

# Military history or the study of “War and Society”?

The Swedish General Staff and the last Russo-Swedish War, 1880–1936 (ca)

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**ABSTRACT** Denna artikel diskuterar finska kriget i svensk officersutbildning före andra världskriget, med särskild hänsyn tagen till undervisningen vid Krigshögskolan (KHS) och den svenska generalstabens historieverk, *Sveriges krig 1808–1809*, som utkom i nio band mellan 1890 och 1922 och var typiskt för samtidens militärhistoria, inriktad på operativa förlopp och fältherrars beslutsfattande. Artikeln ägnar särskild uppmärksamhet åt dåvarande generalstabslöjtnanten Carl Bennedichs kritik av verket i en utredning 1915. Han efterlyste en bredare, samhällsinriktad typ av militärhistoria, delvis från moderna vetenskapliga synpunkter, men främst av inrikespolitiska, ideologiska skäl. Kort efter att generalstabsverket färdigställts framstod dock de militära lärdomarna från 1809 som föråldrade, och den internationella samtiden som viktigare än den nationella historien när det gällde att mobilisera stöd för försvaret.

Traditionally, military history was a subject which was taught at military colleges but nowhere else. In many countries, most of the research was also done by professional officers without academic training, serving at the history section of their general staff. Military colleges are educational institutions which train officers for senior command. General staffs are bureaucratic organisations which make plans and preparations for war. Consequently, the level of analysis

in their teaching and research seldom rose above that of individual commanders making decisions in the battlefield, or that of staffs planning for mobilization and campaigns. Warfare beyond those aspects which were under direct military control, where there were no practical lessons to be drawn, were typically left out. Larger issues which pertained to the political, economic, social, technological and cultural dimensions of war were often absent from military history.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Raschke, Martin: *Der politisierender Generalstab. Die Friedrizianischen Kriege in der amtlichen deutschen Militärgeschichtsschreibung 1890-1914*, Freiburg 1993.

Hans Delbrück (1848–1929) – a German history professor, reserve officer and veteran of the 1870 Franco-Prussian war who was equally disturbed by the scientific amateurism of general staff historians and the military ignorance of civilian historians – made a heroic effort to lay a scientific foundation for military history. According to Delbrück, it was above all through contextual critique – *Sachkritik* – that the modern military historian should remove romantic myth-making and anachronistic misinterpretation from the study of wars in the past. This, of course, required a thorough knowledge of military details – tactics, strategy, weaponry and equipment, horses and logistics – but also thorough knowledge of the historical context: politics, economy, culture, social conditions and geographical environment. All these factors were important to understand warfare. However, Delbrück’s critique of the *Grosse Generalstab*’s history section only earned him bitter enemies in the German military establishment. Nor did he find much support among academic historians, who were suspicious of his theoretical approach and his ambitions to write military history as a form of “total history”. To them, warfare was a technical activity which was best analyzed by professionals,

and really not a subject worthy of serious scientific study. The University of Berlin did not make Delbrück professor of military history, as he had wished, but gave him a chair in international history.<sup>2</sup>

Only the experience of total war in the twentieth century gradually changed the attitude to military history. When the field of military activity and preparations expanded far beyond the horizons of the battlefield, the subject also grew and soon came to include most aspects of the relationship between armed conflict and society. This also meant that it gained some academic respectability, especially when civilian historians began to realize the importance of war and military organizations in state formation processes. After 1945, this broader definition of military history – as a history of “war and society” – has won general acceptance.<sup>3</sup>

This article discusses the interpretation of the 1808–09 Russo-Swedish war in the Swedish military establishment before World War II, with an emphasis on the period after 1880. We will examine how the war was taught at the Swedish staff colleges, and what principles guided the writing of the influential official general staff history, *Sveriges krig 1808–1809*, which appeared in nine volumes between

2 Bucholz, Arden: *Hans Delbrück & the German Establishment: War Images in Conflict*, Iowa City, 1985; cf Raschke, Martin: *Der politisierender Generalstab. Die Friedrizianischen Kriege in der amtlichen deutschen Militärgeschichtsschreibung 1890-1914*, Freiburg 1993.

3 The role of military history in the training of officers is discussed in Böhme, Klaus R & Åselius, Gunnar (eds), *Why Military History?* Stockholm 2000.

