns, six arriving soon after the war. Fortunately, no more were received, as due to the type’s poor landing and take-off characteristics, they were immediately grounded – permanently.

Following a period of stalemate on the frontline, the Soviet forces launched the second phase of their offensive on the Karelian Isthmus on 1 February. Red Army assets poured into the battlefield from other fronts in an effort to force a breakthrough, whilst the bombers switched from strategic targets to tactical support of the offensive and large fighter formations patrolled both the battlefield and into Finnish territory.

During this time the number of serviceable Finnish fighters rose from 45 to 67, with the Gladiators tackling the fighters and the D.XXI continuing to intercept bomber formations – the latter mission now grew steadily more difficult with the introduction of a fighter escort.

After two weeks of familiarisation flying with the Gladiator, LLv 26 scored its first kills on 2 February 1940 when Lt Berg engaged six 1-15s of OjA/6 (a detached fighter aviation escadrille), downing one near his base. Later that same day Sgtr Tuominen (in GL-258) chased two SBs and six 1-16s over the Gulf of Finland, downing one fighter over Korka and another near the island of Suursaari.

Eleven days later, whilst six Gladiators tangled with 1-15s north of Lake Ladoga, nine SBs of 39.SBAP arrived in the midst of the dogfight...
just as WO Lautamäki and his wingman (Ssgt Tuominen) joined the battle. With the escorts busy fighting the bulk of LLv 26, the two Finns attacked the bombers without interference and shot five of them in quick succession. Tuominen’s share was three-and-a-half in GL-255, which made him the first Gladiator ace. His squadronmates then attacked the bombers and claimed another two destroyed.

Based in south-western Finland in order to protect vital ports, LLv 28 also went into battle with little more than two weeks’ experience on their Moranes. On 17 February they drew ‘first blood’ by sending a DB-3 down over the south-western archipelago. Three days later Lt Berg became the second Gladiator ace when he used GL-280 to attack 30 Sibis of 6.DBAP sent to bomb Kuovola. Although he destroyed one of the Tupolevs, Berg was in turn burnt whilst bailing out of his blazing fighter, which had been hit by defensive fire from the remaining bombers.

The aerial battles over the Karelian Isthmus on 25 February were some of the fiercest of the war, causing casualties on both sides. LLv 26 was in the thick of the action, sending three Gladiators to drive off nine R-5 artillery fire-control aircraft, escorted by six I-153s from 13.OI.AE. After downing four ‘sporting’ aircraft, two Gladiators were in turn lost and a third damaged in a forced landing following combat with the I-153s.

This engagement confirmed that LLv 26’s Gladiators were finding it increasingly difficult to fend off Soviet I-16s and I-153s, so after just ten days of training on the Fiat G.50, the unit was thrust into combat with the Italian fighter. On 26 February Lt Puhakka, leading a formation of three Fiat G.50s to intercept fighters and bombers south of Kuovola, shot down an I-16 flying FA-4, whilst his wingman, 2Lt Linnamaa, destroyed a DB-3.

The Finns suffered further losses on the 29th when Soviet fighters carried out a series of raids on the bases of LLv 24 and 26. At Ruokolahti, 49.IAP fighters also downed a Gladiator in the morning. At noon, ‘bombers’ were supposedly detected approaching Ruokolahti, but these instead turned out to be six I-153 ‘Chaikas’ and 18 I-16 ‘Ratas’ from 68.IAP. The Gladiators that were scrambled to intercept the raiders were caught just as they commenced their take-off, and three were instantly destroyed. A further two Gloster fighters and a single D.XXI were subsequently lost in the low-altitude combat which followed, although an I-16 was also downed and another crashed into trees.

By March the Finnish army had withdrawn from the Karelian Isthmus, although it remained steadfast in front of Viipuri. Sensing retreat, the Red Army commenced crossing the frozen Gulf of Finland west of Viipuri on the 2nd.

Soviet forces soon established two small bridgeheads on the mainland, and in order prevent a full-scale invasion, the entire Finnish air force was sent into action against troops, tanks and supply columns crossing the ice. The air force went about its task with clinical precision, light and medium bombers stopping the motorised units in their tracks and fighters strafing the infantry. The Red Army was on the march and was totally exposed on the vast open spaces of the icefield, and within a week the invasion had been suppressed. Theses sorties also attracted Soviet fighters into the area, and after myriad combats, both sides had lost five aircraft apiece.

The situation on the Karelian Isthmus was still critical when peace negotiations commenced in Moscow on 8 March. The resistance of the Finnish forces, supported by material help from western nations who threatened to join in militarily if the invasion continued, convinced the USSR that further action would only see the war expand into an international crisis, which they did not want. So, on 13 March at 1100 hours a cease-fire commenced. Accordingly, but unjustifiably, Finland handed over those tracts of land that the Soviets had demanded back in late 1939.

Lentoryjmentit 2 fighters had flown 3486 sorties, claimed 170 aircraft shot down (and another 70 damaged) and produced 10 ace, all for the and loss of 23 fighters in action. In all, the Finnish Air Force flew 5693 sorties and claimed 207 aircraft destroyed for the loss of 53 of their own operations. Anti-aircraft guns also destroyed another 314 aircraft.

Soviet air forces had flown 100,970 sorties over the Finnish front, claiming 427 aerial victories for the loss of 261 aircraft according to contemporary Soviet records. However, recent research of Russian archives has indicated that Soviet losses amounted to 579 aircraft, which is a figure well in line with total Finnish claims of 521.

Winter War Aces

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With new fighters having been received from abroad, and many more still on their way to Finland, the air force decided to re-organise itself just a fortnight after the Winter War had ended. On 27 March 1940 Lentorykmenni 3 was duly established, this second fighter regiment controlling three units – namely LLv 30, which received Gloster Gauntlets donated by South Africa, LLv 32 (ex-LLv 22), whose Brewsters were exchanged with LLv 24’s D.XXIs within three weeks of its formation, and LLv 34, which flew an array of advanced trainers.

Lentorykmenni 2 remained unchanged, however, LLv 24 retaining its Brewsters, LLv 26 Fiat G.50s and LLv 28 MS.406s. New bases were also built and the fighter pilot training programme totally overhauled.

Following the German occupation of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, and then the Benelux countries and France just two months later, Finland became geopolitically isolated, sandwiched between a previous enemy to the east and Germany to the west. When the latter country approached the Finns in August 1940 to see if they would be interested in acquiring captured war material in return for the transit of German troops bound for northern Norway, an agreement was soon reached.

This deal provided the air force with 25 ex-French MS.406s and 29 Curtiss Hawk 75As from ex-French and Norwegian stocks, the majority of which had arrived in time to see action in the new conflict.

The State Aircraft Factory also assembled 50 Twin Wasp Junior-powered D.XXIs, plus repaired enough captured aircraft from the Winter War to equip one entire fighter flight with J-153s!

**Prelude To War**

The German surprise attack on the USSR, codenamed Operation Barbarossa, was revealed to Finnish military leaders four weeks before it commenced on 22 June 1941. Armed with this knowledge, the Finns instigated a full-scale mobilisation four days prior to the invasion.

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Soon after the commencement of Barbarossa, Soviet intelligence discovered a large number of German aircraft based on Finnish airfields, which made the communists fearful of a massive air raid launched on Leningrad from this direction. On the Finnish front, which stretched from the Gulf of Finland to the Arctic Sea, the Red air forces were equipped with 224 fighters and 263 bombers, and early on the morning of 25 June 1941, about 150 of the latter took off and attacked several locations in southern Finland. So began the Continuation War.

The Finnish fighter force was now in much better shape than it had been some 17 months before, as the following table shows:

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<td>2/LeLv 30</td>
<td>Lt V Karu</td>
<td>Pori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3/LeLv 30</td>
<td>Lt E Ilveskari</td>
<td>Pori</td>
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<tr>
<td>E/LeLv 32</td>
<td>Capt E Heinikä</td>
<td>Hyvinkää</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1/LeLv 32</td>
<td>Capt P Berg</td>
<td>Hyvinkää</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Capt K Lahtela</td>
<td>Hyvinkää</td>
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<td>Lentolaivue 6</td>
<td>Maj K Iivanho</td>
<td>Turku</td>
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<tr>
<td>E/LeLv 6</td>
<td>Capt L Karjalainen</td>
<td>Turku</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**25 June 1941**

The large bomber formations heading for southern Finland were first spotted at 07:00, and the news was quickly relayed to Selinpää, where Maj Magnusson had forward deployed 2/LeLv 24 in anticipation of just such an air raid. At 0710 two Brewsters were scrambled, with Ssgt Kinnunen flying BW-352 and Cpl Lampi BW-354. The latter pilot engaged the enemy first, and he described his engagement in the following report:

Five minutes after take-off I noticed a large enemy formation. I attacked the plane on the extreme right and set it alight with my first
Maj Magnusson's Model 239 BW-380 is seen at Rantakalmi in July 1941. Soon after he had used it to 'make ace' on the 8th. Flying a total of 158 missions, he downed five bombers and shared in a sixth kill.

3/Lv 26 pilots relive the 25 June 1941 battle over Joroinen, during which they destroyed 10 out of 15 72 SBAP bombers encountered. From the left they are 2Lt Carl-Erik Bruun, Sgt Ilmari Pöysti, 1Lt Urho Nieminen, Sggt Onni Paronen, 2Lt Sakari Kokkonen, 1Lt Olli Puhakka and MGt Valio Pervari (SA-kuva).

burst. The aircraft went in a vertical dive and crashed into the forest. I then shot at two bombers on the right-hand side of a three-aircraft echelon, and they both began to smoke. I then attacked the remaining aircraft in the echelon. It too started to smoke and dived to the surface, but remained in the air. I gave chase and the enemy suddenly slowed, forcing me to pull up alongside him. At this point the rear gunner hit me from very close range.

'I pulled up and banked again behind the bomber, firing a short burst into it which created a fire on its right side. It subsequently hit the water burning. I saw Sggt Kinnunen also down two aircraft in the same battle.'

The Finnish pilots had engaged 27 SBs from 201 SBAP at 1500 m as they approached Heinola, the Soviets losing five bombers in total. Kinnunen and Lampi were both credited with two-and-a-half bombers apiece, with the former pilot becoming an ace on this sortie, since he had previously scored 3.5 kills during the Winter War.

Further interceptions later that morning saw the Brewster pilots destroy five more SBs, with WO Turkka (in BW-351) downing two to add to his score of 4.5 from the Winter War. Sggt Kinnunen also claimed two during his second sortie of the day, raising his tally to 4.5.

Recent research has shown that ten SB bombers (three from 2 SBAP,
Mechanics R. Ranta and H. Lusikkonen stand in front of Aaltinen's FA-35 at Jalorinen on 28 June 1941. All of 2/Lv 26's Fiat 201s and 202s were lost in LeLv 24's operational area that day, which matches the figure claimed by the Brewster pilots. LeLv 24, based at Hyyinkää, engaged the enemy next, Lt Evinen (in D.XXI FR-116) leading his Schwarm southwards at 1000 to intercept 'DB-3s' returning to the USSR via Helsinki - his unit downed two. These aircraft were actually SBs from 4.SAD (mixed aviation division).

As the third unit to see action on the 23rd, LeLv 26 had been flying air combat patrols all morning. Its 2nd Flight had just landed when 15 SBs of 72.SABAP attacked Jalorinen at 1145 from 1000 m. Despite being low on fuel, two Fiat pilots took off amidst the falling bombs and caught the attackers, sending three down.

Meanwhile, 1Lt Nieminen, who had led the six G.50s of 3/Lv 26 straight passed the bombers without spotting them, was immediately called back to his base by radio. Div- ing on the bombers from a superior height at 1155, the Fiat pilots destroyed 10 bombers in just 20 minutes. Nieminen described the melee in the following report:

'My flight engaged a 15-20 aircraft formation of SBs above Taunik-sjärvi. I hit two aircraft on the right side of the formation, and both had their engines out alight. Over Kerisalo island I managed to get into a good position behind the third SB. Its fuel tank blew up in mid-air and it went down. I continued to fire at the remaining bombers, and when I ran out of ammunition only 4-5 SBs remained in the formation, including one trailing smoke.'

Nieminen (in FA-11) was credited with three kills and MSgt Por-
Five-victory ace 1Lt Veikko Evinen flew D.XXI FR-114 for a month in June/July 1941. On 26 June he destroyed two DB-3 bombers near Helsinki, although he was piloting FR-116 at the time. Later promoted to lead 3/HLLeLv 32, Evinen was shot down and killed by ground fire exactly three years later whilst flying Curtiss Hawk CU-581.

Mechanics can be seen winding the inertia starter of 2/LeLv 30 D.XXI FR-125 at Hyvinkää in this photograph, taken on 11 July 1941. Three days prior this shot being taken, 2Lt Ture Mattila had opened his score in this machine – he would retain its pilot until the end of the year. Note the different ‘spuggle’ patterns on the spats of the Fokker, this almost random style of camouflage being quite common amongst D.XXIs at the time (SA-kuva)

Vari (in FA-20) 3.5 to make him an ace. Soviet records acknowledge the loss of nine SBs to ’12 Bf 109s’, of which they downed three!

The Soviet offensive on 25 June was focused exclusively on eastern Finland, with the units at Joroinen and Joensuu seeing virtually all the action. However, 1/LeLv 28 pilot Sgt Tani (in MS-406 MS311) and his wingman observed a lone, and obviously disorientated, SB (probably belonging to 10.SBAP) near their base and duly shot it down at 1300 hours.

A haul of 26 bombers destroyed (23 now acknowledged) was just the start the Finnish fighter force wanted to the Continuation War, although its ground-based early warning and fighter control system proved to be less than efficient – indeed, despite having 125 fighters on duty, less than a fifth engaged the enemy. This problem was slowly put right, however.

Soviet records claim that during the bomber offensive of 25 June-July, they attacked 39 Finnish (and German) airfields and destroyed 130 aircraft on the ground. German records show no such losses, whilst the Finns had just two aircraft lightly damaged. On the other hand, Finnish fighters claimed 34 bombers destroyed during the same period.

On 4 July MSgt Tuominen scrambled in G.50 FA-3 to intercept 72 SBAP bombers sent to attack Joensuu. At 1000 m he engaged them;

‘I observed the aircraft shortly after they had released their bombs, and they were surrounded by anti-aircraft fire. I came in just under the clouds, shooting out the left engine of the first bomber to enter my sights. I pressed home my attack to a distance of 50 m astern, and it caught fire.

Having transferred to 1/LeLv 30 just three weeks previously, Ture Mattila proudly stands by the tail of FR-125 at Utti in mid-November 1941. The ‘white 4’ on the fighter’s rudder was freshly applied upon its arrival at the new unit, replacing 2/LeLv 30’s red and yellow tactical number. Mattila later flew Bf 109s with 1/LeLv 34, raising his tally to eight victories in 256 missions (SA-kuva)

4/LeLv 24 pilots are seen at Imnola in late August 1941. They are, from left to right, Cpl Tapio Jarvi, Sgt Aarno Korhonen, 2Lt Aulis Lumme, 1Lt Henrik Elving, 1Lt Urho Sarjamo, Capt Per-Erik Sovelius, 1Lt Ilkka Torronen, Ssgt Martti Alho and Ssgt Jalo Dahl. All but Korhonen, Elving and Dahl would achieve ‘acedom’ (SA-kuva)
I fired at the second bomber from slightly side on, and it dropped away into a steepening dive trailing heavy smoke. Then I fired at three more aircraft, two of which also burst into flames. At this point my aircraft was hit in the fuel tank, and I quickly shot the gunner who had fired at me, resulting in his machine diving into cloud trailing smoke.

