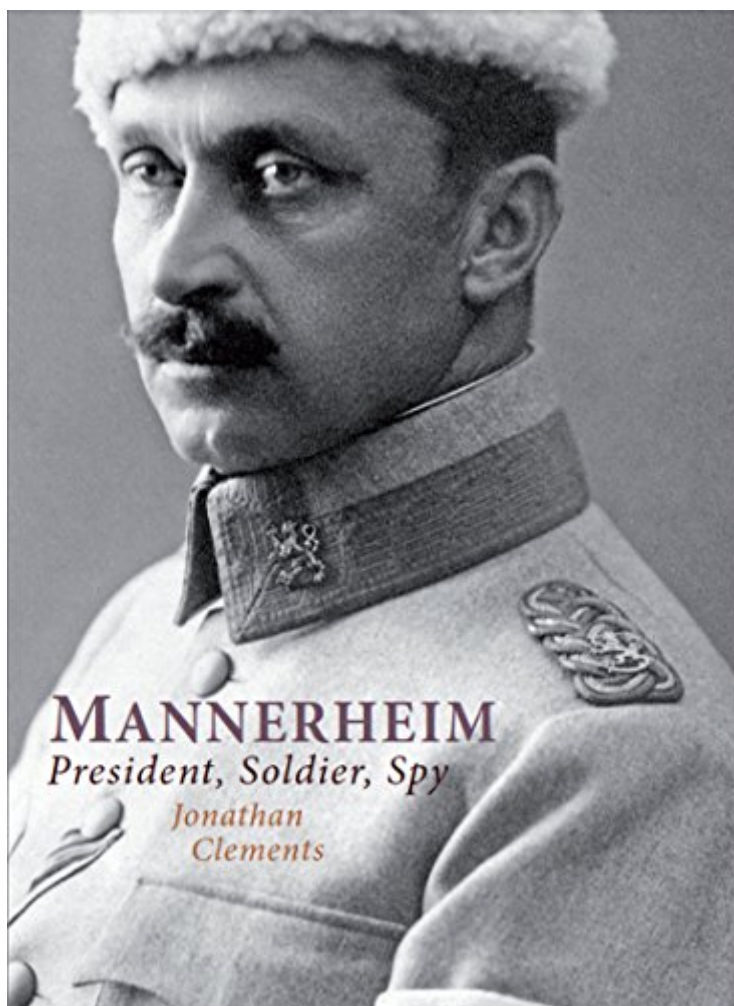


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Mannerheim: President, Soldier, Spy



Synopsis

Baron Gustaf Mannerheim was one of the greatest figures of the twentieth century, and the only man to be decorated by both sides in the Second World War. As a Finnish officer in Russian service, he witnessed the coronation of the last Tsar, and was both reprimanded for foolhardiness and decorated for bravery in the Russo-Japanese War. He spent two years undercover in Asia as an agent in the 'Great Game', posing as a Swedish anthropologist. He crossed China on horseback, stopping en route to teach the 13th Dalai Lama how to shoot with a pistol, and spying on the Japanese navy on his way home. He escaped the Bolsheviks by the skin of his teeth in 1917, arriving in the newly independent Finland just in time to lead the anti-Russian forces in the local revolt and civil war. During Finland's darkest hour, he led the defence of his country against the impossible odds of the Winter War. This major new life of Gustaf Mannerheim, the first to be published for over a decade, includes new historical material on Mannerheim's time in China.

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Customer Reviews

This is a very well written and interesting book on an outstanding man. If it were not for him Finland

would have been gobbled up by Soviet Russia in the 1939/40's. That he, with a small and under-equipped army, and no help from the outside democratic world (which expressed mostly sympathy and outrage at the Soviets) managed to keep Finland free is an amazing achievement. Mannerheim himself was very reticent about his role (in his diaries) and the author is to be congratulated on giving a vivid picture of the man and his deeds.

Good book and well written. Wasnt dry like I thought it would be.. But as other reviewers have said as well, way too much time was taken up on his China trip. The 1918 civil war, Winter war, Continuation war and Lapland war were crammed into maybe a chapter or so. Seemed like the author wanted to just hurry up and get the book done when it came to that. If you know that going into it, its still a good book and I learned quite a bit from it.

So much more than just a person story. It's really a history story that explains easily the 20th century and the how and why's of what we went thru. Would say this is required reading for any history buff of world war 2 or any one doing ancestry work in the scandinavian countries and including Russia.