1890 and 1922. Although this was a period when the traditional, battlefield-narrative from the commander's perspective was still in sway, we will see how a more modern definition of military history was nonetheless considered necessary, at least when the experience of 1808-09 was under consideration. What may seem surprising is the fact that the representative of this broader scientific approach within the general staff was an officer, who otherwise held arch-conservative, not to say reactionary, views on most political issues. It will become clear why this was the case, and why the 1808-1809 war suddenly disappeared from the war college syllabus in the 1930s, in spite of the fact that Finland played a far greater role in Swedish military planning in the inter-war period than before.<sup>4</sup>

A systematic study of past wars had been initiated in the Swedish army already in 1805, when the Reconnaissance and Surveying Corps (*fältmätningsskåren*) was organized. This new unit had been united with the military archives and entrusted the task of collecting the sources and writing the history of Sweden's wars. The same task was given to the Topographical Corps

(*topografiska kåren*), which succeeded the Reconnaissance and Surveying Corps in 1831. Throughout the early half of the nineteenth century, however, the military production of historical works remained meagre. A proposal from the commander of the Topographical Corps in 1851 to organize a special military history section within the corps was rejected by the government. The following year, a group of young officers, who enjoyed royal protection, began collecting documents relevant to Sweden's wars with the aim of publishing them. In 1854, the first volume in a series of three appeared in print.<sup>5</sup>

Until then, some 45 years after the Peace in Fredrikshamn, Swedish literature on the 1808-09 war had been dominated by works written by war veterans, like Carl Johan Holm and Gustav Montgomery.<sup>6</sup> The first Swedish author to approach the conflict from a historian's perspective was Julius Mankell (1828-1897), an army captain and a member of the working group mentioned above. In 1855, Mankell anonymously published a study on the Swedish archipelago-fleet, how it had been employed historically and how it should best be used in the future. Here, he also

4 Cf Turtola, Martti: *Från Torne älv till Systerbäck: Hemligt försvarssamarbete mellan Finland och Sverige, 1923-1940*, Stockholm 1987.

5 *Arkiv till upplysning om svenska kriget och krigsinrättningarnas historia*, Stockholm 1854; cf Broomé, Bertil: "Krigshistoriska avdelningens förhistoria och verksamhet t o m 1917", *Aktuellt & Historiskt* 1973, pp 173-176.

6 For research-overviews of the 1808-1809 war, see Hakala, Pertti: "Kriget 1808-1809 – forskningsläget ur finländsk synvinkel", and Hårdstedt, Martin: "Kriget 1808-09 och svensk militärhistorisk forskning", Hårdstedt, Martin och Backman, Göran (eds): *Krig kring kvarken. Kriget 1808-1809 och slaget vid Oravais i ny belysning*, Oravais, Finland 1999.

analyzed the defence of Finland in 1808–09. Ten years later, Mankell under his own name published a volume on the strength and composition of Sweden’s armed forces from the late sixteenth century onwards, accompanied with an account of Sweden’s wars, including the 1808–09 conflict. Finally, in 1870, he dedicated the second volume of his “notes on the history of the Finnish army and the wars of Finland” to the 1808–09 campaign. However, with exception of some data on the Swedish order of battle which Mankell had collected from the military archives, his sources consisted mostly of memoirs and contemporary communiqués from the army headquarters.<sup>7</sup>

In 1818, a college for artillery and engineer officers had been founded in Marieberg, at the western outskirts of Stockholm. In the 1830s, this college also began to educate staff officers, which meant giving courses in military science and military history.<sup>8</sup> The war against Russia in 1808–09 was part of the syllabus, but took up only a minor portion of the twenty hours or so that were spent

teaching the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>9</sup>

There was still no official history of the 1808–09 War. In 1867, the staff college students were allowed to use Mankell’s writings on the war as textbook-literature, although with certain restrictions.<sup>10</sup> Only with the creation of the Swedish general staff in 1873 and its military history section, the army established an organization specialized in historical research. In 1882, this section was invigorated under the energetic leadership of Major – later Major-General – Gustaf Björilin. In a memorandum written shortly after he took command of the section, Björilin declared that within a few years, a complete account covering all of Sweden’s wars in the past must have been prepared and elaborated within the general staff. Detailed knowledge of the nation’s military experience would be directly useful, according to Björilin, as Sweden’s neighbours would always wage war in the same way, regardless of how the art of war would develop in the future. “Very true”, the chief of the General

7 Mankell, Julius: *Studier öfver svenska skärgårds-flottans historia, krigssätt och användande vid Sveriges försvar, af en infanteriofficer*, Stockholm 1855; *Uppgifter rörande svenska krigsmagten styrka, sammansättning och fördelning sedan slutet af femtonhundralet jemte översigt av svenska krigshistoriens viktigaste händelser under samma tid*, Stockholm 1865; *Anteckningar om Finska arméens och Finlands krigshistoria, särskildt med afseende på krigen emellan Sverige och Ryssland åren 1788–1790 samt 1808–1809 II*, Stockholm 1870.