The remaining bomber gunners then all seemed to fire at me at once, and due to my close range (between 30 and 100 m), my fighter was hit in the fuel tank (again) and in the rudder. Only one of my guns had been working all this time, as the ammunition belt of the other weapon had snapped off after my first burst.

Tuominen claimed three SBs but was later credited with four after the wrecks of all of them were found—quite an achievement with just one synchronised 12.7 mm Breda gun.

**Offensive To Karelia**

Following the successes of Barbarossa, the Finns hastily drew up an offensive plan of their own in late June 1941. It consisted of a two-phase assault on Karelia and a single attack across the Karelian Isthmus, the army’s objective being to seize only those areas handed over to the USSR as part of the 1940 peace treaty.

For operations north of Lake Ladoga, a Karelian Army was formed, and it was assigned Lentorykmentti 2, with all three fighter squadrons plus LeLv 12 and LeLv 16 for reconnaissance and army co-operation duties. LeLv 4 Blenheim bombers could also be called upon when needed.

The massing of Finnish troops in preparation for the offensive failed to escape detection by Soviet reconnaissance flights, and on 8 July air attacks commenced. Defending the assembled force, Brewster pilots shot down Pytisä’s mount is seen at Rantasalmi in July 1941. He scored 4.5 victories with this machine, raising his total in Brewsters to 8.5. During the summer of 1944 he engaged the Red Air Force flying a Bf 109Gs, achieving an additional 4.5 victories. Flying a total of 437 missions, Pytisä scored 19.5 aerial kills.

BW-378 was the mount of 4/LeLv 24’s CO, Capt ‘Pekka’ Sovelius, until 16 February 1942, when he was posted to HQ—he later became a test pilot. Sovelius claimed seven victories in this fighter to raise his tally to 13 in 257 missions. BW-378 is seen at Vesivehmaa in May 1942 (O Riekki).

BW-376’s ‘team’ pose for the camera at 1/LeLv 24’s Rantasalmi airfield in July 1941. They are, from left to right, mechanic Sgt E Hargou, pilot WO V Pytisä and assistant mechanic J Salminen. ‘Isä Vikki’ (‘Father Vikki’) Pytisä was one of the air force’s ‘old hands’, having been born in 1909. Despite his advancing years, he saw service with LeLv 24 throughout the various wars with the USSR (V Lakiö).

1/LeLv 24 Brewster BW 390 taxies out at Nurmoila in October 1941. Whilst with this flight the aircraft was initially assigned to 2.Lt Kai Matola, who went on to score 6.5 victories in Brewsters and four in Bf 109Gs. His final tally of 10.5 kills was achieved during 296 missions (V Lakiö).

3/LeLv 24’s deputy leader, 1Lt Pekka Kokko, was one of the top scoring Finnish aces of 1941, raising his tally to 13.5 victories. He used this Brewster (BW 379) for much of the year, as signified by the inscription of his christian name in small black letters immediately behind the engine cowling. Kokko became a test pilot on 24 November 1941, and was eventually killed in a flying accident on 19 February 1944.
two bombers and six fighters in three engagements. Twenty-four hours later they were even more successful – 12 Brewsters from 3 and 4/LLeLv 24 took off at 0400 on a combat air patrol led by Maj Magnusson, and 70 minutes later nine of them engaged 15 I-153s over Lahdenpohja. WO Juutilainen (in BW-364) participated in the combat:

'I noticed Lt Kokko and his wingman hit an I-153 formation. I also attacked this gaggle, followed by Cpl Huotari. I fired at close range and hit several planes. During my return to Lahdenpohja, I observed an I-153 at low altitude, so I dived after it and shot it at from a distance of 50 m and a height of just 10 m above the forest between Miinala and Lahdenpohja.'

BW-368 of 3/LLeLv 24 was photographed in a worn white distemper at Kontupohja in March 1942. The fighter was regularly flown by Sgt Nils Katajainen, and the fin shows his tally of six aircraft. Note also the "yellow 1" painted on the green rudder. 'Nina' Katajainen would eventually score 17.5 victories in Brewsters (E.Lyly)

For the first year of the Continuation War Sgt Jouko 'Jussi' Huotari flew BW-353 with 3/LLeLv 24, scoring eight kills. The aircraft is seen here at Lunkula (which was a very basic shore landing strip on the banks of Lake Ladoja) in September 1941. Huotari added a further eight kills in BI 109s in 1944 to raise his tally to 17.5 from 291 missions (J Timonen)

WO Olva 'Oippo' Tuominen sits on the tail of his Fiat G.50 (FA-28) at Lunkula in August 1941. Shortly after this shot was taken he became the first knight of the Mannerheim Cross on 18 August due to his score of eight Winter War victories and 11.5 kills in the Continuation War. His elaborate scoreboard shows white kill bars for bomber victories, black/white for fighters and blue/white for flying boats. The horizontal bar denotes WO Lautamäki's kill in this aircraft on 13 August 1941 (Finnish Aviation Museum)

LeLv 26's Fiat Schwarm is seen at the Lunkula shore strip on 4 September 1941 after returning from a mission. The aircraft are, from left to right, FA-3, 35, 27 and -6, and pilots from all three of LeLv 26's flights are present according to the markings painted on the G.50s. FA-6 was regularly flown by 12.5 victory ace MSgt Onni Paronen (SA-kuva)

'CLimbing back up, I spotted two I-153s that had escaped the initial interception heading towards Soroala island, so I followed them. I waited until the lead aircraft stopped taking evasive action and started flying straight and level before I dived in behind it and shot off five or six rounds with both fuselage guns (the wing guns did not work during the combat). The I-153 banked left and plunged belly up into Lake Ladoja. My engine then started to run roughly so I gave up chasing the third fighter.'

In ten minutes the Russians had lost eight I-153s destroyed and another four damaged, these being credited to six pilots – MSgt Nissinen (in BW-353) was the other double scorer. Flying an aircraft that was faster than most of its rivals, Brewster pilots had begun to employ 'pendulum' tactics, which they would use successfully for the next two years.

On 10 July the Karelian army commenced its offensive, and within six days it had seized the northern tip of Lake Ladoja. Two weeks later the army achieved its intermediary goal when it reached the River Tuulos, at which point C-in-C, Marshall Mannerheim, called a halt to the advance.
LeLv 32 Hawk CLxw-560 was photographed at Sausaljärvi in April 1942. Unlike other units, LeLv 32 did not assign its aircraft to any particular pilot, although 20-year-old 2Lt ‘Köös’ Karhila did become an ace in it on 19 September 1941, eventually scoring eight kills with the fighter. His total haul on Curtiss Hawks was 13, and he continued his run of success once issued with a BF 109G in May 1943 (P. Saarinen).

The offensive to capture the Karelian Isthmus started on 31 July, and LeLv 32, equipped with Hurricanes and Hawks (and fortified by 3/LeLv 24’s Brewsters), provided aerial protection. The army pushed east of Viipuri and arrived on the banks of Lake Ladoga a week later. It eventually met up with the victorious Karelian army on 15 August. Viipuri was left in a siege until taken on 30 August. In just four days of fighting Finnish troops had chased the numerically superior Red Army to the old border, where it was told to stop. Leningrad was just 30 km further east.

On 12 August Capt Karhunen’s six Brewsters had engaged some 20 I-153s hell bent on strafing troops on the Karelian Isthmus, the combat commencing at 1300 hours and finishing some 30 minutes later. Nine ‘Chakas’ were destroyed, and all six Finnish pilots were credited with MS-317 was also a 1/LeLv 28 machine, and it too is seen at Solo-
manni during the summer of 1942. During this time it was regularly flown by 2Lt Paavo ‘Pampa’ Myllylä, who scored 1.5 victories in Moranes (both in this aircraft) and 19.5 kills in BF 109Gs during 420 missions. The victory bars on this fighter indicate the score of the plane, rather than an individual – a common feature of LeLv 28’s MS 406s.

3/LeLv 28 MS 406s MS-315 and -329 at Solomanni in October 1941. The latter fighter with a yellow 1 on its tail was flown by 6.5-victory ace Sgt Toivo Tomminen. On 4 December 1941 he collided with a Hurricane of 152 IAP, flown by S/Lt N.F. Repnikov, whilst flying this very aircraft – both pilots were killed.

MS-318 of 2/LeLv 28 was photographed at Viitana in November 1941, this aircraft having been assigned to 2Lt Martti Inehmo the previous September. He remained its pilot until he went missing in action on 26 December 1941 whilst flying MS-618. Inehmo flew 87 missions and scored eight kills, including ‘triples’ on 9 September and 9 October 1941 (J. Puolakkainen).
MANNERHEIM CROSS

Following the end of the Winter War, the statute governing the creation of the Mannerheim Cross was issued on 16 December 1940. The recipient became a knight of the Mannerheim Cross, and it was awarded in two classes for extraordinary bravery, highly notable achievements in battle, or exceptionally outstanding leadership. Its awarding was not dependent on the rank of the nominee.

The first cross (No 1) was issued on 22 July 1941 to Col Ernst Lagus for helping armoured units in battle. The first air force Mannerheim Cross knight (No 6) was WO Oiva Tuominen, who received his award on 18 August 1941 for scoring 20 kills, eight of them in the Winter War — future winners had only their present achievements taken into account.

The Mannerheim Cross can be compared with the British Victoria Cross or the American Medal of Honor, being the highest military honour awarded in Finland. Some 191 were issued; with only four men receiving it twice — fighter pilots Capt Hans Wind and WO Ilmari Juutilainen on 28 June 1944, and Maj Gen Aaro Pajari and Col Martti Aho on 16 October 1944.

The Mannerheim Cross 1st class was issued only twice, to Marshal of Finland Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim himself on 17 October 1941 (No 18), and chief of the staff Gen Axel Heinrichs on 31 December 1944. The latter individual had earlier received the 2nd class award (No 48) on 5 February 1942. The sum of 5000 Fimmarks (then equal to the annual salary of a regular first lieutenant) was also presented to the recipient of the Mannerheim Cross.

Leading Morane ace with 15 kills was MSgt Urho Lehto, who is seen here taxing out in MS-327 at Vittana in December 1941. On the 23rd of that month this aircraft suffered a fire whilst being started, so Lehto was issued with MS-304 instead. Later flying BF 109Gs with 3/LtLev 34 from 28 March 1943, he scored 44.5 kills during 400+ missions. Lehto received the Mannerheim Cross on 9 July 1944.

3 September, LeLv 32’s Capt Berg led seven Hawks across the Soviet border for a 15-minute battle with I-153s of 5.AD (aviation division) — each of the Finnish pilots involved claimed single kills.

Six days later a 2/LeLv 28 Schwarm engaged nine ‘Chaikas’ and six ‘Ratas’ of 155.IAP over the River Svir, shooting six of them down. On the return flight to base, the MS-406s bounced three bombers, escorted by five fighters, and the Soviets duly lost two more I-153s — both 2Lt Inehmo (in MS-623) and SSgt Lehto (in MS-304) claimed three kills apiece.

As the advancing Karelian army closed on Petrozavodsk, LeLv 24 continued to fly top cover. On 23 September, Capt Karhunen led eight Brewsters against three I-16s from 155.IAP caught strafing troops. Enjoying odds tightly stacked in their favour for a change, the Finnish pilots quickly destroyed the ‘Ratas’. Following a pre-briefed plan, Karhunen then ordered his fighter (by radio) to return to base, whilst he circled for half an hour at low level over the wilderness in complete radio silence. He then flew back to the troop emplacements, where he bounced six more I-155.IAP’s 16s strafing the infantry. Only one escaped.

Three days later Karhunen repeated the same tactic, with his flight destroying all six ‘Chaikas’ initially encountered. Circling at tree-top height for a short while, the Brewsters returned to find three I-16s, three I-15bis and two I-153s of 65.ShAP harassing the troops. Three Russians were promptly downed, whilst the others fled the area. Juutilainen scored three in BW-364 and Karhunen two in BW-366.

Following the capture of Olonets and Petrozavodsk by 1 October, the...
Karelian army advanced slowly northward along the west coast of Lake Onega. Once at the northern tip of the lake, the Finns occupied the towns of Karhumäki and Poverina on 5/6 December, thus ending their advance. From these defensive positions, a two-and-a-half-year stationary war now began.

During 1941 LeLv 24 had claimed 135 victories without losing a single Brewster to fighters. LeLv 26 had downed 52 aircraft with its Fiats, also without any combat losses. LeLv 28 scored 70 kills for the loss of five Moranes in combat, whilst LeLv 32 had destroyed 52 aircraft with its Curtiss Hawks, but had also lost five of its number to enemy fighters.

The ace list for the Continuation War was as follows at the end of 1941:

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3/LeLv 30 (ex-1/LeLv 10) D.XXI FR-148 was photographed at Tilkijärvi on 4 November 1941, having just exchanged its wheels for skis. Flown by the unit's top scorer, 1Lt Martti Kalima, during the first 12 months of the war, FR-148 was used by him to claim three victories (SA-kuva)

In August 1941 Lend-Lease shipments of Hurricanes started to arrive in significant amounts at the Soviet arctic ports of Murmansk and Arkhangelsk from the UK. Once reassembled, these fighters were primarily deployed against the Germans by the Northern Fleet air forces in the Murmansk and Kandalaksha areas. However, as more aircraft arrived in the USSR, regular air force units along the Finnish border also started to re-equip with Hurricane IIs and IIBs.

The first Finnish identification of a Hurricane was made on 17 December 1941 when Cap Karl Hansen's Schwarm engaged nine fighters west of the White Sea near Belomorsk. In the ensuing clash, one Hurricane of 152.IAP and four I-153s of 65.ShAP were claimed to have been shot down.

Recent research has shown that 11 days prior to this 'first' encounter with Soviet Hurricanes, 6.5 kill ace Sgt Toivo Tomminen of 3/LeLv 28 had actually collided with a 152.IAP Hawker fighter, flown by Sgt N F Reppikov, over Karhunäki. Both the MS.406 (MS-329) and the Hurricane were destroyed in the collision, which also killed the pilots. The British fighter had been misidentified as a MB-3 at the time.

As Hurricanes started to reach units south of Murmansk, LeLv 14, at the northernmost Finnish airfield of Tilkijärvi (200 km west of Belomorsk, on the White Sea), found that they could not repel the increasing numbers of Soviet Hawker fighters appearing in their sector with their ageing D.XXIs.

Accordingly, on 8 January 1942 the eight Brewsters of 2/LeLv 24 were posted 'temporarily' to Tilkijärvi, and within two weeks the flight had been further strengthened with the addition of four more aircraft. Just 24 hours after their arrival, the airfield was shelled by six Hurricanes, which were in turn intercepted by four D.XXIs that managed to get airborne during the attack. A solitary kill was achieved by the Finnish pilots, future ace Sgt Hemmo Leino, flying FR-146, claiming his first victory (of an eventual tally of 11).

