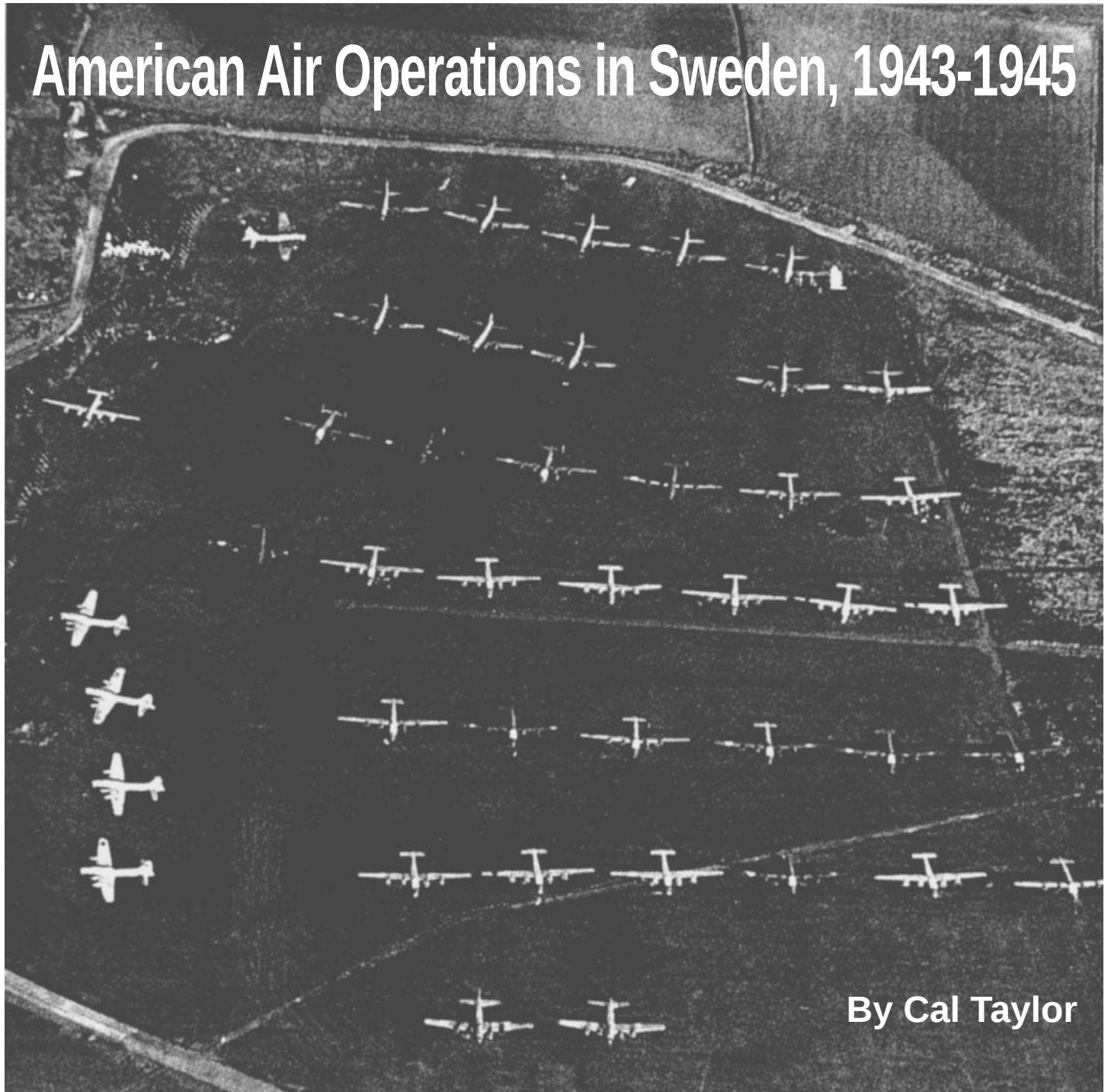


American Air Operations in Sweden, 1943-1945



By Cal Taylor

In 1945, 17 B-17 Flying Fortresses and 26 B-24 Liberators were collected at F1 Västerås, before repatriation to England. (Bo Widfeldt)

In 1945, neutral Sweden may have possessed the third-largest heavy bomber force of all nations. At Västerås Airport, 35 miles west of Stockholm, were parked 17 B-17 Flying Fortresses and 26 B-24 Liberators, all American. These aircraft were only a portion of those from England, the U.S. and Germany that made forced landings in Sweden between 1939 and the war's end in 1945. Numerous fighters and other types of aircraft also landed in Sweden. Their crews were interned in Sweden for sometimes extended periods. In addition to the

forced landings, three major American air operations including courier flights brought numerous transport aircraft to Sweden. Despite Sweden's official neutral status, aircraft of England, America and Germany operated there in both emergency situations and routine missions.

What follows will deal primarily with the American aircraft and crews that made forced landings in Sweden or that participated in *Operation Sonnie*, *Operation Ball* and *Operation When and Where*, all commanded by Col. Bernt Balchen. The



Locals and military gather around B-17 Georgia Rebel after crash landing at Vännacka, July 24, 1943. (Bo Widfelt)

first group totaled 162 aircraft and 1,429 crew members, between July 24, 1943, and April 21, 1945. *Operation Sonnie* employed 22 B-24/C-87s, a C-47 and four DC-4 aircraft to make courier flights between Sweden and England, from March 31, 1944, well into 1945. *Ball* was a clandestine operation delivering supplies and personnel to the Norwegian resistance. *Operation When and Where* used 10 C-47s to transport Norwegian troops into northern Norway from December 22, 1944, until August 1945. In Sweden, the latter two operations were all known under the name *Operation Ball*.

Swedish Neutrality

The Kingdom of Sweden had been politically neutral since 1815. During WWI, the policy prevailed, though there was some pro-German sentiment. After that war, Sweden strongly supported the League of Nations. Its non-aligned policy was severely tested in the 1930s when Sweden operated under the assumption that Germany and the Soviet Union were the strong Baltic powers. The hope was that they would focus their concerns upon each other and could deploy only minor forces against Sweden and other non-aligned countries.

Nonetheless, Sweden began to build its defense forces in the late 1930s. Military spending increased eight-fold, from 1936 to 1939, and a draft was instituted. By 1940, there was a Home Guard and a Women's Voluntary Defense Service. Concurrently, Prime Minister Per Albin Hansson restated Sweden's neutrality on September 1, 1939, though it sided with Finland in the Winter War that began in November 1939, calling itself a non-belligerent, rather than a neutral.

With Germany's conquest of Denmark and Norway in April 1940, Sweden was surrounded by hostile powers. British and German naval blockades caused severe shortages of critical materials and commercial shipping came under attack. Some crucial trade with Britain was conducted by high-speed blockade runner boats. Shipping to and from Germany across

the Baltic increased. Swedish iron ore was essential to the German war effort.

Wartime agreements between Sweden and Germany allowed German troops and equipment to cross Sweden by rail. This was especially necessary to the Germans in summer 1941 after Germany attacked the Soviet Union. The German 163rd Infantry Division and its equipment passed through Sweden by rail to Finland. By 1943, with increasing Allied victories against German forces, Sweden was able to resist German pressures and to increase its transactions with the Allies. Part of this accommodation included agreements to become a refuge for Allied aircraft that were by then attacking targets in northern Germany and the Baltic countries. As German forces were driven back, *Operation Ball* and *Operation When and Where* saw American aircraft operating both clandestinely and quite openly to support the Norwegian underground and to transport Norwegian forces and equipment into liberated areas.