8 Sylvan, Per & Kuylentierna, Oswald (eds): *Minnesskrift med anledning av K Högre artilleriläroverkets och Krigshögskolans å Marieberg samt Artilleri- och Ingenjörhögskolans ethundraåriga tillvaro 1818–1918*, Stockholm 1918, p 17.

9 Memorandum to lectures, no date, J A Hazelius papers serie F fascikel 17 (“Anteckningar, föreläsningar m m i samband med Hazelius verksamhet som lärare vid Marieberg”) Nordiska museet, Stockholm.

10 Protocol Militär läroverksinspektionen, krigsundervisningskommissionen A, vol. I 1866–1885 protocol 17, 14 November 1867, Military Archives, Stockholm.

Staff, Colonel Axel Rappe, commented in the margin.<sup>11</sup>

Plans for a comprehensive study of the 1808-09 war against Russia were brought forward the following year. In a memorandum dated on 7 April 1884, Björlin stated that the new chief of the general staff, Colonel von Vegesack, had decided that a work on this conflict should become the first major project of the general staff's military history section. Writing began in October. According to Bertil Bromée's 1973 study on the early development of the Swedish general staff's military history section, the initiative to the 1808-09 project in reality originated with Björlin himself. The year before he had published a popular book on the subject, and had acquired thorough knowledge of the Swedish and Finnish archival material. Further inspiration may have come from Prussia, where the general staff had published major works on the wars against France in 1813-1814 and 1870-1871, and was now turning its attention to the wars of Frederick the Great. In addition, in 1877 the Austrian military archives had begun publishing several volumes on the campaigns of Prince Eugen of Savoy.<sup>12</sup>

In the following years, the Swedish general staff collected a huge amount of

documents and copies of documents from archives in Sweden and abroad. Soon it was decided that the project should not only cover the conflict with Russia, but also Sweden's wars against Denmark and France in 1808-09. In 1909, when the fifth volume was under production, it was finally decided that the length of the 1808-09 war was to comprise nine volumes. When the project was concluded, excerpts and working material took up more than 130 shelf-meters in the general staff archives.<sup>13</sup>

Although the reception of the 1808-09-work among academic historians was generally positive, there were of course also critical remarks.

Volume 1 (1890) describes the diplomatic background to the conflict, and the state of Sweden's armed forces in 1808. The first part of the volume, which dealt with a subject outside the professional expertise of the military, was later considered to be among the weakest portions in the entire work.<sup>14</sup>

Volume 2 (1895) covered the organisation of Russia's and Denmark's armed forces, the war plans of the belligerents and operations in Finland from the February 1808 Russian invasion up to the surrender of Sveaborg Fortress outside Helsinki in

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11 Broomé, B: "Krigshistoriska avdelningens förhistoria", p 183.

12 Ibid, pp 187-188.

13 Ibid pp 188-192, Krigsarkivet, *Beståndsöversikt* del 2, Meddelanden från Krigsarkivet XI:2, Stockholm 1987, p 557.

14 Ibid p 195.

May. An appendix to volume 2, which appeared six years later, contained further details on tactics and logistics during the winter months of the campaign. The other-wise positive reviewer in the Swedish history journal (*Historisk tidskrift*) – Agaton Hammarskjöld – pointed out that since the general staff historians had worked mainly with materials from the Military Archives, without consulting all relevant documents in the National Archives, their description of the Sweden’s war preparations became slanted and misleading. Had they studied the Swedish ministry records, Hammarskjöld claimed, the authors would have discovered that the government in Stockholm did not passively await the Russian attack but tried to raise military preparedness in time.<sup>15</sup> Also, Lieutenant-General Casimir Ehrnrooth in the Finnish military journal (*Finsk militär tidskrift*) found the harsh judgement passed by the Swedish general staff historians on Sveaborg’s commandant, Vice-Admiral Carl Olof Cronstedt, unfair. However, Ehrnrooth’s views were opposed by other Finnish officers and by the Finnish historian Magnus Gottfrid Schybergson.<sup>16</sup>

Volume 3 (1902) covered the Swedish counteroffensive in Finland, which culminated in July 1808, and also provided a survey of domestic conditions in Finland, tracing the roots of Finnish separatism and Russian intrigues back to the eighteenth century. In his review in the Finnish journal (*Finsk tidskrift*), Schybergson criticized that interpretation.<sup>17</sup>

