

The Swedish Air Force 1939-1945 - Operation Save Denmark

The Air Force's role in Operation Save Denmark



*Crew member, possibly a flight lieutenant, of an S 16 (Caproni Ca 313) reconnaissance aircraft.
From Source 4.*

The air staff's operations department supervised the planning work in connection with the two intended sub-operations - Operation Rädsla Sjöland and Operation Rädsla Bornholm.

The Air Force's contribution was approx. 300 aircraft, which were to be deployed under the leadership of the Air Force chief, Lieutenant General B. Nordenskjöld, who would set up his headquarters at the air station at Ljungbyhed.

The air forces included a squadron of bombers (Second Flying Squadron), a squadron of fighters (Third Flying Squadron) and some reconnaissance squadrons.

Source 3 mentions that the Second Squadron had 5 flying divisions (flying flotilla), while the Third Squadron had 4 flying divisions and some squadrons of reconnaissance aircraft.

The picture also gives an impression of the Swedish flight suit.

The divisions/squadrons are not specified in Source 3, but according to the air force's peacetime organization (Source 1), the two squadrons included the following flying divisions:

Unit

Air station (peacetime) Aircraft types

Second Air Squadron	Gothenburg		
F 6 Royal Västgöta Air Flotilla Karlsborg		Light bomber	B 17
F 7 Royal Skaraborg's air flotilla Såtenäs		Fighter	J 22
F 9 Royal Göta Air Flotilla	Sieve	Light bomber	B 17
F 14 Royal Halland's air flotilla Hamlstad		Medium bomber B 18	
Third Air Squadron	Stockholm		
F 8 Royal Svea Air Flotilla	Barkarby	Fighter	J 22
F 10 Royal Scanian Air Flotilla Ängelholm		Fighter	J 22
F 13 Royal Bråvalla air flotilla Norrköping		Fighter	J 22
F 16 Royal Uppland Air Flotilla Uppsala		Fighter	J 22

The planning work

Planning work began on 14 April 1945; on 20 April, a memo is issued for information to the army and navy, in which the air force's intended tasks are described.

- Third Squadron would have the most active role, as it would have to take care of the fighter coverage of Øresund, both offensively and defensively. Operation center: Malmö.
- The Second Squadron had to be in readiness, with a view to deploying against German naval forces and any pockets of resistance ashore. Bombing was only allowed against targets that were clearly recognized as German, whereby possible damage to Danish property was sought to be limited. Operation center: Ljungbyhed.
- Aerial reconnaissance had to be intensified, a task which, if necessary, also had to take place right up to the start of the operations.

The planning work also included the deployment of divisions and squadrons to air stations and field airfields in southern Sweden.



Reconnaissance aircraft of the type S 16 (Caproni Ca 313).
From Source 1.

On 27 April 1945, the work is completed and an aerial reconnaissance of certain coastal sections on Zealand and Bornholm is carried out on the same day, where aircraft from F 3, Royal Östgöta flying fleet, make a series of oblique shots of German military installations.

The purpose of this photo reconnaissance was to update the entire planning basis for Operation Rädde Denmark.