Internment policy of aircraft and crews

The initial internment policy was that all airplanes and crews would be held until the end of the war. It was soon modified to one that would repatriate crew members on a one-for-one basis. Thus, if a British Mosquito with a crew of two landed, then two Germans would be repatriated concurrently with the British flyers. With the increasing frequency of American bomber landings, the numbers on the Allied side grew much faster than for German flyers. The Swedish Foreign Office negotiated an agreement with the Germans that allowed larger numbers of Allied fliers to go home when a German airplane was returned.

Later arrangements saw German aircraft sold to Swedish civilian companies and registered as civil aircraft. One Dornier Do24 seaplane was purchased by the Swedish Air Force (Flygvapnet) for air/sea rescue service. A sort of barter arrangement came about, in many cases. In 1944, Sweden released 75 British flyers, receiving 50 complete radar sets.



B-24J Lovely Lady's Avenger after crash landing at Bulltofta, June 21, 1944. (Hans Wachtmeister)

was repatriated on March 12, 1944. They were navigator 2nd Lt. A.L. Guertin; bombardier 2nd Lt. C.W. Nevius; engineer SSgt. J.E. Havnis; radio operator TSgt. J. Nicatra and gunners SSgt. C.N. Newcomb; SSgt. M.M. Kelleher; SSgt. S. B. Early and SSgt. A.I. Haugen.

Liberator number one

The first B-24, *Death Dealer* (coded Y-MY), landed on October 9, 1943, at Rinkaby, after a mission against Danzig, Poland.² It was followed by two more B-24s from the same mission. Fifty-eight more American Liberators and crewmembers from six others would also take refuge in Sweden.

Death Dealer was a 93rd Bomb Group B-24D, 42-40610, with a crew of 11 from the 409th Bomb Sqdn, at Hardwick, England. Over Danzig, the plane took antiaircraft fire and was forced to steadily lower altitudes on the return route. At 1414, the plane passed over Bornholm Island with No. 2 propeller feathered. There, aircraft commander 1st Lt. M.R. League decided to turn north toward Sweden. Some 50 miles north, *Death Dealer* landed at Rinkaby Airport, six miles southeast of Kristianstad. The crew set fire to the airplane, which was totally destroyed and the crew was interned. The aircraft remains were sold for scrap in 1945. Rinkaby saw 13 more arrivals over the period ending February 3, 1945.

Lt. League returned to England on November 22, 1943, but the other crew members remained in Sweden for some months, until their repatriation could be arranged. Initially, they were quartered at A3 airfield, near Rinkaby, and then moved on October 11 to Främby, their internment accommodations. They included copilot 2nd Lt. J.R. Colvin; navigator 2nd Lt. J.A. Fox; bombardier 2nd Lt. R. Theis; engineer TSgt. C. K. Gregory; radio operator SSgt. R. N. Daves and a passenger, 2nd Lt. W. M. Bryan. The gunners were all SSgts; L. O. Calcut, R.C. Hulbert, E. Bernhardt and A.H. Hubert.

The first Mustang

The third most numerous American aircraft that landed in Sweden or whose crews arrived in Sweden were P-51 Mustangs. The first one landed on April 15, 1944. It was P-51B, 43-12126, (coded GQ-T), assigned to the 345th Fighter Group, Boxted.³ The pilot was 2nd Lt. E. E. Philips, of the 355th Fighter Sqdn. He was part of a four-ship fighter escort mission over Lübeck, Germany. At 1300, the formation entered clouds at 9,800 feet, from which Lt. Philips was not seen to emerge.

Swedish observers first reported the P-51 over the west coast, near Laholm, and it crashed a few minutes later in soft ground at Skummeslöv, west of Vallberga Station. Lt. Philips was killed in the crash. Speculation was that he became disoriented when he flew over land after a long time over water. The disorientation may simply have resulted from mission stresses. The target area was well in from the coast and the northerly track to the crash site would have also been mostly over

This exchange prompted the United States to swap nine B-17s for the release of 500 American flyers. Seven of the B-17s were then converted to civilian configuration by SAAB, at Linköping, for operation by AB/SILA. The U.S. also offered to transfer 50 P-51 Mustangs, including the four that had survived emergency landings in Sweden. By the last two years of the war, Sweden was able to deal more easily with the Allies. In the meantime, American air crews experienced quite comfortable conditions as internees.

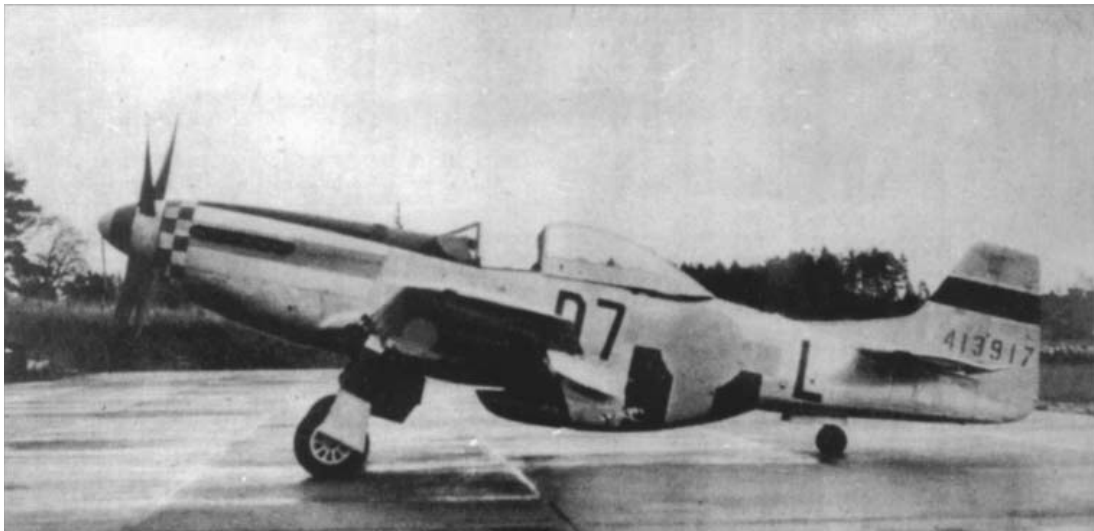
American presence begins

The growing American internee population began with the arrival on July 24, 1943, of B-17F, 42-3217 (coded MS-T), *Georgia Rebel*.¹ This was the first of 70 American B-17s and crews from eight more. She was assigned to the 381st Bomb Group, based at Ridgewell, England, with a crew from the 535th Bomb Sqdn. It was one of 180 aircraft in the formation attacking a nitrate and aluminum plant at Porsgrunn, Norway, 65 miles southwest of Oslo. Flak damaged one engine and the crew initially set course for England. A second engine then failed, bringing the decision to make for nearby Sweden. During the eastward flight, which was uneventful, the crew jettisoned the bomb sight, maps and other materials. The plane crossed into Sweden at about 1430, flying at 600 feet above the ground during much of the 194 miles to landing.

At the railroad between Arvika and Årjäng, the pilot turned north, searching for a suitable landing site. Some 20 miles north of Årjäng, he decided upon a large field next to the tracks. Reversing course, he made a belly-landing on what proved to be a bog, covered with small pines. The crew exited via the waist door and was soon met by a young farmer, who spoke English.

