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**CORRESPONDENCE IN TIMES OF CRISIS. PROVERBS IN THE LETTERS “FROM
HERE IN SOMEWHERE” [TÄÄLTÄ JOSTAKIN]**

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Abstract

There have been and will be crises. Amid crises, communication with loved ones is felt to be meaningful. When everything is destroyed, what does a human carry with one is forced to flee or leave one's country? If nothing else, your own language, with its familiar expressions, creates a sense of permanence.

During the Second World War (in Finland 1939–1944) sent the Finnish soldiers in battlefront about 1,3 billion letters and postcards to their nearest ones in the home front. The delivery of the so-called field mail was arranged from and to the front. These letters were mainly written in language more like vernacular speech than with grammatical spelling in mind.

Proverbs, references to them, and as well as proverbial expressions are (were) part of everyday speech. No wonder they also settled on written speech in letters. I am interested in the proverbs used in letters. Based on my previous reviews, I know they were used in their letters. The material consists of letters that one soldier sent from the front to his mother over a period of five years, totalling more than one hundred letters.

Key words: field mail, letters from front line, proverbs, soldier, the Second World War in Finland.

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Introduction and some facts

During World War I, Finland was an autonomous part of the Russian state. However, during the second World War II, Finland as an independent state. For Finland, World War II covered three different periods.:

The Winter War November 30, 1939 – March 13, 1940.

Armistice March 13, 1940 – June 25, 1941

Continuation War June 25, 1941 – September 19, 1944.

The phase called “war of positions” as a whole on the Finnish front is considered to have begun on 9 December 1941 and it ended in June 1944 when the Soviet Union launched a major offensive.

In addition to these, the removal of foreign troops from Finland was continued in accordance with the requirements of the peace terms. This period is called the **Lapland War**. It started on September 15, 1944 – April 27, 1945.

In the time of the Winter War 1939 in Finland the population was about 3,7 million. Of this were about 200,000 - 300,000 men in field troops. In the time of the Continuation War in 1944 the population was still about 3,7 million. Of this population about 600,000 people, including women, were serving in the Defence Forces. Only about 60,000-75,000 Finnish men participated in the war after the defensive war.

As a result of the war, Finland retained its independence. However, the price paid for it was high. Over the years, about 94,000 Finns lost their lives. Death touched the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, and the war left some 30,000 women widowed, about 50,000 children orphaned, and almost 100,000 parents lost their children.

In addition to area rental of areas¹ Finland paid war reparations to the Soviet Union in goods. War reparations included timber, forestry and metal industry products, 119 vessels, which was the one-quarter of the Finnish merchant fleet already reduced by half due to the war. As for the second year of compensation, the disposals were new production, mainly the products of the metal industry. This required a substantial expansion of the metal industry. The quantities delivered were so large that, for example, more than 500 ships built at 15 shipyards would have formed a single line of ships more than 30 kilometres long. A total of 345,000 rail cars were needed for rail transport. One item of war reparations deliveries was ready-to-erect wooden house packages. A considerable amount of war reparations was made up of railway equipment, for example a total of 728 narrow-track locomotives, most of which were steam locomotives.

During the war, the population was evacuated from the war zone. During the truce, some returned to their homes, as the peace was believed and hoped to be permanent. However, this was not the case, but after the peace agreement in 1944, with the evacuation of the area, more than 11% population of Finland at the time people became resettled as over 400,000 inhabitants lived in the areas. Surrendered areas (including expropriated areas or lost areas) refer to areas that Finland had to surrender to the Soviet Union in the peacemaking that ended the Winter War in 1940 and related to the peacemaking that ended the Continuation War in 1944.

Material

The material of this article consists of altogether 107 letters, most of them written by one soldier.² They were written during 1939-1944, by the son to his mother and his brother, only one letter was sent by mother, 4 letters are from his younger brother to their mother or elder brother. When the winter war began the writer was just a young boy in 16 years, at the end of war he was already a man in 21 years age.

Field mail [*Kenttäposti*]

Field mail is a mail transport and address system of the Finnish Defence Forces designed for crisis situations, where mail is transported to and from the front. Field mail, which carried more than one billion shipments during the war years, is a miracle of crisis-time logistics. Mail between soldiers serving on the front and people on the home front as a joint organization between the Finnish Defence Forces and Post [*Posti*] was free of charge.

During the Winter War and Continuation War in Finland, field mail was under close surveillance. No addresses were written on the field mails to prevent them from revealing the location of the units to the enemy when they fell into the wrong hands. Instead of plain language addresses, a so-called cover number was used, which served as a key to forwarding mail to the unit's current location. Coverage tables were handled by specially selected people for this task. Similarly, the place marking at the beginning of the letters might have been, for example, "On the stump at the end of the stump", "In a dugout" or "There somewhere", which is probably the best known of these. Already during the early stages of the war, the significance of letters in interaction between people gained a central role as the majority of men had to go to the battlefield, away from their family members. At the very beginning of the war, people were encouraged to keep in touch by letter. It was understood that the connection between the front and the home front was important to maintain the mood and the will to fight. Correspondence was, therefore, the most important means to maintain personal relationships. In the 1980s, it was estimated that only one out of 100 wartime letters were still in storage at the time.