Volume 4 (1905) focused on the southern front against Denmark from February to July 1808, when a Franco-Spanish army was deployed on the Danish Isles to invade southern Sweden, while volume 5 (1910) covered events on the Danish and Finnish fronts until October 1808, including the decisive Swedish defeat against the Russians at the battle of Oravais on 14 September. In a review which appeared in the Swedish history journal in 1905, following the publication of volume 4, Gothenburg Professor Ludvig Stavenow expressed his great appreciation of the thorough research behind the general staff work, the high standard of maps and the many interesting data presented in the appendices. At the same time, he pointed out how the lack of scientific training among the authors had

15 Hammarskjöld, A: "Finska kriget 1808–1809", *Historisk tidskrift* 1896, pp 2, 25–26.

16 Ehrnrooth, Casimir: "Betraktelser med anledning av svenska generalstabens värk "Sveriges krig 1808 och 1809", *Finsk militär tidskrift* 1896, pp 116-131, 178-191, 241–262, 437-438; Ehrnrooth, Casimir: "Sveaborgs öfvergång 1808. Haeretiska åsikter", *Finsk militär tidskrift* 1897, pp 209-220; "A", "Kommentarier", *ibid*, pp 371-396; Schybergson, MA: "Med anledning av uppsatsen 'Sveaborgs öfvergång 1808. Haeretiska åsikter', *ibid*, pp 423-428; "Historiker", I anledning av polemiken om Sveaborgs öfvergång", *ibid*, pp 544-550; "A", "Replik", p 550; "Anmärkningar med anledning av 'Betraktelser med anledning av svenska generalstabens värk Sveriges krig 1808 och 1809"; *ibid*, pp 579-602, 642-667; "Historiker", "Signaturen A. om Sveaborgs öfvergång", *ibid*, pp. 633-636; "Bemötande av signaturen \*\*:s anmärkningar", *ibid*, pp 667-674; "A", "Slutord", *ibid*, pp 713-714.

17 Op cit. p 197. Fotnot 11.

resulted in a fragmented text overridden with details at the expense of general context and inner structure.<sup>18</sup>

After 1878 Swedish staff officers no longer went to the same college as artillery and engineer officers, but to a school of their own, located in the centre of Stockholm – the War College (*Krigshögskolan*). As could be expected, the Swedish general staff's huge research effort soon had an impact on the teaching at the War College. The 1808-09 project had produced a greater amount of texts in military science than ever before in the Swedish language, and it would have been a waste not to use this literature as teaching-material. Moreover, many officers who had served at the general staff's military history section later took up positions as teachers at the War College, bringing their detailed knowledge of this particular conflict with them into the class-rooms.

In the war college-syllabus in military history for the junior course in the academic year of 1905-1906, at least 14 out of 180 hours of lectures were spent on Sweden's wars in 1808-09. This was only equalled by the amount of time spent on Napoleon's defeat in 1813 – which was Sweden's last participation in European great power politics – or the more recent

Russo-Turkish War of 1877-1878.<sup>19</sup>

In addition, the events of 1808-09 were also treated during the course in strategy. In 1894-97, students were given home assignments in strategy with titles like "Critical description of the defence plan for Finland at the beginning of the century, and how it was applied by Klingspor (commander of the Swedish army in Finland)", "Were there in 1808, after the defeat at Oravais, still a possibility for the Swedish army to retake Finland?" or "The Swedish Army in Finland 1808". The class of 1898-1900 spent 4 out of 115 hours of strategy lectures studying the operations of 1808. The more recent Greek-Turkish war of 1897 was covered in 6 hours.<sup>20</sup>

In the autumn of 1914, when Europe was experiencing its most disastrous war since Napoleon, the Swedish general staff was still struggling to conclude its history of Sweden's most disastrous war. Volume 6, which treated the campaign on the Norwegian border until July 1808, was being prepared for publication in the following year, while the work on volume 7 – which dealt with operations against Norway and Denmark until March 1809 – had proceeded quite far, although it would not appear in print until 1919. In view of the ongoing war and the possibility of Swed-

18 Stavenow, Ludvig: "Sveriges krig åren 1808–1809" *Historisk tidskrift* 1905, pp 57-58.

19 Sjögreen, C A: 15 May 1905, "Förslag till program för läsåret 1905–1906", "Redogörelse för kursen 1904–1905" KHS arkiv, liggare förteckningar, undervisningsjournaler, serie D, Military Archives, Stockholm.

