

Historical Sociopolitical Context

The Soviet relationship with northern Europe was characterized by two hundred years of ideological conflict and distrust, exchanges of political rhetoric, spy accusations, border disputes, wars, and fears of invasion.² From 1899 to 1914, itinerant Russian workmen traveled the Swedish countryside. They were called "saw-filers" (*sagfilare*), as they were renowned for sharpening various tools, especially saws. Most were Russian farmers from the Novgorod region who traveled to Sweden in the autumn and remained through the winter. Between fifty and three hundred saw-filers came to Sweden each winter to earn good wages.³ The term eventually became synonymous in Sweden with Russian spies, although the saw-filers' intention of spying was never confirmed.⁴ Speculations as to their possible clandestine purpose were particularly intense between 1899 and 1902 and from 1910 to 1914.⁵ Swedish police maintained a close surveillance on them and even masqueraded as saw-filers, but none was ever caught in the act of spying. Newspaper editorials were primarily responsible for portraying saw-filers as possible spies.⁶

During the 1930s, mysterious "ghost planes" were seen across northern Sweden. Also popularly known as "ghost fliers" or "flier x," they were typically described as gray monoplanes with no identifying insignias or markings. They were sometimes seen or heard during fierce blizzard conditions, occasionally landing and taking off, and always in remote areas. Sightings of the phantom plane were almost exclusively nocturnal, and there was typically a searchlight beam coming from the craft. Despite a pervasive folk belief in the flier's existence, no plane or secret airfield was ever found. The flier possessed quasi-supernatural qualities, because period aircraft were incapable of operating under treacherous blizzard conditions for hours at a time, performing the daring maneuvers described by witnesses, and eluding the massive military search that ensued during the heaviest concentration of sightings, between December 1933 and February 1934. Many thought the fliers may have been liquor smugglers avoiding customs,⁷ or possibly weapons smugglers.⁸ The most prominent and more sinister

theory held that they were potentially hostile reconnaissance missions from Russia,⁹ Germany,¹⁰ or Japan.¹¹

Since the early 1980s there have been thousands of reports of phantom submarines in Swedish territorial waters, which are popularly assumed to be Soviet spy missions. The Swedish government's Submarine Commission was given the task of assessing over six thousand reports of suspected underwater incursions between 1981 and 1994.¹² While the Commission's report focuses on a few major incidents that were concluded to have involved Soviet vessels, most cases were ambiguous visual sightings that could not be accurately evaluated, including reports of wave movements,

Den stora gåtan

Vad är det för ena maskiner som far i kvallarna sena och skrämmer envar?

Det blixtrar som vore det fyrverkeri.
Det lyser som fore det stjärnskott forbi.

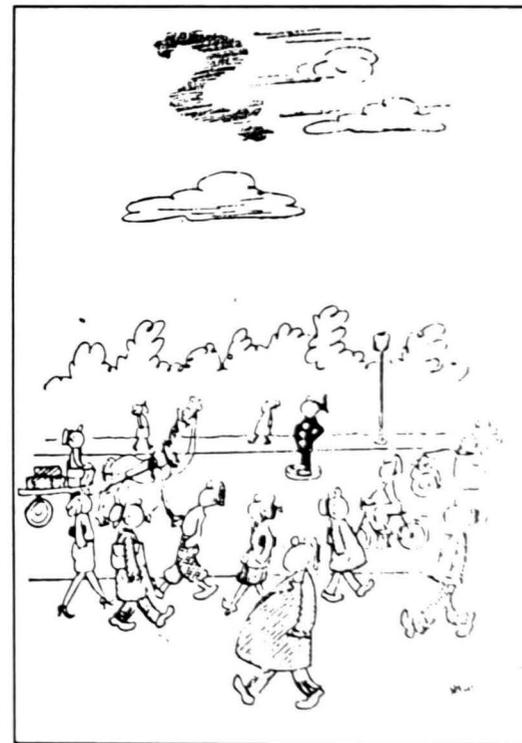
I slott och i kåtor, på land och i stad nu tager man gåtor på entreprenad.

"Det kan val ej vara raketbomber, tro? Då måste jag fata till moster i Hjo!"

Raketernas bågar i mörknande luft med skräckstämning plågar vårt lilla fornuft.

Det vore ej alla om allt—eller hur?—var enbart en villa av optisk natur.