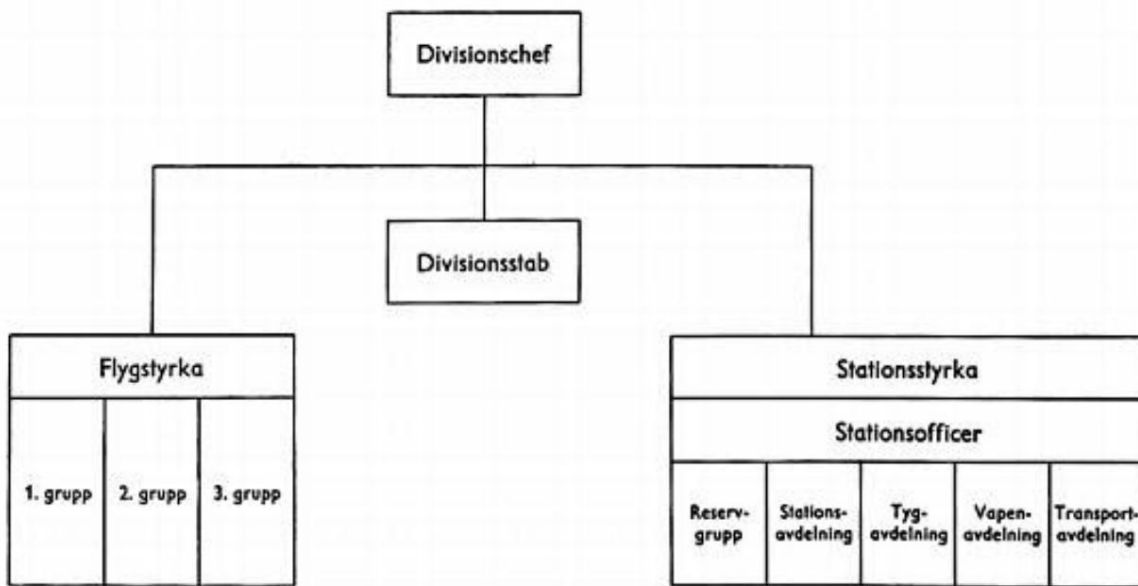
Organisation

The Swedish flying units were divided into 2-3 squadrons (*divisions*).

The following example shows a light bomber squadron, immediately before the war, referred to by the Danish designations of the period.

The squadron consisted of:

- **Staff (24 men)**
Operations section, radio section, photo section, meteorology section and catering section.
- **Flying echelon (18 men)**
Three sections of 3 aircraft with crews (of 2 men); the squadron commander is included in the personnel strength.
- **Rolling echelon (approx. 100 men)**
Station and Transport Service as well as Aircraft Mechanics and Weapons Mechanics.



Let bombeeskadrille, ca. 1939.
From Source 2.



Fighter aircraft of the type J 22.
From Source 4.

Aircraft types

The Swedish Air Force could not acquire a suitable modern fighter on the international market, so they had to produce one themselves.

The task went to *Flygförvaltningens Verkstad in Stockholm (FFVS)*.

The aircraft was equipped with either 2 8 mm and 2 pcs. 13.2 mm machine guns, or 4 pcs. 13.2 mm machine guns.



Light bomber of the type B 17.

From the Swedish Aviation Historical Society.

The plane, manufactured by SAAB, had a crew of 2 men and could carry a bomb load of 500 kg.

The aircraft is known in the Danish context as the Swedish aircraft, the Air Force of the Danish Brigade was made available by F 7, Royal Skaraborg's air fleet, at the air station in Sätenäs.



Medium bomber of the type B 18.

From Source 4.

The aircraft had a crew of 3 men and could carry a bomb load of 1,400 kg.

The aircraft was built by SAAB and replaced an older bomber of the Junkers 86 type.

The aircraft existed in two main versions - B 18 (medium bomber) and S 18 (medium reconnaissance aircraft).

I am not aware of exactly which aircraft carried out the photo reconnaissance over Denmark on 27 April 1945.



*Medium-heavy reconnaissance aircraft of the type S 16.
From Source 4.*

The planes were purchased in Italy in 1940-41.

The aircraft existed in two main versions - B 16 (medium bomber) and S 16 (medium reconnaissance aircraft).

In the reconnaissance version, it was equipped with 4 pcs. 8 mm machine guns.

Aircraft types - summary

Data	J 22	B 17	B 18	S 16
Span	10 m	13.7 m	13.23 m	11.8 m
Length	7.8 m	9.8 m	17.04 m	16.65 m
Height	3.6 m	4.0 m	4.35 m	3.70 m
Starting weight	2,835 kg	8,793 kg	5,900 kg	
Maximum speed	575 km/h	435 km/h	570 km/h	420 km/h
Crew	3			

1

2

4

Field airfields



A fighter aircraft of the type J 20 (Reggiane Re 2000 Falco) in a shelter at a field airfield.

From Source 1.

As early as 1936, the air staff anticipated that air divisions and squadrons would have to be dispersed in the event of mobilization.