20 "Redogörelse för lärokursen 1892–1894"; "Redogörelse för lärokursen 1896–1898"; Hult, Ivar: "förslag till program i strategi" 18 May 1898; KHS arkiv, liggare förteckningar, undervisningsjournaler, D, Military Archives, Stockholm.

en being dragged in, a special study was ordered by the chief of the general staff on what precautions should be taken with regard to volume 8. In contrast to the other volumes in the series, this one would deal with defensive measures that had taken place on the territory of present Sweden in 1808–09, and thus risked revealing information which might still be sensitive.

It so happened that the task of writing that report was entrusted to Lieutenant – later Colonel – Carl Benedich (1880-1939), who in November 1914 started his second tour of service at the general staff's section of military history. Together with the Swedish explorer Sven Hedin, Benedich, who was well connected in court-circles, had in February that same year secretly authored King Gustav V's famous "Palace Court Yard Speech" (*borggårdstal*). Addressing 30,000 Swedish farmers who had gathered in the court yard of the royal palace in Stockholm to protest against the defence policy of Sweden's Liberal government, the King on this occasion had publicly expressed his support for the demonstrators, in defiance of constitutional practice, an act which a few days later forced the government to resign.

In reality, the difference between the government's proposed level of defence

spending and that of the Conservative opposition was marginal. Therefore, the bitterness with which the political struggle over defence was waged in Sweden around 1914 is hard to understand, unless related to the main ideological struggle at the time between Left and Right over democracy, parliamentary rule and the constitutional function of the monarch. Benedich's motives for participating in the overthrow of the Liberal government must also be interpreted within this broader context.<sup>21</sup>

In March 1915, Benedich presented his memorandum on the planned volume 8, beginning by listing the literature he had consulted on the period. Among the historians he had read were also Liberal history professor Nils Edén, an expert on the 1809-constitution who a few years later would lead the government of Liberals and Social Democrats which would introduce general and equal suffrage in Sweden for men and women. Benedich pointed out, however, that he had only read Edén in order "to get acquainted with the desires and needs of modern Swedish party politics when it comes to coloring the truth about the events of 1809".<sup>22</sup>

To Benedich, who was a fervent admirer both of contemporary Imperial Germany and of Sweden's eighteenth-

21 Benedich's political activities around 1914 are described in Jarl Torbacke, "*Försvaret främst*". *Tre studier till borggårdskrisens problematik*, Stockholm 1983.

22 Benedich, Carl, 5 March 1915: "Vilka särskilda synpunkter böra göra sig gällande vid utarbetandet av Del VIII av 'Sveriges krig åren 1808-1809' dels på grund av att denna del, i motsats till övriga delar av ifrågavarande arbete, behandlar försvarsåtgärder inom eget land, dels med hänsyn till verkets avslutning inom rimlig tid?" *Sveriges krig 1808-1809*, vol. 398, Military Archives, Stockholm.

century Soldier-King Charles XII, the war of 1808-09 was a tragedy not only because it had ended in humiliation and the loss of Finland. The defeat had also led to the only successful military coup in Swedish history – the mutiny of the army stationed on the Norwegian border in March 1809 – the end of royal absolutism and the adoption of a new constitution (which would remain in function until 1974). While Swedish liberals in the early twentieth century regarded the 1809 revolution as the founding moment of modern Swedish society, Bennedich saw it as a disgraceful moment in history, when self-serving, un-patriotic bureaucrats had initiated the erosion of royal power and of national greatness.

Although Bennedich could be described as a romantic dreamer with little understanding for the century in which he lived, he was also a person of unusual intellectual capacity. Among the many hundred officers who applied to the War College in Stockholm in the 36 years preceding World War I, he was the only one ever to receive a “10” as grading on his entrance essay (Bennedich applied in 1908, when the given subject was “Which were the gravest disadvantages with the great power position that Sweden upheld in the seventeenth century?”).<sup>23</sup>

Bennedich had also been one of the

founders of the Society of Carolean Studies (*Karolinska förbundet*) in 1910 – dedicated to studying Swedish history in 1654–1718, when the dynasty of Charles XII had ruled Sweden – and he was in constant correspondence with some of the leading Swedish historians of his time. During World War I, he served in the general staff’s military history section and as a history teacher at the War College, while at the same time editing and writing most of the general staff’s next monumental history work, a four-volume series on Charles XII. Bennedich’s wish to portray the King as one of the greatest generals of all times and to “sell in” the notion of a special Swedish tactical tradition, focused on decisive action and much ahead of its time, made the Charles XII-work biased and in some respects even unreliable, but it must still be regarded as far superior to the 1808–09 general staff history. Bennedich’s work contained detailed references to sources, was written with considerable dramatic talent in a clear and elegant prose, and approached its subject from a conscious theoretical perspective.<sup>24</sup>

Against this background, it is no surprise that Bennedich’s memorandum from 1915 contained a highly critical appreciation of those volumes of the 1808-09 history which had hitherto appeared, and of the research-work that had produced them.

