

Idealists or Adventurers? The Swedish volunteers in Estonia in 1919

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Swedish volunteers fought alongside the Finns and the Danes in the Estonian War of Independence. Sweden had been neutral in World War I, but some 1,000 Swedish volunteers had fought in the Finnish War of Independence in the first half of 1918. Many of those Swedish fighters were among the volunteers who came from Finland to Estonia in 1919. 'The Swedish corps' – in fact a company – spent nearly half a year in Estonia and was disbanded in the beginning of June 1919. The unit did not play a significant military role; for the most part, it attracted the attention of the Swedish public with several scandals. There were quite a few volunteers who did not return home. Some men joined the Estonian Army, but some also ended up in Russian White Guard units, as well as in Latvia or Lithuania. Major Carl Mothander, the commander of the Swedish volunteers, is known in Sweden, Estonia and Finland thanks to his memoirs. Captain Einar Lundborg became a pilot after returning to Sweden. He is renowned for rescuing the Italian Arctic explorer, Umberto Nobile, from an ice field in 1928.

In 1915, Germany made an attempt to convince Sweden to join her against Russia on the eastern front. The bait was the prospect of future Swedish influence in Finland and the Baltic countries, or 'the Baltic provinces' as the Germans put it. The proposal was rejected in Stockholm, but the Germans had understood that Sweden's had genuine strategic interest for the political development on the eastern shore of the Baltic Sea.¹

¹ Torsten Gihl, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, IV, 1914-1919 (Stockholm: P. A. Norstedt & söners förlag, 1951), passim; Wilhelm M. Carlgren, *Neutralität oder Allianz: Deutschland Beziehungen zur Schweden in den Anfangsjahren des ersten Weltkrieges* (Stockholm: Alm-

When Finland declared its independence from Russia in December 1917 the Finnish ambitions were highly supported in Sweden, but the Swedish government did not want to get deeply involved in Finland, especially not after outbreak of the war between the Finnish government and the Red guards in January 1918. The situation was made more complicated by the fact that the Swedish government consisted of a coalition between liberals and social democrats, and the latter were divided in their opinions about the Civil War in Finland. However, some 1,100 Swedish volunteers fought on the White side during that war, most of them in a Swedish brigade. This is an important background for understanding the Swedish policy towards Estonia in 1919.

Sweden and Finland 1918²

Directly at the outbreak of the hostilities in Finland in January 1918 an intense propaganda in favour of the White side started in Sweden. Swedish and Finnish contacts had taken place for several years and the government in Vasa had also begun to buy tents, blankets, medicine and other supplies in Sweden. But the Swedish government, a coalition between liberals and social democrats, did not allow shipments of weapons and ammunition from Germany to White Finland crossing Swedish territorial waters. However, some of these shipments took place anyway and were even escorted by vessels from the Swedish navy, in order to protect them from attacks by ships of the Russian Baltic navy. This whole escort operation took place with the active support of the Swedish minister of naval affairs Erik Palmstierna, a social democrat.

While the Swedish government to a large extent regarded the war between Whites and Reds in Finland as a struggle about social issues and reforms, many others in Sweden, mainly within the sphere of the political

qvist & Wiksell, 1962), passim; Wilhelm M. Carlgren, *Sverige och Baltikum. Från mellankrigstid till efterkrigsår. En översikt* (Stockholm: Publica, 1993), 11–20.

² This part is, when nothing else is said, based upon Gihl, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia IV*, 339–391; Tobias Berglund & Niclas Sennerteg, *Finska inbördeskriget* (Stockholm: Natur & Kultur, 2017).

right, regarded the war as a Finnish fight for independence from Russia. In these circles the sympathy for the white Finland was strong.

Among the social democrats – although the party majority belonged to the reformist part of the party – many felt sympathies for their Finnish social democratic comrades, although they did not accept revolt against the legal government. During the whole war leading Swedish social democrats tried, in vain, to mediate between the White government and the rebellious Reds in Finland.

During the spring of 1917 the radical left wing broke away from the Swedish Social Democratic Party and formed Sweden's Social Democratic Leftist Party, which in 1921 developed into a Soviet-loyal Communist Party as a section of the Comintern, from which all free thinking was excluded. In these circles the sympathies for the Red side in Finland were strong, and some also wanted to see a similar development in Sweden as in Finland.

In the elections in Sweden during the autumn 1917 the Social Democrats got about a third of the votes, while the Liberals and the Right got around a quarter each. Two farmer's parties got eight percent altogether, and about that many were won by the Leftist Socialists. Neither in the Riksdag nor among the popular opinion were there any widespread sympathy for a violent transformation of the society, although political and social tensions were very high also in Sweden, particularly from the spring of 1917 to the late autumn of 1918.³

At the same time there were deep sympathies for Finland, which had deep historical reasons. Until the Russian conquest in 1809 Finland had for 650 years been an integral part of Sweden and for many in Sweden, all over the political spectrum, the emotional feelings for Finland were still deep. The fact that Finland also had a large minority of Swedish-speaking people also played an important role in the feelings.

Estonia had of course also been a part of the Swedish Empire, but 'only' for 150 years (160 years formally speaking),⁴ and also here there

³ Aleksander Kan, *Hemmabolsjevikerna. Den svenska socialdemokratin, ryska bolsjevikerna och mensjevikerna under världskriget och revolutionsåren 1914–1920* (Stockholm: Carlssons bokförlag, 2005); Carl Göran Andrae, *Revolt eller reform: Sverige inför revolutionerna i Europa 1917–1918* (Stockholm: Carlssons bokförlag, 1998).

⁴ Province of Estonia (Estland) during 1561–1710/1721, Livonia (Livland) from 1629–1710/1721 and Saaremaa (Ösel) from 1645–1710/1721.

was a small Swedish-speaking minority. But the differences between Finland and Estonia were still significant, which explains the differences in the Swedish commitment for the efforts of the two states towards independence.

Since Sweden, on 4 January 1918, recognised Finland's independence, and when fighting broke out at the end of that month, a Swedish volunteer brigade with a total of 1,100 men was formed and served with the White side during the war. Many Swedish officers also worked in the staffs of the White army and thus contributed to its professional skill. Among other operations the Swedish brigade participated in the hard battles for Tampere (Tammerfors) that fell into the hands of the White army on 6 April 1918.

