

The Swedish volunteers in the Waffen SS

by Erik Norling

Source: „ELLOS NO FUERON NEUTRALES. Voluntarios suecos en la Waffen SS europea. (1940-1945) “ (2002, 330 pages.)

During WWII, between 175 and 200 Swedish volunteers, (possibly as many as 315), served in the Waffen-SS, in spite of the fact that Sweden was a neutral country with a strong pro-Allied public opinion. The number of Swedish volunteers in the Waffen-SS might have been 2,000 to 3,000 had the Swedish authorities not set up so many obstacles to reach Germany and had Finland not admitted foreign volunteers into their armed forces, where they spoke the same language as a great part of the population. Thus it was easier to join the Finnish Army than the Waffen-SS. Thus, approximately 75% to 80% of the Swedes in the Waffen-SS had already served in the Finland before volunteering and all of them reached the Waffen-SS by illegally crossing the borders.

The number of Swedes KIA can be estimated around 40-50, who fell or died during the battles in the Ukraine, the Caucasus, the Baltic States, Pomerania and during the final Battle of Berlin. During the first years of the war most of the Swedish volunteers were to be found on the eastern front in the SS Division „Wiking“. From the summer 1943 onwards the majority of the volunteers served in the SS Panzer Grenadier Division „Nordland“, where together with Ethnic Swedes from Estonia they belonged to the so called „Swedish Company“, (as it was designated by III. Germanic Corps commander SS-Obergruppenführer Felix Steiner) in the division's Armoured Recce Battalion. In addition Swedish volunteers were to be found in many other SS units („Freikorps Danmark“. „Den Norske Legion“, Division „Nord“, „Leibstandarte“, „Totenkopf“ etc.). Also, SS-Oberscharführer Sven-Erik Olsson served in the SS division „Frundsberg“ and was decorated with the German Cross in Gold.

About 20 Swedes attended the Waffen-SS Officer's School at Bad Tölz (at least two of them as first in their class), and between 15-20 were trained as war correspondents in the SS-Standarte „Kurt Eggers“, in which they served on the Eastern, Western and Mediterranean Fronts. One of them, the SS-KB Untersturmführer Torkel Tillman was KIA at Cheux (Normandy) July 1944 while serving as a war reporter. On the other side Swedish volunteers served in regular army units such as Nils Rosen, who was a Lieutenant at the 3. Panzer division or Ernst Sterner that was KIA in July 1944 in Poland serving in a Luftwaffe Field Division. The same fate also suffered the Swedish Corporal Sjogren who served with Leon Degrelle in the same platoon in his „Wallonian Legion“; he was KIA February 1942.

Politics and recruitment

When Finland was attacked by the Soviet Union on 30 November 1939, over 12,000 Swedish volunteers went to Finland to help their brother country. At this time, Sweden was just an under-populated Nordic country with a population of only 6.5 million people and a neutral foreign policy. The last conflicts it had been involved in were the Napoleonic Wars at the beginning of the 19th Century. Therefore, when the Crusade against Communism started in June 1941, Swedish volunteers, most of whom were veterans from the 1939-1940 Winter War, decided to immediately enlist either in the Finnish Army; (an estimated 1,500 Swedish volunteers did so between 1941-1944), or in the European Waffen-SS.

Due to its status as a neutral country no official recruitment centres for the Waffen-SS were allowed, even though the German legation in Stockholm had studied the possibility of enlisting Swedish volunteers at an early stage (even before the Operation Barbarossa) into the SS-Standarte „Nordland“. After the war started with Russia, only recruitment for the Finnish Army was tolerated in Sweden and even that was strongly limited by the government. An unknown story is the plan drawn up by the Swedish High Command in July 1941 when they offered to a selected group of Swedish officers the opportunity to enlist the German Army, but this project was soon cancelled by the government.

Therefore recruitment for the Waffen-SS had to be done on a private, individual basis or through the Swedish anti-communist political parties such as the „Svensk Socialistisk Samling“ (Swedish Socialist Union or SSS for short). This party had clearly chosen the side of Europe from the beginning. The SSS was an openly National Socialist party led by the former Swedish NCO Sven-Olof Lindholm: it had the strongest representation among the Swedish Waffen-SS and Finland volunteers, at least 50% of whom were members of this party. The SSS had a political unit named „Sveaborg“ at home and at the front during the war, but it never acted as a party during frontline engagements. The fact that at least 80% of the Swedish volunteers were true National Socialists has been censored by the „official“ Swedish history writers who prefer to cover the „democratic“ volunteers who served in Finland during the war and just „forget“ about the other brave Swedish who fell for Europe and Sweden. The SSS was the link between the homeland and the Swedish volunteers, maintaining a local group with an office in Berlin led by the former Swedish War reporter from the „Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler“. Thorolf Hillblad.