A crowd of interested Swedes gathered and the crew showed off the airplane. Eventually, the crew was taken to F7, the Flygvapnet base at Sätenäs, where they were interviewed by a Flygvapnet officer before finally going to an internment facility at Falun. The B-17 was taken in pieces to the SAAB Company, in Linköping, where it was a source of spare parts for the seven B-17s that were converted as airliners. The two pilots, 1st Lt. O.V. Jones and 1st Lt. G. McIntosh, returned to England in November 1943, while the remainder of the crew

P-51D You've Had It, which 1st Lt. F.D. Talcott landed at Bulltofta August 6, 1944, became Flygvapnet J26 26004.(Widfeldt)



land. Still, the Danish terrain was quite flat and would have been unfamiliar to Lt. Philips. The crash site is some 165 miles and about 30 minutes northeast of Lübeck, over the length of Denmark's Sjaeland Island, past Copenhagen and up the Swedish west coast.

He was buried in the Östrakyrkogård (Eastern Cemetery) in Malmö. Later, his remains were repatriated to the U.S. and buried in a private cemetery in New Jersey.

There were 13 other P-51s involved with Swedish refuge. Two ditched and the pilots made land safely. Three went down in Denmark but the pilots escaped to Sweden. Eight aircraft landed in Sweden, including four that went over to Flygvapnet as the first J26 fighters.

Orphan types

Outside of the many bombers and the P-51s, there were only three of other types of aircraft. They were a C-87 courier transport, an F-5E Lightning reconnaissance aircraft and a Mosquito XVI light bomber.

Earliest was C-87, NC18618, (AAF 43-30619), assigned to the Air Transport Command (ATC) and based at Leuchars, Scotland.⁴ The airplane was one of those involved with *Operation Sonnie*. It had departed Leuchars in early evening on October 19, 1944, with a crew of six, bound for Stockholm's Bromma Airport. Weather there and in the Göteborg area was foggy. The route was over Norway, with the first radio contact with Bromma at 2226. Because Bromma was closed by fog, the airplane was directed to divert to Göteborg's Torslanda Airport. ETA for that airfield was 0030. Enroute, the pilot and navigator apparently mistook the lights at Alingsås Airport for those at Torslanda. The airplane descended from 5,000 ft. to 500 ft. and collided with the terrain, killing all aboard. Later, the crew members were buried in

Malmö's East Cemetery. Capt. T.C. Campbell, the navigator, and radio operator TSgt. O. J. Ragland are still buried there. The other four, pilots Capt. T.K. Bullock and 1st Lt. R.P. Buchanan, passenger Capt. E.K. North and radio operator TSgt. D.J. Johnston were later removed to stateside cemeteries or an American cemetery in Luxembourg. Local people built a monument in their memory at the crash site.

The Lightning was F-5E, 43-28616, of the 7th Pursuit Grp., Mount Farm, England.⁵ Piloted by 1st Lt. A.V. Elston, Jr., from the 13th Pursuit Sqdn., the objective was Stettin, Poland, 135 miles from the southern tip of Sweden and 465 from Barkarby Airfield, near Stockholm. Elston diverted to Sweden after he had to shut down one engine. Two Swedish B17C fighters from F12, at Kalmar, intercepted him and handed off to a Barkarby-based J9 fighter (Seversky P-35) south of Stockholm. Elston first tried to land at Bromma Airport but then followed the Swedish fighters to Barkarby, where he landed at 1513. On the way in, Swedish air-raid warning troops fired on him nearly over the field. Lt. Elston was officially interned at Korsnäs but was used as an instructor for Swedish pilots who would be making test flights after the Lightning had been repaired.



Damaged over Stettin, 1st Lt. A.V. Elston landed F-5E 43-28618 at Barkarby. It was later destroyed during a test flight. (Bo Widfeldt)

Unfortunately, the Lightning crashed during a test flight at Västerås in 1945.

The last single was Mosquito NS650, assigned to the 25th Bomb Grp. at Watton, England.⁶ The pilot was Lt. Col. Podwojski with navigator Capt. L.A. Proulx. On April 3, 1945, they were lead of a flight of six, dropping Window chaff to confuse German radar during an attack on the submarine pens at Kiel, Germany. The Mosquitos were then to take photos of the target area for bomb damage analysis. This was the only instance when more than a single USAAF Mosquito flew in the same formation. Col. Podwojski's plane had engine problems prior to the attack but he was still able to lead the group. Additional engine troubles after the attack led to his decision to divert to Sweden. Enroute, three Bf 109s attacked him but he escaped by ducking into some clouds. At 1705, landing was made at Bulltofta Airport, near Malmö. Before the end of April, both crew members were repatriated to England via a courier flight. The airplane was returned to England after VE day.

The busiest single day for arrivals was on June 20, 1944, when 15 B-24s landed at Malmö's Bulltofta Airport. A total of 358 B-24s attacked petrochemical targets at Pölitz and Ostermoor. Huge formations of Bf 110, Me 410 and Ju 88 fighters attacked the Liberators, seriously damaging many American bombers and shooting down at 10 B-24s between Rügen, Germany and Bornholm Island. The Liberators landed at Bulltofta between 0927 and 1030, leaving the field littered with damaged B-24s.

Landing locations and crew totals⁷

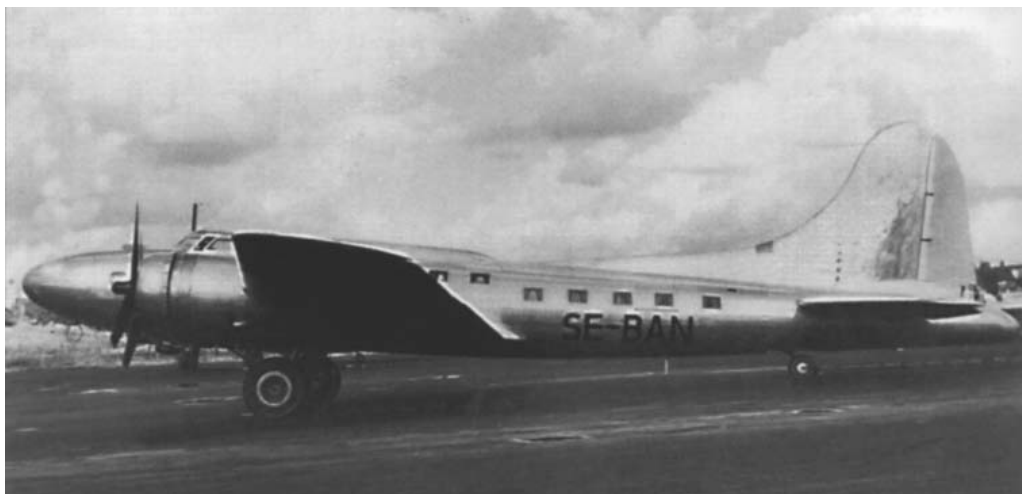
Fifty locations were involved with American emergency landings and the 1,429 crew members whose aircraft landed in Sweden or went down outside of Sweden, with the crews making their way to refuge. Agreements were in place between the U.S. and Sweden that USAAF airplanes could use suitable airfields in southern Sweden in conjunction with their activities over Germany.⁸ The crew of B-17G, 42-40006, *Liberty Lady/Memphis Belle* (not the same plane featured in the movie) had no charts of Sweden when they landed at Mästermyr on March 6, 1944. Later in 1944, an 8th Air Force training film contained a briefing to crew members that they would be given a map of Sweden in case their airplane could not make the return flight to England.⁹ Bulltofta Airport, near Malmö, received 62 airplanes, while 14 landed at Rinkaby on the east coast and 11 came down at Sövde, approximately 15-miles north of the southern port city of Ystad. Fourteen aircraft went down in Denmark but some or all of the crew members made their way to Sweden, as did crew from three airplanes that

went down in Norway. The remainder of the airplanes landed at airports all over southern Sweden. Many aircraft were write-offs from either battle damage or the landing. The specific breakdown of crew involved was; 60 KIA, 20 MIA, 72 POW in Germany, Denmark or Norway and 59 who escaped from Denmark or Norway.