A problem in the relations between Sweden and Finland was the question of the Åland islands, its Swedish-speaking population trying, without success, to unite with Sweden. At the turn of February and March of 1918 a Swedish expeditionary force landed on Åland, where the tsarist-Russian garrison had formed soldier's soviets, while Estonian, Latvian, Polish and Ukrainian soldiers in the garrison began to organise their own units with their national flags.

The main task for the Swedish forces was to protect the Swedish-speaking population on the Åland islands if violence would break out. That mission was accomplished but after some days the situation was complicated when a German naval task force arrived and landed German army troops on Åland. In that situation the Swedes decided to withdraw their forces, so they would not be drawn into a fighting with the Germans and thus become part of the ongoing World War.

The non-Russian soldiers of the former tsarist garrison were evacuated by the Swedes, while the Russian were captured by the Germans. Eventually, all these soldiers were repatriated, along different routes, back to their native countries.

Even if the Swedish Åland operation had a humanitarian purpose, there was in Finland, both among the White government in Vasa as well as among the Reds in Helsinki, a growing suspicion that the government in Stockholm had a hidden agenda concerning Åland. Among the Swedish-speaking population on Åland there had been strong efforts to

convince the Swedish government that the islands should be transferred from Finland to Sweden.

Any official Swedish politics striving for that goal can't be traced in 1918, although the minister for naval affairs, the social democrat Erik Palmstierna obviously had that ambition. However, Sweden under the social democrat Hjalmar Branting's time as a premier from 1920 had the ambition to annex the Åland islands via negotiations, but Finland's resistance was absolute. The question was finally settled in favour of Finland in the League of Nations in 1921.⁵

The Question of Support for Estonia

In late September 1918, Jaan Tõnisson, then representative of the Republic of Estonia in Scandinavia, met Sweden's foreign minister Johannes Hellner (liberal) and the minister of the navy Erik Palmstierna (social democrat). Tõnisson pledged for Swedish military assistance – at least two army regiments – to control Estonia's internal security until the new republic had been able to build up a defence force of its own. Tõnisson stressed on the threat from the Russian Bolshevik units in Petrograd. The Swedish forces, he thought, should improve calm and order until an Estonian legislative assembly had been elected.

During October and November 1918 Tõnisson made several attempts to convince Sweden's government of the necessity of a military involvement in Estonia. Similar suggestions also came from the United States and Great Britain. Even the provisional Russian government – via its Foreign Minister Mikhail Ivanovich Tereshchenko – joined this 'activist' camp.

⁵ The Åland question is analysed in Berglund & Sennerteg, *Finska inbördeskriget*, 216–241; Lars Ericson (Wolke), "Politiska flyktingar eller krigsfångar? Behandlingen av de estniska, lettiska, polska och ukrainska soldaterna på Åland vårvintern 1918" – *Meddelande* 53, *Armémuseum* 1993 (Stockholm: Armémuseum, 1993), 71–106. The Åland debate at the League of Nations is examined in Torbjörn Norman, "Slutakt med efterspel. Ålandsuppgörelsen, Sverige och Nationernas förbund" – Torbjörn Norman, *Hjalmar Branting, freden och Folkens förbund samt andra studier i svensk och nordisk 1900-talshistoria*, edited by Karl Molin and Alf W. Johansson (Stockholm: Hjalmarsson & Högberg, 2014), 103–144. Important is also Kenneth Gustavsson, *Ålandsöarna – en säkerhetsrisk? Spelet om den demilitariserade zonen 1919–1939* (Mariehamn: PQR-kultur, 2012).



*Members of Estonian foreign delegation in Copenhagen in 1918.
From the right: Karl Menning, Jaan Tõnisson and Mihkel Martna.
Estonian National Archives (RA), EFA.180.A.58.64*

The Swedish government, similar to the Danish government, however did not want to send her own forces to Estonia, where they could be drawn into the greater conflict in Russia. Britain's impatience with the Scandinavian governments was manifested when the Royal Navy was sent into the Baltic Sea in late November 1918, just after the collapse of Germany as well as the Bolshevik offensive against Narva.

The vice-consul in Tallinn, Karl Erik Gahlnbäck, on November 12 sent a telegram to Stockholm, in which he urged the government to send troops to secure the situation in Estonia. But the response from the Foreign Office in Stockholm was negative. In early December the three Nordic countries broke their diplomatic relations with Red Russia, but the recognition of Estonia was postponed until the Peace Treaty of Tartu was signed on 2 February 1920.⁶

⁶ Lars Ericson (Wolke), "Sweden and Estonia's struggle for Independence, 1918–1920" – "The Boys from the North." *The Nordic Volunteers in Estonia's War of Independence, 1918–1920*,

The first Finnish volunteers arrived in Tallinn in late December 1918, among them the 1st Finnish Volunteer Corps under command of a former Swedish NCO Martin Ekström. He had served with Uppland's artillery regiment (A 5) in Uppsala between 1906 and 1911, before he joined the Swedish-organized gendarmerie in Persia (Iran) that was set up between 1911 and 1915.⁷ Between 1914 and 1915 he, together with a handful of other Swedish officers from the Persian Gendarmerie, fought for German and Persian troops against both Russian and British units in the parts of the Ottoman Empire that were to be the state of Iraq.⁸ In 1916 he returned to Sweden and became a sergeant in the reserve of his former regiment, Uppland's artillery, before he in January 1918 joined Mannerheim's White army in Finland. There he was promoted to major, commander of a battalion and after the capture of Tampere the commander of the Vasa regiment. He was one of numerous Swedish officers that served in Finnish units of Mannerheim's White army, and not in the Swedish volunteer Brigade.

In Ekström's Corps there were some 100 Swedish-speaking men from Finland as well as native Swedes that have fought in Finland during the spring of 1918. They participated in the operations against Rakvere and Narva in 1919.

After the war Ekström would return to Finland and settled in Vasa, but later moved back to Sweden. Later during his career he joined some

edited by Lars Ericson (Wolke) (Tallinn: State Archives, Stockholm: Riksarkivet, Copenhagen: Rigsarkivet, Helsinki: Sotaarkisto, 1993), 19–24; John Hiden/Karlis Kangeris, “Die schwedische Baltikumpolitik 1918–25” – *The Baltic in international relations between the two world wars*, edited by Aleksander Loit (Stockholm: The University of Stockholm, 1988), 187–207. The Swedish volunteers are seen in a broader perspective in John Chrispinsson, *Den glömda historien. Om svenska öden och äventyr i öster under tusen år* (Stockholm: Norstedts, 2011), 263–348. See also Tobias Berglund and Niclas Sennerteg, *Baltikums befrielse* (Stockholm: Natur och Kultur, 2023).