On 24 January 2/LeLv 24 engaged the enemy for the first time in the Ruokajarvi area when five Brewsters ran into ten I-153s and L-155 fighters from 65.ShAP and claimed four of them shot down. A fifth Soviet fighter was also destroyed when SrLt V A Knižnik deliberately rammed (dubbed a 'taran' attack – see Aircraft of the Aces 15 - Soviet Aces of World War II)
War 2 for further details) his I-153 into Spt P Koskela’s BW-372, the ‘Chaika’ making a forced landing and the Brewster returning to base. Both pilots claimed an aerial victory.

During February the Brewsters engaged Hurricanes on two occasions, claiming three destroyed both times, but March proved to be quiet. However, this was very much the ‘lull before storm’, as the communists had decided to destroy the Tiiksjärvi base once and for all.

**Suursaari Operation**

The island of Suursaari is located south of Kotka in the middle of the Gulf of Finland. It was held by the Russians until early December 1941, when they evacuated their base in the face of Finnish advances. However, a realisation of its strategic importance soon after saw Red Army forces recapture the island on 2 January 1942. This latter action in turn prompted the Finnish army to take the island back whilst its troops could still safely advance over the ice.

Accordingly, on 27 March a 3500-man occupation force started the advance on Suursaari, supported by air cover to the tune of 57 aircraft – five captured SB bombers and six I-153 fighters from LeLv 6, six Brewsters from LeLv 24, sixteen D.XXII from LeLv 30, thirteen Curtis Hawks from LeLv 32 and eleven Blenheims from LeLv 42.

The 27th saw Finnish pilots shoot down four defending fighters, and 24 hours later two large-scale engagements took place. At 0800 1Lt Kauppinen led his Schwarm of Brewsters against ten I-153s of 71.IAP claiming exactly half their number shot down. Later that same day the island was taken by Finnish troops, and at 1740 12 Hawks led by 1Lt Nurminen intercepted 29 Soviet aircraft of 11.IAP and 71.IAP approaching in three groups. Whilst an impromptu victory parade continued on the ground, the Curtis pilots scythed into their Soviet counterparts during a 20-minute melee which saw ten I-153s and five I-16s reportedly shot down without any losses to the Hawk flight. Soviet loss records for this action acknowledge the destruction of one I-15bis, one I-16 and six I-153s.

**Easter At Tiiksjärvi**

On 29 March seven Hurricanes strafed the Tiiksjärvi base, and in response 1Lt Pekuri (in BW-372) led eight Brewsters on a reconnaissance mission to Segasa 24 hours later. Some 12 Hurricanes of 152.IAP were duly bounced during the offensive sweep and six were shot down.

Eight days later the Soviets carried out their long-planned air raid on
4/LeLv 24's BW-370 is seen at Rimpöltti in August 1942. It was regularly flown by 1Lt Aulis Lumme, who scored 4.5 of his total of 16.5 victories (in 287 missions) with the Brewster. 4/LeLv 24 used a stylised 'Osprey' as its flight emblem until 11 February 1943, when it reformed as the 2nd flight

Part of the same formation as seen on the previous page, S/Sgt Heimo Lampi flies BW-354 over Tiiksärvi in September 1942. As a member of 2/LeLv 24, he flew this particular Brewster for a period of 18 months in 1941/42, scoring his first 4.5 kills with it. Lampi was eventually commissioned to the rank of second lieutenant and went on to fly BF 109Gs with 1/HeLv 24, raising his score to 13.5 in 268 missions (P Ervi)

Aces of 3/LeLv 24 are seen at Hirvas on 27 June 1942. From left to right, they are S/Sgt 'Jussi' Huotari (17.5 kills), WO 'Illu' Juutelainen (94 kills), who is sitting on the tailplane of his BW-364, and Sgt 'Emppu' Vesa (29.5 victories). Vesa had scored his first kill (a Hurricane) just two days prior to this photograph being taken (SA-kuva)

3/LeLv 26 Fiat G.50 FA-1 sits with its engine protected from the cold at a snowy Helsinki-Malmen in March 1942 – each fighter flight undertook one month shifts in defence of the capital. 1Lt Olli Puhakka flew this aircraft during the Finnish advance into the USSR in 1941, claiming six victories, as elaborately marked on the rudder of the Italian fighter (C-E Brum)

and an interception vector was duly radioed to 1Lt Pekuri, who was leading 2/LeLv 24 on a routine patrol at the time. Intercepting the Soviet formation just minutes before its arrival over the Finnish airfield, the eight Brewster pilots succeeded in downing two DB-3 bombers (they were actually SBs from 80.BAP) and twelve Hurricanes without losses. During the action, which lasted 25 minutes (from 1525 to 1550 hours), 2Lt Lauri Nissinen (in BW-364) succeeded in downing three aircraft, as he explained in his report:

'I flew as a lead plane in the top Schwarm. We were returning from a recce from Belomorsk when we were alerted by radio of 25 Russian aircraft. We started to climb while heading towards the enemy. A big turning combat then started with the fighters. At first I fired at several planes, but was too busy to follow any.'
‘We met the enemy about 20 km from the airfield and I attacked the fighters, leaving two Brewsters to go after the bombers. I shot my first fighter down about five kilometres south-east of the base, where it burned on the ground. The second I hit in the engine and cooler, leaving the plane smoking heavily 800 m south of Ontrosenvaara – the wreck was later found here.

‘Finally, in a chase just above the ground I shot my third Hurricane down into a ridge covered by forest half a kilometre west of the southern tip of Lake Rukajarvi. The pilot was captured in a wounded condition. The Hurricanes engaged all had 12 guns, and the pilots flying them appeared to be generally helpless.’

One pilot who actually achieved acedom as a result of his success on 6

Curtiss aces of LeLv 32 pose for a formal photo at Suulajärvi on 29 April 1942. They are, from left to right, WO Eino Koskinen (12.5 victories), 2nd flight leader Capt Aulis Bremer (8 victories), 1st flight leader Capt Kullervo Laltele (19.5 victories), 3rd flight leader Lt Pentti Numminen (6 victories) and Sgt Jukka Kojanto (5 victories) (SA-kuva)

3/LeLv 26 G.50 FA-32 has been parked in a wooden blast pen at Kilpaslitta on 3 September 1942. MSgt Onni Paronen flew this fighter throughout the latter half of this year, claiming two victories (both 1-16s). On 23 March 1943 Paronen was posted to LeLv 34 to fly Bf 109Gs, and he finished the war with 12.5 kills in 316 sorties (SA-kuva)

‘After shooting at one Hurricane it went into a half roll and dived. I followed and fired a short burst at close range, sending the machine vertically into the forest trailing smoke. After the battle had gone on for ten minutes, the remaining Russians broke off and headed home. Over Rukajarvi, I spotted an enemy aircraft at a height of 500 m, and I managed to close up on him until opening fire from obliquely behind at a distance of 50 m. Just after pulling the trigger it exploded. I did not have time to pull aside, and a piece of the Hurricane snapped off one of my exhaust pipes.

‘I then joined 1Lt Pekuri and Sgt Korhonen in the chase of two remaining Hurricanes. When the one of them tried to bank towards Pekuri, I slipped in behind his tail, and then the Russian took evasive action. I managed to cause the Hurricane to smoke with my fire, and after a short chase it dived into the forest. In spite of numerical superiority, the Russians did nothing but attempt to evade our attacks. They appeared to be very helpless. No hits to my plane. Exhaust pipe shot off.’

Mentioned above in Nissinen’s report, fellow ace 1Lt Lauri Pekuri also enjoyed success during the interception by downing a trio of Hurricanes (in BW-372);

LeLv 32 Hawk CU-503 was photographed at Nurmola, on the Olonets Isthmus, in July 1942. This fighter (c/n 13816) was originally a Cyclone-powered A-4, but it was re-engined with a license-built Twin Wasp once in Finland. Various LeLv 32 pilots claimed an accumulated total of ten victories while flying this aircraft (A Brenner)
April was 22-year-old Sgt Eino Peltola, whose double Hurricane haul, flying BW-379, repeated his score achieved again in this aircraft on the 30 March sweep to Segesha, which was detailed earlier in this chapter. His combat report was as follows:

"I was part of 1Lt Pekuri’s flight, heading the second pair in his Schwarm. We got a message that seven bombers and 18 fighters were approaching, and we soon found them. After our first diving attack, I managed to see one of the Hurricanes alight, and it made a forced landing about 15 km south of Tiiksijärvi."

Eino Peltola would eventually score 10.5 kills in 200+ sorties prior to his death on 2 April 1944, 7.5 of these being achieved in Brewsters and the remaining three in Bf 109Gs.

Whilst the Hurricane pilots had reportedly offered little resistance to the Brewsters, the bombers proved to be worthy opponents for the two
pilots sent to shoot them down. Indeed, 1Lt Lasse Kilpinen (flying BW-394) suffered a serious calf injury when the tail gunner from the SB he was later credited with having destroyed managed to hit him with return fire on his second pass.

Official Soviet losses are known to have amounted to one SB from 80.BAP, two Hurricanes from 609.IAP and a further four from of 767.IAP. In return, the communists claimed four aircraft destroyed on the ground and seven Brewsters in the air. Following the poor results of this raid, the Red Air Force was not seen again until 8 June, when 1Lt Pekuri’s six Brewsters engaged thirteen Hurricanes from the Kēsa-based 152.IAP, sending five down but also losing one of their own.

On 25 June the last big combat took place north-east of Lake Sijärvi when Schwarm from both 2 and 3/LeLv 24 engaged in a 15-fight with Hurricanes from 609.IAP. The Finns claimed four shot down and their Russian counterparts three, and on this occasion they were not far off the mark, as two Brewsters were lost, although both pilots survived.

In six months some 45 Hurricanes were claimed to have been shot down, which is not an unreasonable tally bearing in mind that during this period the average strength of an IAP numbered 15-20 serviceable fighters. Their job done, the Brewsters pilots would remain mostly unemployed at Tikkijärvi until November 1942.

These final engagements in June signalled the start of a six-month period of relative stability along the Soviet frontlines, allowing the air force’s senior staff to reorganise its fighter squadrons so as to offer Finland a better area defence system. However, air regiment commanders ‘in the field’ considered that the new strategy would result in their units losing an element of combat flexibility, which had been the main tactical advantage employed so effectively by Finnish fighter units up to this point in the war.

Nevertheless, on 3 May 1942 the front was divided into three sectors, with a single regiment then placed in charge of defending the airspace within that particular sector. The Lake Onega sector was covered by LeR 2, comprising LeLv 16, 24 and 28, Olonets belonged to LeR 1, with LeLv 12 and 32, and the Karelian Isthmus remained with LeR 3, controlling LeLv 26 and 30. The northern flank was covered with LeLv 14, whilst in the south LeLv 6 handled the Gulf of Finland. The bomber regiment LeR 4 was used wherever needed.

The system received further adjustment on 18 July 1942 when LeLv 24 was transferred to LeR 3, whilst on 16 November LeR 5 was formed to control LeLv 6 and 30 in the maritime patrol role. Finally, on 23 January 1943 LeLv 34 was also transferred to LeR 3.
When the ice melted in the Gulf of Finland in May 1942, the red Banner Baltic Fleet started sending out submarines into the coastal shipping lanes from its huge naval (and air) base at Kronstadt, just outside Leningrad. These vessels had retreated into port the previous autumn, and with the spring thaw, their sole purpose now was to harass German and Finnish commercial shipping in the Baltic Sea. The early summer saw the red Banner Baltic Fleet air force increased in size so as to cover naval movements in the area — especially the submarine departures and arrivals in the eastern Gulf of Finland.

To counter the growing aerial activity, LeLv 24 was seconded to LeR 3 on 14 July, and 3 and 4/LeLv 24 duly flew to Römpöti on 2 August, followed a week later by 1/LeLv 24. Their role was to prevent Soviet aircraft from flying over the western areas of the Gulf, but the latter chose to fly under the protection of the anti-aircraft artillery at Oranienbaum instead, thus preventing any large-scale encounters.

Nonetheless, engagements did indeed take place, the first of which occurred on 6 August when 1/LeLv 24 downed two I-16s near Seiskari. Six days later 4/LeLv 24 claimed an IL-2 and an I-16 over Tolli lighthouse, whilst that evening 3/LeLv 26 leader Lt Puhakka led his Fiat C.200s to a raid on Kronstadt, where they bounced four I-16s and downed them all. This sweep violated the unit’s area of operations, and LeLv 26 was subsequently ordered to stay on the eastern side of the Karelian Isthmus.

Much of LeLv 24’s intelligence on their counterparts’ activities were derived from an excellently placed forward observation post at Ino, where ‘spotters’ could actually see aircraft taking off from Kronstadt and Oranienbaum! New tactics were suitably employed to enact upon this information, the Brewsters being sent out to await the return of the Soviet formations. On 14 August the Finns claimed nine Hurricanes in two combats, and 48 hours later 3/LeLv 24 engaged a formation of aircraft late in the afternoon. Capt Karhuinen (in BW-388) leading the attack:

‘I was leading a six-plane Brewster flight on an interception mission. South of Seiskari I spotted an enemy formation of 8 SBs, 3 MiGs and 16 I-16s, which was flying at a height of 200 m. We attacked the fighter escort, and whilst the I-16s chose to fight, the others fled. In my first dive I shot down the I-16 at the extreme left of the formation, the aircraft diving into the sea. My second I-16 crashed into the water on fire, turning over as it hit. My third I-16 had just evaded the fire from another Brewster when I hit it with several bursts, the fish then pulling up and being struck again, before falling into the sea wing first. I made 12 attacks.

The escort flew at the same altitude as the SBs, and although the I-16 pilots fought bravely, they failed to use their numerical strength to pull up on the bombers’ flanks and hit us from above.’

The Brewster pilots claimed 11 I-16s from 4.GIAP, KBF (guard’s fighter aviation regiment of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet), whilst the MiGs encountered were actually Il-2s from 57.AP, KBF.

On 18 August the largest combat of the summer occurred when information was received that ‘ten’ I-16s had been spotted near Tyrnäs, heading eastwards. Lt Hans Wind scrambled with eight Brewsters at 2000, and flew to Seiskari to await the Russians’ arrival. However, upon sighting the enemy, it was realised that there were nearer to 60 aircraft in the formation, so Capt Karhuinen and 1Lt Lamme both immediately departed with their Brewster Schwarm to offer further assistance. Piloting BW-393, Wind described the resulting melee in his report:

‘I engaged four Hurricanes with eight Brewsters, and after a long chase
1/LeLv 24 Brewster BW-371 is operated at Suulajärvi in June 1942. The aircraft boasts a captured Russian 1000 hp M-62 engine which was fitted for trials purposes, although this was soon replaced by a trusty Cyclone unit. WO Viktor Pytisä was assigned this aircraft at the time of its re-engining, although he failed to score any victories with it (V Lakiö)

I set on alight with two bursts. It fell into the forest in flames. Then about 60 I-16s appeared on the scene, and I quickly caused one to smoke before another I-16 succeeded in shooting a cannon shell through my port wing (two inches outboard of the wing tank). After pulling up I saw the I-16 that I had just fired at burning on the water’s surface. I then fired at three I-16s in a series of head-on passes, but failed to see the results.

