

Baron Carl Gustav Mannerheim (1867-1951)



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FINNISH POLITICAL AND MILITARY LEADER, EXPLORER, FORMER GENERAL IN THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL ARMY, President of Finland from 1944 to 1946. C.G. Mannerheim supported close ties with Sweden and Western European culture and opposed communism as well as German national socialism. He was an excellent linguist and had wide international experience, which helped him to maintain wide international contacts at various levels. As one of the most influential characters of Finnish history from the Civil War to the late 1940s, the personality of Mannerheim has attracted various artists and writers, among them Ilmari Turja, Veijo Meri, Paavo Rintala, Paavo Haavikko and Jari Tervo.

"What is the quality which in the end is essential in a officer? Courage, yes, moral and physical courage, a sense of responsibility towards his problem and, at the same time, a sense of responsibility towards to those he commands. Initiative? Yes. Judgment? Yes. Personal tenacity in the most difficult situations? This is where we come nearest to the mark, I should think. Tenacity is what we must demand - that is what counts; but not only physical toughness, but also spiritual tenacity - what we know as spiritual strength. There we have, I think, what is the most important, the most essential quality, at least for those in highest authority - spiritual strength." (C.G. Mannerheim according to General Heinrich, in Marshall Mannerheim & the Finns by Oliver Warner, 1967)

Carl Gustaf Emil Mannerheim was born of a wealthy and distinguished Finland-Swedish family at Louhisaari Manor in Askainen, north of Turku. His father was Count Carl Robert Mannerheim and mother Hedvig Charlotta Helena (Hélène) von Julin. As a younger son of a count he inherited the title of baron. Mannerheim's early life was shadowed by the death of her mother and problems in the family's financial situation. In

1886 he was expelled from the Hamina Military College for disciplinary reason, but he continued his studies at a private grammar school in Helsinki, passing his university entrance examinations the next year.

Mannerheim attended the Nikolayev Cavalry School in St. Petersburg. He was appointed to H.M. the Empress's Chevalier Guard, and in 1902 he became a captain in the imperial Russian Army. In 1892 Mannerheim married Anastasia Arapova; they had two daughters, Sophie and Anastasie. The marriage ended in practice in 1903 and in 1919 legally. Anastasia lived in France, but the real reason why Mannerheim divorced her was that he had fallen in love with Catharina Eugénie Marguerite (Kitty) Linder (1887-1969), twenty years his junior. However, they did not marry – it is possible that Kitty eventually rejected his proposal – and from 1921 they were only friends. Anastasia died in 1936 while Mannerheim was hunting in India, where he shot tigers.

In 1904-1905 Mannerheim served in the Russo-Japanese war on the Manchurian front. Winning the respect of his superiors, Mannerheim was promoted to colonel and he received three decorations for his strategy in organizing the retreat from Manchuria. Partly inspired by the example of Nordenskiöld and other explorers, Mannerheim went on an expedition in October 1906 to Central Asian and China to investigate mountain and desert regions. His diary and his notes Mannerheim wrote in Swedish, which was his native language, not in Russian, to hide the fact the he was also on an intelligence mission for the army. His Chinese name in his passport, Ma Dahan, Mannerheim interpreted to mean "The Horse That Leaps Through Clouds".

Taking with him only a few men, Mannerheim started his journey from the Russian Turkestan, heading for Beijing. From Tashkent to Kashgar he travelled with the French Sinologist Paul Pelliot. On his mission Mannerheim studied the customs, languages, ethnic traits and regional archaeology of the tribes that he encountered, collected objects and took photographs. Mannerheim's purchases included a number of everyday articles. From a beggar Mannerheim bought a complete outfit. While in Jarkand, Mannerheim suffered badly from rheumatism. In Utaishan Mannerheim met the Dalai-Lama. He was handed a piece of white silk to

give to the Tsar and he gave the Dalai-Lama his Browning FN M1900 semi-automatic pistol, explaining how it could be loaded with seven bullets simultaneously. "The times were such," he reasoned, "that a gun might at times be of greater use, even to a holy man like himself, than a praying mill." The Dalai Lama asked if Mannerheim had a message for him from the Tsar. Mannerheim said that he did not.

Mannerheim returned to St. Petersburg in September 1908. The objects from the expedition were donated to the Finno-Ugrian Society (Suomalais-ugrilainen Seura). Later Mannerheim published the results of his two years long journey in *A Visit to the Saro and Shera Yogurs* (1911), and in *Across Asia I-II* (1940), which was based on his travel diaries. The photographic material was published in the 1990's.