⁷ Markus Ineichen, *Die schwedischen Offiziere in Persien (1911–1916): Friedensengel, Weltgendarmen oder Handelsagenten einer Kleinmacht im ausgehenden Zeitalter des Imperialismus* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2002).

⁸ Lars Ericson Wolke, “Sweden, the Western world and the war that saw the birth of Iraq: implications of the events in 1914–1921 for the present conflict” – *The Iraq War. European perspectives on politics, strategy and operations*, edited by Jan Hallenberg and Håkan Karlsson (London, New York: Routledge, 2005), 98–117.

of the rather small Nazi parties in Sweden, for a time as the leader of the so called National Socialist Block. During the Winter War of 1939–1940 he served both with the Swedish volunteer Corps and the regular Finnish army.⁹

During the Christmas of 1918, an Estonian delegation visited Stockholm, where they negotiated with several Swedish officers about the establishment of a Swedish volunteer force. The recruiting campaign started in January 1919 after the government in Stockholm had, on 30 December 1918, given its permission for volunteers to go to Estonia. At the same time an intense press opinion from Social Democratic and Socialist newspapers acted against the recruitment campaign.

In Stockholm plans were drawn for a Corps of some 4,000 men, but in reality the result was much less successful. During the month of January 1919 smaller groups of volunteers arrived in Tallinn, where they were placed in different units. Together with Ekström's Corps there were some 40 Swedes in Colonel Kalm's Finnish Regiment, about ten Swedes in Estonian units and a dozen men in Baron Georg Stackelberg's Baltic Battalion in Tartu.

Most of the Swedes however were gathered in the Swedish Corps, called in Estonian 'Rootsi Korpus Eestimaal'. After the liberation of Narva from the Bolsheviks on 19 January 1919, where Martin Ekström's unit played an important role, the town became a base for the Swedish Corps. During the following weeks at least four Swedes were killed in action in Narva.¹⁰

The former Swedish NCO Carl Mothander started to build up the Corps in Narva together with his 'Chief of Combat' Karl Georg Malm-

⁹ Sivert Wester, *Martin Ekström: orädd frivillig i fem krig* (Stockholm: Militärhistoriska förlaget, 1985). See also Bengt Rur, "Värjans egg: några svenska militärer hemma och ute" – *Krig och fred i källorna. Årsbok för Riksarkivet och landsarkiven 1998*, edited by Kerstin Abukhanfusa (Stockholm: Riksarkivet, 1998), 218–230.

¹⁰ The History of the Swedish volunteers has to be written with the help of scattered private archives, since no files of the Swedish Corps itself has been preserved, see Ericson (Wolke), *Sweden and Estonia's struggle for Independence* as well as references made in the following beneath. Important are also the documents in the Swedish War Archive (Krigsarkivet, henceforth KrA): Generalstaben, Utrikesavdelningen, former secret archive, E I a Estland, Lettland, Litauen volume 1, 1919–1925.



Swedish volunteers in Narva, 1919.

Estonian History Museum, AM _ 4403:13 F 4265

berg, also a former Swedish NCO who among other merits had served in the Belgian army in Congo. Between 1883 and 1902, 44 Swedish officers had served in the army and the navy of the Congo Free State, the Force Publique, whose owner and commander was the Belgian king Leopold II. Not less than 22 of them died of diseases during the service in Congo or after their return home.

The Congo Free State was a pattern card of oppression and human abuse to that extent that the Belgian state took control of it as a colony in 1908. The military men that had served there and survived had both been hardened and procured as professionals.¹¹

During the following months Swedish volunteers, together with some Finnish-Swedes and Danes gathered in Narva, where their salary was paid by the Estonian government. Mothander himself after a while established a headquarter in room number 6 at Hôtel Du Nord in Tallinn,

¹¹ Lars Ericson (Wolke), *Svenska frivilliga. Militära uppdrag i utlandet under 1800- och 1900-talen* (Lund: Historiska Media, 1996), 176–184.



Group of Swedish volunteers in Estonia, 1919. Estonian War Museum – General Laidoner Museum, KLM FT 1018:5 F

together with a recruiting officer, a quartermaster and a cashier. In Narva (the now) captain Malmberg was in command.

A lot of money, meant for wages and uniforms, disappeared without any trace on their way from Tallinn to Narva. This obvious embezzlement resulted in a steep fall of the morale within the Swedish Corps.

Obviously there was a relatively large amount of adventurers within the Swedish Corps, whose interest for the professional goal was drastically reduced when their personal salaries disappeared into someone else's pockets. In that situation something dramatic occurred.

On 1 March 1919 one of the Swedes who served with Baron Stackelberg's battalion in southern Estonia arrived to Narva. This Swede had been given the task to recruit countrymen from the Swedish Corps to the Baltic-German battalion. Stackelberg obviously had analysed the situation correctly. The Corps in Narva was at risk to be totally dissolved, and then Stackelberg wanted to be able to recruit the best men to his own unit.

The Destiny of Giuseppe Franchi

The man given this task of recruitment was Giuseppe Franchi, a military musician, a trumpeter, of Italian heritage. Franchi had served with the Swedish brigade in Finland, and in Estonia he had chosen to join Stackelberg's battalion in Tartu. Now he was walking among countrymen in Narva and tempted them with the possibility to serve under more professional circumstances in the Baltic battalion. The nervous leadership in the Swedish Corps in Narva immediately reacted on Franchi's attempts of recruitment.

He was arrested and accused for spreading calls for mutiny. After a short court-martial led by Karl Georg Mothander, but with the lack of support in both Estonian and Swedish law, Giuseppe Franchi was sentenced to death. He was immediately executed at the bank of the Narva river by a firing squad consisting of three men from the Swedish Corps.

With the death of Giuseppe Franchi in Narva a remarkable personal destiny was ended, half a century since his ancestor Anton Franchi arrived from Parma in Italy to Stockholm, where he established himself as one of the leading names in the growing Italian colony in the Swedish capital, working as an organ grinder, caster of plaster and ice-cream salesman.