Towards the end of the combat I managed to conveniently manoeuvre myself in behind a lone I-16, and the aircraft caught fire after my first burst and crashed into the sea.

For the loss of just one pilot, the Finns claimed two Pe-2s, one Hurricane and 13 I-16s destroyed. Wind, Kathunen and Juutilainen each being credited with three kills. The Soviets officially list at least a Yak-1 and LaGG-3 from 21.IAP, KBF and two I-16s from 71.IAP, KBF.

**Other Fronts**

LeLv 32 transferred to Nurmoila, on the Olonets Isthmus, during late May 1942, their Curtiss Hawks often being engaged in fierce fights with small formations flying more modern aircraft like the Pe-2, MiG-3 and LaGG-3 – all of which were much heavier than the Hawk.

One such action took place on 5 September when WO Koskinen (in CU-551) and his wingman observed an unusually large formation of 35–40 aircraft over the River Svir at Lotinapente at noon. He duly radioed for help, and Capt Bremer scrambled with his Schwaare. In the following battle, which lasted a full hour, the Finns claimed four LaGG-3s, four I-16s (from 824.IAP), two MiG-3s and one Pe-2 all without loss.

During the first nine months on the Olonets, the Hawk pilots claimed 65 aircraft destroyed without losing a single fighter in combat. With the arrival of winter, flying on both sides of the front was done only as a matter of necessity, and if the weather permitted.

The ‘ace race’ had not yet started, and a more important target at that point was the Mannheim Cross, which had so far been awarded to pilots with 20 aerial victories – this was raised to 30 in 1943. By the end of 1942 the Continuation War ace list was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Squadron</th>
<th>Victories</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>Juutilainen, Ilmari</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>Tuominen, Olavi</td>
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<td>23</td>
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<td>Capt</td>
<td>Karhunen, Jorma</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lt</td>
<td>Nissinen, Lauri</td>
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<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>Kinnunen, Eero</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>15.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lt</td>
<td>Tervo, Kalevi</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maj</td>
<td>Luukkainen, Eino</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lt</td>
<td>Wind, Hans</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>14.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sgt</td>
<td>Katajainen, Nils</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lt</td>
<td>Pekuri, Lauri</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>12.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capt</td>
<td>Pihakka, Olli</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>Koskinen, Eino</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Lehtovaara, Urho</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lt</td>
<td>Kokko, Pekka</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of these pilots, Nissinen was tutoring at the cadet school, Luukkainen had been posted to command a recce squadron, Katajainen was flying anti-submarine aircraft and Kokko had become a test pilot. On the aircraft front, only the Brewsters were considered to have any potential left, for the Fiats and Moranes were worn out – they could barely reach a top speed of 350 km/h – and the Hawk ranks were getting very thin.

Finland had tried in vain to purchase Messerschmitts early on in the conflict, and their persistence finally paid off when in late 1942 Germany agreed to sell them 30 Bf 109G-2s to equip one squadron, and cover any
This aircraft (BW-393) was the mount of Finland’s second ranking ace, and 3/LeLv 24 leader, 1Lt ‘Hase’ Wind, who is seen preparing to take-off in it at Suulajärv in 12 September 1943. There are 33 victory bars painted on the fin of ‘orange 9’. Wind scoring 26.5 of this total in BW-393 between January 1942 and September 1943. His final haul in Brewsters reached 39, and he followed this up with 36 in Bf 109Gs for a total of 75 victories in 302 missions (SA-kuva)

attrition – a contract for these fighters was signed on 1 February 1943.

Just over a week prior to contracts being exchanged LeLv 34 was established at Immol on 23 January 1943, and ex-LeLv 32 commander, Maj Ehrnrooth, appointed to head the new squadron. The new squadron was intended to be a ‘crack outfit’ right from the start, with air force commander Maj-Gen Lundquist giving Ehrnrooth the authorisation to pick the best pilots from any of the Finnish fighter units. Despite bitter protests from other squadron commanders, LeLv 34 was duly formed.

Those pilots selected were duly sent to Germany for familiarisation on the Bf 109G, the Luftwaffe training officer placed in charge of the conversion initially insisting on a full-scale training programme as was taught to ab initio Jagflieger. However, upon seeing the skill of the Finnish pilots, he agreed to a much shorter course. On 9 March 1943 the first 16 Bf 109G-2s left for Finland, followed by a second batch of 14 on 10 May.

The Bf 109G (and LeLv 34) scored its debut kill on 24 March when Capt Ervi and WO Juurtulainen of 1/LeLv 34 intercepted a Pe-2 returning from a photo-recce sortie over the Gulf of Finland. At 1430 Juurtulainen, in MT-212, sent the bomber down near Suursaari.

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**Eastern Karelian Episode**

Finnish intelligence at Tiiksjarvi discovered in early 1943 that the Soviets were building up a sizeable partisan training and supply base at Ieljarvi, some 50 km from the frontline. The Finns decided to destroy this complex before it could be made operational in the coming summer, duly dispatching a single battalion of troops on skis to wipe out the target, supported by air cover from Tiiksjarvi-based MS.406s from LeLv 14.

On 16 March the Finns attacked Ieljarvi, and Capt Tainio of 1/LeLv 14 led six Moranes on aerial protection duties. Ten I-15bis of 839.IAP
duly responded to the raid by attempting to strafe the Finnish troops, but they were repelled by the MS.406 pilots, who downed five fighters during the first assault and another two in a second attack. Future ace Sgt Hemmo Leino (in MS-319) was the most successful pilot, claiming two.

The base was duly destroyed once aerial superiority had been achieved.

**Baltic Fleet Offensive**

In an attempt to stop Soviet submarines entering the Baltic Sea come the spring thaw in 1943, the Germans had used the cover of the winter weather to lay a double anti-submarine net across the Gulf of Finland from Porkkala to Naissaari, in Estonia. As a further anti-submarine measure, a double mine belt further east between Kotka and Narva had also been sown at the same time. To keep these protective boundaries operable, equipment and men were shuttled between the island ‘links in the chain’, with servicing vessels based at a northern supply base at Kotka. For over a year these supply points, and bases along the belt, became the prime target of the Red Banner Baltic Fleet air force. At around this time the air arm also started exchanging its I-153s and I-16s for La-5s and Yak-1s/7s, as well as increasing numbers of Pe-2s and Il-2s. Better aircraft, allied with better tactical training, made the Russians more dangerous opponents.

The Soviet offensive commenced as soon as the sea was free of ice, LeLv 24 being given the responsibility of protecting the area. On 18 April it fought the first major air battle of the campaign IlLt Liumme (in BW-370) leading seven Brewsters scrambled at 1700, with a further seven following five minutes, led by IlLt Savonen (in BW-375). They intercepted eight Il-2s (7.GShAP, KBF) and 50 fighters (21.IAP, KBF) west of Kronstadt, and in an hour-long combat claimed two Il-2s and 18 fighters destroyed.

On 21 April all three Brewster flights intercepted 35 Yak-1s, LaGG-3 and La-5 fighters in the Seiskari-Kronstadt area. Leading the Finns into action were Capts Karhunen, Törrönen and Savanto, and for the cost of one Brewster shot down by fighters and another by Oranienbaum’s flak, the Finns claimed 19 destroyed – both 4.GIAP and 21.IAP (both Red Banner Baltic Fleet units) are known to have suffered casualties.

Battles continued into May, and after six weeks of action, the obsolete Brewsters had claimed 81 aircraft destroyed for the loss of three in combat. These startling successes were achieved primarily by attacking from altitude, thus allowing ‘pendulum’ tactics to be employed.

On 21 May the BF 109Gs had scored four kills in their first two encounters in-theatre, although in the latter engagement MT-228 had collided with an I-153 of 71.IAP, KBF. IlLt T Saalasti was killed in the crash, although Soviet pilot, Lt V Siirinikov, managed to take to his parachute. The final encounter of the day took place at 1845 when Maj Luukkanen (MT-201) led 11 BF 109Gs to the Seiskari-Lavansaari area to intercept four Il-2s (7.GShAP, KBF), escorted by 17 LaGG-3s and Yak-1s (13.IAP, KBF). Two of each type were reportedly downed, although Soviet records actually show the loss of an additional Il-2 and LaGG-3.

On 1 August 1943 LeLv 34 moved to the new Kymi airfield, just north of Kotka, thus expanding its area of responsibility to the Viipuri-Oranienbaum line in the east. This left the old Brewsters with far fewer opportunities for combat, and an increased chance of survival.
The final great air battles over the eastern Gulf of Finland prior to the onset of winter were fought on 23 September 1943. At 1330 four Brewsters of 3/LLeLv 24, escorted by four Bf 109Gs from 1/LLeLv 34, engaged against 20 aircraft from 4.GIAP, KBF in the vicinity of Shepelnikov lighthouse – three Yakovlevs and five Lavochkins were claimed to have been shot down. Two-and-a-half hours later, 1Lt Wind’s seven Brewsters attacked 15 aircraft returning to Seiskari airfield, and claiming one IL-2 (7.GShAP, KBF) and six Lavochkins destroyed.

The ‘ace race’ was now in full swing, although WO Juutilainen was still clearly ahead. As of 31 December 1943, the list was as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Name</th>
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<th>Victories</th>
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<td>Wind, Hans</td>
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<td>26.5</td>
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<td>23.5</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Niinimaa, Lauri</td>
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<tr>
<td>WO</td>
<td>Keinonen, Eero</td>
<td>24</td>
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</table>

On 14 February 1944 all frontline units received a prefix denoting their duty. Thus, instead of being just plain Lentolaivue (aviation, or flying, squadrons), the units became Hävittäjälentolaivue (fighter aviation squadrons), as follows:

LLeLv 24 became HLeLv 24 (Ler 3)
LLeLv 26 became HLeLv 26 (Ler 3)
LLeLv 28 became HLeLv 28 (Ler 2)
LLeLv 30 became HLeLv 30 (Ler 5)
LLeLv 32 became HLeLv 32 (Ler 1)
LLeLv 34 became HLeLv 34 (Ler 3)

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**Baltic Fleet Strikes Kotka**

Early in 1944 the Red Banner Baltic Fleet air force switched targets from the mine belt across the Gulf of Finland to the city of Kotka, and its port, or, on occasion, Hamina port, 20 km further east. This tactical change was made in an effort to disrupt the shipping of supplies to the front.

On 6 March Kotka experienced its first major air raid, resulting in Maj Luukkanen (in MT-201) scrambling with five Bf 109Gs at 1345. They subsequently intercepted a 40-aircraft formation over Narvi and shot down five Pe-2s from 12.GPBAP (guard’s dive-bomber aviation regiment), KBF and two La-5s. Two-and-a-half hours later 1Lt Myllylä (in MT-216) led five Bf 109Gs against a smaller formation, sending four aircraft down south of Kotka.

The following month saw the Finnish Air Force take receipt of enough new Bf 109G-6s to re-equip both HLeLv 30 and 34, the latter unit passing on its surviving G-2 to HLeLv 24.

On the morning of 17 May HLeLv 34 employed its new fighters rather differently than from before when it intercepted intruders heading for Kotka or Hamina. Instead of first climbing above the Soviet aircraft prior to attacking them, they now chose to hit them directly from below. This switch surprised the enemy. Maj Luukkanen’s 11 Bf 109G-6s downed eight (of 27) Pe-2s from 12.GPBAP, KBF before their 15-strong escort could react. In the resulting melee, three Yaks were exchanged for one Bf 109. Capt Puhakka (in MT-419) was one of those to score.

‘Right after take-off I saw a bomber formation of 10+, escorted by around 20 fighters, approaching Kotka. Before entering the interception area the planes turned east, having obviously observed the take-off of our fighters. I could not make it above the fighters, so I decided to attack the bombers from below. This tactic worked well, for I caught them as they pulled up and levelled off after diving at tarsors in the harbour.

‘The first one I fired at burst into flames and dived into the sea just off Hamina. Utilising my speed advantage, I quickly fired at a second bomber, which also burst into flames and turned over into a dive. I did not have time to see where it crashed, however, although several large pieces came off the plane, including the canopy, and I saw one man bail out, although I did not observe the parachute.

‘I then attacked a third bomber. Pieces soon fell off it, and the pilot entered a shallow dive and crashed into the sea between two small islands. I saw one man bail out, but did not observe if his parachute opened.’

On 19 May 1Lt Myllylä (in MT-406) scrambled from Kotka with nine Bf 109Gs when 20 Pe-2s of 12.GPBAP, escorted by 15 Yak-9s, were reported heading for the city. The Finns destroyed two bombers and four fighters as they chased them back to Luvansaari. This marked the end of the raids, for the Red air forces now began concentrating on Generalissimus Stalin’s fourth strategic blow – the assault on the Karelian Isthmus.
SOVIET OFFENSIVE OF 1944

Following their successes on the German front in 1943-44, the Soviet Red Army carried out the fourth of its ten strategic attacks, and it proved to be the only one which failed to reach its goal.

Late May and early June 1944 saw Russian troop concentrations northwest of Leningrad substantially increase in size, as did the number of tanks and artillery pieces observed by Finnish reconnaissance aircraft. Unfortunately senior Finnish military figures failed to appreciate the seriousness of the situation emanating from the fighter reconnaissance pilots.

The forthcoming ‘Great Attack’, as it became known in Finland, would see Soviet forces advancing in a 20-km wide ‘wedge’ across the Gulf of Finland, supported by no fewer than 1300 aircraft from the 13th Air Army. A further 220 aircraft from the Red Banner Baltic Fleet air force were charged with covering the invading army’s left flank.

Opposing this massive air armada on the Karelian Isthmus, Lentokoulu 3 could muster just 14 Bf 109G-6s from HLeLv 24, 16 Bf 109G-6s from HLeLv 34 and 18 Brewsters from HLeLv 26.

The attack commenced on 9 June, and after quickly breaking through the Finns’ first defensive line, the Red Army soon had its enemy reeling back towards a hasty retreat. Within ten days the invasion spearhead had reached the outskirts of Viipuri, and following the capture of the city the next day, the Soviet advance was stopped so the communists could consolidate their newly-won gains. The first day of the offensive had seen the Red air forces fly some 1150 sorties, followed by another 800 the following day. Day

2/HLeLv 24 pilot 1Lt Jorma ‘Jotte’ Searinen sits strapped into the cramped cockpit of his Bf 109G in May 1944. Coming to the Messerschmitt with five victories already scored in Brewsters, he would rack up a further 18 kills in the German fighter, raising his total to 23 in 139 missions. Searinen had the unenviable distinction of being the last Finnish fighter pilot killed in action, losing his life whilst attempting to force-land a shot-up MT-478 on 18 July 1944 (SA-kuva)

two of the invasion also saw the Finnish fighter force score its first victories when its pilots downed 16 aircraft during five separate encounters. On 14 June a further 18 were claimed in seven engagements, and three days later 21 fell in seven clashes.

On 19 June the arrival of new attrition replacement Bf 109G-6s from Germany made good the losses suffered by the fighter units up to this point in the battle, allowing both HLeLv 24 and 34 to reach almost full strength (25 aircraft). That same afternoon, a further two encounters resulted in six Soviet aircraft being destroyed. Finally, at 2000 an eight-aircraft formation from 3/HLeLv 34, led byCapt Puhakka, and ten Bf 109Gs from 3/HLeLv 24, commanded by Capt Wind, intercepted several regiments of Russian aircraft near Viipuri. The Finns destroyed six Pe-2s (58.BAP), three Airacobras (196.IAP), two Il-4s (836.BAP) and two La-5s (401.IAP), all for no loss. WO Lehtovaara, flying MT-406, claimed four aircraft during this epic engagement.