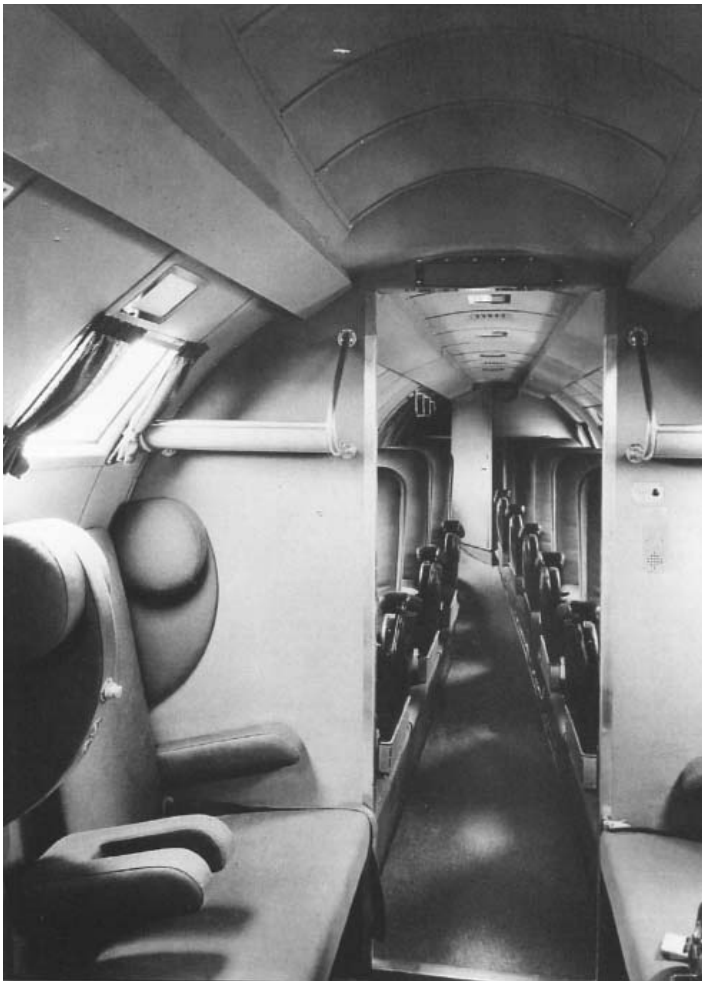
Even at established airports, such as Bulltofta and Västerås, landing conditions were not truly adequate to support bomber operations. Bulltofta was a sod field, as were many airfields in the 1930s and early 1940s, and not only in Sweden. It did not have a paved runway until 1952. Västerås had a single paved runway and other sod landing areas. If bombers made belly landings, they created serious damage to the airfield, which was compounded if the crew followed 8th Air Force direction and set the airplane on fire.¹⁰ Even a normal wheel landing could cause damage to the sod strips because the wheel loading on the single main tires was quite high. Damaged or burned aircraft became scrap heaps that the Swedes were not readily equipped to dispose of. Aircraft that landed off airport were also often reduced to scrap but there was not such pressure to remove the scrap.

B-17s converted to civil operations

Nine B-17s were handed over to the Swedes for conversion to passenger transport configurations, at a cost of \$1.00 each.¹¹ Two of these served as parts sources, including *Georgia Rebel*. The conversion was done by SAAB, in Linköping. The work included removing the military equipment and lengthening the nose, then installing airline seats. The airplanes were operated by Svensk Interkontinental Lufttrafik (SILA) for several years, before replacing them with purpose-built airliners. They then went on to various other operators. B-17F 42-3490/SE-BAN was seen as far distant as Ethiopia in 1947.¹² Probably most interesting to American readers is B-17G *Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby*, 42-32076/SE-BAP. In late 1945, it was sold to a Danish airline, DDL, and registered as OY-DFA. The Danish Army Air Corps bought it in 1948, with tail number 67-672. A year later, it went to the Danish Navy and then to the Royal Danish Air Force in 1952, numbered ESK-721. A year later, it went into storage until the French Institut Geographique National bought it for worldwide photographic and geophysical survey flights. The French registration was F-BGSP. Then, for several years,



Modifications made by SAAB to convert B-17s to airliners are clear on SE-BAN/ex B-17G, 42-31490, at Bromma. (Bo Widfeldt)



Interior of one of the B-17s converted for passenger service. (SAAB photo from the Swedish Aviation Historical Society)

it went derelict, until the National Museum of the USAF bought it and restored it to its WWII configuration. It is now displayed in the NMUSAF, though in olive drab rather than its wartime bare metal.

The airplanes that were converted and their Swedish registrations are as follows:

B-17F-75-DL	42-3543	SE-BAH
B-17F-115-BO	42-30661	SE-BAK
B-17G-5-BO	42-31163	SE-BAM
B-17F-70-DL	42-3490	SE-BAN
B-17G-40-BO	42-97115	SE-BAO
B-17G-35-BO	42-32076	SE-BAP
B-17G-35-DL	42-107067	SE-BAR

Providing parts for the conversions were B-17F-35-DL 42-3217 and B-17F-25-VE 42-5827.

Taking the easy way out?

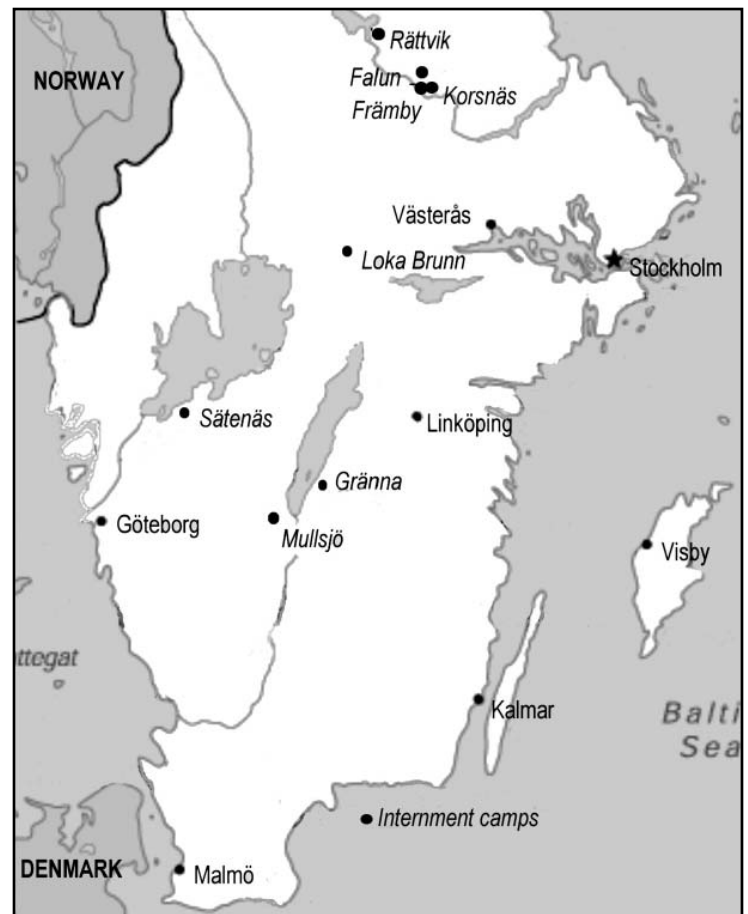
In mid-summer 1944, Army Air Force commander Gen. Hap Arnold wrote to Gen. Carl Spaatz, commander of U.S. Strategic Air Forces, about the number of bomber crews then interned in Sweden and Switzerland.¹³ There were rumors that the internees had an “idyllic” life. Spaatz was angered