The murder on Franchi resulted in an intense debate in Sweden and the newspapers attacked the conditions within the Corps in Narva. The government in Stockholm had to promise harsh measures taken against the guilty, as well as also Estonian authorities began to investigate the fateful court-martial.

On 31 March 1919, three weeks after the shots in Narva, the field-priest of the Corps Axel Lord wrote to the Foreign Department and defended the acting of the court-martial. Franchi was accused of having "deserted from the Swedish Corps" at an earlier time, and well back in Narva he "had agitated among private soldiers and men of commanding degree in Narva". Lord did not believe in Franchi's statement that he had been given a promise by Stackelberg that he should be the commander of the unit he hopefully would recruit in Narva.

Besides that Axel Lord, in an obvious attempt to give more authority over the activities of the Corps, told the Foreign Department in Stock-



Officers of the Swedish volunteer corps. Captain Einar Lundborg in center, Bo Samzelius in Swedish uniform on his right hand. February 1919. RA, EFA.114.2.140

holm that Martin Ekström had been informed about and had accepted the decision of the court-martial. This was obviously a clear lie, or at least wrong if not a deliberate lie. Lord also underlined that the Estonian authorities had studied the matter, under the direct command of the military prosecutor, and the Commander-in-Chief General Johan Laidoner on 29 March had signed an order that freed the men involved in the murder of Franchi. The question is if the Estonian authorities could have acted in any other way. They were depending on all assistance they could get, and did not afford to make the volunteers hostile.

In the autumn of 1919 Axel Lord came into conflict with Karl Georg Malmberg and several other members of the court-martial. Now he changed his version of the story and on 28 October sent a new letter to the Foreign Department in Stockholm. Now he demanded that the trial against Franchi should be investigated according to Swedish law and rejected the acting of the Estonian authorities and General Laidoner.

In that situation the Chancellor of Justice (Justitiekanslern) in Stockholm started an investigation but this was not about whether the composition and work of the court-martial had been correct according to the Swedish military law.

The chancellor focused on the question of whether Estonia was to be regarded as an independent country with independent judicial institutions and, as a result of the first question, if General Laidoner's order of 29 March could be regarded as a legitimate government issue according to diplomatic rules?

Sweden had not *de jure* recognised Estonia, but if the legal advisors of the Foreign Department answered no on the first question it would result in a *de facto* recognition of Soviet-Russia's supremacy over Estonia, which of course was impossible for political reasons. But with a yes on the first question followed a yes on the second, and with that the chancellor ended his investigation on 6 February 1920. The fact that the court-martial's attorney Färling was a Finnish citizen and neither Estonian nor Swedish was mentioned. Thus both Swedish and Finnish citizens of this irregular unit were involved in this 'affair'.

Whatever the diplomats figured out of this case, it resulted in a lot of articles in leading Swedish newspapers, most of them not very flattering for the Swedish Corps.¹²

Thus, no member of the court-martial was ever to be brought to justice, although several members were 'marked' in Sweden, and after the end of the war in Estonia drifted further into other wars in the Baltic countries and eastern Europe. They could return home later on, when the worst outrage had calmed down.

Franchi's dead body was sent home to Stockholm and he was buried at the Catholic cemetery there on 14 April 1919.¹³

¹² See for instance the article in conservative daily Svenska Dagbladet on 4 April 1919 which concluded that Franchi "made mutiny against mutineers", Svenska Dagbladet, Historiskt sidarkiv, www.svd.se/arkiv/1919-04-04/9.

¹³ Ericson (Wolke), "Sweden and Estonia's struggle for Independence, 1918–1920"; Einar Lundborg's handwritten memoirs from Estonia, KrA, Einar Lundborg's arkiv, vol. 2; Riksarkivet (henceforth RA), Utrikesdepartementet, 1902 års dossiersystem vol. 2210-02/U/37:1 vol. 1813 among others. For Franchi's family background see Christian Catomeris, *Gipskattor och*

The dissolution of the Swedish volunteer Corps

The tragic destiny of Franchi symbolized the moral state of dissolution of the Swedish Corps.

The Swedish officers involved were stripped of their authorities and were placed under the direct command of the Ministry of War in Tallinn. After that the whole Corps was transferred from Narva. On March 30 the Swedes left Narva and were moved to Paldiski, before they after a few days went south, now placed under the command of major Lambert Hällén. In southern Estonia the Swedish Corps joined an Estonian reconnaissance battalion and participated in the fighting around the villages Podlesye and Mitkovitsy (Madgrovnets) around April 10.

The following weeks several members of the Corps left for other units, among them Stackelberg's battalion. In early May only 68 men remained according to Hällén, together with some 50 wounded in field hospitals. Major Hällén suggested to the Estonian government on May 15 that a new Swedish Volunteer Corps should be recruited, but the idea was rejected by General Laidoner with the words: "I think that one attempt is enough. Too large costs and too little use of such units." The Swedish Corps was disbanded in early June 1919.

Many Swedes stayed in Estonia but served in Finnish and Danish units, as well as in the Estonian army and White Russian units.

Axel Lord during the late spring of 1919 came to be hostile toward Karl Georg Malmberg, most likely since Malmberg denied Lord the position as field priest on the armoured train 'Pskovchanin' and within the Swedish legion that had joined the White Russian forces. Once the White Russian had been forced to retreat and the Commander, General Nikolai Yudenich had left Tallinn later in 1919, Axel Lord stayed in Estonia and began to produce a number of letters to Estonian and Swedish authorities (not the least to consul Gahlnbäck), where he demanded money that he thought others owned him. During that time Lord made his living on 'banker activities' in Estonia before he returned to Sweden. Axel Lord passed away on 5 January 1934 before his 60th birthday.

positive. Italianare i Stockholm 1896–1910 (Stockholm: Kommittén för Stockholmsforskning, 1988), *passim*.

Swedish volunteers on the White Russian side

After the dissolution of the Swedish Corps in the summer of 1919 a minor group of Swedes joined General Judenich's White North-Western Russian Army, which was fighting together with the Estonian forces against the Bolsheviks. Some 200 men under the command of Karl Georg Malmberg formed 'The Swedish White Legion of the Russian North-Western Army'. Albert Flenberg became the chief's adjutant in the Legion, however, the number of national Swedes in the Legion never exceeded 20–30 men. Several of them returned home while some continued to serve with the Estonians. This Legion never counted more than a company, including several Baltic Germans and persons of other nationalities.