‘I was part of a reconnaissance mission sent to patrol the route to Vammelnsu-Haapakangas-Kyrnolä. Soon after take-off I spotted about 30 enemy aircraft above Säkkiara, heading north, followed moments later by a further 20 machines. Other enemy formations also started to appear from the south-east, and S/Sgt Nuorala and I engaged in combat with enemy fighters over the Gulf of Viipuri.

‘I eventually got into position to fire at two Airacobras from below and behind, one of which fell about four kilometres west of Koivisto and the other eight kilometres south-east of Koivisto. This engagement had taken up so much time that I could not continue my briefed reconnaissance mission, so I turned back to base. After flying south of Viipuri, I saw several Pe-2s, escorted by ten fighters, to the south-east of the city. I attacked, and managed to shoot at two of the Pe-2s from directly astern, causing both of them to burst into flames. The first came down about two kilometres south of Kämäri, and the second a further kilometre away.’

The air war reached its peak on 20 June when Russians troops forced their way into the streets of Viipuri, supported by a massive aerial ‘umbrella’ of fighters and ground attack aircraft. Before midday, the Finnish Bf 109G pilots had already been embroiled in three large-scale actions which had seen them claim 35 aircraft shot down. Before the end

Sgt Tapio ‘Tappi’ (‘Shorty’) Jarvi scored all his kills with 2/HLeLv 24. Seen here in May 1944, he had achieved 11.5 victories in Brewsters prior to tallying a further 17 in Messerschmiitts in 1944, raising his final total to 28.5 in 247 missions (SA-kuva)
2/HLeLv 24's MT-213 is run up seconds prior to commencing its take-off run at Susulajärvi on 12 May 1944. This fighter was one of just a handful of Bf 109Gs that actually had its luftwaffe 'greys' oversprayed with the standard Finnish black/green camouflage scheme. During the Soviet summer offensive of 1944, MT-213 was flown by 1Lt Eero Riihikallio, who claimed a total of 16.5 victories (three in this aircraft) in 110 missions (SA-kuva)

1/HLeLv 34 ace Sgvt Erik Lylly admires his unit's new emblem (a fledgling eagle) painted on the tail of MT-423. Based on an idea put forward by the squadron CO, the emblem was officially adopted on 1 July 1944. Lylly scored eight victories in 188 missions (E Lylly)

Another photograph of Bf 109G-6 MT-423 at Kymä in June 1944. It was then assigned to 1/HLeLv 34 pilot Sgvt Hemmo Leino, who had become an ace on 1 October 1943. Leino had scored victories with LeLv 30's O.XXIs and LeLv 14's MS.406s before achieving further successes in the Messerschmitt. His final total was 11 kills (one in this fighter) in 251 missions (Finnish Aviation Museum)

of the day a further five battles had taken place, the Finns claiming an additional 16 victories to bring total victories for the 20th to a staggering 51 – 31 to HLeLv 24 and 20 to HLeLv 34. Multiple losses were suffered by the Yak-9-equipped 14.GIAP, the La-5-manned 159.IAP, Aircobra unit 196.IAP, and the IL-2-equipped 943., and 35.StAP, KBF.

The Finnish pilots scored a further ten kills the next day, followed by 14 on the 22nd, 28 on the 23rd, 20 on the 26th, 44 on the 28th and 12 on the 29th. To cap off an extraordinary month, 30 June saw WO Juutilainen become the second Finn to achieve 'ace in a mission' status.

'Fully kitted out in late war flying gear, 1/HLeLv 24's aces pose for a group shot at Susulajärvi in April 1944. They are, from left to right, 1Lt Mikko Pasila (10 victories), WO Viktor Pyottri (19.5 victories), flight leader 1Lt Lauri Missinen (32.5 victories), 2Lt Heimo Lampi (13.5 victories), 1Lt Kai Metsola (10.5 victories) and Sgvt Arvo Koskelainen (5 victories). Behind them is Missinen's MT-225 (V Laki)

3/HLeLv 24 aces present a far less 'uniform' sight in respect to their apparel at Lappensuunta in July 1944. They are, from left to right, flight leader 1Lt Kyösti Karhila (32 kills), squadron CO Maj Jorma Karhunen (31 kills), the father of 1Lt Ahti Latinen (10 victories) who had been made a PoW on 29 June 1944.'
1/HLeLv 34 pilots T/lt Ilmari Joensuu (five victories) and S/Sgt Keiko Tuominokski (four victories) pose in front of MT-416 at Kymi in May 1944. Joensuu was 195 cm tall, and so was appropriately nicknamed "Pitkä-Jimi" ('Long Jimi') (K Tuominokski)

"Yellow 6" MT-416 was photographed on the point of take-off at Taipalsaari in late June 1944. Assigned to 3/HLeLv 34 (as denoted by the tactical number on its fin), the fighter was often flown by S/Sgt Aaro Nuorala. A successful Messerschmitt pilot, he scored ten kills (six in MT-416) with the German fighter to add to three victories in D.XXIs with LeLv 30 in 1941-42 and 1.5 kills flying MS.406s with LeLv 14 in 1943. Nuorala completed 250 missions (K Risku)

into the enemy. Over Jaujärvi I downed a Yak-9, which crashed in flames, whilst a second Yak-9 was destroyed in the same area after I shot its starboard wing off.

Then we provided an escort for German Stukas, after which we again came into contact with Russian fighters and bombers. This time I failed to achieve any conclusive results, so I turned my attentions instead towards a formation of II-2s, and their escorts. I then spotted some II-2s devoid of fighter protection, so I quickly manoeuvred into them from side-on and shot an II-2 down in flames over the Jaujärvi peninsula. At the same time I was effectively surrounded by a vastly superior number of La-5 escorts. After "wrestling" with them for five minutes, I managed to shoot one down in flames at an altitude of 2000 m, the La-5 crashing 3-4 km north of the II-2 alongside a road.

I then ran out of ammunition, so I had to break off the fight. Frustratingly, I still had ten minutes of fuel left.

Juutilainen was subsequently credited with six victories, two of which were deemed to be personal scores and the remaining four regimental kills. During this mission, flown between 1045 and 1200, HLeLv 34 despatched eight Bf 109Gs and HLeLv 24 seven, and between them they claimed 15 aircraft destroyed out of 200-300 observed — 404.IAP is known to have lost Yak-9s, 403.IAP P-39s and 872.ShAP II-2s.

AIRFIELD STRIKES

Both HLeLv 24's base at Lappeenranta and HLeLv 34's airfield at Taipalsaari had escaped Soviet attention throughout June, as had the German-held Immola site. However, on the evening of 2 July 35 Pe-2s and 40 Il-2s, escorted by 20 fighters, attacked Lappeenranta. Fortunately radio intelligence alerted HLeLv 24 of the imminent raid, allowing the unit to get 11 freshly refuelled and re-armed Bf 109Gs airborne. However, some could not be made airworthy in time, and two valuable Messerschmitt fighters were duly destroyed and four more damaged. Two captured Pe-2s reconnaissance aircraft from PLeLv 48 were also burnt out.

Eight Bf 109Gs from Taipalsaari also scrambled in response to the raid, arriving over the airfield just five minutes after taking off. They quickly cut a swathe through the ranks of the vulnerable Il-2, and together with HLeLv 24, claimed 11 shot down from 448, 703 and 872.ShAP (all members of 281.ShAD). A further four Pe-2s and a solitary Yak-9 were also claimed to have been destroyed.
Despite the ferocity of the airfield attacks, neither the Finns at Lappenranta or the Gefechtsverband Kuhlmey at Imola had their ability to undertake combat patrols seriously affected. This was clearly illustrated less than 24 hours later when Finnish BF 109G pilots reported the destruction of 21 aircraft, followed by a further 14 on the 5th. On 9 July the scoreboard showed ten kills, and the next day 13. These huge aerial melees reached a peak on the 15th when the Finns claimed 12 Soviet aircraft destroyed in five encounters. Strangely, these numbers could have been even higher had the Finnish fighter pilots not been so dedicated to the task of escorting the bombers of LeR 4. Indeed, so effective were the pilots in this role that not a single bomber was shot down by fighters whilst operating over the Karelian Isthmus. Following a planned retreat, the Finns dug in between Tali and Hantala, causing the Indian invasion across the Gulf of Viipuri to stall, before finally stopping altogether after the Soviet push between Vuosalmni and Áyrapää did not materialise. Stalin daily called off the offensive on 12 July after exhausted his reserves of troops, although bitter fighting continued along the new front line for a further six days. A combination of the stiff rearguard action by the Finnish army and the successful Allied landings in Normandy early the previous month had a great influence on Stalin’s decision to halt the invasion and focus instead on the push for Berlin. The attack on the secondary front at Olonets Isthmus had commenced 12 days after the main offensive, and it too had been stopped well short of its original goal prior to it being abandoned on 17 July.

During the 38 days of the ‘Great Attack’, BF 109G pilots claimed no fewer than 425 aircraft shot down and another 78 damaged during 355 missions (2168 sorties). In turn ten Messerschmitts were lost to Soviet fighters, three posted missing in action, three more to flak and two to ‘assault’ aircraft. Eight pilots were killed and three captured. The Luftwaffe’s II/JG 54 claimed 126 aircraft in 179 missions (984 sorties) during the same period. Soviet losses were indeed heavy, far by the time fighting stopped on the Karelian Isthmus, the 13th Air Army possessed just 800 aircraft. The top scorers of the summer offensive of 1944 were:

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<th>Rank</th>
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ARMISTICE

Having repelled their invasion, Finland now sought a permanent peace with the USSR, and this led to an armistice on 4 September 1944 and the signing of a truce in Moscow two weeks later. Its terms included the removal of German troops from northern Finland, resulting in a short land war being fought in Lapland against their former ally. In February 1947 the truce was ratified in the Paris Peace Treaty, freeing Finland to hand over the same chunk of land as had been surrendered in 1940, plus the town of Petsamo on the Arctic Sea coast. These demands were hardly fair, for Soviet troops had never even got close to seizing either area.

During the two wars Finnish flying units officially claimed 1807 aircraft destroyed out of a total of 3313. Flak accounted for 1345, whilst the rest comprised aircraft destroyed by naval units, those destroyed on the ground (not those destroyed in Finnish bomber raids) or aircraft seen to crash whilst attempting to avoid Finnish fighters or flak. Fighters were also responsible for downing 28 observation and fire-control balloons.

In turn, the Finnish Air Force lost 257 aircraft on operations, 215 non-operationally and 100 in training accidents. Personnel losses amounted to 353 airmen killed or missing in action and 86 in flying accidents.

In respect to the accuracy of the pilots’ claims, recent research in Russian files has revealed that 1855 aircraft were downed by Finnish fighters, with the aces themselves accounting for 77 per cent of this figure.

TOP Aces

Warrant Officer Eino Ilmari Juutilainen

Ilmari Juutilainen was born in Lieksa in eastern Finland on 21 February 1914. In 1935 he enlisted in the air force, and on 1 May 1937 was posted to Lk 5 (Air Station 5) as a reconnaissance sergeant pilot. He subsequently retrained as a fighter pilot and was duly posted to the 3rd Flight of Lt 24, which was equipped with D.XXI, on 3 March 1939.

On 30 November 1939 the winter war broke out, and in his first combat on 19 December 1939, ‘Illu’ Juutilainen downed a Tupolev SB. On the last day of the year, whilst flying FR-106, he claimed an I-16 and was also promoted to staff sergeant – 25 days later he had risen to the rank of master sergeant. During the Winter War he flew 115 missions, Juutilainen received his final promotion to a warrant officer on 1 March 1941.

The Continuation War started on 25 June 1941, and it found Juutilainen flying BW-364 in 3/Lt 24. In his first combat on 9 July, he claimed two ‘Chaikas’ destroyed, whilst on 12 August he scored his first ‘triple’ – all I-153s, claimed in BW-364 during a single sortie. His second ‘triple’ came on 26 September in the same machine. On 26 April 1942 he was awarded the Mannerheim Cross (No 56) for scoring 20 victories, and on 18 August he claimed his third ‘triple’. By the time he was posted to 1/Lt 34 on 8 February 1943, his scoreboard showed 36 kills, all bar two having been scored in Brewsters during the course of 181 missions.

At his new unit, ‘Illu’ was initially assigned BF 109G-2 MT-212, although this aircraft was lost when 44-kill ace WO Oiva Tuominen ditched after downing a Pe-2 on 2 June 1943. Juutilainen was subsequently given MT-222 as a replacement, and he scored a ‘triple’ with it three days later. 10 July saw a further three victories fall to the air force’s ranking ace, although these were claimed in MT-217. On 27 October 1943 Juutilainen destroyed three La-5s, whilst on 6 March 1944 his ‘triple’ comprised two Pe-2s and a Yak-9 – all scored on single missions.

MT-426 was assigned to Juutilainen on 30 May 1944, and ten days later he again downed three aircraft in a single sortie, plus an II-2 (flying MT-424) later that same day. On 20 June ‘Illu’ claimed five in three missions, and on the 26th scored a ‘triple’ in MT-422. Two days later he won the Mannerheim Cross for the second time after attaining 75 victories – he and Hans Wind were the first to achieve such an accolade. Indeed, this award was issued twice to just four Finnish soldiers.

Juutilainen was then assigned MT-457, and on 30 June he equalled Jorma Savanto’s score of six on a single mission, being credited with two
Yak-9s, two P-39s, one La-5 and one Il-2. The next day Juutilainen scored a ‘triple’ over two missions, and then repeated the feat on 5 July, but on a single sortie. On 3 September (just 24 hours before the armistice) Juutilainen claimed a Lisunov Li-2 transport, thus bringing his score to 94 victories in 437 missions – the highest non-German score in Europe.

On 16 May 1947 Juutilainen resigned from the air arm with a full pension. He bought a light aircraft and became a regular sight at various airshows for a decade until fully retiring. He is still alive and well in 1998.

**Captain Hans Henrik Wind**

‘Hasse’ Wind was born on 30 July 1919 at Tamminsaaari. Upon graduation from the local secondary school, he was accepted into ISK (Air Fighting School) in 1939. The following year he went to cadet school and then joined LLe 25 (advanced training unit) on 16 June 1941 as a 1st lieutenant.

On 1 August 1941 Wind was posted firstly to 4/LLev 24 and then to 1/LLev 24, with whom he scored his first kill on 27 September 1941 – shared with Capt Eino Luukkainen. The New Year saw him back at 4/LLev 24, where he became an ace on 29 March 1942 flying Brewster BW-378. On 1 August he joined 3/LLev 24 as deputy flight leader, and two weeks later Wind downed two Hurricanes, followed on the 18th by two more Hurricanes and an I-16 – he used BW-393 on both missions.