by what he saw as an implication of cowardice. In his reply to Arnold, he demanded that military representatives go to Sweden to evaluate hearsay evidence that was being passed through diplomatic channels. Arnold responded in a manner to soothe Spaatz, but sent Lt. Col. James Wilson to England to talk to crews. His final report did not seem to have any obvious results. Further military investigation concluded that cowardice was not involved and that the airplanes that landed in Sweden were truly incapable of returning to England. An inspection of all airplanes in Switzerland concluded that all were there for very good reason.¹⁴

Internment camps

Lt. Elston joined hundreds of other American crew members who were interned in Sweden between July 1943 and war’s end. Conditions in Swedish internment camps were far more comfortable than for the internees in Switzerland, where there were nearly as many American bomber crew members as in Sweden. The Swiss were very restrictive and internees who did not conform to Swiss rules found themselves in conditions more like those of prisoners of war. In Sweden, the accommodations were tourist hotels and other such buildings where the internees had easy access to local communities and people.

There were at least six camps for American internees.¹⁵ Camp I was at Främby, a suburb of Falun in Dalarna. British internees were already there and the mix was not good, due to economic differences between the two Allies. The situation



American internment camps in Sweden, 1944-1945.



The crew of 297496, one of five at Bulltofta on April 9, 1944, shows its fatigue. L-R 2nd Lt. W.D. Patterson, TSgt. D.L. Patterson, 2nd Lt. F.H. Calfee, Sgt. F.M. Skelton, 2nd Lt. C.C. Byrd, 2nd Lt. C.R. Vickrey, SSgt. J.C. Exnowski, SSgt. M. Holzman, Sgt. L.S. Muscarella and SSgt. W.T. Hussey. Before repatriation April 7, 1945, Muscarella married a Swedish woman and studied at Stockholm University. (Bo Widfeldt)

was perhaps reminiscent of the complaint voiced by the British about Americans: "Overpaid, over-sexed and over here." From February 1944 until April 1945, Americans were located at Camp IV at Korsnäs, only three miles east of Främby. There, one of the main buildings was the Humlebacken Pensionat and a hostel in Rättvik, 30 miles northwest, was an annex. This area is the heart of traditional Sweden.

From May until October 1944, when Korsnäs was full, American internees were sent to Internment Camp V at Loka Brunn, in Grythyttan, some 110 miles south. When the camp was closed on October 15, those remaining were sent to Korsnäs, Gränna and Mullsjö.

Camp VI in Gränna was established in July 1944 to absorb excess personnel from Korsnäs and Loka Brunn. Gränna is the birthplace of Swedish engineer Salomon August Andreé, who died in 1897, in an attempt to reach the North Pole by hydrogen balloon. It is also famous for the peppermint candy made there, since 1859. The first 150 flyers moved from Korsnäs on July 20. The next month, another camp opened at Mullsjö, southwest across Lake Vättern. The first nine flyers came from Falun and one from Gränna. Soon, another 61 came from Falun and 52 crew members from landings in southern Sweden brought the total to 123 at Mullsjö.

The camps at Gränna and Mullsjö were closed on November 15, 1944. Korsnäs was the only remaining American internment camp. By that time, internees were being flown to England from Bromma Airport. Some had been in Sweden for several months, while others spent much shorter times.

The camps were supervised by Swedish military personnel but were funded largely by American officials. The flyers received about 1,500-3,000 Swedish kronor (SEK) per month, or \$375-750, a good monthly income in 1944. These funds covered¹⁶ lodging, food and other expenses. From 1943 to 1946, the Swedish government expense for American internees was SEK 124,116. By comparison, 200 British internees cost the Swedish government SEK 349,252, for the British government could not afford the American level of support.

The internment experience

On May 29, 1944, B-24H 42-94973 (RR-F) was one of five Liberators to land at Bulltofta, Sweden. Piloted by aircraft commander 1st Lt. John C. Forsyth and copilot 1st Lt. George Burroughs, the airplane had been part of an 880-plane formation attacking Pölitz, Poland. A supercharger failed on No. 3 but Lt. Forsythe used excess power to stay in formation.¹⁷ Exiting the target area, they were attacked by a Me 410, which shot out No. 2 engine. A rocket tore away most of the left vertical tail. Tail gunner TSgt. Harold N. Rhodes and left waist gunner SSgt. R. Sawyer were injured in the attacks. The decision was to make for Sweden, where they landed at Bulltofta at 1235.

After a successful landing, Rhodes and Sawyer were taken to a hospital. There, Sgt. Rhodes had several pieces of shrapnel or Plexiglas removed from his neck. For some time after his recovery, he stayed at Bulltofta to help repair aircraft, including switching engines from one airplane to another. Lt. Forsythe said, "He was good.... He was a top engineer [who] could do just about anything." Later, Rhodes joined the rest of the crew at Loka Brunn, except for Sawyer, who was returned to England



Mullsjö was an annex to Gränna from August to November 1944, when both were closed. The pensionat was a vacation hotel where crews were quartered during that period and is an example of the relatively good facilities. (Bo Widfeldt)



ABOVE: An unidentified crewman performs engine maintenance on a B-24 at F7 Sätenäs. (Bo Widfeldt)

LEFT: 2nd Lt. Lester Mickelson spent five pleasant months in Gränna. With him is another crew member and a young woman from the Ekwall family. (Bo Widfeldt)

Loka Brunn was a vacation village that housed Danish refugees during winter 1943 to spring 1944. The Danes were hastily removed and the Swedish camp commander, Maj. Leo Sager, arrived on May 16, 1944.¹⁸ He was an assistant to Count Folke Bernadotte, who was responsible for all internment camps in Sweden. Sager had earlier set up camps in Falun, Rättvik, Korsnäs, Mullsjö and Gränna. Capt. Richard Rollo, from the American Embassy, worked to organize the internees.

Loka Brunn was in "miserable condition" at that time. Sanitary facilities needed repair, meals were horrible and the stoves smoked. The first Americans arrived on May 22, even as problems were being fixed. Nevertheless, conditions improved and American internees stayed until October 1944. Relations with the community were orderly and good and Rhodes' crew enjoyed its time there. They boated on the lake, built docks, a diving board and a 30-foot tower and even had some contacts with German internees held nearby. One discovery was the Swedish sauna, where copilot George Burroughs was nonplussed when he entered after rolling in the snow, to find a Swedish girl ready to dry him off.