Many of the Swedish veterans could not return home after their service in Finland and Estonia, and one of them, Conrad Carlsson, described their situation in a book two decades later: "We have nothing to look forward to. We have to live for the day. We cannot go home, that much we know. No one would dare to give us work. No one from the class that most of us belong to would acknowledge us. Only the fronts will accept us."

The Swedish trade unions blacklisted many of the veterans from Finland and Estonia, while especially those with a background among industrial workers or crofters found it difficult to find a job in Sweden after the war.

Instead the White Swedish Legion was filled with soldiers that most likely had got to know each other during the fighting in Estonia during the spring of 1919; Swedes, Baltic Germans, Danes and Finnish. Weapons and ammunition came from British shipments. Judenich also succeeded to get financial support from Sweden, although it is not clear exactly how. While the governments in Helsinki and Tallinn were very much split in their attitudes towards Judenich, it was easier for him to find supporters in Stockholm, although not with the Social Democrats and Liberals in the government. The Finnish and Estonian governments were very suspicious towards Judenitch and his White army for the simple reason that, despite that they had the same Bolshevik enemy, the White Russian forces had never accepted the dissolution of

the tsarist Empire, while Lenin's government had recognized Finland's independence.

In the beginning of the autumn of 1919 the Swedish Legion operated together with White Russian forces south and east of lake Peipus, around Pskov, Gdov and further north towards Narva. The operational base of the Swedes was an armoured train, and it contained the hardened core of the Swedish volunteers in Estonia. One of the Swedes described it as follows: "It is an elite unit that Malmberg is commanding now. All the weaklings in the Swedish Corps have gone home."

All the Swedes did not, however, fight in the same unit. The soldiers in the Legion formed battle groups of 20–30 men each (equivalent to platoons) and were equipped with one or two machine guns for each group. According to some, unconfirmed rumours, their task was to give 'moral support' during the Russian attacks, i.e. to shoot the Russian soldier that tried to flee the battlefield without any order given for retreat.

Malmberg commanded 30 men under General Stanisław Bułak-Bałachowicz, 20 men under the officer Franzon served in the Semyonovsky regiment at Gdov, while a 'group Eklund' fought in Akovs regiment at lake Peipus, whereas 'group Dahlgren' was fighting at Volodino.

When the White Army on midsummer eve began to retreat from Ingria, the Swedish Legion together with some other units, was given the task to cover the retreat from positions near Jamburg (Jama, now Kingisepp). Several Swedes were wounded during the fighting that night, but they managed to survive since their enemy – Red Finnish cadets from an officer's school in Petrograd – offered them ten minutes armistice. Thanks to that the Swedish Legion managed to retreat from its positions and reunite with the main White force further towards the West.

At the end of October 1919 Judenich's forces once again were stopped, this time just outside Petrograd and then pressed back westwards. In January 1920 General Judenich himself left Tallinn while the rest of his army – some 10,000 soldiers and 20,000 civilians – began to fall apart. Already on 8 September Pskov had fallen into the hands of the Red Army. The defeat of the White Russian army also resulted in the downfall of the Swedish white Legion. After an advancement as far east as Detskoje Selo (Tsarskoye Selo before 1918, since 1937 Pushkin) also the Swedes had to

retreat towards the west and around the turn of the year 1919–1920 the Legion was disbanded.¹⁴

The final chapter of the Swedish volunteers in Estonia

After the dissolution of the Swedish Legion in white Russian service some of the soldiers returned home to Sweden, while others for different reasons neither could nor would want to return to their native land. Some stayed east of the Baltic Sea, among them Malmberg.

In March 1920 he was awarded with a piece of land in Estonia by the Estonian government. But during the 1920s Malmberg began to engage in the lucrative smuggling of cheap Estonian spirits to Sweden and Finland. During a winter tour his boat was unscrewed by the ice in the Gulf of Finland and Malmberg's both legs were so severely wounded that he for the rest of his life only managed to walk with two sticks.

Later Malmberg's career as a smuggler came to a brutal end when a competing smuggler gang blew up both him and his boat in the Finnish Gulf. His colleague Carl Mothander later (1943) talked positively about Malmberg's leadership and ability to take decisions. Mothander characterized Malmberg as "ruthless and hard as flintstone".

Other more wind-driven individuals could, for several reasons, not settle in a peaceful Sweden. Some of them in 1920 joined the French Foreign Legion, while others followed the white Russian General Bułak-Bałachowicz, who went to Poland together with a number of Russian soldiers. But the Poles established strict control over this unit, and most of the little Swedish group then gave up and soon left Poland. They were assisted by the Swedish military attaché in Warsaw, Carl Petersén. He had served with the Swedish gendarmerie in Persia, and later came to be

¹⁴ Ericson (Wolke), *Svenska frivilliga*, 184–190. Some documents concerning the Swedish Legion are kept in KrA, Einar Lundborgs arkiv, vol. 2–3. The Legion's activities are described in Conrad Carlsson, *Okänd svensk soldat* (Stockholm: Bonnier, 1937) although that book is partly highly unreliable. The Legion is also partly mentioned in Kaido Jaanson, *Soldiers of Fortune. Volunteers from Sweden and Denmark in the Estonian Civil War 1918–1920* (Tallinn: Perioodika, 1988).

the one who during the Second World War organised the secret Swedish military intelligence.