On 7 November he assumed command of 1/LLev 24 from Maj Eino Luukkainen, remaining in charge until Capt Jorma Sarvanto arrived on 16 January 1943. On 4 May Wind (again in BW-393) downed three I-2s and an I-153 in a single sortie. This haul was followed up by a ‘triple’ 16 days later. On 27 May Wind was appointed CO of 3/LLev 24, taking BW-393 with him. On 31 July he received the Mannerheim Cross (No 116), having taken his score to 34, and on 19 October he ‘made’ captain. Wind claimed his 39th, and last, Brewster kill on 21 March 1944.

The following month HLev 24 converted to Bf 109Gs, and Wind was assigned MT-201. On 13 June he downed four Pe-2s in a single sortie flying this aircraft, the veteran G-2 (in which he had scored 11 kills in total) finally being replaced by G-6 MT-439 on 19 June 1944. Over the next ten days Wind used this machine to claim 25 aircraft destroyed, including hails of five on the 20th from two sorties, four on the 23rd in a single sortie, and five again on both the 26th and 28th (both in two sorties).

During the second of the two sorties flown on 28 June, his cockpit was struck by a 20 mm shell soon after he had downed the third, and last, Yak-9 to fall to his guns during the course of the engagement. Although badly wounded, Wind nevertheless managed to get MT-439 safely back to Lappeenranta, and he was hospitalised for the rest of the war. That same day he was awarded the Mannerheim Cross for the second time. Wind had flown 302 missions and was credited with 75 victories.

Leaving active duty on 16 October 1945, he acquired a degree in economics, and went on to hold senior positions in the shoe and bakery industries before retiring in 1984. Hans Wind died on 24 July 1995.

**Major Eino Antero Luukkainen**

Eino Luukkainen was born at Jaakkima, in Karelia, on 4 June 1909. In 1929 he volunteered for military service at Maaentokoulu (Land-based Aviation School) at Uhti, graduating the following year and progressing to cadet school. Luukkainen completed his training in 1935 as a 2nd lieutenant, and was posted to LAs. 6. On 21 March 1935 he joined LAs. 5 (as a 1st lieutenant), where he flew Bulldogs.

On 24 January 1939 he was transferred to command 3/LLev 24, being D.XXI FR-104. On the second day of the Winter War he claimed an SB bomber over the Karelian Isthmus (the third victory for his squadron). Luukkainen’s original fighter was damaged by ground fire soon after, and its replacement, FR-108, was used to claim a further 1.5 aircraft destroyed. On 15 February 1940 ‘Eikka’ Luukkainen ‘made’ captain.

The start of the Continuation War found Luukkainen in command of 1/LLev 24, flying Brewster BW-375. In his first combat on 8 July 1941, he claimed one ‘Chaika’ destroyed and another damaged – documentation has just been found confirming the latter did indeed crash. On 1 June 1942 he was assigned BW-393, and he used the fighter to score six kills up to 7 November 1942 – by which time his tally had reached 17. By now a major, Luukkainen took command of LLev 30, flying captured I-153s and D.XXIs in the maritime recce role.

On 29 March 1943 he was posted to lead the new LLev 34, being issued with the first Bf 109G-2 (MT-201) delivered to Finland. Luukkainen scored steadily throughout the following year, and on 6 March 1944 achieved his first ‘triple’ by down two Pe-2 and an La-5. The following month his unit converted to the new G-6, and he was assigned MT-417. On 14 June he claimed three fighters and four days later he received the Mannerheim Cross (No 127). On the 19th he was downed by flak after destroying a fire-control balloon, belly landing in no-man’s land.

Within 24 hours Luukkainen was back in action, using MT-415 to score a ‘triple’ on 23 June. Aside from numerous single kills, he claimed a further four ‘doubles’ up to 5 August, when he achieved his unit’s final success of the war in MT-451 – a Yak-9 shot into the Gulf of Finland.

Luukkainen flew 441 sorties during his career, which was the highest number achieved by any Finnish fighter pilot. His final kill tally was 56.
Postwar, Luukkanen remained in command of his unit, which was redesignated HLeLv 33 on 4 December 1944. On 13 February 1948 he was promoted to lieutenant-colonel and given command of Lentorykmentti 2, based at Rissala. On 8 November 1951 he finally retired from the air force, Luukkanen then entering the timber trade, before dying prematurely on 10 April 1964.

**Warrant Officer Urho Sakari Lehtovaara**

Lehtovaara was born on 27 October 1917 at Pyhäjärvi, in northern Finland. In 1937 he went into military service, and in 1939 was accepted for pilot training. On 10 February 1940 he was posted as a corporal to 2/LLv 28, scoring a kill with MS.406 MS-326 during the Winter War. Lehtovaara was promoted to sergeant on 23 March 1940.

The start of the Continuation War found Lehtovaara still with 2/LeLv 28, flying MS-327. Nicknamed ‘Pikku-Jähti’ (‘Little Giant’), owing to his small build, Lehtovaara enjoyed his first success of the new conflict on 3 July 1941 when he downed a DB-3, and he followed this up six days later with two SBs and a MiG-3 in a single mission. On 23 July Lehtovaara downed two more DB-3s, and was then promoted to staff sergeant.

On 9 September he claimed three 1-16s in a single sortie while flying MS-304, and two days later he was rewarded with promotion to master sergeant. Lehtovaara’s unit then went to Karelia, where opportunities for further kills were scarce. On 5 March 1943 he claimed a ‘double’ as his last (of 15) victories in the Morane, before transferring 23 days later to 3/LeLv 34. Lehtovaara’s first BF 109G kills came on 19 April, and he steadily added to his score throughout the year whilst usually flying machines other than his personal MT-218.

On 6 March 1944 Lehtovaara (in MT-235) downed two Pe-2 in his first sortie of the day, and then destroyed an La-5 on the second. On 26 April he was promoted to a warrant officer. When the new BF 109G-6s arrived shortly afterwards he was issued with MT-404, and he scored a ‘double’ with the fighter on 17 May. On 19 June Lehtovaara destroyed two Pe-2s and two P-39s (in MT-406) on a single sortie, whilst 2 July saw him chase more Pe-2s from Lappeenranta to Viipuri, where he destroyed three. Seven days later he was awarded the Manneheim Cross (No 142).

On 25 July Lehtovaara claimed a P-39 as his last victory, which took his tally to 445 from 400+ missions. On 22 November 1946 he resigned from the air force, and eventually became a cinema manager, before also suffering a premature death on 5 January 1949.

**Warrant Officer Oiva Emil Kalervo Tuominen**

‘Oippa’ Tuominen was born on 5 March 1908 in Kouvol in southern Finland. In 1926 he volunteered for military service at the air force’s recruiting centre in Helsinki, and was duly trained as an aircraft mechanic. However, he wanted to fly, and in 1933 he was finally accepted into ISK and graduated as a sergeant pilot flying recce aircraft with LAs 5. On 1 January 1938 he was posted to the Bulldog-equipped LLv 26.

Shortly before the outbreak of the Winter War, he was transferred to 1/LLv 24, equipped with D.XXIIs, and subsequently scored 1.5 kills on type. On 30 January 1940 he was promoted to sergeant and sent back to 2/LLv 26, which was now equipped with Gladiators – Tuominen scored his first two kills with the Gloster fighter in GL-258 three days later. On 13 February he (in GL-255) and WO Lauri Lauramäki downed five SBs between them, Tuominen’s share being 3.5 bombers destroyed. Later that same day he claimed a Polikarpov R-5 just after he had taken off. His final score of eight during the Winter War placed him second in the overall ace listings for the conflict. On 25 April he was promoted to sergeant major.

Tuominen was serving with 1/LeLv 26 when the Continuation War erupted. On 4 July 1941, whilst flying Fiat G.50 FA-3 instead of his ‘FA-26, he claimed four SBs destroyed in one sortie. Nineteen days later he was promoted to warrant officer. On 18 August Tuominen became the first air force pilot to win the Mannheim Cross (No 6), his accumulated score then standing at 20.

Tuominen remained with 1/LeLv 26 into 1943, his tally of 23 in Fiats including six ‘doubles’. On 8 February 1943 he joined 1/LeLv 34, before moving four months later to 2/LeLv 34, where he was assigned BF 109G-2 MT-220. His score continued to rise until 22 August, when his flight was transferred to Helsinki for city protection duties. On 6 March 1944 he joined HLeLv 30, but returned to 3/LeLv 34 on 6 July and was thrust straight back into action in MT-405. Tuominen’s last kill was claimed on 18 July 1944, and in his 400+ mission career, he was credited with 44 confirmed kills.

Tuominen resigned from the air force on 6 January 1945 and became a taxi driver in Helsinki. He kept up his flying skills, however, piloting light aircraft for almost 30 years. He died on 28 January 1976.

**Captain Risto Olli Petter Puhakka**

Puhakka was born in Sortaval, Karelia, on 11 April 1916. In 1935 he graduated from secondary school and was accepted into the ISK for officer pilot training. He graduated on 6 October 1936 with the rank of 2nd lieutenant, but went to university to study law rather than to cadet school.

With the outbreak of the Winter War, he was posted to LLv 26,
although he was dully attached to 1/LLv 24, with whom he flew D.XXIs (primarily FR-117). He scored four kills before being posted to the Fiat G.50-equipped 3/LLv 26 on 30 January 1940. On 15 February Puhakka was promoted to 1st lieutenant, and two weeks later he was given command of the flight after 1Lt Urho Nieminen was wounded in action. He had added a further two kills to his tally by the end of the Winter War. Puhakka then spent time reaching at the cadet school, but by the time the Continuation War erupted on 25 June 1941, he was back with his old unit, 3/LLv 26, flying G.50 FA-1. On 13 July Puhakka scored his first kills of the new conflict with a ‘triple’ haul, and within a month his tally had risen to an accumulated 12 kills from both wars. Following a tour as an instructor with various fighter squadrons that lasted until 3 June 1942, Puhakka then assumed command of 3/LLv 26.Assigned G.50 FA-25, he scored a further five kills and ‘made’ captain on 29 December 1942.

On 9 February 1943 Puhakka became CO of the newly-formed 3/LLv 34, being assigned Bf 109G-2 MT-204. Although he claimed just three kills in this fighter, he enjoyed success in other machines, and on 20 August he used MT-216 to down three La-5s and an IL-2 in two missions. On 17 May 1944 Puhakka destroyed a trio of Pe-2s in MT-419, followed exactly a month later by another ‘triple’ in the same fighter, although on this occasion he had to belly-land the battle-damaged Bf 109G.

Flying MT-433 for the remaining months of the war, Puhakka had flown 401 missions and claimed 42 victories – three of them without firing a shot – by the time of the ceasefire. On 21 December he was awarded the Mannerheim Cross (No 175). Generally considered to be the most skillful pilot in the fighter arm Puhakka resigned from the air force on 25 July 1946 and flew airliners, rising to the position of chief pilot prior to retirement at age 55 in 1971. On 28 January 1989 Puhakka passed away.

**1st Lieutenant Olavi Kauko Puro**

Olavi ‘Olli’ Puro was born on 18 November 1918 in Helsinki. After graduating from secondary school, he volunteered for military service in 1940, becoming a 2nd lieutenant on 11 February 1941. Trained as a pilot soon afterwards, he was posted firstly to LeLv 24 on 22 June 1942, before joining 3/LLv 6 three months later, where he flew captured I-153s.

Puro demonstrated his skills by downing two aircraft in IT-18 before returning to 2/LLv 24 on 4 April 1943. He went on to down 5.5 aircraft during the great air battles of the following two months over the Gulf of Finland, flying Brewsters’ BW-387 and BW-365.

On 19 October 1943 Puro was promoted to 1st lieutenant. In May 1944 his flight converted to Bf 109Gs, and he was assigned MT-246, in which he scored 4.5 kills. On 20 June, while flying MT-201, he was credited with five vicio-

dies in two missions, and three days later (in MT-449) he scored four in two missions. Puro was, however, wounded in the same battle at Hans Wind on 28 June 1944.

Returning to 2/HLeLv 24 on 9 July with one leg still in plaster, he scored four kills the following day during two missions in MT-479. On 22 July he scored a ‘triple’, and the following day he destroyed an La-5 for his 36th, and last, victory. Puro had flown 207 missions in total.

On 10 November 1944 he returned to civilian life and taught himself economics. Puro then went into banking, retiring in 1983 from the position of data processing director. Now aged 79, Puro is still alive and well.

**Master Sergeant Nils Edvard Katajainen**

Katajainen was born in Helsinki on 31 May 1919. He was accepted into military service in 1939, joining the ISK and training as a fighter pilot. On 18 June 1941 Cpl ’Nipa’ Katajainen was posted to 3/LLeLv 24 and assigned Brewster BW-368. Ten days later he made his first kill, and duly became an ace as a sergeant on 12 August 1941 with the destruction of two ’Chaikas’. On 12 April 1942 he was promoted to staff sergeant.

Following his 13th kill, Katajainen was suddenly posted on 9 September 1942 to a training unit to learn the intricacies of flying twin-engined patrol aircraft, prior to joining LeLv 6 on 18 October 1942 – where he flew captured SBs on anti-submarine patrol! He soon applied to return to fighters, and finally on 9 April 1943 he was posted back to 3/LLeLv 24, with whom he scored a further 4.5 kills. On 24 September 1943 he was promoted to master sergeant, and in April 1944 converted to Bf 109Gs.

Katajainen was subsequently wounded in combat on 2 June 1944, and although entitled to further recuperative leave, he returned to 3/HLeLv 24 on 21 June and recommenced his scoring run just two days by downing three kills in two sorties. On both 26 and 28 June he scored ‘triples’ in MT-436, whilst on 3 July he went one better with four aircraft in two missions, although his own Bf 109G (MT-462) was so badly shot up that he had to belly-land it. Two days later he destroyed a Yak-9, but was again wounded. This time he crashed-landed MT-476 in a barely conscious state at Lappeenranta doing 500 km/h, and although destroying the fighter, Katajainen survived to recover in hospital. This time the war was over for him, however, his 196 sorties having realised 35.5 victories.

On 10 November 1944 Katajainen was released from service, and on 21 December he received the Mannerheim Cross (No 170) – the only fighter pilot recipient to be given the award while not on active duty. Katajainen ran a small business for a number of years immediately after the war, before joining the Helsinki City legal department and retiring in 1982 as a distrainer. Katajainen died on 16 January 1997 at the age of 78.

**1st Lieutenant Lauri Vilhelm Nissinen**

Lauri ’Lapra’ Nissinen was born in Joensuu, in eastern Finland, on 31 July 1918. In 1936 he volunteered for military service at LaS 5, becoming a mechanic, and in 1938 he was accepted into the ISK and was posted to LLv 24 as a sergeant pilot on 1 March 1939, flying D.XXIs. During the Winter War he was a member of the 3rd Flight, scoring four bomber kills.
in FR-98. At the end of the conflict he had 'made' master sergeant.

Nissinen was still with 3/HLelv 24, now flying Brewsters, come 25 June
1941, and he used his first assigned fighter (BW-353) to score 'double'
kills in his first two combats on 7 and 7 July. Two months later he was
given BW-384, which he duly took with him to 2/HLelv 24, in eastern
Karelia, on 21 January 1942. Nissi-
en aspired to become an officer, and following completion of several
courses, he 'made' reserve 2nd lieute-
nant on 30 March 1942, although cadet school had to wait a while.