The Loka Brunn camp closed on October 23, 1944. Internees were split up among camps at Korsnäs, Gränna and Mullsjö. Crews that were repatriated went to Falun and on to Stockholm and then flew out of Sweden on B-24s used as transports. They rode in the cold bomb bay on board seats for the six-hour flight to England.

The crew of B-17G 42-31810 from the 425th Bomb Group,

729 Bomb Sqdn. landed at Sövde on June 21, 1944, with No.s 1 and 4 surging. After processing, they went first to Korsnäs and then on to Gränna on July 19. Bombardier 2nd Lt. Lester Mickelson kept a detailed diary of a very pleasant time in the small town of about 1,000.¹⁹ They traveled by train and then by bus, arriving in the evening. His entire crew was quartered in private homes that were already assigned when they arrived. The four officers on his crew stayed with a family that had lived in Chicago for 12 years, until 1932, and the enlisted men were in two others. All were cared for very well, calling their situation the best in town.

Though nominally under Swedish supervision, the camp was run by a group of men chosen by the American Air Attaché in Stockholm. The camp commander was Capt. Brook Baier, from Pennsylvania and Lt. John Harper, of Washington, D.C., was the executive officer. The senior noncommissioned officer was TSgt. George Rake, a Californian. Mickelson considered him one of the finest men he had met.

In Mickelson's building, they had a second-floor room with a beautiful view over Lake Vättern. From the veranda, they could see "the most captivating sundowns I ever beheld." The day began with formation in front of respective accommodations and an hour of exercise, before breakfast. Their time was otherwise at their disposal. Quite often, many internees gathered at some of the konditori in town to drink warm chocolate and eat the wonderful Swedish pastries. There was also basketball, tennis, volleyball or six-man football.



ABOVE: 1st Lt. Edwin R. Peterson landed B-24J 42-110065 at Rinkaby on May 29, 1944. He later was a test pilot for repaired aircraft at Västerås until war's end. (Bo Widfeldt)

RIGHT: The Vissla Kvarn memorial was one of at least four in Sweden, in remembrance of Americans killed in crashes. Others were at Antens Kapell, Örnahusen and Malmö Östrakyrkogård. (Bo Widfeldt)



Some men found the peacefulness hard to take, after the stresses of combat flying. One solution was to rotate crew members to other locations to provide maintenance and aircraft servicing on newly arrived airplanes. They were part of a maintenance structure organized by the USAAF to deal with tasks ranging from engine changes to what amounted to near-rebuilding of aircraft. These units were located at Bulltofta (F10), Sätenäs (F7) and Västerås (F1).

The internees were supposed to remain within 12 miles of Gränna. This gave plenty of latitude for exploration by bicycle of perhaps 50 neighboring villages. During their time in Gränna, the weather was excellent. On Saturday evenings, there were dances at the Ribbagård Hotel, quite a grand structure right in the middle of town. The girls came long distances to meet the Americans and there were many relationships from those evenings that resulted in at least 30 Swedes whose fathers were American. Each week, internees got 24-hour passes and there was a 3-day pass each month. The day pass was time enough to go to Jonköping for a movie, while three days allowed travel to see distant relatives or to Stockholm and nearby towns.

Life in Rättvik was similar to the Gränna experience.²⁰ Flt. Off. (F/O) Joe Sirotnak was the copilot in B-24H 41-28963 (J4-T) that landed at Hellerups Gård on January 17, 1945. The location was on the southern side of the west coast city of Falkenberg. The airplane had fire in one engine and in the bomb bay. Eight of the 10 crew bailed out, but the two waist gunners did not hear the order, so rode the airplane to its crash

landing. Both survived. The entire crew was soon collected by Swedish troops and began the transition to internment.

The first stop was the Grand Hotel in Falkenberg, where they had a big fish dinner before retiring. The next morning, there was a small breakfast before they departed on the train to Rättvik, some 360 miles away. Upon arrival, they were met by Swedish Army Maj. T.E. Tistrand, who escorted them to taxis in front of the station. The taxis sported modifications on their rear that burned charcoal to produce wood gas that propelled the cars. The final destination was the 25-room Turisthemmet Hotel that was to be their home until April 1945. There, Sirotnak's crew and a B-17 crew were the first residents in what was an annex to the camp at Korsnäs. Another facility used was the Lerdalshöjden Hotel.

Rättvik had a population of perhaps 900 persons in 1945 and was a resort area, summer and winter. The Americans soon fit into the local society. Their first major step was to purchase civilian clothing, which brought a boom to the single men's wear store. Sirotnak commented that their fashion sense was lacking, perhaps due to high altitude flying. An early disappointment to the Americans was their discovery that alcohol was prohibited. The beer tasted all right but gave no effects, despite some sincere testing. But, a mid-winter arrival gave lots of opportunity for skiing. The 21 Americans gave the local sporting goods store a big rush and replacement of broken skis and poles was a continuing business. Another favorite spot was Klingberg's Konditori. There, the Americans grew to love Swedish coffee and pastries.



Crew of B-24H 42-52569 Lovely Lady's Avenger in civvies. Landed at Bulltofta June 21, 1944. L-R Sgt. George Hamas, 2nd Lt. Lynn Fostmeier, 2nd Lt. Charles Seth, TSgt. Walter Taylor, SSgt. James Branum, SSgt. Harry Brainerd, TSgt. Edward Magalski, 1st Lt. Leo Mower. The crew was interned at the Grand Hotel in Rättvik for five months. (<http://www.sodabob.com>)

At least one marriage came out of the internee population in Sweden. Sgt. Ed Whitman, the B-17 right waist gunner on B-17G 42-31163 *Glory Girl* that landed at Rinkaby on June 3, 1944, met Maj Barbro Hedvall, during a walk to the pier on Lake Siljan. Maj worked at Klingberg's Konditori, the gathering point for the American crews. Soon, they became a couple and Whitman bought a small English-Swedish grammar book to help improve their communication. Their connection was strong and he returned to Rättvik two years later, when they were married on August 31, 1947. She moved with him to Scranton, Pa., where they had 51 years together, until his death on December 16, 1998.²¹

The Liberator tail gunner, Sgt. Robert I. Schausel, was noted for his unique downhill style and for his value as the tail-end man on bobsleds. Once he had reached the top of the ski slope, he stood ramrod straight, facing downhill. He pushed off, traveled about 40 feet and tumbled. By repeating this process, Schausel reached the bottom of the hill. Because he was a big man and "indifferent to pain," he would take the last seat on the crew's home-made bobsled. The run was straight down the hill into Rättvik and across the railroad tracks, where a sudden drop-off usually made the last man eject from the sled. Sirotnak said that Schausel loved the experience.

As winter passed into spring and war news improved, the crew knew that their days in Rättvik were numbered. Finally, they received word that they were moving to Västerås.²² There, F1, the Swedish Air Force base, had become a gathering point for bombers. It was not fancy, having a single paved runway and three grass strips plus an operations hut that appeared to have been hastily built. But, accommodations in the town were in a pleasant hotel and they were only 35 miles from Stockholm. The Americans could make easy weekend trips and even have wine in a restaurant.

At F1, the B-24s and B-17s were repaired and even nearly rebuilt by American and Swedish personnel. Sirotnak said they were brought to "slightly better than marginal condition." He made some test flights and concluded he would rather have been

back in the Hamburg flak. No longer did they have the leisure of Rättvik. They had a job during the day, so any play was restricted to the evening hours. Still, there were weekend dances in the city park and bicycling in the beautiful Dalarna countryside.