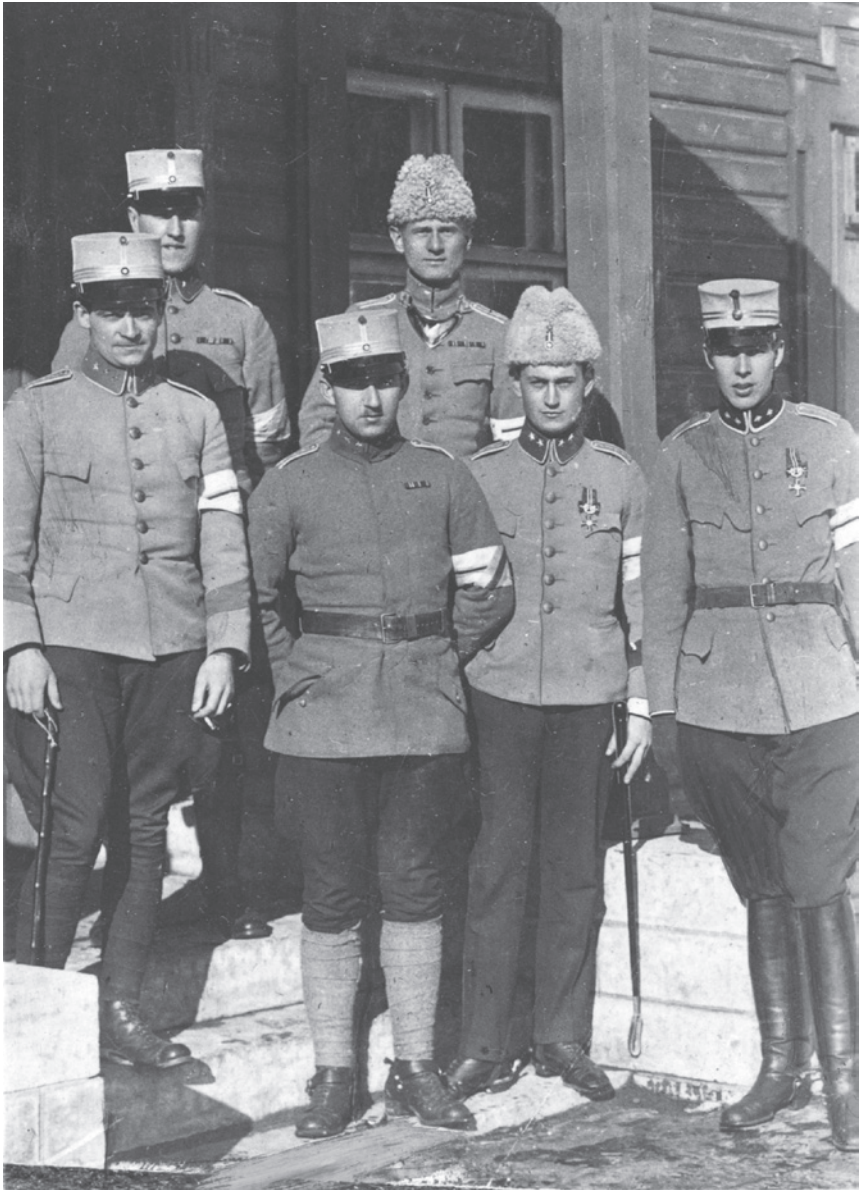
With the assistance of Petersén a handful of Swedes went to Danzig where they got aboard the Swedish ship *Egil*, and with that they travelled, via Riga, to Stockholm. The receiving was, however, not so honourable: in the harbour of Stockholm the CID (Criminal Investigation Department) police waited for questioning and de-lousing, before the veterans could travel further to their respective communities.

But many of the veterans had already experienced too much to be able to adjust to a normal life at home, or as Conrad Carlsson wrote much later: “We are root-less in our society. Betrayed on both profession and work. Without any peace of mind. Doomed to go under.” His words can be said about many of the Swedes that served in Estonia in 1919.

Swedish activities in Latvia and Lithuania¹⁵

There was also an attempt to create a Swedish brigade to fight the Bolsheviks in Latvia. The driving force was lieutenant Nils David Edlund, one of the most skilled Russia experts of the Swedish General Staff, and Gustaf Hallström, later a famous archaeologist. In February 1919, Edlund arrived by boat from Stockholm to Liepāja. There he was searched by customs officers and they discovered a document that seemed to be a plan for a coup d'état in Latvia, supported by Baltic German groups as well as German and white Russian forces. A part of this plan was a Swedish volunteer Corps for Latvia. The idea was to restore a Baltic German duchy in Latvia and Estonia. But now the plan collapsed when it still was on paper.

¹⁵ These activities have been studied in Lars Ericson (Wolke), “Volunteers in the Baltic? Sweden's support to the National Insurgency in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, 1917–1920” – *Acta: XX. International Colloquium of Military History, 28 August – 3 September 1994, Warsaw, Poland. National Insurgency Movements since 1794*, edited by Tadeusz Panecki and Urszula Olech (Warszawa: Polish Commission for Military History, 1995), 128–140. Important sources concerning Latvia and Lithuania respectively are to be found in KrA, Generalstabens, Utrikesavdelningen, former secret archive, vol. F V:I, KrA, Olof Dahlbecks arkiv, vol. 2 and KrA, Gustaf Hallströms arkiv, vol. 1 and 11–12.



Officers of the Swedish volunteer corps in April 1919 near Petseri. 1st row from the left: Captain Sven Liljencrantz, Company Commander Captain Carl Malmberg, Lieutenant Harry Tammelin, Lieutenant Tenander. 2nd row: Lieutenant Bo Samzelius, Captain Einar Lundborg. RA, EFA.26.0.52055

In Lithuania the Swedish activities were even smaller but still far more successful. Olof Dahlbeck was a naval officer who became Sweden's first military pilot, educated in England in 1911 and in 1914–1915 acted as the Commander of the Swedish naval air force. In 1919 he became colonel and inspector-general of the young Lithuanian air force. That force was formed by German Fokker planes and directed bombing and reconnaissance operations towards Bolshevik positions south and north of Kaunas. Olof Dahlbeck was almost the only Swedish volunteer in Lithuania but had far bigger military importance than the volunteers in Estonia.

Another Swede, the from Finland and Estonia well known Martin Ekström also arrived to Lithuania. Here he examined the possibilities to set up a gendarmerie in Lithuania. He arrived in Kaunas on 15 August 1919.

However, Ekström was very critical toward most of what he saw in Lithuania. When he came to Kaunas Ekström noted: "The impression given was terrible. Met Arnberger and Dahlbeck. Nice." Here Ekström met Olof Dahlbeck and another Swedish volunteer, Arnberg. The following days two other Swedes arrived, Kalle Häger and a person named Jacobsson. Now followed a number of visits both to the Prime Minister and the Minister of the Interior. After that the airport of Kaunas with its station for Zeppelins was inspected. Ekström also was able to participate in an inspection tour over the front in a plane, piloted by a German.

