PART FOUR
WARS OF MEMORY
CHAPTER TEN

SHIFTING IMAGES OF “OUR WARS”
FINNISH MEMORY CULTURE OF WORLD WAR II

Tiina Kinnunen & Markku Jokisipilä

You could hear the old General’s shaky voice all the more often and in all the more surprising contexts: he was driven around to speak to schoolchildren and youth, they even took him to a hockey arena locker room when the national team was playing against Sweden. He told the youngsters about sacrifice and heroes, of men, who knew how to die—men who weren’t lambs.¹

This notion by a Finnish journalist of the last two decades’ memory production related to Finnish history in World War II is felicitous. The general in question is Adolf Ehrnrooth (1905–2004), who was from the collapse of the Soviet Union until his death assiduous in propagating an image of bravery and self-sacrifice of the Finnish combatants, who clinched a victory in terms of preventing the Red Army from occupying Finland in 1940 and 1944, and, thus, safeguarded Finland’s independence. This legacy of national pride and determination should be cherished by present and future Finnish generations. The prominent role reserved for General Ehrnrooth in contemporary Finnish publicity indicates that World War II is still strongly present in the Finnish collective memory. In the field of public history culture the wars of 1939–44 are remembered and both the fallen soldiers and the still-living war veterans are commemorated in various ways. The memory of war is preserved—and reproduced—through a variety of publications, memorial days, cultural events, public speeches and visits to important memorial sites, especially the military cemeteries called “Hero’s Cemeteries” in Finnish.

Finns can be said to have a close relationship with the past of their nation first and foremost through the memory of the Winter War

¹ Ilkka Malmberg, Tuntemattomat sotilaat (Helsinki, 2007), p. 191, all the translations here and hereafter by Markku Jokisipilä.