All came to an end on VE day, May 8, 1945. Stockholm saw great celebration of the event. Sirotnak and others had a party at a restaurant where the champagne corks popped frequently. There were Danes, Norwegians and others joining in the toasts. The Americans would soon be going home — but not quite yet.

First, there was the bomber force at Västerås to be removed from Sweden. They must be flown back to England and the crews in Sweden had that task. Sirotnak's crew made two trips, both in civilian clothes. Their first arrival in England caused quite a stir, as a bunch of "civilians" in motley civvies erupted from the bomb bay. But, the novelty passed, photos were taken and they carried on. All told, 84 bombers were flown back to England.²³

Not all crews remained after VE Day to fly airplanes to England. Most were repatriated over the period of internment on B-24s or C-87s that had been modified for courier flights to and from England. These were operated by the USAAF ATC as *Operation Sonnie*, commanded by Norwegian-born Col. Bernt Balchen. Lt. Mickelson, of the Gränna camp, provided a detailed description of his repatriation experience.²⁴

The word came that they would be released from internment on November 15, 1944. They would go to Stockholm's Bromma Airport for processing and then be flown to England. There was a large crowd to bid the 150 Americans farewell, when they boarded their buses. It would be quite a change in their quiet little town. When the crews arrived in Stockholm, American Embassy representatives briefed the crews on procedures for their departure that evening. There were three hours for a final walk about Stockholm, which stretched to another day, when the flight was canceled. They were put up at a hotel in Södertälje, south of Stockholm, where the instructions were that they were to remain in their quarters. Perhaps some of the beautiful blondes in the city were German spies!

At 3 p.m. the next afternoon, Capts. Brooke Baier and Bernard Davey brought the word from Stockholm. Those



The first Sonnie mission flew on March 31, 1944. On April 2, the plane visited Torslanda Airport in Göteborg, sporting false British civil registration G-AFYO. (Bo Widfeldt)

to depart the same evening were identified that resulted in Mickelson's crew being split for the first time in six months, leaving some strange feelings after becoming such good friends. SSgts. Roy Ness, Isaac Alban and Ernest Simi would go out on a later flight. The remaining crews were bused to Bromma, arriving about 6 p.m. There, they were instructed to remain on the bus until it was time for customs processing. There were six other buses, filled with flyers from other camps. The weather was snowy, which was good for a route that would go over German-occupied Norway and then over water to Scotland.

During the wait, a rumor came that customs would confiscate the perfume, sweaters, cameras and other things that people had. This converted the bus into a "magic club" where people tried to make their treasures disappear into clothing or other places where customs might not look. As it turned out, customs could not have cared if they took the whole country. Processing was quick and personnel soon found themselves on the ramp. There, 30 men climbed into a waiting Liberator transport where they were given a blanket and a life jacket, but no parachutes. The thought of flying over enemy country and the cold North Sea gave Mickelson some pause but other thoughts were very happy. He found a seat in the forward bomb bay, which was one of the worst places for a six-hour ride on a cold November night. Still, it was the way out.

Hundreds of other American flyers shared the experiences of those mentioned above. For the most part, they found their time in Sweden comfortable and they made many Swedish friends. In later years, many returned to visit those whom they had come to know and the places where such challenging events had transpired. These experiences were only part of larger and rather unknown American air operations in Sweden.

American fatalities in Sweden²⁵

Of the total 1,429 men involved in Sweden in this period,

a total of 60 died and were considered killed in action. Lt. Franklin D. Talcott died when his P-51 crashed at Ljungbyhed and SSgt. Harry S. Bower drowned while interned at Rättvik. Three men died on Sweden's southern coast and others were killed in crashes elsewhere. Six men died in the *Operation Sonnie* B-24 that crashed at Anten and others died of injuries sustained from enemy action during their flight to Sweden. A total of 40 men were buried in Malmö's East Cemetery, though all but two bodies were removed to stateside cemeteries or the American cemetery in Luxembourg. Their graves, near the middle of the cemetery, are marked by a B-17 propeller on a plinth bearing this text:

U.S.A.A.F.
DUTY CALLED THEM
TO GOD AND COUNTRY
THEY REST IN PEACE WHILE
MEMORY OF THEIR SACRIFICE
IS WRITTEN IN ETERNAL GLORY

Twenty men were listed as Missing in Action.

Air operations in Sweden

Three designated American operations took place in Sweden in 1944 and 1945. They were *Operation Sonnie*, *Operation Ball* and *Operation When and Where*, all commanded by Col. Bernt Balchen. *Sonnie* began in early 1944, after the necessary consent had been garnered from Great Britain and Sweden.²⁶ Sweden's consent was necessary to protect its neutrality. England was concerned that the operation would make the Americans a strong rival in postwar aviation. Nominally, *Sonnie's* purpose was to transport about 2,000 Norwegian aircrew trainees and interned American aircrew released by Sweden. ATC had overall command and control of these flights. Over 15 months, the operation moved over 4,300 passengers from Sweden via the only dependable air communication with



One of the 10 C-47s that flew Operation Ball missions between F21 Luleå and Norwegian destinations. (Bo Widfeldt)

the American embassy in Stockholm. It brought in supplies and equipment that assured sufficient repair of about two-thirds of the American aircraft that had made emergency landings in Sweden. Outbound flights often carried ball bearings, essential to the Allied war effort.

The neutrality issue called for all crews and ground personnel to wear civilian clothes and to assign civil registration numbers to 14 of the 22 unarmed Liberators that formed most of the fleet. There were also four DC-4s and a single C-47, all with civil registrations. The operation began with the March 31, 1944, departure of B-24D 42-40551 (later, NC18649) from Leuchars, Scotland to Bromma, landing at 0837.²⁷ On this mission, the airplane carried bogus British registration G-AFYO. The seven-man crew was commanded by Col. Balchen, who met with Swedish military and Foreign Office officials to make final arrangements. Two days later, Balchen visited Göteborg's Torslanda Airport, which was to be the alternate for Bromma. Departing Sweden on April 6, the airplane carried 30 persons, including the first flyers to be repatriated on an American airplane. The first of 550 flights between Bromma and England was on the same airplane, now marked as NC18649. To support the flights, the Americans paid for the 1944 extension of Bromma's runway to 5,580 feet.

The single C-47 assigned to *Sonnie* flew a particularly important mission on July 29, 1944. Sixteen days earlier, a German V-2 rocket went wildly off course, crashing near Kalmar. The Swedes collected about two tons of wreckage and decided to hand them over to the Allies. Maj. Keith Allen flew C-47 NC18639 to Bromma, where the V-2 pieces were loaded. Allen departed for England at 2213, where the V-2 components would be studied.

Balchen, in his autobiography, *Come North With Me*, recounted an event that showed how Allied, Swedish and German air operations were unavoidably intermixed at Bromma. One day, an in-bound Liberator cracked a cylinder head. Rather than wait for one from Leuchars, Balchen asked

Carl Florman, of the Swedish airline ABA, to borrow a spare cylinder from the Lufthansa representative at Bromma. The German didn't have one on hand but would arrange to have it flown in on the next plane from Berlin. The next day, there was a B-24 cylinder from a crash in Germany. Balchen had his B-24 repaired and brought back a new one on the next flight from Leuchars, which he gave to the Germans.