But an inspection tour by car only gave bad impressions: "Start at 07.30 p.m to the front at Dyneburg (Daugavpils). A hell of a night. The car broke five times – then fleas. Two of them, Ugh!"

Martin Ekström had to conclude that there was no prerequisites for the creation of a gendarmerie led by Swedish officers. Both economy and organization had to be improved. In December 1919 a rather disillusioned Ekström left Lithuania. He was rather bitter over what he perceived as weak support from Sweden: "One thinks many times that one doesn't find the right understanding for such a work at home."

Political hesitations towards volunteers in the east¹⁶

The explanations to the most varied level of success for the Swedish volunteer efforts in the Baltic states are among other things to be found in the weak support at home. Among conservatives, especially in the Swedish armed forces, and in parts of the Liberal and Social Democratic parties there was a lot of sympathy for the three countries' striving for independence, as well as their possible function as a barrier towards Russian influence in the future. But many among the liberals and the political left, both social democrats and leftist socialists, were more critical toward this support. The criticism was more loud than the one that had been directed towards the support for the White side in Finland in 1918.

There were also among leading Swedish politicians fundamental doubts whether Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania at all had the ability to survive as independent nations. At a secret meeting with the government on 6 February 1919, the Liberal Prime Minister Nils Edén declared: "They will end up at war with a restored Russia. We would come into war [with Russia] if we participated in this thing."

It was not until the end of the 1920s and the early 1930s that the Swedish military and political establishment began to activate the contacts with the Baltic states. Before that it was individual Swedes that were engaged for these countries, both during the chaotic year of 1919 as well as during the decade that followed.¹⁷

Finally, two of the Swedish volunteers are worth looking into a little bit more: Carl Mothander and Einar Lundborg, since their individual destinies explain much of the destiny of the Swedish volunteer effort more generally.

¹⁶ See the references above in note 1 and 5.

¹⁷ Lars Ericson (Wolke), "Estland och Lettland i svensk marin debatt 1918–1925" – *Forum navale. Skrifter utgivna av Sjöhistoriska samfundet* 48 (Stockholm: Sjöhistoriska samfundet, 1992), 39–55.

Carl Mothander¹⁸

Carl Mothander was born in Stockholm as a son of Axel Fredrik Leonard Mothander, a lawyer who among other things served within the fortification administration. But most important, Carl's father was an alderman and city notary at Stockholm's city court, until his death in 1902.

It was thus not surprising that the son Carl studied law at Uppsala University. But obviously law was not his main interest, instead Carl Mothander enlisted in the army. His unit became Västmanlands trängkår (Logistic Corps; T 5) in Sala, a small garrison town west of Uppsala. In Sala Mothander advanced to the rank of NCO before leaving the army in 1915.

The year 1918 changed Carl Mothander's life when he joined the Swedish brigade in Finland. During the final battle for Viborg in the end of April 1918 he organized the medical care on the White side. From that the step was not far to Estonia and the Swedish Corps in 1919.

Despite the events concerning Franchi's death in Narva Carl Mothander managed to play a rather positive role for the Estonian authorities and he later was promoted major in the Estonian army. He came to settle in Estonia from 1928 and married to the Baltic German baroness Benita von Wrangel (1878–1967) and the couple stayed in Estonia until the Soviet occupation in 1940, when they moved to Stockholm.

Mothander returned to Estonia already in 1941 and began to work for the Estonian Red Cross. In that function he became a member of the International Red Cross Commission that in 1943 investigated the mass graves with murdered Polish officers in Katyn near Smolensk. When the Red Army once again advanced towards Estonia Mothander was also

¹⁸ Besides the references made above concerning the Swedish volunteers Mothander's own reflections concerning Estonia are published in Carl Mothander, *Baroner, bönder och bolsjevik i Estland* (Helsingfors: Holger Schildts förlag, 1943); Estonian translation *Parunid, eestlased ja enamlased* (Tartu: Ilmamaa, 1997, 1998, 2010, 2021) and his *Svenske kungens vita skepp: det äventyrliga spelet om estlandssvenskarna* (Stockholm: Hökerberg, 1949; Estonian translation *Rootsi kuninga valge laev: riskantne mäng rannarootslaste pärast* (Tallinn: Eesti Päevaleht, Akadeemia, 2011 and Tallinn: Hea Lugu, 2017). For the evacuation of the Estonian Swedes in 1943 see Viktor Aman, "Överflyttningen till Sverige" – *En bok om Estlands svenskar 1* (Stockholm: Kulturföreningen Svenska Odlingens Vänner, 1961), 179–264.

Carl Mothander (1886–1965).
Photo from the book *Eesti
Vabadussõda 1918–1920, vol. II*
(Tallinn, 1939), 59



engaged in the evacuation of parts of the Swedish-speaking population in Estonia from the autumn of 1943 to the autumn of 1944. He himself also returned to Sweden where he became a writer.

Already during his years in Estonia Mothander was devoted to writing and published the books *Presidenten: en oblodig revolutionshistoria* (1923) and *Kulinariska kåserier* (1931). In 1949, he described his experiences of the 1943–1944 evacuation of large parts of the Estonian-Swedish population to Sweden in the book *Svenske kungens vita skepp: det äventyrliga spelet om estlandssvenskarna*.

His most important book was *Baroner, bönder och bolsjeviker* (1943) where he told about the time in Estonia in 1919 but mainly during the years from 1928 until 1944. Here large and small subjects are mixed, not the least during the convulsions of the agrarian reform, but also about the reading habits and food culture of the Estonians (both were admired by him).

Carl Mothander must be regarded as the most influential and important person among the very mixed group of Swedish volunteers. He is also the one that, both through marriage and settlement, became loyal

to the young Estonian republic. Among all other thing, he contributed to the spread of knowledge about Estonia in Sweden.