On 6 April Nissinen claimed three Hurricanes in BW-384, and
he continued to use this fighter until 8 June 1942, when he scored his
20th kill of the Continuation War. This qualified him for the Manner-
heim Cross (No 69), which he received on 5 July – four days after
he had started cadet school. On 26
March 1943 he graduated as a 1st lieutenant, and was made CO of
1/HLelv 24 (still flying Brewsters) on 21 June.

In April 1944 Nissinen's unit converted to Bf 109Gs, and he was
assigned MT-225. He had claimed six victories with the fighter up to 17
June 1944 when he was killed in MT-229 – Nissinen had commenced a
diving attack on Il-2s with his wingman, 2Lt Heimo Lampi, when his fighter
was suddenly hit from above by the remains of MT-227, flown by
12.5-kill ace 1Lt Urho Sarjamäki, which had had its starboard wing shot
off. Nissinen had flown around 300 sorties and had scored 32.5 kills.

1st Lieutenant Kyösti Keijo Ensio Karhila

Kyösti Karhila was born on 2 May 1921 in Rauma, in south-western Fin-
land. In 1939 he volunteered for military service and was accepted
into the ISK, where he became a fighter pilot. On 18 March 1941 2Lt Karhila
was assigned to 1/HLelv 32, flying fighter D.XXIs and then Curtiss Hawks
from mid-July onwards. On 19 September he scored his fifth kill (a MiG-
3) in CJu-560 to thus become an ace at just 20 years of age.

*Kössi* Karhila kept on claiming victories until 20 April 1943 when he
was posted to LeLv 34, equipped with Bf 109Gs, following his promotion
to 1st lieutenant. His tally then stood at 13, all scored in Hawks. Part of
to the 2nd Flight, Karhila made an immediate impact in MT-214 by
claiming a 'double' on 4 May 1943, and he kept on steadily scoring until
22 August 1943, when his flight moved to Helsinki-Malmin on city
defence duties. On 6 March 1944 he was transferred to HLeLv 30, before
returning to HLeLv 34 on 15 June.

On 30 June he assumed command of 3/HLelv 24 following the the serious wounding of Hans Wind – this promotion was quite unusual, for the post of flight leader usually belonged to a regular officer. He duly was
assigned MT-461 (one of the 'gun boat' G-6/R6s), and used it to score
eight kills. On 21 July Karhila was promoted to command 2/HLelv 30, but by that late stage in the war the action was all but over. He had flown
some 304 sorties and claimed 32 victories.

On 16 November 1944 he resigned from the service and became an air
traffic controller for a year, before becoming an airline pilot, again and
finally an inspector before officially retiring in 1973. Thereafter he flew
charter airliners and business jet until 1985 when he finally retired for
good. Karhila is still alive and well at the time of writing.

**Major Jorma Karhunen**

Karhunen was born on 17 March 1913 at Pyhäjärvi, in southern Finland.
In 1933 he graduated from secondary school and joined up for military
service, entering the ISK. In 1936 he graduated from the cadet school and
was posted as a junior flying officer to Lentolaivue 1, which duly became
Lentotyökaluset 2 on 1 January 1938.

At the outbreak of the Winter War 1Lt Karhunen was the deputy
leader of 1/HLelv 24, flying D.XXIs. He was assigned FR-112, and he used
this fighter to score most of his 4.5 victories up to 30 January 1940, when
he took over 2/HLelv 24. He failed to add to his score following his new
posting as he spent the rest of the Winter War in Sweden performing eval-
uation flights and pilot training on the then new Brewster Model 239.

When hostilities resumed on 25 June 1941 'Joppie' Karhunen was lead-
ing 3/HLelv 24 in his personal Brewster, BW-366, which he flew for two
years. He became an ace in his first combat of the new conflict on 4 July
1941 by down an SB. Exactly a month later he was promoted to captain,
and he continued to lead his flight into 1942, scoring 'double' kills on
three occasions – 26 September, 17 December and 26 February.

During the first great air battles over the Gulf of Finland in the summer
of 1942, Karhunen's flight benefited greatly from his leadership. Indeed,
during the week commencing 12 August 3/HLelv 24 downed 25 aircraft,
Karhunen himself (flying BW-38) scoring two 'triples' on the 16th and
18th. On 8 September he was decorated with the Mannerheim Cross (No
92) for both his outstanding leadership and personal tally of 25 kills.

Karhunen kept on scoring until 4 May 1943 when he downed an I-153
for his 31st, and last, victory. On 1 June he was appointed commander of
Lentotyökaluset 4, and three months later was promoted to major – he had
flown 350 missions prior to be promoted out of the frontline.

After the war Karhunen remained in active service, being promoted to
lieutenant-colonel on 6 December 1951 and given command of Lentolaiv-
uettu 1 (which had become 2. Lentosottilaituri), based at Porin. Karhunen
finally retired from active duty on 13 December 1955, and in 1967 he was promoted to full colonel in reserve. He commenced a
career as a writer soon after leaving the air force, publishing works detail-
ing both his own wartime experiences and those of his fellow fighter
pilots. Karhunen has written over 30 books during the post war decades,
plus in excess of 200 magazine articles. He is still alive and well today.
## APPENDICES

### Ace Listing

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See overleaf for notes to this listing.
Lentolaivue 24 - Hävittäjälentolaivue 24

Commanders: Capt Ilti-Col Gustaf Magnusson from November 1938, and Capt (Maj) Jorma Karhunen from June 1943.

Equipment: Fokker D.XII (Mcurvy) in April 1938, Brewster Model 239 in April 1940 and Messerschmitt Bf 109G in April 1944.

Lentolaivue 24 was founded on 15 July 1933 following a major re-organisation of the air force which saw ‘air stations’ formed and flying units duly subordinated to them. Lentoaemia 1 (Las 1), controlling Lvl 10 and 34 at Utti, became known as the ‘cradle of fighter pilots’, and on 1 January 1938 the ‘air stations’ were transformed into ‘flying regiments’, with Las 1 becoming Leir 2.

At the outbreak of the Winter War on 30 November 1939, Lvl 24 was based at Immola with 35 D.XXIs split between five flights – two of these had actually been seconded to the squadron from Lvl 26. On 26 December 1939 the headquarters moved to Joutseno, and the squadron was split into detachments to be used wherever it was deemed necessary. On 25 February 1940 the unit returned temporarily to Immola, before moving to Lemi on 1 March and then Ristina ten days later. The Winter War ended on 13 March 1940.

The following month saw Lvl 24 transferred to Joroinen, where it exchanged its Fokkers with Lvl 32 for Brewster Model 239s. In August the newly-turfted Vesivihna airfield welcomed the unit as a period of intensive training.

The start of the Continuation War on 25 June 1941 saw Lvl 24 flying 33 Brewsters split between four flights become part of Leir 2 and move to Vesivihna. On 2 July the bulk of the squadron was sent to Rantasalmi, whilst smaller detachments operated from various bases. By 16 September the majority of Lvl 24 had regrouped at the ‘dry shore’ bases of Lunkula or Mantsi. On 23 December the bulk of the unit moved closer to the front by flying into Kontupohja ‘ice base’, although it pulled back to Hirvas come the warmer spring weather on 14 April 1942.

On 18 July Lvl 24 was transferred to Leir 3, and two weeks later the headquarters and three flights moved to Römpöti. By 21 November the unit had assemblled at Sukaalari, on the Karelian Isthmus. On 11 February 1942 attrition forced Lvl 24 to reduce its flight numbers to three, each assigned eight Brewsters.

On 14 February 1944 the unit was redesignated Hävittäjälentolaivue 24 (Fighter Squadron 24), and two months later the last six Bf 109G-2s were received, allowing the surviving Brewsters to be passed on to HLeLv 26 in May.

In early June the squadron came under sustained Soviet attack at Sukaalari, forcing HLeLv 24 to retreat firstly to Immola on 11 June, followed four days later by a move to Lappeenranta, which ultimately proved to be its last wartime base. On 4 September 1944 the Continuation War ended, and exactly three months later all Finland’s Bf 109G-2s were re-numbered, HLeLv 24 becoming HLeLv 31.

Hävittäjälentolaivue 24 claimed 877 aerial victories during both wars – 96 in D.XXIs, 477 in Brewsters and 304 with the Bf 109G. In return it lost 55 aircraft to all causes, 44 of which fell in combat – 11 D.XXIs, 19 Brewsters and 14 Bf 109Gs. Some 27 of its pilots were either killed or posted missing, and a further three became POWs. Finally, the unit produced five Mannheimer Cross winners.

Lentolaivue 26 - Hävittäjälentolaivue 26

Commanders: Capt Erikki Heinilä from February 1939, Maj Raoul Harju-Jeanty from December 1939, Capt (Maj) Envo Carlson from December 1941, Maj Lauri Laiho from March 1944 and Maj Erikki Metsola from July 1944.

Equipment: Bulldog IV from July 1935, Gladiator II from January 1940, Fiat G.50 from February 1940 and Brewster Model 239 from May 1944.

Formed on 15 July 1933 and assigned to Lentoaemia 5, Lentolaivue 26 transferred to Leir 2 on 1 January 1938 when all fighter squadrons were concentrated into one regiment. 30 November 1939 found the squadron based at Heinjoki with just ten Bulldogs, for its two D.XXI-equipped flights had been temporarily transferred to Lvl 24, which was serving near to the frontline. The Bulldog flight, meanwhile, was restricted to patrolling areas where it was less likely that they would come across superior Soviet fighters. Finally, on 2 February 1940 the veteran British biplane fighters were handed over to training units.

The Bulldog was partially replaced by the ultimate British biplane fighter, the Gladiator. On 19 January Lvl 26 had received the first of its Glider fighters, which would eventually re-equip two flights, plus Fiat G.50s for the third. The former were flown from various bases until the end of February 1940, when they were handed over to Leir 1. The rest of the Winter War was fought with the Fiats from Utti and, from 15 February onwards, Haukkajärvi. In July Lvl 26 moved to Joroinen.

When the Continuation War broke out on 25 June 1941, Lvl 26 Istli assigned to Leir 2 at Joroinen could field just six G.50s split between the three flights. On 6 July the unit’s headquarters moved to Joensuu, with subordinate flights using various bases until 2 August, when the squadron came together again at Lunkula. On 12 September the unit was transferred to Leir 3 and sent to Immola, with detachments flying from several bases. On 5 July 1942 LeLv 26 went to Kipisäta, on the Karelian Isthmus, and on 14 February 1944 became Hävittäjälentolaivue 26.

On 9 May 1944 it moved to Heinjoki, from where its veteran Fiats were finally sent to training units following the arrival of marginally younger Brewster Model 239s – these were received in two batches from HLeLv 24. Based on the renewed Red Army assault of mid-1944, the squadron moved on 14 June to Immola and then to Käkisalmi 48 hours later. On 7 July HLeLv 26 was again transferred, this time to Mantsivaara, before moving to Värtola 19 days later. Here, it began part of Leir 2 on 4 August 1944.

The end of the Continuation War resulted in the unit moving to Onttola on 8 September, and then to Vaala on 2 October 1944. On 23 January 1945 the unit was transferred to Rissala, which was its designated peace-time base.

Hävittäjälentolaivue 26 claimed 183 aerial victories during the three wars in which it participated – six in Bulldogs, 25 in D.XXIs, 34 in Gladiators, 99 in G.50s and 19 with Brewsters. In turn it lost 41 aircraft to all causes, 28 of which were done in action, and 16 pilots were either killed or posted missing. Finally, the first air force Mannheimer Cross winner emerged from this unit.

Lentolaivue 28 - Hävittäjälentolaivue 28

Commanders: Maj Niilo Jusu from December 1939, Capt (Maj) Sven-Erik Siren from May 1941, Maj Auvo Mannila from August 1942 and Maj Per-Erik Soevile from June 1944.

Equipment: Morane-Saulnier MS.406 from February 1940 and Mörkö Morane (M-105) and Messerschmitt Bf 109G from July 1944.

Lentolaivue 28 was established at Utti on 8 December 1939 as part of Leir 2. During February 1940 30 MS.406s were received and issued to three flights, the unit then moving to Säkylä, in south-western Finland. Two of these flights later flew from Hollola during the final stages of the Winter War, which ended on 13 March.

During the truce the squadron was transferred to Naarajarvi, where it remained until the commencement of the Continuation War – it consisted of 27 MS.406s, split between three flights, at the time. Still controlled by Leir 2, Lvl 28 moved to Joensuu on 4 July 1941, and then to Joensuu two weeks later. By 29 July, the squadron was back at Joensuu, however, although it moved closer to the action on 19 August when it flew to Karkkila. ‘Dry shore base’ on 18 October the squadron returned to ‘solid land’ when it was posted back to Vitäna – from here it sent out small detachments to various bases.

On 3 August 1942 the headquarters and the bulk of LeLv 28 moved to Kemi, following the redesignations on 14 February 1944, the unit became Hävittäjälentolaivue 28.

In the wake of the Soviet offensive, ‘Detachment Soevile’ flew into Karkkila on 10 June 1944, its two flights being controlled by Leir 3 at Lappeenranta. In late June 1944 the detachment received Bf 109Gs, allowing it to hand over its Moranes to the 1st flight, which also began converting to Mörkö Moranes at the same time. On 1 July the squadron flew to Värtsila, where ‘Detachment Soevile’ merged back into HLeLv 28 within 12 days of the parent unit’s arrival. The squadron remained a part of Leir 2.

Following the ceasefire, HLeLv 28 saw further action with its Mörkö Moranes in the briefly fought Lapland War, together with an MS.406 flight from TLeLv 14. Initially based at Paltamo on 2 October 1944, the unit moved to Kemi just two weeks later. On 27 November 1944 all flights returned to Rissala, thus marking the end of the war for them. On 4 December the unit became Hävittäjälentolaivue 21.

During two wars Hävittäjälentolaivue 28 had claimed 133 aircraft shot down – 118 for the MS.406 and 15.
for the BF 109G. It had lost 39 aircraft to all causes, with 26 (all MS-406s) destroyed during combat and had 16 pilots killed or posted missing in action, plus a further three made PoWs.

**Lentolaihvu 30 - Hävittäjälentolaihvu 30**

**Commanders:** Capt (Maj) Lauri Bremer from April 1940, Maj Olavi Seevä from May 1942, Maj Eino Luukkanen from November 1942, Capt (Maj) Toivo Kivivähi from March 1943, Maj Arvo Haukkamaa from November 1943 and Capt (Maj) Veikko Kivu from March 1944

**Equipment:** Fokker D.XXI (Wasp) from March 1941, Polikarpov I-153 from November 1942 and Messerschmitt BF 109G from February 1944

When Lentoryymi 3 was established on 27 March 1940, Lentolaihvu 30 was also created to act as an advanced training squadron for the group. A year later it was transformed into a frontline fighter squadron, and by 25 June 1941 it had five Hurricanes and 18 D.XXIs on strength, split between three flights, at Pori. On 1 July the Hurricane flight was handed over to the II. L.V, and two days later the rest of the squadron moved to Hämeenlinna, with detachments being sent to various local bases. On 1 September the unit flew to Tampere and 17 days later the 3rd Flight moved south to Viena to form the nucleus of LV.10. On 21 October the remaining 25 D.XXIs split into two two-flight squadron based at Suurjärvi. LV.10 disbanded on 1 November 1941, although its 3rd Flight remained active until merged with LeLv 14 on 1 August 1942. On 16 November 1942 LeLv 30 became a reconnaissance unit following its transfer to LeLv 5, its D.XXIs being exchanged for captured I-153s and the unit moved to Raọpotz. On 14 February 1944 it was renamed Hävittäjälentolaihvu 30 and transformed into a fighter squadron once again. It subsequently operated two flights of BF 109Gs primarily from Vesaheimaa. Detachments flew from other bases as well until war’s end. Hävittäjälentolaihvu 30 claimed 39 aerial victories – 36 in D.XXIs and three in BF 109Gs. Some 24 aircraft were in turn lost to all causes, eight of which were the result of combat (six D.XXIs, one I-153 and two BF 109Gs). Eleven pilots were killed. The Mannheim Cross was awarded to a solitary pilot from the unit.