A major reconnaissance work was carried out to find suitable places for the construction of field airfields. The work was completed in 1938 and funds were allocated to build 19 field airfields (*krigsflygfält*).

By the end of the war, a total of 39 field airfields had been built. 11 of these had fully or partially concrete runways, which ensured that they could be used in all kinds of weather, not unimportant in a country where snow and frost have an influence.



A SAAB B 17 light bomber in a field hangar at Feltflyveplats 16.
From Source 6.

Source 5 contains maps showing air stations and field airfields of the time.

Source 6 has a full and richly illustrated description of Krigsflygfält 16 on Brattforsheden, near Karlstad.

Here, i.a. the field hangars, which were constructed from logs, branches and netting.

Close air defense

The field airfields were secured by a close-in air defence, which included 40 mm anti-aircraft guns and 20 mm machine guns as well as anti-aircraft machine guns, i.a. in double staircases.

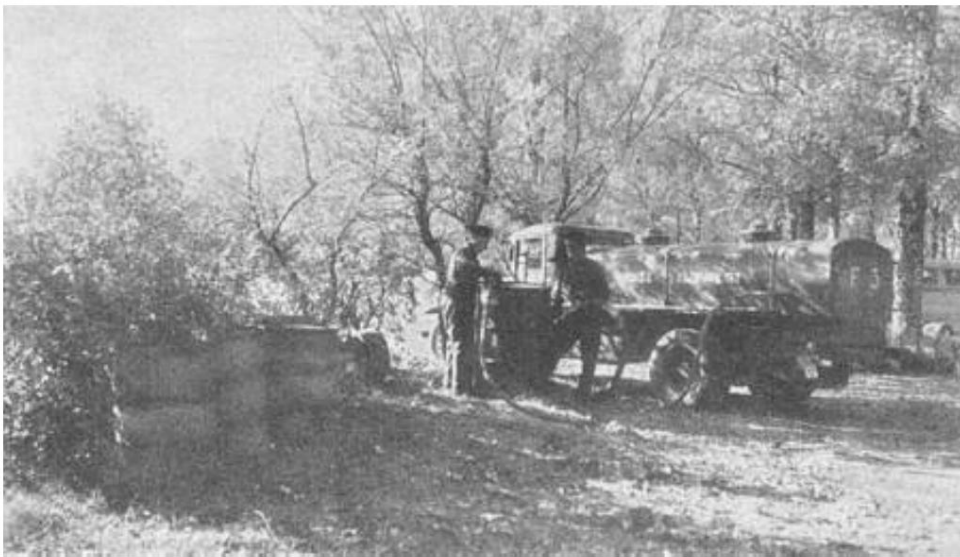
Machine guns and machine guns were manned by personnel from the rolling echelons of the squadrons, whether the light anti-aircraft guns were also so manned or whether they came from army anti-aircraft units, I am not aware. The following pictures clearly show that the crew are from the air force, wearing an aviator wing on their steel helmets; the army used a blue shield, with three golden/yellow crowns.



