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THE FORTRESS NÖTEBORG (SHLISSELBURG) 1650–1702

INGRIA had been brought under the Swedish crown as a result of the peace treaty of Stolbova in 1617. Its acquisition meant that the Swedish government no longer had to worry about the appearance of Russian war ships in the Gulf of Finland and could concentrate on building ships suitable for fighting the Danish navy. When speaking of his latest conquest Gustav II Adolf famously said that he hoped it would prove difficult for the Czar to jump across «that small stream» (meaning Ladoga) and reach the heart of the Swedish empire – the Baltic Sea. In order to assure that the King's hope became a permanent reality it was important to maintain a strong defense of key areas.

The main Swedish fortification was the town of Narva, after 1651 also the administrative center of the province of Ingria. In Narva resided the Governor General, almost without exception a distinguished soldier of high rank. The important Neva River was protected by the fortified town of Nyen and the fortress Nöteborg. Between Nyen and Narva lay the two castles Jama and Koporie.

A permanent problem for the Swedish government was the lack of funds. The empire was large, so a strong army and navy were necessary in order to keep neighboring countries at bay. However, as it was quite impossible to keep large forces permanently stationed along the borders the first line of defense had to be towns like Stade, Wismar, Stralsund, Stettin, Riga, Narva, Malmö och Gothenburg. The almost catastrophic war of 1675–1679 made a huge impact on the young Charles XI, who became determined to avoid a repetition. Large sums were spent on building a new main naval base in the southern province of Blekinge (Karlskrona) and on strengthening fortresses in western and southern

Sweden as well as in the German provinces. However, Ingria was not entirely neglected. In the early 1680's a massive rebuilding of the fortifications at Narva was begun, a project still not completed when the Great Northern War broke out almost twenty years later.

Nöteborg : plans and actions

Nöteborg had been captured by a Swedish army in 1612. The strategic value of the position was recognized, but not everyone liked the construction. The fortification officer Henrik Muhlman wrote in 1650/51 that the fortress was not well built. The walls and towers were very high and thick, but equipped with less than 150 embrasures. This made the fortress vulnerable to sudden attacks by a naval force. It was in Muhlman's opinion necessary to build outer, lower ramparts and construct palisades to overcome this deficiency ¹.

The first test came in 1656. On 4 June a Russian force arrived by boat and landed on the northern shore of the Neva and captured cattle belonging to Mustila manor. A detachment continued towards the town of Nyen, which was abandoned by the defenders. The garrison of Nöteborg, 18 officers and 87 soldiers, burned the buildings on the southern shore of the Neva and withdrew to their island. During the following months the siege continued, but made no real progress. In late November it was abandoned entirely, apparently without having caused significant damage to the fortress and its garrison ².

During the next 25 years very little work, apart from basic repairs, seems to have been undertaken. After his visit in late 1681 the Quartermaster General Erik Dahlbergh even claimed that Nöteborg had not been repaired in the last 30, 40 or more years and was in danger of total collapse ³. In Dahlbergh's opinion Nöteborg was a very important position and «the key to the Ladoga», but the damage caused to walls and towers by rain and water were so great that it would be very expensive and time consuming to bring the fortress into an adequate state. The so called «Svarta Rundeln» (*Black Tower, today Korolevskaya*) was particularly poor, with major cracks running from the top to the foundation. It was, Dahlbergh concluded, necessary to tear down the tower and rebuild it entirely ⁴. Another problem was the many wooden buildings inside the fortress as any fire could have devastating consequences. Something should also be done about a few small islands on the southern side of the fortress, particularly the so called «Kyrkholmen» where according to

Dahlbergh siege batteries had been placed during the Swedish-Russian war in the late 16th century ⁵.

Dahlberghs report caused an immediate reaction. Two days after the Quartermaster General had briefed Charles XI, the latter instructed Governor General Schultz in Narva to make sure that «Kyrkholmen» was removed, the moat surrounding the castle cleaned up and stone brought to Nöteborg so that necessary repairs could be carried out ⁶.

In 1695 the discussions started again. Erik Dahlbergh presented a detailed analysis of the fortresses in various parts of the Swedish empire. As far as Ingria was concerned he put particular emphasis on the importance of Nyen, but warned that Nöteborg no longer was the impregnable fortress it had been considered in the old times ⁷.

