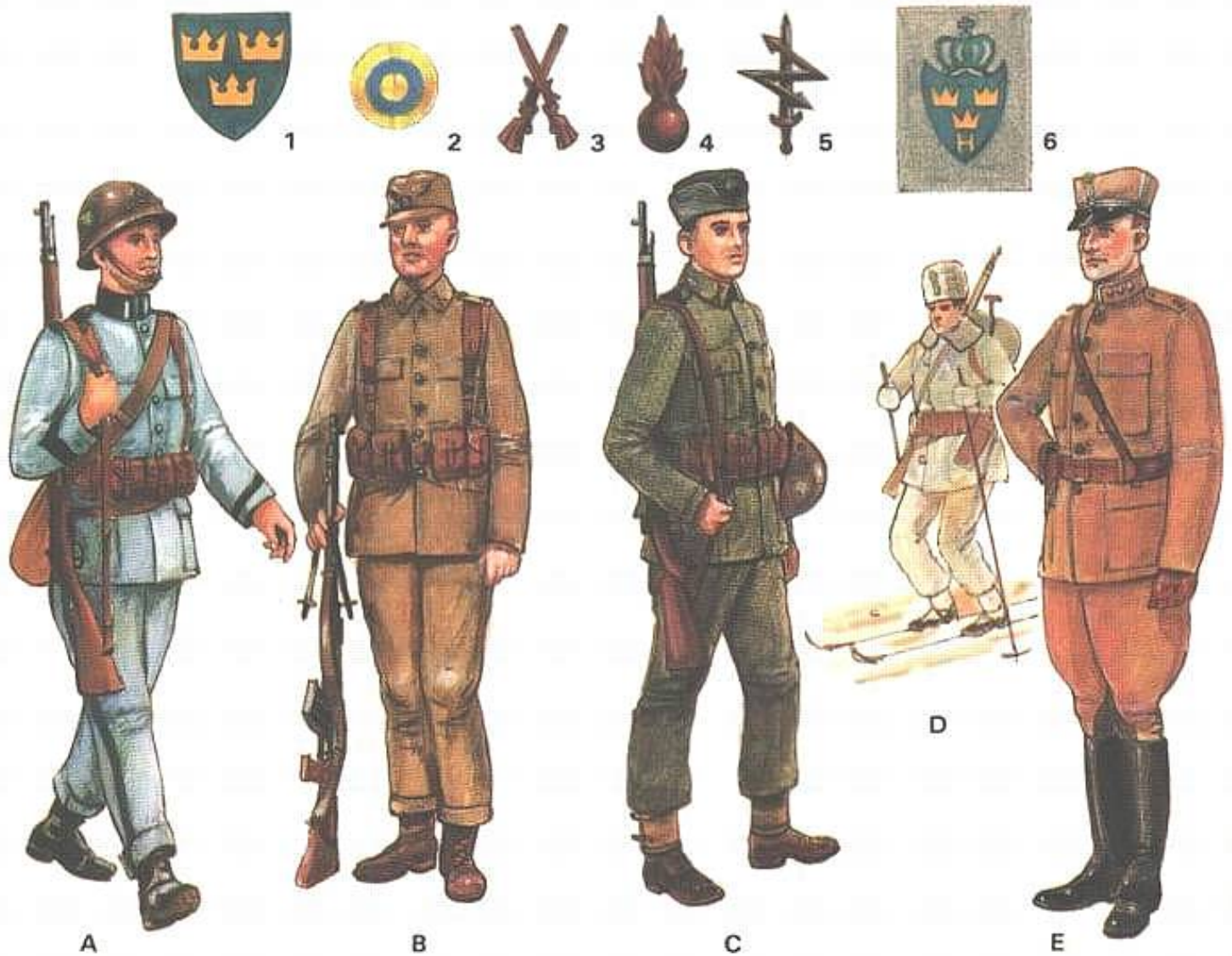


# The Swedish Army - The uniforms worn during World War Two

## Introduction

The following article and uniform plate by Ronald Kidd derives from the British magazine Military Modelling, November 1985.