In any event this political party never „officially“ recruited volunteers for the Waffen-SS, so most of the Swedish recruits had to go to Finland or to Norway to enlist, some through Denmark. During the first months of the war several attempts were made (linked with the SS-Hauptamt at Berlin) to try and include Swedish volunteers in the ranks of the Germanic Waffen-SS. However none of these efforts resulted in a

major success and the Swedish police acted always immediately to stop it, as they did in the summer of 1943 when an illegal recruiting centre was discovered in Stockholm, financed by the SS. The „Germanische Leitstelle“ at Oslo, Norway, led by the SS-Sturmbannführer Karl Leib. It had been ordered to coordinate the enlistment of the few Swedes that had been recruited. As of 30 September 1944 a total of 109 Swedish volunteers have been recorded in Norway.



Sven-Olof Lindholm
(08.02.1903 – 26.04.1998)

The SS-Division „Wiking“ 1941-45

The Swedish volunteers in the Division „Wiking“ were distributed randomly to the regiments and various unit of the division, in most cases they did not even serve in the same companies. A group of Swedes were sent to the SS Regiment „Westland“, but again except for four who remained in the same squad, they were scattered

throughout the unit. Other Swedes went to the SS regiments „Nordland“, „Germania“ and even to the divisional Flak Battalion.

In the report issued by the divisional staff on 19 October 1941, eight Swedes were listed as being on duty with „Wiking“, and one had already been killed in action and another wounded. The first Swedish volunteer to be KIA has not yet been identified but the youngest, and the first of the SSS party's volunteers to die at the front was surely SS-Sturmmann Hans Lindén. He was only 19 years old and hailed from Stockholm. Linden died at Stalino on 27 December 1941 after participating in the division's heavy battles on the Mius Front over the previous few months. He was another veteran of the 1939-40 Winter War in Finland and an active member and Youth Leader in the SSS. He served in the „Wiking“ Flak Battalion along with Norwegian, Danish, Finnish and German comrades. His name was bestowed upon the Swedish SSS Party's „Sveaborg“ frontline unit at the Waffen-SS and he became a symbol of the movement.



SS-Sturmmann Hans Lindén

On 15 January 1942, the SS Statistical Department listed 39 Swedish volunteers on duty in the Waffen-SS. By the end of October 1942 the figure was 61. Out of that total, six had been killed in action.

Most of the remaining Swedes from the „Wiking“ were regrouped and sent together in the spring of 1943 to the new SS Division „Nordland“ but some Swedes remained in the „Wiking“. Officially only 5 Swedes were on the divisional rosters as of 14 July 1943. although there actually were about 8 to 10 Swedes in the division at this time. Of this total, 4 of the volunteers from the Swedish SSS party were serving together in the same squad from the 6th Company of SS Regiment „Germania“, but only one of them would survive the war.

The losses to the Swedish members of the „Wiking“ Division had been very high, around 15 to 20 of them had been killed, which was about 40% of the engaged Swedish volunteers in the unit.

The „Swedish Company“ in the SS-Division „Nordland“ 1943-45

Approximately 75 Swedish and Estonian Swedish volunteers took part in the extremely severe fighting in Croatia (autumn 1943), Russia (The withdraw from Oranienbaum, January -February 1944), Estonia (Narva, Dorpat, March-September 1944), Latvia (Dünaburg, Kurland, Preekuln, September-December 1944), Pomerania (Arnswalde, Stettin) and Brandenburg (Küstrin) finishing in Berlin April-May 1945. Since the „Swedish Company“ was completely mechanized and equipped with armoured cars, it was a powerful unit in the III. Germanic SS Panzer Corps and the „Nordland“ division, and it was used as a „fire brigade“ in the most dramatic combat situations.