Mannerheim continued his military career in Poland and by 1912 he had attained the rank of lieutenant-general. In a letter to Princess Marie Lubomirska, he made some anti-Semitic remarks, being aware of violent pogroms against Jews in Poland, but during WWII he refused to deport Jews to Poland when requested to do so by Hitler.

After the outbreak of World War I, Mannerheim served on the front and received the valued St George Cross. When Finland declared her independence after the Bolshevik Revolution in October 1917, Mannerheim resigned from the Russian Army, and returned to Finland. As the commander-in-chief he organized the White Guards, which with Germany help defeated the Red Guards in the civil war of 1918. In his Order of the Day after the celebration of victory in Helsinki, Mannerheim stated: "The task of the army is accomplished. Our country is free. From the Tundras of Lapland, from the remotest skerries of Åland to Systerbäck, the Lion flag is flying. The people of Finland have flung away the chains of centuries and stand ready to take the place that properly belongs to them." Mannerheim held the post of regent of Finland until his defeat in the presidential election of 1919.

Mannerheim's reputation among the beaten left was shadowed by the 'White terror' during the war and mass death in prison camps, although he had opposed the mass imprisonment of Reds. From 1919 to 1931 he lived

in semiretirement. Mannerheim's home in Kaivopuisto Park in the middle of Helsinki was opened as the Mannerheim Museum after his death. His library there consisted mostly of political works and books of history, but also T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* in Finnish and Stefan Zweig's *Die Schachnovelle* were on his bookshelf.

Between the World Wars, Mannerheim devoted much of his time to travelling abroad, and to humanitarian work in the Finnish Red Cross. In 1931 Mannerheim was appointed head of the national defence council and commander-in-chief in the event of war. Two years later he was made field marshal. In the following years he reorganized the army and constructed a system of defence, later known as the Mannerheim Line, which was built in Carelia across Finland's southeast frontier. He advocated 'Nordic orientation' but also cultivated relations with Great Britain and Germany. Although Mannerheim was very critical about National Socialism, he with others participated in Herman Göring's hunting trips.

In 1939 in late June Mannerheim threatened to resign from the Defence Council when the country wanted to go on with the preparations for the Olympic Games and defence expenditures were not increased enough. The fortifications in the Karelian Isthmus were not finished. His threat of resignation was forgotten when a Soviet bomber squadron attacked Helsinki on November 30, 1939. Marshall Mannerheim reported for duty. On the Karelian Isthmus six Finnish divisions fought against twelve or fourteen divisions, and to the north of Lake Ladoga, two divisions held a sixty-mile front against the Soviet Eight Army of seven divisions and a brigade of armour.

During World War II Mannerheim commanded the Finnish forces in two wars against Soviet aggression: first in the Winter War in 1939-1940, and again in 1941-1944, when Finland joined the Germans. Before the war broke out in 1941, England's Prime Minister Winston Churchill sent a letter to Mannerheim, saying: "I wish I could convince Your Excellency that we are going to beat the Nazis. I feel far more confident than in 1917 or 1918. It would be most painful to the many friends of your country in England if Finland found herself in the dock with the guilty and defeated

Nazis." Mannerheim answered on December 2, 1941: "I would regret if these operations, carried out in order to safeguard Finland, would bring my country into a conflict with England, and I will be deeply grieved if you will consider yourself forced to declare war upon Finland. It was kind of you to send me a personal message in these trying days, and I have fully appreciated it."

Mannerheim was made Marshal of Finland in 1942. On his 75th birthday in the same year Germany's leader Adolf Hitler visited Finland and brought his personal congratulations – however, Mannerheim did not cherish the memory of the visit. He was astonished – not only by the visit – at Hitler's diet: "While the rest of us enjoyed the good but simple dishes, Hitler ate his vegetarian meal washed down with tea and water." On his own visit to Germany Mannerheim again met Hitler and was entertained by Reichsmarshal Göring at his shooting box.

When the Germans were defeated on the eastern front, Mannerheim was in August 1944 appointed the President of Finland to negotiate a separate peace with the Soviet Union. Noteworthy, Mannerheim was never elected to this high public office in a democratic election. The Soviet offensive of June-July 1944 had forced the Finnish army to retreat, and Eastern Karelia and Viipuri were taken by the Red Army. Finland withdrew from the war on September 4, 1944. However, the Germans were still in force in the north. During the fighting between former allies, much of Lapland was laid waste by the German troops. In the autumn of 1945, Mannerheim travelled to Portugal, where he met Dr. Salazar, the Portuguese dictator.