**A** Uniform Model 1910 - Lance-corporal of a HEMVÄRNET (Home Guard) unit, c. 1940.

**E** Uniform Model 1923 - Captain, c. 1940.

**B** Uniform Model 1937 - Infantry private, c. 1941.

**C** Uniform Model 1939 - Infantry senior NCO, c. 1945.

**D** Sheepskin hats and coats were worn during the winter months.

**1** Helmet decal.

**2** National cockade.

**3** Bronze collar branch badge for infantry; worn on the collar point.

**4** Bronze collar branch badge for artillery.

5 Bronze collar branch badge for signal troops.

6 General arrangement illustration from photograph, of the sleeve badge worn on the upper left arm of greatcoat or tunic by HEMVÄRNET units.

Shield and crown are worn on a rectangle of uniform cloth.

## Historical background

The Swedish military system, like the Swiss, rests on the militia system. Also like the Swiss, Swedish neutrality is effectively well over a century old, the last war being fought against Napoleonic armies in 1814. Although the Royal Swedish Army has not fought a war since Napoleonic times, Swedish volunteers have on a number of occasions assisted their fellow Scandinavian countries in resisting much larger and more powerful neighbours. This happened in Denmark in 1848 and 1864, and more recently in Finland during 1939-40.

Following the First World War, Sweden allowed its armed forces to sink to a very low period of preparedness; in 1924 conscription was reduced to four months, only being raised to six months in 1936 when it was becoming obvious that international tension was growing. Following the German invasion of Poland in September 1939, Sweden called up 70,000 reserves.

When Russia declared war on Finland in November 1939, Sweden although sympathetic to the Finns, declined to send troops to assist. However, supplies were sent and over 8,000 Swedish volunteers, together with volunteers from America, Norway, Denmark, Hungary and Spain fought with the Finns until they were forced to sue for peace in March 1940.

In April 1940 the German invasion of Norway and Denmark was so rapid that no volunteers had time to assist. German aircraft flying across Swedish territory were fired on with little effect, although during the war a number of Allied and Axis aircraft crashed, or were brought down, when flying over Sweden.

At the start of the Norwegian Campaign, Sweden put its entire forces of 400,000 men on full alert. During this campaign Sweden resisted German demands to be allowed to send troops through Sweden, although after the Norwegian surrender German "humanitarian" traffic was allowed to travel over Swedish railways into Norway. Later, German supply and leave trains were also allowed to use this route, until this agreement was terminated by Sweden in 1943.

In Sweden, a national government was formed, and the country went onto a war-footing; the armed forces had its conscription increased to 450 days, and its strength was eventually increased to 800,000; civilians were formed into home guard, aircraft observer, air-raid precautions and various auxiliary units.

The German invasion of Russia in June 1941 was supported in the north by Finnish forces anxious to retake territory lost during the previous "Winter War". Despite the increasing Swedish defence of its neutrality, about 1,000 volunteers were allowed to serve with the Finnish troops in blatant breach of its neutrality. Sweden also allowed a fully equipped and uniformed German division to cross from Norway to Finland to enable it to reach the battle-front quickly. In 1945 German units retreated alongside the Swedish frontier, across northern Finland to Norway.

Danish and Norwegian exiles were allowed to set up camps in Sweden and received military training as "police-troops" in preparation for the eventual liberation of their respective countries. From December 1944 until May 1945, American aircraft of the USAF were allowed to operate in support of Norwegian "police-troops" fighting in Northern Norway. On May 5, 1945 an entire Danish brigade of "police-troops" were escorted by Swedish warships across the channel dividing the two countries, here they assisted allied troops to control the defeated German forces [1](#).

Although Sweden did not take direct military action in Norway and Denmark, she did have contingency plans for intervention in both countries, should the Allies fail to reach these countries in time to prevent

deliberate German action against their peoples. The German unconditional surrender on May 4 and May 8, 1945, in Denmark and Norway respectively, made any such action unnecessary.

## Uniforms

The beginning of this century saw the general adoption by European armies of drab-coloured service uniforms and Sweden was no exception.

The first service uniform was introduced in 1906 in a light blue-grey colour, with dark blue collar, sleeve chevrons and trouser stripes. All regimental distinctions were abolished, with the exception of the buttons and a cloth arm-of-service shield worn on the right upper sleeve. A distinctive feature of this uniform was a light and dark blue tricorne hat, in the style of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century.

In 1910 this uniform was modified by the removal of the sleeve shield, and the addition of dark blue shoulder straps with cloth regimental numbers in arms-of-service colours: yellow for infantry; red for artillery, and white for cavalry. This modified uniform was adopted by all branches of the army and was still being worn by the beginning of the Second World War by members of local defence units.