23 KHS arkiv, Inträdesprov, serie F I, 1908, Military Archives, Stockholm.

24 *Karl XII på slagfältet. Karolinsk slagordning sedd mot bakgrund av slagtaktikens utveckling från alla äldsta tider* I–IV, Stockholm 1918-1919.

Benedich's criticism was in fact similar to that which had been expressed by professional historians in Sweden and Finland since the 1890s.<sup>25</sup>

In spite of Benedich's admiration for the German military, he also shared Hans Delbrück's critique of the history writing of the Prussian general staff. In his memorandum, Benedich emphasized that the writing of history must always be founded in a critical analysis of the available sources, asserting that like any other academic institution the War College should "teach its students to form their own opinion on the basis of their own research". When it came to source-criticism, Benedich believed, this would amount to nothing less than giving the future staff officers the same kind of training that civilian university students received at a history seminar. Although one could argue that the Swedish general staff should not aspire to produce works in military history of the same quality as those of great powers like Germany and Austria with their superior resources, scientific quality was not necessarily a function of size, he said. The Danish general staff, Benedich noticed, had in recent years published no less than four volumes of high scientific standard on the Great Northern War, with no more officers than three active in the project, none of them full-time.<sup>26</sup>

To Benedich, it was obvious that mil-

itary history could not be written out of context. He therefore demanded that the proposed structure of the last two volumes should be revised. According to the existing plan, volume 8 should deal with the remaining operations on land and volume 9 with the remaining operations at sea. It would be better, he said, to have both volumes describe land as well as naval operations and draw a chronological line between them in March 1809. On the domestic scene, at this point the overthrow of King Gustavus IV Adolphus and the return to constitutional monarchy introduced a system of government related to (and paving the way for) that of modern Sweden. From March 1809, the strategic situation was also that of modern Sweden, the Russians having conquered the Åland Islands and advancing across the northern border of Sweden proper.<sup>27</sup>

Benedich also pointed out the need for a thorough geographical description of the theatre of operations, something which had been missing in the earlier volumes. Such a description must contain data on economy and agriculture, population density, the availability of horses and vehicles, communications, shipping and ice conditions in the Baltic region. The war must be analyzed in its full geographical and societal context, Benedich believed, expressing views that would only later become academically fashionable, through the famous

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25 Op cit pp 21-24, 27. Fotnot 22

26 Ibid pp 20-21, 26.

27 Ibid pp 9-11.

French school of *Annales*-historians in the inter-war period. Hopefully, Bennedich said, the material collected could also be of use later, when the general staff went on to write about Charles XII, who had fought most of his wars in the same geographical setting. Although giving publicity to such information could prove harmful to Sweden's present defence, a thorough geographic survey of the Baltic would still be necessary for a correct analysis of events. Even if only a few pages of such a survey proved fit to print in the end, it would still have served its purpose.<sup>28</sup>

The influence of winter conditions on operations merited further research, according to Bennedich, as did the role of the archipelago-fleet. Bennedich also pointed out that the Russian army had in fact defeated the superior Swedish army in winter-time, although Russian equipment had been just as bad and Russian logistical support even weaker than that of the Swedes: "Are we better than in 1808, the Russians are probably better too, at least to the same degree."<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, Bennedich found it necessary to add a thorough investigation of Sweden's relations to her ally in 1808–09, Great Britain. He claimed that the British had dealt with the Russians behind Sweden's back throughout the conflict, as they knew that Russia was the only power on

the European continent worth mobilizing in the struggle against Napoleon. Sweden's will to resist the Russian invasion had also been weakened by financial interests inside the country who wanted to continue to trade with Russia and who therefore were prepared to sacrifice the eastern part of the realm for a quick peace. It would therefore be valuable if the general staff history could explain the true nature of British policy in 1808–09, as "in the present situation there are certain delusions even at very high levels regarding the interests of foreign powers in Scandinavia"... "Already in those days the ghost of 'neutrality' hang over us"<sup>30</sup>

Bennedich's remarks seem to have been a direct comment to Swedish foreign policy in the winter of 1915, when the country was neutral in the ongoing world war, Britain and Russia openly aligned against Germany and influential groups with whom Bennedich sympathized wanted Sweden to enter the war on Germany's side. The principal guardian of neutrality in the Swedish government was Foreign Minister Knut A. Wallenberg, who was also the head of Sweden's leading financial family. Many of the pro-German activists saw Wallenberg's care for Swedish neutrality merely as a way to protect his own economic interests.