Central themes in the letter narratives are love, hunger, fatigue and a strong experience of strangeness related to other people and the circumstances. In the men's letters, alongside their own hopes and dreams, Finland's official guidelines and the nationalistic discourse that aimed to raise people's mood were always present, and the nationalistic discourse exploited to some extent the contact surface constructed in personal experience to justify the aims of the war. The topics of the letters that are the material of this article follow these general topics: descriptions of routines, living conditions, food, weather, and interactions with fellow servicemen; letters crafted to ease the worries of loved ones, especially mothers, wives, and children; self-censorship in writing as not wanting to cause worry or get into trouble; asked for parcels, clothes, food, sweets, tobacco, or other supplies (e.g. Taskinen 2021). Along with one's own hopes and dreams, Finland's official policies and nationalistic discourse aimed at raising one's mood were carried on all the time. When wartime emergency conditions lasted for years, correspondence was of great importance.

What to write

Päämajan Käskylehti No. 35/15.12.1942 [Section from the Commandment magazine of Headquarters]

“In his letters, as well as in his speeches, the soldier is to observe decency. Magnifying and exaggerating, fabricating false stories, twisting facts, bragging about one's own transgressions, slandering others, and other writings demeaning a soldier are not appropriate for a true soldier and give the recipient of the letter anything but a beautiful picture of the writer. Nor does the home region need letters whistling about ailments to fulfil its responsibilities on the front. The region also has its own difficulties enduring in our struggle and must be able to rely on every warrior on the front to fulfil his mission without grumbling. The above reading for anyone served in the armed forces.”³

Also, the newspapers published instructions on how to write. Letters were to be cheerful and brisk, and writers should avoid writing about problems at home or other pointless things. Encouraging letters would keep men's fighting spirit and mood high. Soldiers were also to write encouraging and confident letters and to avoid writing about defeats and destruction by the enemy. Their letter was to contain information that they were doing well and that a will to fight was found.

From the beginning of the war, letters played a key role in human interaction. This was made possible by well-organized field mail operations, as well as an understanding about the importance of letters to the moods and well-being of the front men. In the context of wartime, letters became a symbol of human relationships and interaction, referring in particular to the meanings of the longing that produced love and distance. Even popular music intended to improve moods may have referred to the phrase ‘from there’, familiar from letters, which, for practical reasons, expressed a ban on telling one's own location, but also a romantically obscure place of longing.

In particular, the function of letters has been to strengthen the link at a distance (Peltonen 1998, Decker 1998). Letters are written to connect people although of course the words do not completely bridge the physical geographical distance. The letter as a means of communication has been formed in a situation where the chatter has not been able to handle matters. During the war, the key function of letters was to maintain a relationship with the home, communication by letter does not occur in real time. It was not self-evident that the recipient of the letter was alive when the letter arrived. In wartime, writing letters was also a way to spend free time, when thoughts were directed to the nostalgic past and future instead of the unpleasant present state. However, the letters are written speech from a long distance.

It was strictly forbidden to write about things the enemy could benefit from. It was not allowed to write about the location of the troops, the transfer of troops, the strength, condition or armament of the troops. And it was also forbidden to add “inappropriate writings or drawings” to the letters.

The primary purpose of censorship was to prevent such information from reaching the enemy's hands that could damage the defence of Finland, foreign policy or relations with foreign powers. Censorship of mail was part of general censorship activities and took the form of spot checks on letters. Detailed descriptions of the misery of war or events were not officially allowed. Inspection activities by Post were also seen as important in determining the moods of the troops.

Some examples

... *ei niin hyvää, että ei olisi jotain pahaa.*

... **not so good that there isn't something bad.** [the first letter maybe January 1939]

... *ei surra, pää pystyyn, vaikka jalat olisivat hel- - -.*

You won't believe how bad it felt when we found out that the line now runs right in front of our front line. But **don't worry, keep your head up even if your feet are in hell---** date 15.3.1940

... *”Herra ei hylkää vaikka koetteleekin.”*

Don't be nervous, for there will be a time of relief for those of us who are unhappy, there will once again be a flag of Finland flying in the streets of Vyborg [Viipuri], for it is said that **“The Lord does not abandon even though he is testing.”** date 13.4.1940.

Endnotes

1. Porkkala for 50 years 1944-1956 (returned to Finland as early as 1956), Hanko for 30 years 1940-1941 (returned to Finland as early as 1941).
2. The materials are in the possession of the author.
3. Translated by the author.

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Curriculum Vitæ

Liisa Granbom-Herranen is associate professor at the Department of Folkloristics, University of Turku, Finland, as well as at the Department of Education at University of Jyväskylä, Finland. She holds a PhD both in folkloristics and education. Her studies are multidisciplinary while her main interest in folkloristic studies is related to the proverbs, she is also interested in the concept of metaphor in philosophy as well as the questions of power, authority, and autonomy in education. Her main research interests in paremiology (proverb science) have focused on the interpretation of proverbs, considering the environment and purpose of use.

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