In 1697 it was decided to make a thorough investigation of every fortified place in key provinces of the Swedish Empire. Various governor generals, county governors, garrison commanders and engineers sent memorials and these were subsequently handed over to Erik Dahlbergh. The Governor General of Ingria, Field Marshal Otto Wilhelm von Fersen replied on 7 June. As far as Nöteborg was concerned Fersen noted that «Svarta Rundeln» was practically restored to its former strength and height. It was therefore not necessary to do more in that area, but the wall near the garrison commander's house was in need of repairs and the walls should be given a protective roof, a work von Fersen already had begun ⁸.

In his reaction to Fersen's memoranda Dahlbergh started by mentioning the total rebuilding of «Svarta Rundeln», but pointed out that the fortress walls were weak. Although it could be difficult for an enemy to bombard the fortress with cannons, mortar fire was dangerous as the interior of Nöteborg was full of wooden houses ⁹.

The final major inspection of Nöteborg before the outbreak of the Great Northern War came in 1699, when Carl Magnus Stuart was sent on a tour of the Baltic provinces. He spent 8 days in Nöteborg and made several drawings and maps of the fortress and the surrounding area. He also began the construction of new fortifications ¹⁰. On 10 July Stuart even wrote an instruction for the defense of the fortress, a document of considerable interest as it was presented as evidence during the investigation of the circumstances surrounding the surrender of Nöteborg in 1702. Stuart pointed out that no regular siege was possible, so regardless of how the enemy would go about attacking the fortress everything would in the end be decided by the ability of the garrison to

withstand a direct assault. The very high walls and towers would make such an attempt difficult. One key point was the gate. If it was damaged or ruined by artillery fire from the northern shore of the Ladoga this could be countered by filling the entire area with stone and soil, thereby making any entrance impossible. The main danger was instead, Stuart believed, an attempt to force Nöteborg to surrender by closing all supply routes. It was consequently imperative to make sure that there was adequate protection for gunpowder, ammunition, provisions and the garrison during a bombardment. This could best be done in the newly rebuilt «Svarta Rundeln», which was constructed to withstand such fire. The bottom floor of other towers could also be used as storage areas if the towers were strengthened by filling one of the floors above with soil and timber and the underlying vaults supported by vertical wooden stanchions in great numbers. If everything was done properly Stuart believed Nöteborg could hold out for a long time ¹¹.

The garrison in time of peace and in time of war

In 1696 the garrison commander Lieutenant Colonel Gustaf Wilhelm von Schlippenbach suggested that the strength in peace time should be about 300 infantry and a detachment of gunners. In time of war he believed the garrison needed to be increased to 700–800 ¹². The strength in peace time seems however generally to have been one company of about 150 soldiers and a compliment of «soldiers' sons». The intention was that these children would become ordinary soldiers at the age of 15. Until then they (or rather their parents) received money from the Swedish government – an early form of child support. The children were divided into classes, based on age. A muster roll from 1678 puts them in three categories – 25 boys below the age of five, 19 between five and ten and 24 between eleven and sixteen ¹³. In 1702 the garrison consisted of 166 officers, non-commissioned officers and common soldiers, 25 «soldiers' sons» and 30 artillery officers and gunners. In the course of the siege it was reinforced by about 240 men ¹⁴.

The defense of Nöteborg 1700–1702

When Governor General Otto Vellingk in the spring of 1700 was made head of the army that was gathering for the relief of Riga, he appointed the commander of the Narva garrison Colonel Henning Rudolf Horn as his deputy.¹⁵ After the Narva battle Vellingk temporarily returned to his duties, but soon followed Charles XII on his march into

Courland, Lithuania and Poland. On 21 December 1700 Charles XII further strengthened the position of Horn, who after the battle of Narva had promoted to Major General, by appointing him supreme commander of all fortresses in Ingria and the County of Keksholm. According to the instruction Horn was to make occasional inspection tours of the area and check on the condition of the various fortresses, but nothing was said about the extent of control Horn would have over the various garrison commanders ¹⁶.

The command of the army in Ingria had already in November 1700 been given to Major General Abraham Cronhjort. These two appointments apparently created a confusing situation. On 13 and 15 January 1701 Charles XII felt it necessary to instruct the commanders of Nyen and Nöteborg that they should obey Cronhjort in all matters. No orders, apart from those given by the King himself and by Cronhjort, were to be followed. Furthermore, on 27 May 1701 Cronhjort was told that he would depend only on the King's orders ¹⁷. This created a situation where Horn had the supervision of every fortress in Ingria, but at least as far as Nyen and Nöteborg were concerned no real authority. Horn could of course advise Cronhjort and ask him for reinforcements, but the latter was only obliged to listen if Horn managed to persuade Charles XII – who moved further and further away.