It is likely that Bennedich viewed the

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28 Ibid pp 5, 32–39.

29 Ibid, pp 57, 67, 69.

30 Ibid, pp 42, 62 (quotes), 63–64.

Wallenberg family as a modern example of those forces which had brought the fatherland down during the Napoleonic Wars. Apart from a survey of the military geography in the Baltic, he urged that an examination of Sweden's domestic conditions in 1808-09 should be included in volume 8. Bennedich realized that it might seem inappropriate that the general staff published a study on domestic politics but if the history work was to be concluded in a satisfactory way, all factors which had undermined national defence had to be investigated. As in the case with the geographic survey, a full publication would not be necessary. The published account could well terminate with the new year of 1809, "when the shadow of revolution approaches".<sup>31</sup>

In earlier historiography, the king overthrown by the revolution in March 1809, Gustavus IV Adolphus, had received most of the blame for Sweden's defeat. According to Bennedich, however, the King's only fault was his reluctance to use force against his subordinates to command the necessary obedience. The breakdown of army logistics and the mass-death of Swedish militia conscripts during the war had in reality been caused by passive local officials.<sup>32</sup>

These important truths about 1808-1809 must be brought to light, according to Bennedich. The general staff historians must therefore abandon their nineteenth

century-ambition of scientific impartiality and instead write an account of the "dangers and consequences of the self-delusions of a people, its bureaucracy and its party bosses, and their negligence towards their real, most basic duty." Bennedich hoped that such an emphasis would also make the revered 1809 constitution appear in a different light. The true lesson of 1809 was that the ideals of the French revolution had eroded national consciousness and the sense of duty in officialdom, which in turn had led to chaos in the governmental apparatus: "The Gallic phrase had confused the stern Germanic reason".<sup>33</sup> Clearly, Bennedich found it useful if the general staff history could draw conclusions from Sweden's catastrophic defeat in 1808-1809, which would also be useful in the contemporary political debate on parliamentary rule and democracy, a debate to which Bennedich had made his most important contribution in February 1914, as anonymous co-writer to King Gustav V's Palace Court Yard speech.

When volume 8 finally appeared in 1921, many of Bennedich's recommendations had in fact been implemented. The volume covered operations on both land and sea until March 1809, there was a short survey of military geography as well as some thirty pages on domestic politics, albeit somewhat more moderate in tone than Bennedich would have preferred.<sup>34</sup> Volume

31 Ibid pp 6-7, 39, 40 (quote).

32 Ibid pp 41-47.

33 Ibid pp 72-73.

9, which covered operations in Åland and Västerbotten and the end of hostilities in September, appeared the year after, and had been written at record-speed by one single author.<sup>35</sup>

With this, the greatest research project that the Swedish general staff would ever undertake had been concluded, after more than thirty years. However, when the final volumes appeared, the utility of this kind of military history seemed less obvious than before. World War I had changed the strategic geography in the Baltic, but above all the conduct of war. In the age of tanks, poison gas and aircraft, the relevance of military lessons from the Napoleonic Wars were called into question.

And when new wars were to be added to the syllabus at the War College, old ones had to be removed. Already in May 1918, the commandant of the college had suggested at a faculty meeting that the 1808-09 War should be omitted, as too little time would remain to general lectures on the Napoleonic Wars otherwise. During the course in military geography, the students would get the necessary acquaintance with the Finnish theatre of operations anyway. The teachers in military history, Bennedich and his colleague Archibald Douglas, op-

posed to the proposal as the 1808-09 campaign contained many “negative lessons” that they believed to be of great value to Swedish officers. The teacher in military geography supported them, asserting that his own teaching was much enriched if the students had studied the campaigns in 1808-09 before.<sup>36</sup>

Soon, however, the 1808-09 War disappeared from the lectures. In 1926, the new curriculum at the War College spent half of the teaching hours in military history on the period after 1914. At the same time, a new subject was introduced, “Sweden’s strategic conditions”, which aimed at describing strategic, economic and infrastructural conditions in the Baltic region. It could be argued that this new subject would add the same dimension to the war college education that Bennedich had found missing in the first seven volumes of the general staff history. However, this would not be achieved through the study of events more than a hundred years ago, but by focusing on modern conditions. The new curriculum became operative in the academic year of 1926-27, and when next year’s syllabus in military history was presented in the spring of 1927, the 1808-09 War was gone.<sup>37</sup>

In the new course on Sweden’s strate-

34 *Sveriges krig* vol VIII, Stockholm 1921, pp 44-47, 220-254.