After J. K. Paasikivi became president in 1946, Mannerheim moved to Switzerland, where he lived mainly at the Valmont sanatorium in Montreaux. Much of the old Europe and values of life which he represented were forever gone. The last years of his life Mannerheim devoted to writing his memoirs. He narrated periods of his life to his assistants, among them General Heinrichs and Colonel Paasonen, who wrote the text for the future book. Mannerheim also revised the manuscript and sometimes made considerable alterations. During this period, his close friend was Countess Gertrud Arco-Valley, who claimed in a letter in 1953 that she gave Mannerheim the inspiration for his memoirs.

Mannerheim died in Lausanne on January 27, 1951. His body was brought to Finland, and he was buried at the Hietaniemi Heroes' Cemetery with full military honours. However, because of political reasons, the government – except Prime Minister Urho Kekkonen and Foreign Minister Åke Gartz – did not participate in the mourning ceremonies. Mannerheim's equestrian statue, sculpted by Aimo Tukiainen, was unveiled in 1960. When the Museum of Modern Art, Kiasma, was built near the statue, critics in a wide public debate in the late 1990's argued that a curved aluminium wall was not a proper background for the statue.

Mannerheim has been subject of many novels, including Paavo Rintala's trilogy *Mummoni ja Mannerheim* (1960), *Mummoni ja marsalkka* (1961), *Mummon ja marsalkan tarinat* (1963), Jari Tervo's *Troikka* (2008), Hannu Raittila's *Marsalkka* (2010); Raija Oranen's *Metsästäjän sydän* (2011) - Plays: *Mummo ja Marski* by Paavo Rintala (1968-69); *Päämajassa* (1966) and *Jääkäri Ståhl* (1979) by Ilmari Turja; *Mannerheim Puolassa* by Antti Tuuri (1984); *Tie Talvisotaan* by Heikki Ylikangas (1989); *Airo ja Brita* by Paavo Haavikko (1999); *Mannerheim, mies moneksi* by Laila Hietamies (1999); *Nuori Mannerheim* by Terttu Savola (2000) - Further reading: The most comprehensive biography of Mannerheim was written by Stig Jägerskiöld: *Nuori Mannerheim* (1964); *Gustaf Mannerheim 1906-1917* (1965); *Mannerheim 1918* (1967); *Valtionhoitaja Mannerheim* (1969); *Marshall Mannerheim & the Finns* by Oliver Warner (1967); *Mannerheim rauhan vuosina 1920-1939* (1973); *Talvisodan ylipäällikkö* (1976); *Suomen marsalkka, Gustaf Mannerheim 1941-1944* (1981); *Viimeiset vuodet 1944-1951* (1982) - Other studies: *Mannerheim: Mannerheim Suomen kohtaloissa 1-2* by Erik Heinrichs (1957, 1959); *Valikoiva Mannerheim-bibliografia 1906-1967 - A Select Bibliography of Marshal Mannerheim* by J.E.O. Screen (1967); *The Years of Preparation* by J.E.O. Screen (1970); *C.G. Mannerheim* by Veijo Meri (1989); *Mannerheim, tsarin kenraali* by Leonod Vlasov (1996); *Mannerheim: kuvaelämäkerta* by Matti Klinge (1993); *Mannerheim: tuttu ja tuntematon*, by Sampo Ahto et al. (1997); *Mannerheim kaskujen kuvastimessa, koonnut Tauno Bergholm* (1997); *Mannerheim: upseeri ja tutkimusmatkailija* by Leonid Vlasov (1997); *Mannerheimin matkassa* by Paavo Friman (1998); *C.G. Mannerheim in Central Asia 1906-1908*, ed. by Petteri Koskikallio and Asko Lehmuskallio (1999); *Päämaja - Suomen*

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Selected works:

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Resa genom Asia, 1940 - Matka Aasian halki: päiväkirja matkalta Kaspianmeri-Peking (suom. Emerik Olsoni, 1940) - Across Asia from West to East in 1906-1908 (transl. by Edward Birse, 1940; revised by Harry Halén, 2008)

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C. G. Mannerheimin valokuvia Aasian matkalta 1906-1908 =
Photographs by C. G. Mannerheim from his Journey Across Asia 1906-1908, 1990 (ed. by Peter Sandberg) - C. G. Mannerheims fotografier från asienresan 1906-1908 = Photographs by C. G. Mannerheim from his Journey Across Asia 1906-1908, 1990 (edited by Peter Sandberg)

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