**Lentolaihvu 34 - Hävittäjälentolaihvu 34**

**Commanders:** Maj Olavi Ehrnrooth from January 1943 and Maj Eino Luukkanen from March 1943

**Equipment:** Messerschmitt BF 109G from March 1943

LeLv 34 was established on 23 January 1943 as part of LeLv 3. Between March and May 1943 30 BF 109Gs arrived as its equipment, the unit being based at Use, with smaller detachments flying from other sites. On 2 August the squadron moved to Kymi. On 14 February 1944 the unit became Hävittäjälentolaihvu 34, and two days later the whole of the 2nd Flight was handed over to the LeLv 30. Thereafter, the unit fought through to war’s end with just two flights of BF 109Gs. Following the major Soviet attack on 9 June 1944, LeLv 34 moved firstly to Imatra three days later; and then again to Lappeenranta on 16 June. Finally, on 23 June it was transferred to Taipalsaari, which became its last wartime base. On 4 December 1944 the unit was re-numbered HL.aLv 33. Hävittäjälentolaihvu 34 claimed 345 kills, all with the BF 109G, and of the 30 fighters lost to all causes, 18 were downed in combat. Twelve pilots were either killed or posted missing and one became a PoW. Finally, three of its aces were awarded the Mannheim Cross.

### Speed and Climbing Performance of Finnish Fighters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aircraft</th>
<th>D.XXI</th>
<th>D.XXI</th>
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<th>G.50</th>
<th>B-239</th>
<th>H 75A-6</th>
<th>BF 109G-2</th>
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<th>D.XXI</th>
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**Flown on:**

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<tr>
<td>wing</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*All aircraft were flown in loaded condition, with full fuel tanks, gun magazines and no external stores.*
1. **Bulldog IVA BU-68** of **Sgt Valio Povilas**, Os. Heinämaa/Lv26, Hei-Joki, December 1939
   - During the October 1939 war exercises, this aircraft was assigned to Spt Povala. Less than two months later, during the Finnish Air Force's first encounters with Soviet aircraft on 1 December, the same fighter/pilot combination claimed an SB, which was duly credited as a probable. On Christmas Day Povilas used this Bulldog to gain a confirmed victory in the shape of an I-16 over the Karelian Isthmus. Väissä Povilas's 'big date' came on 25 June 1941 when he was credited with 3.5 SBs destroyed whilst flying Fiat G.50 FA-20 - a month later he was promoted to warrant officer. Povilas served throughout the war with LeLv 26, finishing with a tally of 7.5 kills from 251 sorties.

2. **Gladiator II GL-256 of Cpl Ilmari Joesuus**, 2/Lv26, Ruokolahti, February 1940
   - 'Pikku-Jim' ('Little Jim') Joesuus was assigned to LeLv 26 on 26 January 1940, and within a month of his arrival he had been credited with four confirmed victories, all while flying this machine. He became an ace on 13 August 1941 when he downed a 'Chaika' flying LeLv 26's G.50 FA-35. Joesuus was then posted to cadet school to become a regular officer, but he failed to add to his tally upon joining the BF 109G-equipped HL-Lv24 during the summer of 1944.

3. **Fiat G.50 (MM 4786) SA-1 of Capt Olavi Ehmrooth**, CO of Koel, Tampere, January 1940
   - SA-1 (later FA-1) was the first G.50 to arrive from Finland on 16 December 1939. It remained with the Koelenska air force test unit at the State Aircraft Factory at Tampere for evaluation purposes for some time, and whilst here Capt Ehmrooth flew it on several interception missions, claiming two bombers. From 12 July 1941 Ehmrooth commanded the Hawk-equipped LeLv 32, and he scored his fifth and last victory on 28 March 1942. On 19 January 1943 Ehmrooth was posted to command the new BF 109G unit LeLv 34, but on 27 March 1943 he was killed in a flying accident.

4. **Morane-Saulnier MS.406 MS.318/’Yellow 3’ of 2Lt Pauli Massinen**, 3/Lv28, Säkylä, February 1940
   - Massinen joined LeLv 28 when it was formed on 8 December 1939. On 2 March 1940 he downsed a DB-3M in this aircraft, the star of the squadron killing the pilot. Massinen continued to serve as a first lieutenant with LeLv 28 into 1941, becoming an ace on 21 August 1941 flying MS-314. He claimed five kills in 40 sorties, before being posted to the air fighting school as an instructor on 7 November 1941. Massinen remained in this post through to the end of the war.

5. **Fokker D.XXI c/n III/11 FR-110/’Blue 7’ of WO Viktor Pytola**, 3/Lv24, Joroinen, April 1940
   - Serving with 3/Lv24, Pytola scored 7.5 kills during the Winter War with FR-110, this score including two ‘doubles’ on 27 December 1939 and 20 January 1940. This fighter is one of only two known examples to have carried victory symbols during the Winter War. ‘Isä-Vikki’ ('Father-Vikki') was one of the ‘old hands’ of LeLv 24, remaining with the unit throughout the five years of conflict. Aside from his success with the D.XXI, he also scored victories in Brewsters and BF 109G-6s, which took his accumulated total to 9.5 kills in 437 sorties - the latter figure being the second highest total for any Finnish fighter pilot. On 3 July 1944 he was shot down in BF 109G-6 MT-235, but he successfully parachuted to safety.

6. **Fokker D.XXI c/n III/1 FR-97/’White 2’ of 1Lt Jorma Savantalo**, 4/Lv24, Uitti, January 1940
   - Savantalo became the first Finnish ace during a four-minute action on 6 January 1940, using this aircraft to down six DB-3Ms of 66DBAP south of Uitti. This action received much coverage in the global press, and ‘Zumbo’ Savantalo went on to score a total of 13 kills in the Winter War. He later added a further four victories in Brewsters again with LeLv 24. After flying a total of 261 sorties, Savantalo became an instructor in the final months of the Continuation War, using his skills to train future fighter pilots.

7. **Fokker D.XXI c/n III/30 FR-112/’Black 7’ of 1Lt Jorma Karhunen**, 3/Lv24, Immola, December 1939
   - ‘Uppo’ Karhunen flew FR-112 for five weeks whilst deputy leader of 1/Lv24, scoring three and two shared kills during this time. His scoring run in the fighter came to an end on 3 January 1940 when FR-112 was damaged in a taxing accident with another D.XXI at Värttö, causing it to be sent away for repairs – his final score with the Fokker fighter was 4.5. On 30 January Karhunen was appointed commander of 2/Lv24, although he spent the rest of the Winter War test flying Brewsters in Sweden (see rear cover profile)."
during the course of 285 sorties. Earlier in the Continuation War, Kalina had flown D.XXIs with LeLv 30 and 10, downing four Soviet aircraft. On 1 August 1942 he had transferred to 1.LeLv 14, where he had initially flown MS-326, before being issued with this fighter. On 16 June 1944 he was placed in charge of a detachment sent to Germany for nightfighter training, but returned to Finland following the ceasefire on 4 September 1944.

10 Fiat G.50 (MM 3614) FA-25/"Yellow 1" of Capt Olvi Puhakka, CO of 3/LeLv 26, Kilpisjärvi, December 1942

11 Fiat G.50 (MM 4736) FA-15/"Yellow 5" of Sgt Klaus Aikio, 3/LeLv 26, Kilpisjärvi, November 1942

12 Polikarpov I-153 IT-18/"Grey 8" of 2Lt Olavi Puro, 3/LeLv 6, Röömö, November 1942

13 Morane-Saulnier MS 406 MS-327/’White 9’ of S/Sgt Urho Lehtovaara, 2/LeLv 28, Vittula, November 1944

14 Morane-Saulnier MS 406 MS-317/’Black 2’ of 1Lt Paavo Myllylä, 1/LeLv 28, Ääsnäs, July 1942

15 Fiat G.50 (MM 4743) FA-26/’White 5’ of Olof Tuominen, 1/LeLv 26, Kilpisjärvi, October 1942

16 Polikarpov D.XXI (c/n IV12) FR-125/’Red 1’ of Capt Veikko Karu, CO of 2/LeLv 30, Susilajärvi, November 1941

17 Brewster Model 239 BW-384/’Orange 3’ of 2Lt Lauri Nissinen, 2/LeLv 24, Tikkakoski, May 1942

18 Brewster Model 239 BW-352/’White 2’ of S/Sgt Eero Kinnunen, 2/LeLv 24, Tikkakoski, September 1942

19 Brewster Model 239 BW-389/’White 9’ of 1Lt Hans Wind, CO of 3/LeLv 24, Susilajärvi, January 1943

20 Brewster Model 239 BW-370/’Black 1’ of Capt Ilmari Juutilainen, 3/LeLv 24, Susilajärvi, October 1942

21 Brewster Model 239 BW-396/’White 0’ of 2Lt Kai Menelius, 1/LeLv 24, Nurmolla, October 1941

22 Brewster Model 239 BW-380/’Orange 4’ of Col Ilmari Juutilainen, 3/LeLv 24, Susilajärvi, December 1942

23 Brewster Model 239 BW-393/’Orange 9’ of Capt Hans Wind, CO of 3/LeLv 24, Susilajärvi, April 1944

24 Brewster Model 239 BW-379/’Black 4’ of 1Lt Aulis Lumme, 4/LeLv 24, Röömö, October 1942

25 Hurricane I (N2394) HC452/’Black 2’ of Sgt Lauri Juutila, LeLv 32, Suulajärvi, May 1942

26 Curtiss Hawk 75A-6 (c/n 13944) CUIV-580/’Yellow 0’ of 1Lt Kyösti Karhila, 1/LeLv 23, Lopenenta, September 1941

27 Curtiss Hawk 75A-3 (c/n 13747) CUIV-552/’Yellow 2’ of 2Lt Kalle Tervo, 2/LeLv 32, Nurmolla, June 1942

28 Curtiss Hawk 75A-2 (No. 170) CUIV-581/’Blue 1’ of Capt Veikko Evinen, CO of 3/LeLv 32, Nurmolla, March 1944

During the course of 285 sorties. Earlier in the Continuation War, Kalina had flown D.XXIs with LeLv 30 and 10, downing four Soviet aircraft. On 1 August 1942 he had transferred to 1.LeLv 14, where he had initially flown MS-326, before being issued with this fighter. On 16 June 1944 he was placed in charge of a detachment sent to Germany for nightfighter training, but returned to Finland following the ceasefire on 4 September 1944.
day. His score of five kills was achieved flying D.XXIs and Hawks with LeLv 32, and Bf 109Gs with LeLv 34.

**Figure Plates**

1

SSgt Nils Katbajnen of 3/LvLe 24 at Sokoljina in May 1943 is wearing the standard woolen m36 service dress, including cap and boots. This uniform was worn throughout the ranks, except in the navy. At the bottom of his left chest pocket is his pilot’s badge, which in this form is from 1942 and 1944. Katbanen’s rank is shown on the collar patches, whilst his epaulettes bear the air arm symbol.

2

WO Viktor Prysta of 3/LvLe 24 at Vârstin in January 1940 is wearing the standard m36 dress uniform of the Finnish Air Force where his winter flying overall. The latter is a mustard in colour, and off - temperatures of 30°C. His leather holsters and goggles are of Finnish design, whilst his hands are kept warm through the wearing of deep ski mittens, which have only the thumb and forefinger separated to allow him to grip objects. Completing his winter gear, Prysta has felt boots on his feet.

3

Capt Aulis Brien, CO of 2/LvLe 32 at Sokoljina in April 1942. He too is wearing m36 service dress beneath his own leather jacket, which has his rank stripes sewn on to the left arm only. Over the jacket is worn an m37 waterproof plus a thinner cross - strap issued exclusively to officers and warrant officers, in addition to the pistol holster belt. Brien’s peaked cap is a standard m37 issue to all personnel, although his boots and woolen socks are private purchase items.

4

Lt Hans Wims, CO of 3/LvLe 24 at Sokoljina in August 1943. He is wearing standard air force officer’s m37 service dress, with rank stripes on both sleeves and epaulettes bearing the air force and Finnish state iron emblems. Above his left pocket is the awards stripe, whilst on the pocket itself is the Mannheim Cross. Beneath the latter is Wims’ pilot’s badge, and to the right of both is his cadet pilots’ emblem. Finally, the ribbon through the first button hole of his tunic denotes his awarding of the German Iron Cross, 2nd class.

5

Lt Kyosti Kerkila, CO of 3/LvLe 24 at Lappeenranta in July 1944. He is attired in standard German fighter pilot’s jacket, pocket trousers, life vest and lightweight cloth helmet. This equipment was bought directly from Germany from early 1943 onwards primarily for the 109G pilots. Indeed, only Kerkila’s boots are standard Finnish Air Force items.

6

WO Ilmari Juutilainen of 1/LvLe 34 at Tampasalo in July 1943. He is wearing an m39 summer blouse with m37 waistbelt and cross - strap, air force issue m37 trousers and standard issue boots. The summer cap is also an air force m22 model, with the neck scarf a favourite of the ranking Finnish ace. The rank insignia on the collar patches were unique to the air force’s warrant officers. The left chest pocket is adorned with Juutilainen’s Mannheim Cross, and immediately below the decoration is his pilot’s badge. Note also the Forker and Messerschmitt manufacturers’ pins fastened to his cross-strap.
1. Bulldog IVA BU-68 of Sgt Valio Porvari, Os. Heinila/LLv 26, Heinjoki, December 1939
2. Gladiator II GL-256 of Cpl Ilmari Joensuu, 2/LLv 26, Ruokolahti, February 1940
3. Rati G.50 (MM 4738) SA-1 of Capt Olavi Ehrnrooth, CO of Koek, Tampere, January 1940
4. Norani-Saulnier MS 406 MS-318/’Yellow 3’ of 2Lt Paivi Massinen, 3/LLv 28, Säkylä, February 1940
5. Fokker D.XXI (s/n 311) FR-110/’Blue 7’ of WO Viktor Pytola, 3/LLv 24, Joroinen, April 1944
6. Fokker D.XXI (s/n 311) FR-97/’White 2’ of 1Lt Jorma Sarvanto, 4/LLv 24, Uhti, January 1944
7. Fokker D.XXI (s/n 313) FR-112/’Black 7’ of 1Lt Jorma Karhunen, 1/LLv 24, Immola, December 1939
8. Fokker D.XXI (s/n 313) FR-99/’Black 1’ of Maj Gustaf Magnusson, CO of LLv 24, Joutseno, January 1940