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BOATSMEN in BLEKINGE

By Sven Bjerstedt

Sweden as a Great Power nation was at its peak in 1660. The death of Charles X Gustav temporarily led to a change from offensive to defensive politics. Charles XI came of age in 1672; two years later, Sweden again intervened in the conflicts on the European continent. It turned out, however, that the army was not as fortunate as during the 'Thirty Years' War.

Several surrounding powers wished to access land that had been conquered by Sweden in the Baltic Sea area. The Danish king Christian V saw an opportunity to regain the Eastern Danish landscapes, which had been lost to Sweden through the Treaty in Roskilde in 1658, and he declared war in

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September 1675. The Scanian war lasted until 1679. Sweden was successful on land but met with disaster at sea. After the peace treaties, Charles XI realized that the entire armed forces needed to be reformed. At the same time, a campaign was launched to make the landscapes east of the Sound (Öresund) more Swedish. It meant, among other things, that those who were enrolled as soldiers in these landscapes were forbidden to serve in their own country but ended up on the other side of the Baltic Sea. This rule was valid until 1700.

At the end of 1679, Charles XI decided that the entire naval fleet would be moved to a completely new base that was more central to the Baltic Sea Empire and that was free from ice earlier in the year. The choice fell on Blekinge where the town of Karlskrona was founded in 1680. Resources were transferred from all over the country and as early as 1682 the first warship, Blekinge, was completed in the new shipyard. In December 1682, the new military division department ('indelningsverket') was implemented for the navy as well as the army. The naval fleet included boatsmen, who were recruited in the coastal parishes, were organized in special boatsman companies and were provided with boatsman's cottages. In addition, cities would hold a certain number of boatsmen.

For the fleet to maximize its power, a well-trained crew was required in the vicinity of the fleet's main station Karlskrona. Those who lived too far away were relocated to Blekinge in the early 1680s. Boatsmen in Norrland and Finland were moved; the parishes and towns there that previously held boatmen were instead required to pay a certain amount of money. A large

number of boatsmen were concentrated in a rather small geographical area, the idea being that they all should be able to come to Karlskrona shortly after a mobilization order had been issued.

The relocation began in 1681. By the end of 1682, more than 1,000 boatsmen had been moved from southern Finland to Blekinge. A number of Finnish carpenters were also transferred to Blekinge. Gradually their families joined them; the total number of Finnish immigrants to Blekinge during these years exceeded 3,000. In 1683, the Blekinge division was fixed to 1,551 boatsmen, organized in three companies, and the plan was to eventually increase the number to 1,729.

For instance, the 1685 census register ('jordebok') lists 69 boatsmen in the parish of Mörrum and 14 in Elleholm. All of them came from Finland, mostly from the former Nyland company in southern Finland's coastal regions. In Elleholm there were ten boatsmen from Viborg and four from Ostrobothnia, out of which three were from Nykarleby and one from Korsholm. In Mörrum there were 39 boatsmen from Karis, 21 from Viborg and three from Borgå and parishes nearby. In addition, five boatsmen came from the company of Northern Finland and one from the company of Ostrobothnia. Including families, the Finnish immigration to these parishes was extensive. Although they came from the Swedish-speaking parts of Finland, many did not speak Swedish. In 1683 a Finnish-speaking priest was employed at the Admiralty in Karlskrona; he was to travel around the area four times a year in order to visit the parishes where the Finnish boatsmen and their families lived and perform worship services there.

A number of 65 boatsmen in Mörrum and 11 in Elleholm were retained until the military division department was discontinued in 1901. In 1845 the organization was changed from three companies to six. Mörrum and Elleholm now belonged to the fifth company of boatsmen, which geographically comprised the municipality of Karlskrona. The total number of boatsmen in this company was 244. Gradually, more local boatsmen were recruited from the Skåne, Blekinge and Småland regions. However, Finnish names remained frequent in the area for a long time: for instance, Mannonen, Tarwo and Tutti in Mörrum, Korhonen and Lembian in Elleholm.

The boatsmen were the crew of the sailing fleet. During the 1850s, discussions were initiated about discontinuing the boatsman system. In 1887 it was decided that the crew of boatsmen would be put on vacancy. Instead of keeping boatsmen, the farmers would have to pay a vacancy fee to the government. The withdrawal took place gradually as the boatsmen were dismissed. In the 1890s, some younger boatsmen were given the opportunity to switch to the newly formed mariner corps. The last Mörrum boatsman was dismissed in 1905.

Photo Credit: Image provided by VisitBlekinge.se.

References

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Member News

*Karleby/Kronoby Students Visit
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NEW MEMBERS

If we don't have your email address, please send it to the SFHS Office at info@swedishfinnish-toricalsociety.org.

MARCH

Curtis Johnson
Douglas Shuberg
Timothy J. Stachoviak
Nils Holm
Doris Sten Blumenthal
Sally Lessard
Lori Rupe
John L. Petersen

APRIL

Joan Sanaker
Inger Leonew
Kirsten Frichette
Dave Erickson

May

Nancy Taylor
Emily Kurlinki
Simone D. Bennett
Norman Johnson
Christopher Weiss
Donald Bamber

June

Catherine Oberg
Scott Mantyla
Brent Mitchel-Gaudet
Richard Sjolund
Laurie Garrett

Lifetime Membership

Mark And Mary Hillman

Donations

2 Anonymous Donations Through
Facebook
John Ostergard
Elaine Stevens
George & Judi Miller
Nils Holm
Kathryn Lang
Bob Östrand
Barbara & Frank Sanchez
Carolyn Oster
Johanna & Bill Padie
Ingrid Holmlund
Diane Hardiman Smith
Carl Granquist
Susan Krentz
Prof. Arnold Alanen
Thomas Erickson
Bo Wickstrom
Sandy Suckoski
Judith Thompson
Syrene Forsman
Dorothy Granholm Hankins

Archives

Syrene Forsman
Curtis Johnson
Ingrid Carlson
George Nelson
Ed Brannfors
Janet Duxbury

checked in our bags. We had to queue for quite some time before we came through the security check. After that we ate something and bought some snacks for the flight. The flight from Vancouver to Reykjavik took about 7 hours and we arrived at Reykjavik early in the morning local time. The last flight from Reykjavik to Helsinki took about three hours. We waited for an hour before we caught the train in Tikkurila."

"All of us were very tired and it was nice to come home and meet our families. Although it was nice to come home, I already miss our group and all the other people we met during the trip!"

I really enjoyed...

- "Getting to know the group."
- "Getting to know the group we travelled with."
- "Spending time with our group. We really had fun together."

Looking back, my favorite food I ate in Washington was...

- "Shake Shack hamburgers."
- "The food at my host family."
- "A 4-course sushi meal in Bellevue."
- "Fresh fish, burgers, traditional USA food."
- "Mac and cheese that I tried for the first time."

SFHS enjoyed the student's energy and adventurous spirit. We hope to see you again!

*Boatsmen
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Further reading

Ericsson Wolke, Lars. Svenska knektar: Indelta soldater, ryttare och båtsmän i krig och fred. Lund: Historiska media, 2002.

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