The only fatal accident of an *Operation Sonnie* aircraft has already been described. Two other airplanes, NC18643/ex-42-40551 and NC38942/ex-42-63780, damaged their nose gear during operations on Bromma's ice-covered runway. Both airplanes were written off rather than being repaired.

Operation Ball was far different from *Sonnie*.²⁸ It was a clandestine program, from July through September 1944, and was part of the larger *Operation Carpetbagger*. Run by Gen. William Donovan's Office of Strategic Services (OSS), missions supported resistance groups in France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Norway. For Ball, six war-weary B-24s were specially modified and painted with light-absorbent paint. The planes flew 64 missions to drop weapons, ammunition, food, radios and sabotage equipment to the Norwegian underground. Agents and radio equipment were also dropped behind German lines. Fifteen missions saw enemy opposition without direct damage. Nevertheless, operational hazards precluded success on several missions and two aircraft and 12 men were lost. Later, the 8th Air Force took over the mission, which was finally passed to the British.

One crew's experience must stand for the other missions flown.²⁹ Dave Schreiner was a pilot on a 36th Bomb Sqdn. crew at Leuchars, Scotland, that included both American and British personnel. On a September 20, 1944, mission, after they had made a successful air drop to the Norwegian resistance, they were shot down by Soviet anti-aircraft fire at Murmansk where they were trying to land. The crew was interned for two weeks and then returned to Leuchars via a British battleship to the Shetland Islands and a seaplane flight to Leuchars. The



Col. Bernt Balchen commanded air operations in Scandinavia after establishing air bases in Greenland and many other accomplishments. (USAF)

command pilot, Lt. Col. Keith Allen, was killed. He had flown the V-2 recovery mission mentioned above. Shortly after, General Spaatz terminated *Operation Ball*.

The third operation under Balchen's command was *When and Where*. This was a project in which American C-47s and uniformed crews flew Norwegian troops and supplies into northern Norway. During autumn 1944, Colonel Balchen began negotiations with the Swedes for rights to use bases in northern Sweden to support such flights. More detailed discussions proceeded in October, followed by multilateral talks involving the Swedish Foreign Office, the Norwegian government in exile and American, British and Soviet representatives. A serious Norwegian concern was to forestall any Soviet attempt to take over parts of far northern Norway. The final decision was on December 15, 1944. With that, ATC could provide 10 C-47s and their crews for the operation.³⁰

The 1409th and 1415th Air Base units in England supplied the airplanes and crews that arrived at Bromma on December 23, except for one airplane with mechanical problems that arrived on December 27. The fleet then moved to F21, at Kallax, via F1 in Västerås. Balchen set up his base there with more than 100 personnel, including air crews and maintenance. The necessary

buildings were built in record time, especially given that it was mid-winter. Meanwhile, Norwegian troops, which had trained in Sweden, had been waiting at their nearby encampment. The troops were identified as police personnel, which was another concession to Swedish neutrality.

The first mission was on December 30.³¹ C-47s flew to Västerås, where they loaded a complete field hospital and 14 tons of equipment that was flown to Kallax. Eight days later, on January 7, 1945, was the first flight to Kirkenes, Norway. Bad weather forced their return, but another attempt on January 12 was successful. All 10 airplanes reached Kirkenes' Høibuktmoen Airport to deliver the field hospital and a portion of the Norwegian battalion. In later missions, the C-47s delivered food and forage to snow-bound communities, often using improvised landing strips. If they could not land the cargo was air-dropped.

At its conclusion in August 1945, *Operation When and Where* had flown 572 missions. Some 1,100 tons of medical, military and civilian supplies and 1,142 ski troops were flown to Kirkenes and other destinations.³² Norwegian troops totaled 1,142. The Norwegian forces supported Red Army units operating against the Germans in Arctic Norway, forcing them to the west and south. They also made it clear to the Soviets that Finnmark, the easternmost Norwegian county, was part of Norway. In the Bodø and Narvik areas, there was a large number of Soviet and Yugoslav POWs who had been used by the Germans to build an Arctic railway. They were in much the same condition as those in concentration camps in Germany. To serve these personnel, the *When and Where* planes flew a Swedish Red Cross hospital on June 7, 1945, to Bodø, including 112 personnel and 240 tons of supplies. Ironically, *When and Where* also flew Germans who had surrendered in Norway from Göteborg to Germany.

The airplanes used for *Operation When and Where* missions were these, all of which arrived at Bromma Airport on December 23, 1944:

Type	Serial No.	C/N
C-47A	42-93703	13664
C-47A	43-47987	13803/25248
C-47A	43-48243	14059/25504
C-47A	43-48245	14061/25506
C-47A	43-48247	14063/25508
C-47A	43-48248	14064/25509
C-47A	43-48251	14067/25512
C-47A	43-48252	14068/25513
C-47A	43-48262	14078/25523
C-47A	43-48958	14744/26219

These three operations had little in common except being under Bernt Balchen's command. They were also far outside of ATC's normal tasking. They were all set up quickly to take on tasks in Sweden and provided essential services that enabled interned air crews to be repatriated quickly, gave essential support to the Norwegian resistance and ensured that Norwegian forces were able to return to their own country and reestablish control in the far north.

Operations debrief

Even with its official status as a neutral during WWII, Sweden saw a very large amount of American air activity, as well as what the British and Germans carried on. Hundreds of American aircrew were interned for as long as six months or more. Aircraft made emergency landings all over southern Sweden and some provided the start of the next generation of fighters for Flygvapnet. Beyond the aircraft and crews that were interned, there were three designated operations, *Sonnie*, *Ball* and *When and Where*, that saw American crews and aircraft carrying out military missions from Sweden. Though it might have been considered a side show, there were lots of American air activity in Sweden that made a huge difference in the war's progress for the Allies.

Author's recommendation

For very detailed information about aircrew and aircraft interned in Sweden, I highly recommend the three-book set published by Air Historic Research, Nässjö, Sweden. Two are by Bo Widfeldt, Sweden's leading aviation historian. They are *Amerikanska Nödlandare 1943-1945* and *Tyska Nödlandare 1939-1945*. The third is Rolph Wegman's *Brittiska Nödlandare 1940-1945*. All three have the same format, with detailed information about each airplane and its crew, most with a photo. There is extensive supplemental material dealing with internment, casualties and other operations. Each book has a complete list of all personnel involved, their airplane and unit.

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About the Author



Cal Taylor retired as a Lieutenant Colonel in 1989, after a 26-year USAF career. During 16 years of flying duty, he was a navigator in the B-52H, C-141, AC-130, C-133, C-5 and the C-130. In the other twelve years of his Air Force service, he was an intelligence analyst, supervisor and manager with the Military Airlift Command, Defense Intelligence Agency and the 6th Tactical Intelligence Group, in South Korea.

At the end of two years in the C-133, assigned to the 84th Military Airlift Squadron, he collected much information from the unit scrapbook, valuable for a future book. This article is one chapter in that book, *Remembering an Unsung Giant: The Douglas C-133 Cargomaster and its People*.

The author has contributed several articles to the *AAHS Journal*. This includes on the "1700th Test Squadron (Turboprop)," "C-133 Engines and Propellers" and "Mustangs in Swedish Service," detailing the acquisition, use and disposition of P-51s by the Royal Swedish Air Force. Mr. Taylor is a member of SFF (Svensk Flyghistorisk Föreningen).