The Model 1910 (m/1910) uniform was replaced by a new service uniform in 1923 (m/1923), although it took a very long time before this uniform came into general use. The colour was known as Mignonette and was a cloth mixture of brown-grey-brown, with the brown predominating. A modification of this uniform introduced in 1937 (m/1937) was a stand and fall collar in place of the original upright collar. The colour remained the same. Both these uniforms were worn during the first years of the Second World War.

Following shortly on the m/1937 uniform was a new service dress introduced in 1939 (m/1939). This was a modern style uniform in a grey-green cloth, similar in style to the German army uniform of the time. By 1945 the whole of the army was dressed in the m/1939 uniform.

**Figure A:** Lance-corporal of a HEMVÄRNET (Home Guard) unit, c. 1940, wearing the m/1910 uniform. The steel helmet introduced in 1918 is coloured grey-brown overall. Swedish Triple Crown emblems on a shield, on both sides, are blue and yellow national decals. NCO rank insignia is indicated by vertical silver bars or chevrons, one vertical bar denoting a lance-corporal. The rifle is the 6.5mm Mauser Rifle, m/1896; the narrow leather strap below the 5-pouch ammunition belt could be used to secure the rifle stock when marching. A canvas haversack is carried over the left shoulder. Note the rolled-up trouser bottoms, a common feature of Swedish uniforms until the introduction of anklets with the m/1939 uniform.

**Figure E:** Captain, c. 1940, wearing the m/1923 uniform. The officer's kepi had silver cords on the vertical seams and silver bands around the base, the number and thickness varying according to rank. On the front were an upper national cockade and a lower heraldic button, both joined by silver cords. Officers' rank was indicated by 1 to 3 five-pointed silver stars, in small, medium and large sizes worn on the collar. The collar had silver braid to the front and top edges. Buttons were bronze colour, with patch pockets on the breast and skirt. The brown leather Sam Browne belt and holster carries the m/1940 9mm Swedish version of the Finnish "Lahti" pistol of 1935.

**Figure B:** Infantry private, c. 1941, wearing the m/1937 uniform. Simple peaked field cap worn with ear flaps held by front buckle. The collar carried a bronze metal branch insignia introduced with this uniform, and the shoulder straps have the regimental number, also in bronze metals. The tunic pockets for the other ranks have visible flaps only. The four large leather ammunition pouches contain 20-round magazines for the m/1937 6.5mm Swedish version of the American Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR).

**Figure D:** Sheepskin hats and coats were worn during the winter months. The hat has a national cockade and heraldic buttons similar to Figure B; otherwise the figure is without insignia. A rucksack with ground sheet, tent, shovel, etc. is carried on the back, and a German-style cylindrical gas mask case is carried on the front. The trousers are tucked into side-laced spats.

**Figure C:** Infantry senior NCO, c. 1945, wearing the m/1939 uniform. The field service cap has a national cockade fixed to the front. Senior NCO rank is indicated by two or three bronze chevrons fixed to the shoulder straps above the bronze regimental number. On the collar is the bronze branch insignia, similar to Figure B. the modern-looking steel helmet, introduced in 1937, is painted khaki with national decals on both sides. The trousers are tucked into leather-edged canvas anklets, the first time this item has been included as part of field dress. Officers' uniforms included an open-necked tunic and a peaked forage cap. The rifle carried is the Swedish designed AG m/42 with a 10-round magazine. Other weapons used by the Swedish army included the m/1937 Swedish version of the Finnish "Suomi" sub-machine gun, and German stick grenades.

## Acknowledgements

I gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Dr. Jan von Konow, Armémuseum, Stockholm.

## Sources

1. The Luftwaffe in Sweden 1939-45, B. Widfeldt, 1983.
  2. Uniforms of the World, R. Knötel & H. Sieg, 1980.
  3. Sweden, E. Elstob, 1979.
  4. Battle for Scandinavia, Time Life, 1981.
  5. Military Small Arms of the Twentieth Century, I. Hogg & J. Weeks, 1974.
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I thank Roger Dennis, England, who kindly supplied me with a scan of the article.

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## Noter:

- 1) The "channel", of course, is Øresund; the escort left the Danish ships at the end of Swedish territorial waters.