DANUS



This poem appeared in a regular column called "This Day's Melody." Entitled "The Big Street," it begins with: "What kinds of machines are those, travelling late in the evenings and frightening each and everyone?" Source: *The Stockholms-Tidningen*, August 18, 1946.

marine lights and sounds, and possible divers. The Commission stated that "many different objects and conditions . . . can be interpreted as being connected to underwater activity," noting that natural explanations had been found for a "great number of reports." It also remarked on the influx of cases in proportion to media publicity.¹³ Waves of claims and public discourse about Soviet submarines routinely violating Swedish territory have occurred intermittently throughout this century, becoming particularly intense after 1981, when a Soviet Whiskey Class U137 probably carrying nuclear weapons ran aground during a reconnaissance mission, which resulted in an international incident that engendered Swedish political protests and intense media publicity.¹⁴

Near the end of World War II, German V-rockets devastated parts of the United Kingdom. Occasionally the rockets strayed into Scandinavia, causing no damage but raising concerns. One V-2 fell near Backebo in southeastern Sweden, leaving a crater sixteen feet wide and nine feet deep. Fears of a destruction like that in England were rekindled in Sweden during 1946, since Russian forces occupied Peenemunde, the former center of German rocket science. Soviet troops controlled much of northern Europe during this time, and it was unclear as to how much Scandinavian territory they might claim in the political uncertainty following the war.¹⁵

There was speculation as early as March 19 that the Soviets would soon begin test firing rocket bombs. A newswire from the Swedish newspaper agency *Tidningarnas Telegrambyrå* appeared in numerous newspapers on March 19, including *Sydostra Sveriges Dagblad*, *Umbladet*, and *Norra Vasterbotten*, and served as a prelude of what was to come in the spring and summer. It quotes the London *Daily Mirror's* Berlin correspondent as stating that "German scientists and technicians who work under Russian supervision will shortly release a number of V-2 bombs from secret research stations on the Baltic." Xenophobia resurfaced between April 23 and 26, 1946, as a series of earth tremors were reported in the Swedish counties of Blekinge, Skane, and Kalmar, and in the vicinity of the Danish island of Bornholm in the southern Baltic. One newspaper suggested that they were Russian tests of nuclear weapons.¹⁶ On April 28 Swedish foreign affairs minister Osten Unden met privately with his Norwegian counterpart Halvard

Lange, who warned that there was great consternation in American political circles that the Soviets would soon possess atomic weapons. Lange stated "that there was an imminent danger of war" and that a group aligned with General Dwight Eisenhower felt that "differences between the U.S. and the Soviets had taken on such a nature that the U.S. ought to strike with a preventative war. President Truman, however, was opposed to this. The rumours came from the U.S."¹⁷

The Genesis of the Episode

Astronomer Louis Winkler correlates the rocket sightings to a rare confluence of astronomical and meteorological events: geomagnetic comets and the occasional disbursement of their orbital streams in conjunction with exceptionally high solar activity,¹⁸ which generated spectacular auroras, meteors, and cometary spray streaking through the atmosphere.¹⁹ Unusual aerial phenomena were first noted in January of 1946, with reports of meteors and strange glowing clouds. On the morning of January 4, observers across southern Sweden reported that luminous clouds cast eerie red, green, and purple hues on the snowy landscape. At the Revingehed military training field, "army watch-dogs crawled into their kennels," while a horse "lowered his head towards his legs," remaining so for the duration of the twenty-five-minute display.²⁰ These luminous phenomena were interpreted as extraordinary and intense, but auroral in nature. There were also reports of meteors at Fransborg, northwest of Stockholm, on January 9,²¹ above Ljungdalen in Jamtland later that same afternoon,²² as well as a bright fireball with a long glowing tail seen by many across Dalarna County on January 17.²³ Intermittent reports of fireballs and mysterious auroral activity continued through early May and were almost exclusively defined as natural phenomena.²⁴ Various other strange celestial activity was reported between January and May of 1946, including a mirage at Gagnef involving a lake, a hill, and several buildings,²⁵ a mirage of an aerial cargo ship at Visby on Gotland Island,²⁶ an eerie nocturnal light in Dalarna County,²⁷ a rainbow-colored halo near the sun at Helsingfors,²⁸ sun-dogs above

CUFON - Computer UFO Network Seattle, Washington

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SECRET

February 26, 1942.

OCS 21347-86

MENORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT:

The following is the information we have from GHQ at this mement regarding the air alarm over Los Angeles of yesterday morning:

"From details available at this hour:

1. Unidentified airplanes, other then American Army or Navy planes, were probably over Los Angeles, and were fired on by elements of the 37th CA Brigade (AA) between 3:12 and 4:15 AM. These units expended 1430 rounds of ammunition.
2. As many as fifteen airplanes may have been involved, flying at various speeds from what is officially reported as being very slow to as much as 200 MPH and at elevations from 9000 to 18000 feet.
3. No bombs were dropped.
4. No casualties among our troops.
5. No planes were shot down.
6. No American Army or Navy planes were in action.

Investigation continuing. It seems reasonable to conclude that if unidentified airplanes were involved they may have been from commercial sources, operated by enemy agents for purposes of spreading alarm, disclosing location of anti-aircraft positions, and slowing production through blackout.

Such conclusion is supported by varying speed of operation and the fact that no bombs were dropped.

Gen. George C. Marshall

Chief Of Staff

Document #, or ('E' to end): 26

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