35 *Sveriges krig* vol IX, Stockholm 1922, cf Kleen, Willy: *Ur skuggan av min dal*, Stockholm 1954.

36 KHS faculty protocol 21 May 1918, KHS avd I, Exp lärarkollegiets protokoll, serie A II, vol. 2, Military archives, Stockholm.

37 Protocol 27 March 1926, Proposal for new curriculum, Protokoll militärläroverksinspektionen, krigsundervisningskommissionen A, vol 4, Military Archives, Stockholm; General Order (GO) 20 September 1926, nr 1650 Torsten Holm 13 May 1927, syllabus proposal ”Förslag till undervisningsprogram i krigshistoria för yngre kursen, läroåret 1927-1928”, *ibid*, vol 5;

gic conditions, only one or two lessons were dedicated to Sweden's situation before 1809. In 1933, the teacher asked that even this lesson should be removed from the syllabus, as the time would not suffice otherwise. On the other hand, the geo-strategic situation of contemporary Finland received much attention – eleven lessons, or half the teaching-time dedicated to conditions outside Sweden.<sup>38</sup> Finland in this period held a more central position in Swedish defence planning than ever before since 1809, and contacts between the general staff in Sweden and that of the newly independent Finnish republic were very close. Consequently, when the 1808–09 War was removed from the military history syllabus, ten hours of lectures on the Finnish Civil War of 1918 were added instead. In 1935, the military history teacher tried to exchange these lectures for a series of lectures on the Polish-Soviet War of 1920. The Board of Officers' Education (*krigsundervisningskommissionen*) protested. At the Swedish War College, the Board declared, special attention must always be paid to the situation of Finland.<sup>39</sup>

Major revisions of the war college curriculum occurred in 1935 and 1938. Now,

almost all military history before 1914 disappeared. The Swedish war college students were to focus their studies on the experience of the world war, and on current strategic and security policy issues. The preceding generations of general staff officers had viewed Sweden's wars in the past as the key to understanding future wars, believing that the nation's neighbours would always wage war in the same way. In part because of Carl Bennedich's ideological awareness and his strong Conservative views, it would seem, his approach to military history seems so modern. Bennedich simply could not limit the analysis of the conflict which had led to Sweden's final fall from great-power status and the erosion of royal power, to an exclusively military context. That would have been intellectually and emotionally impossible. Paradoxically, this made him scientifically more progressive than most of his colleagues in military history at the time.

General staff officers in the 1930s, who had begun to accept modern democracy and the mechanisms of parliamentary control within their own professional domain, realized that they needed to convince Social Democratic and Liberal politicians in

38 Kleen, Willy; 23 May 1927: syllabus proposal, "Förslag till undervisningsprogram i läroämnet Sveriges strategiska förhållanden. Äldre lärokursen 1927-1928"; C A Ehrensvärd 31 August 1928, syllabus proposal, "Förslag till undervisningsprogram i läroämnet Sveriges strategiska förhållanden. Äldre lärokursen 1927-1928", Protokoll militärläroverksinspektionen, krigsundervisningskommissionen A, vol 5; Ehrensvärd to the board of officers' education (krigsundervisningskommissionen) 3 July 1933, *ibid*, vol 7.

39 Ribbing, Olof: 30 June 1934, Proposal for military history in the academic year of 1934-1935, Protokoll militärläroverksinspektionen, krigsundervisningskommissionen A, vol 8; protocol 19 September 1935, *ibid*, vol 9.

order to secure a stable development of the defence sector. Then, historically founded arguments would not do.<sup>40</sup> That Finland in the inter-war period had become more important than ever in Swedish security policy, and even figured as a likely theatre

of operations for the Swedish armed forces, was of no significance. The war of 1808–09 quickly became just another old war.

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40 Åselius, Gunnar: "Krigshistoria i kris: Historia, strategi och kampen om undervisningstimmar vid Krigshögskolan under mellankrigstiden", Artéus, Gunnar; Molin, Karl & Petersson, Magnus: *Säkerhet och försvar. En vänbok till Kent Zetterberg*, Stockholm 2006.