Probably no leader was more improbable that Carl Gustav Emil Mannerheim. He was part of the old line Swedish nobility that to this day still make up a tenth of the population of Finland. Though he was fluent in Swedish, Russian, and French for most of his life, he only learned Finnish in his 50s and then when he was the chief military leader of Finland. He was cavalry officer in time in which horses were becoming obsolete in modern warfare. He was an aristocrat in a time in which democratic and totalitarian processes were seeping into the political firmament (much to confusion of Mannerheim). This multi-faceted life is given the full treatment in Jonathan Clements' biography, Mannerheim: "President, Soldier and Spy." Mannerheim's career as a soldier began in the imperial Russian army. This career narrowly came off. He was expelled as a cadet from an institution that now features his picture on the wall of every classroom. Mannerheim embodied the high living Chevalier Guards lifestyle in the Russian capital. If one looks closely at pictures of Tsar Nicholas II's coronation, there is Mannerheim standing to his right. Mannerheim did not have a problem as a Finn serving in the Imperial Army. In his home in Helsinki, which operates as a public museum, there are autographed pictures of the Romanovs on the piano and elsewhere. Had the 1917 revolution not taken place, Mannerheim could have lived out his life as a member of the Russian military. Clements' biography largely follows the traditional narrative of other biographies of

Mannerheim and relies in some sections on secondary sources. However the section that sets this book apart is the one that deals with Mannerheim's career as a spy in China. Following the Russo-Japanese, there was some concern about China and whether or not it could prove to be as problematic in the Far East as Japan had been. Mannerheim's characteristic take on the struggle for influence in Far East with Japan that it was perfect example of how not to fight a war. Mannerheim had two outstanding talents, which served him well in this expedition, the ability to choose good horses and outstanding skill at map-making. Both would stand him in good stead as he moved along the Silk Road into China and played his role. Mannerheim was attached to a French archeological expedition by way of cover. This was probably not the best fit had authorities been more alert. Mannerheim and Paul Pelliot frequently clashed as they made their way to China. Although Mannerheim sent back a number of artifacts to Finnish museums (and as the contents of his house illustrate, bought back a number of things himself), Mannerheim missed out on the cache of Silk Road era documents at Dunhuang. These documents, which are one of the greatest archeological finds of the 20th century made Pelliot's reputation. Although Mannerheim failed to realize their value, Pelliot did not. It was one of the few times in which Mannerheim missed out on something. Mannerheim's great moment came when he left his career as soldier behind and as former general of the Tsar's Army moved to preserve the independence of Finland as it sought to safeguard its independence from Soviet Russia. Mannerheim was essentially the spirit of counter-Revolution in 1918 and was perhaps the only effective resistance to the Communists. He was also the only competent military leader that the White Finnish government could muster at this point. Along with being the father of the Finnish nation, Mannerheim is also the father of the Finnish military. The inter-war years were a bit of a disappointment for Mannerheim. He managed to secure recognition for Finland at the Versailles treaty, but his domestic political career was largely unsuccessful. In the future, whenever it looked as though Finland would vanish from the map, the Finns would turn to Mannerheim as the savior of the nation and Mannerheim, true to his aristocratic heritage would play this role time and again. Mannerheim served as commander in chief of the armed forces up to the outbreak of hostilities in 1940. He did try and warn his political masters that Finland could not stand up to the might of the Red Army and urged them to attempt a compromise of some sort since the Russians were starting to make demands for territory in Karelia and elsewhere. Mannerheim had resigned when Moscow invaded in 1940, but soon assumed the duties of Finland's war chief. Understanding just how little tactics had changed in the Russian military from Tsarist times to 1940 would prove invaluable in constructing a viable defense of Finland. Knowing that the infantry would be placed behind the tanks, a move that was totally unsuited for the forest

fighting that made up the Winter War, enabled Mannerheim to construct a program of hit and run tactics that undermined Soviet planning and maintained Finnish independence. Mannerheim understood the need to bloody the Soviets in order to conclude a peace that left Finland independent and avoided the fate of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. War between Germany and the Soviet Union led to Finland to resume its conflict with the Red Army. Acting on the principle of "the enemy of my enemy is my friend" led the Finns to make concessions to Nazi Germany to recapture territory lost during the Winter War as the primary objective of what is known as the "Continuation War." Mannerheim as marshal of Finland worked himself relentlessly and probably endured more than might be expected from a man in his seventies. Perhaps his greatest trial was when Adolf Hitler dropped in for his 75th birthday. Mannerheim despised an upstart such Hitler and underscored this disdain by smoking in front of the German leader, something few others ever even considered. When it became clear that Germany would lose the war, Mannerheim became president of Finland. He negotiated a ceasefire that ensured that Finland would remain independent, probably his greatest monument. Although this biography of Mannerheim is predictable in some ways, it is also very well written and Clements does have a great deal of material on Mannerheim's pre-revolutionary experiences in Central Asia and China. This book is well worth reading.

Very interesting biography of Field Marshall Mannerheim. Learned allot about his life and how it prepared him for his heroic leadership of the Finns in their battle against the Soviet Invasion.

A good book.

An amazing character in history. His story is so entertaining it is difficult to believe it is non-fiction

Great story which is presented in an interesting way. Full of relevant details which bring the story of a great man to life.

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