*Machine gun m/36 in anti-aircraft attachment.
From Source 6.*



*20 mm machine gun w/ 40 in stationary anti-
aircraft mount.
From Source 6.*



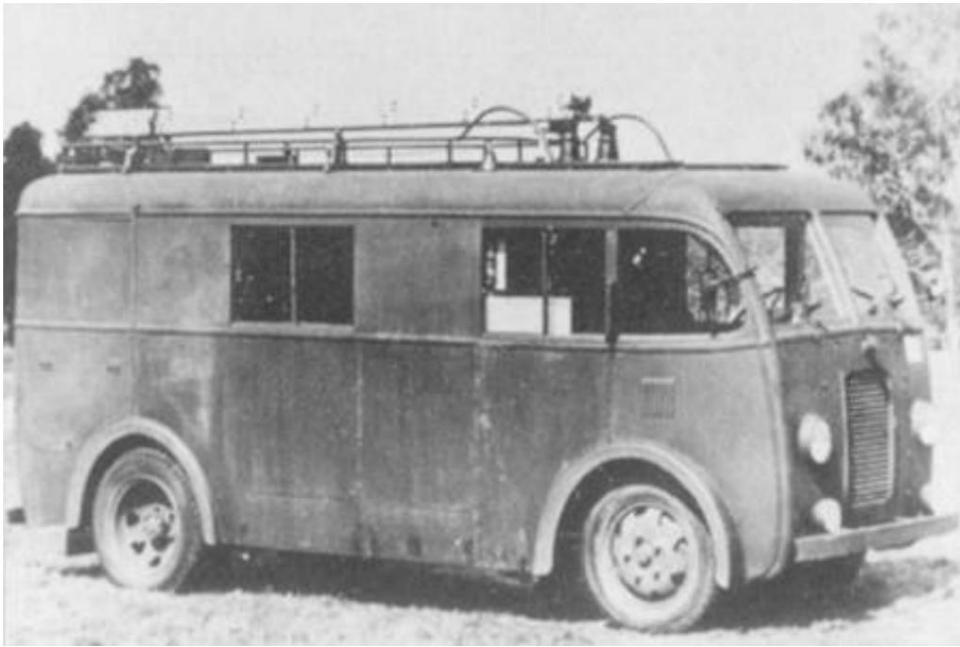
*Tank truck and fuel depot at an airfield, approx. 1939.
From Source 1.*

The rolling echelon

The deployment to field airfields was part of the training.

Source 6 contains a number of good photographs of a deployment exercise from September 1942, see Squadron exercise 1942.

From here you get a good impression of how a field airfield was arranged and a glimpse of the rolling stock.



Radio car, Volvo. From Source 7.

Judging by these images, buses seem to have been a preferred mode of transport, both as special vehicles and transport vehicles.

Vehicles of this type were introduced in 1941, and were among others in the editions *rabil TMR8*.

Similarly, but on a slightly longer undercarriage, the photo interpretation vehicles were *photo car m/42* and *photo car 202*.



Radiovagn, Scania-Vabis.

The image comes from Scania-Vabi's website, where it is however shown in reverse.

In the Air Force version it was called *Rabil TMR9*, while in the Army it was called *Rabil 323*.

These versions appeared in 1943-44 and were in service right up to the 1970s.

The wagon was also used as a rolling command station.

Closing

This article gives an impression of the material in and the organization of the units of the Swedish Air Force that are intended to be deployed during a possible Operation Rädde Danmark.

My article *The Danish Brigade in Sweden 1943-1945 - The Brigade's Flying Forces, Part 3* gives an impression of how a light bomber squadron, equipped with SAAB B 17 machines, was intended to be deployed against German targets in Denmark. I also consider Lieutenant CH Sandqvist's operational command as an example of how the Swedish Air Force's squadrons worked, all the while that the Danish pilots had Swedish training and tactics as a background.

My sources report nothing about the possible participation of the Danish squadron in the operations against Denmark, so here one can only guess...

Sources

1. *Militärkalendern 1944*, Åhlén & Åkerlunds Förlag, Stockholm, 1943.
2. *Citizen's book on national defense* by Erik Malmström (ed.), General Staff, Stockholm 1939.
3. *Aid to Denmark - Military and political relations 1943-1945* by Ulf Torell, General Förlaget, Stockholm 1973, ISBN 31-38-01693-1.
4. *Flieger* by Mikael Östberg, especially the sections on the current aircraft types.
5. Swedish military aviation, especially the Dispersed basing section.
6. Brattforsheden's Flygklubb, especially the History section.
7. *Historic Military Vehicles Directory* af Bart Venderveen, After the Battle, London 1989, ISBN 0900913-57-6.

Supplementary material about the Swedish defense of the period

- Operation Save Denmark
- The Swedish Army 1939-1945 - Infantry
- The Swedish Army 1939-1945 - Armored troops
- The Swedish Army 1939-1945 - Artillery
- The Swedish Army 1939-1945 - Luftvärnsartilleriet
- The Swedish Army 1939-1945 - Engineer troops
- The Swedish Navy 1939-1945 - The Navy
- The Swedish Navy 1939-1945 - The coastal artillery
- The Swedish Air Force 1939-1945 - Experiments with airborne units

Per Finsted