The 4th Armored Platoon of the 3rd Company was almost entirely composed by Swedish volunteers and Swedish officers. Led during the time in Croatia and Oranienbaum by the 25 years old SS-Oberscharführer Walther Nilsson. He was the first unit CO to be KIA, in January 1944 during the withdrawal from Oranienbaum when the Europeans armies were attacked by surprise by the Reds who pushed them to the Narva River. Following him, the SS-Untersturmführer Hans-Gösta Pehrsson took over the command but only for a short time, as in April 1944 he became commander of the entire company. This officer, who was promoted to SS-Hauptsturmführer during the last months of the war, was the highest decorated Swedish volunteer with the Iron Cross 1st Class and the *Ehrenblattspange des Deutschen Heeres* (Honour Roll Clasp of the German Army).

The remnants of the „Swedish Company“ were surrounded and destroyed with the division during the final struggle for Berlin in April 1945 in the defence of the Reich Chancellery and the centre against the Red Army.



Hans-Gösta Pehrsson
(10.10.1910 - 16.03.1974)

Several other Swedish officers served as platoon leaders and company commanders in the „Nordland“ Division. All of them were KIA or wounded including the SS-Untersturmführer Rune Ahlgren (2./AA 11) and Ragnar Gustavsson (*Kampfgruppe Scheibel* „Nederland Division“), both KIA; Gunnar Eklöf, Heino Meyer, Sigurd Bäcklund, all wounded.

Ethnic Swedes from Finland and Estonia in the Waffen-SS

The history of the ethnic-Swedes in the Waffen-SS that lived in Finland and Estonia have been more or less forgotten due to their status as a national minority and thus can be compared partially to the „Volksdeutsche“ in their treatment by modern history. Since the Middle Ages, the historical chronicles show us the settlement of Swedes along the Baltic Sea Coast, especially in Finland and Estonia but also much further to the south in the depths of Ukraine. They kept their culture, language and religion even when those countries gained their independence or were absorbed by Russia.

The biggest group were the Finland-Swedes, approximately 10-15% of the country's population before WWII and represented a large percentage of the Finnish officer corps. In Estonia there were a smaller community, amounting not even 10,000 people and concentrated in the Baltic islands that faced Sweden.

Finland-Swedes served in the Waffen-SS in the „Wiking“ Division among the other Finnish volunteers enlisted due to the agreements between the Finnish government and the German Reich. The recruitment of Finland-Swedish volunteers for the Waffen-SS was led by Gunnar Lindqvist and his National Socialistic movement known as „*Samfundet Folkgemenskap*“ (*Association for Popular Union*), which was mainly composed of Finnish-Swedes. He managed to recruit around 100 volunteers, not all of them Finnish-Swedes, and he received for his assistance a civil award in 1944 from the German government for his services. Apart from these volunteers many other Finnish-Swedes served, not only as privates and NCO but also as officers. The highest ranking ethnic-Swede to be killed in action was SS-Obersturmführer Lennart Simeon Wallén, a member of the NS movement, and a platoon leader in a „Wiking“ anti-tank unit that was not attached to the Finnish Volunteer Battalion. He was killed on 9 October 1942 during the heavy battles around Malgobek.

SS-Ostuf Ulf Ola Olin, born 1917, remained in the „Wiking“ as a tank commander with the II. Abt./SS-Pz.Rgt.5 when the Finnish group was sent home in 1943. He was to become the most decorated Finnish volunteer (and Finnland-Swede) when he received the German Cross in Gold on 28 February 1945, while commanding a platoon of the 7th Company of the battalion during the heavy fightings around Warsaw in the summer of 1944.



Ulf-Ola Olin
(18.07.1917 - 11.01.1995)

Finland-Swedes have also been reported in the 6th SS Mountain Division „Nord“ and the *Sonderkommando* Skorzeny. Several also graduated from the SS officer's school at Bad Tolz.

The Estonian-Swedes were enlisted into the Waffen-SS in a planned action by the SS-Haupamt, with the assistance of the Swedish SS-Obersturmführer Sven Rydén as part of the recruiting staff. Around 30 to 40 volunteered for the European army and served in the „Swedish Company“ in the „Nordland“ Division. It has not been reported that any of these Estonian-Swedes were sent to Bad Tolz or ever promoted to ranks higher than NCO.

Other books by Erik Norling:

- „División-SS Norland, 1943-45“
- „Vidkun Quisling, ¿traidor o patriota?“
- „Léon Degrelle y el Rexismo“
- „Sangre en la nieve“, „Jaches Doriot“
- „De los fiordos a las estepas“
- ‘ „Rudolf Hess, Lugarteniente de Hitler“
- „Ellos nunca fueron neutrales“
- „Guerreros de Borgoña“
- „Las JONS revolucionarias“
- „Eurofascismo“