His feelings for Estonia and its destiny during the storms of the 20th century came to expression when Mothander on 7 May 1945 stood upon Regeringsgatan's bridge over Kungsgatan in Stockholm and watched the peace celebrations. Beneath him a huge crowd celebrated the peace that had come to Europe and that Denmark and Norway once again was free after the German occupation. Mothander described his very mixed feelings when he thought about the country, "my wife's native place – that has become my second motherland", where "I have half of my heart". With not so little bitterness he concluded: "Satan's power is crushed, but Beelzebub was alive, the Beelzebub that one in the salvation rave has forgotten."¹⁹

Einar Lundborg²⁰

The most famous of the Swedish volunteers in Estonia, Einar Lundborg, was born in Calcutta in British India, where his parents were missionaries, before the family returned back to Sweden. A part of his childhood he spent in Fornösa outside Motala in Östergötland. After that Einar began a military career and became officer at Svea trängkår (Logistic Corps; T 1) in Örebro. He also served with Västmanlands trängkår (T 5) in Sala, and must have met his colleague-to-be in Estonia Carl Mothander, although Lundborg was an officer and Mothander an NCO.

¹⁹ Mothander, *Svenske kungens vita skepp*, 9–10.

²⁰ KrA, Einar Lundborgs arkiv, vol. 1-4. Einar Lundborg's handwritten memoirs from Estonia are kept in volume 2 and they are published in Estonian: Einar Lundborg, *Soomusautoga Eesti vabadussõjas: minu rindeelamusi 1919–1920* (Lund: Eesti Kirjanike Kooperatiiv, 1968 and Tallinn: Grenader, 2012). His documents about the Nobile rescue are kept in Eskilstuna City Archive (Eskilstuna stadsarkiv), Einar Lundborgs arkiv, vol. 1–5. The printed version is Einar Lundborg, *När Nobile räddades: mina upplevelsewr under svenska Spetsbergenexpeditionen* (Stockholm: Geber, 1928; an English edition: *The Arctic rescue: how Nobile was saved* (New York: Viking Press, 1929). Literature about Lundborg are Carl Billengren, "Livet som äventyr: Einar Lundborg I krig och fred" – Billengren, *Det förgångnas närvaro: fjorton historiska essäer* (Stockholm: private print, 2008), 56–68 and Bo Widfeldt, *In Memoriam. Personal- och materielförluster inom svenskt militärflyg*, Svenska Vingar 4 (Nässjö: Air Historic Research AB, 2002), 154 (no. 81).



Captain Einar Lundborg in front of the armoured car 'Kalewipoeg'. April 1919. RA, EFA.114.3.3872

Lundborg first made his service in the Swedish Corps and participated in the activities in Narva, including the execution of Franchi. Later he joined the Estonian army as a commander of the armoured car 'Kalewipoeg'. He and his crew began their fight with their armoured car at the Võru front in May 1919. During the autumn Lundborg also served with the Swedish White Legion in the army of Judenich, on an armoured train in southern Estonia, before he returned to Sweden after the Peace Treaty of Tartu in February 1920.

Unlike some of the other Swedish volunteers Lundborg seems to have made a "sympathetic and polite" impression, at least if we should believe the Danish captain Richard Gustav Borgelin, who in early September 1919 met Lundborg in the White Russians headquarters in Cherskaya in connection with the fighting around Pskov and Porkhov.²¹

²¹ *Hvor Dannebrog faldt ned. Kaptajn Richard Borgelins erindringer fra Den Estniske Frihedskrig*, edited by Ann-Mari Borgelin (Frederiksberg: Bogforlaget Frydenlund, 2012), 134–136.

Back in Sweden Lundborg trained to be a pilot, including a course in England, and in 1928 became a captain in the young Swedish Air Force. In the very same year Lundborg became famous far beyond Sweden's borders.

An Italian explorer, Umberto Nobile, travelled towards the North Pole with his airship *Italia*. However, *Italia*, was forced to land on ice north of Svalbard. On 26 June 1928 Lundborg managed to land and rescue Nobile, but on another rescue mission he crashed on the ice with his Fokker plane. But on 6 July he and the others were saved by another Swedish rescue plane flown by Birger Schyberg.

When they came back Lundborg and Schyberg were famous heroes, and that fame became even greater when Lundborg published a book about his adventures close to the North Pole. Already on 5 August 1928 an air show took place at Helsingborg, where Lundborg and Schyberg participated with the very same plane that they had flown at Svalbard. Now they were both celebrities who travelled around Sweden, giving several lectures illustrated with lantern-slides. Lundborg also wrote a best-selling book about his adventure: *När Nobile räddades. Mina upplevelser under den svenska Spetsbergenexpeditionen 1928* (1928).

In the year of 1929 Einar Lundborg and his wife Margareta Charlotta travelled with the Atlantic liner *S.S. Drottningholm* to the United States, where he among other things met with the world famous Swedish actress Greta Garbo. One could hardly be greater in the media world of the late 1920s.

On 27 January 1931 Einar Lundborg perished in a plane crash during a test flight with a new fighter plane of Swedish construction (J 5, also called Jaktfalken or The Falcon) at Malmslätt air force base outside Linköping. The accident also resulted in a government commission examining the conditions within the air force. Einar Lundborg was buried in Linköping.

A former commander of T 5 in Sala later described Lundborg as very interested in motor engines as well as "totally fearless of everything and he looked for all opportunities where he could face risks and dangers ... the adventure was his hobby". At the same time Lundborg was described as a "exceptionally good squad officer, who made the men follow

him”.²² It is a description that contributes to the explanation of both Lundborg’s engagement as a volunteer in Estonia but also later as a pilot.

Final conclusions

The destiny of Einar Lundborg is in many aspects unique, but he could also be held as representative for the Swedish volunteers in Estonia. They never managed to establish a numerous enough and well disciplined unit of themselves. Instead they were split up between several different units under Swedish, Finnish, Estonian, Baltic German or White Russian command. Hence the Swedish support to Estonia never managed to gain the power that the Swedish Brigade in Finland 1918 achieved.

This was, I believe, to a large extent due to the lack of political and logistical support from Sweden to the Swedish volunteers. The Swedish Brigade in Finland in 1918 was, literally, filled with experienced NCOs and officers, but that was far from the case in Estonia in 1919. This had two effects.

First, the Swedish support for Estonia could never reach the importance that the (much more numerous) Finnish volunteer forces managed to develop.

Secondly, this fundamental weakness of the Swedish Corps gave the forces of chaos and destruction within it greater possibilities to act more freely than otherwise had been the case. That negative developments culminated in the execution of Franchi in Narva.

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²² Sten Camitz, *Minnen från Trängkåren i Sala* (Sala: Sala Allehanda, 1969), 87–89.

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