Thus the commander of Nöteborg, Lieutenant Colonel Gustaf Wilhelm von Schlippenbach found himself in a predicament. On 21 May 1701 Cronhjort instructed him to equip a few small boats and send them on a scouting mission. On 1 June Major General Horn wrote Schlippenbach that the latter in such cases had the right to inform Cronhjort that the weakness of the garrison made it impossible to carry out reconnaissance missions. This attempt to challenge Cronhjort's authority apparently did not sit well with the Major General, who on 10 June made it clear to Schlippenbach that no delays or refusals were tolerated ¹⁸. In the coming months the recurring cases of Cronhjort ordering small detachments of soldiers from Nöteborg to take part in various expeditions seems to have caused Schlippenbach considerable irritation.

The siege according to Schlippenbach

On 15 September 1702 Schlippenbach wrote to Horn, telling him that the garrison had been weakened by a fever. Unless he received 100 soldiers within two weeks the ongoing repair work and the defense of the fortress would be seriously hampered. The fact that Vice Admiral

Numers squadron had left the Ladoga also caused anxiety as there were reports of a strong enemy army camped at Loppis. If elements of this force crossed the Ladoga and landed on the north shore close to the fortress, Schlippenbach would no longer be able to receive reinforcements¹⁹.

Towards the end of September Schlippenbach wrote directly to Cronhjort, appealing for more troops. At noon on 27 September the Russians appeared near Nöteborg and the following day Schlippenbach again asked Cronhjort for more soldiers. On 30 September the garrison commander reported that the enemy was building siege batteries, boats had been spotted the day before and a landing on the north shore was feared. The detachment at Mustila, 100 soldiers commanded by Captain Freytag, should immediately be ordered to retreat to the fortress. The same day Freytag informed Schlippenbach that he would immediately do so. Two days later Schlippenbach again wrote to Cronhjort, telling him that 200 men and Major Charpentier had arrived²⁰. The enemy batteries were now ready and there appeared to be 48 embrasures. Schlippenbach asked Cronhjort to take up a position on the shore northwest of the fortress and use his artillery to bombard the enemy batteries. If the fortress was captured, he added, great damage would be caused to the King's cause. The same day, 1 October, Field Marshal Sheretemev sent a trumpeter to Schlippenbach, informing him that the Russians had taken up positions on both shores and were ready to open fire. If the fortress was handed over promptly the Swedes would receive generous terms. In the presence of all his officers Schlippenbach told the trumpeter that he the fortress was well supplied with gunpowder and ammunition and that the King had ordered him to defend it as long as possible. Schlippenbach then asked for a delay of five days so that he could inform Major General Horn and get orders.

Upon receiving this reply, Schlippenbach writes, the enemy started to bombard the fortress with 34 twelve pounders, 3 salvoes per hour. 10 mortars fired continually, day and night, so that the fortress was hit by 30 bombs every hour. A breach was soon created and due to the poor state of the wall and the material used, stones started to fall down all by themselves. On 4 October Schlippenbach decided to send a soldier and a peasant to Cronhjort, informing him of the dangerous situation and asking for more reinforcements. He also suggested that perhaps the whole army could draw nearer. On the 7 the messengers returned, but the only support which arrived was Major Hans Georg Leijon and 50 grenadiers²¹.

However, only 34 of them could be brought into the fortress as there was a shortage of boats. The enemy continued his bombardment until the 9. At that time all houses, baking ovens, wells and the armory was ruined and most storage houses badly damaged. Three large breaches had been created and three of the towers had been hit so hard that they no longer were of any use. Schlippenbach could also observe that the Russians were preparing to storm the fortress. The same day a Russian captain appeared before Nöteborg with a letter from Sheremetev, who again suggested it was time to surrender. The captain told Schlippenbach that no relief could be expected. Schlippenbach replied that the garrison consisted of more than 1000 good soldiers, all willing to fight until the very end. The captain said that he doubted this very much and that the number must include women and children.

After the captain had returned to the Russian camp the bombardment started again and continued until the 11. The breaches were at that point so big that the twelve pounders on the walls started to fall down. During the following night one of barracks caught fire, but it was extinguished before reaching the Powder Tower. At 1 am the very same night, the enemy fired 5 bombs as a signal for the general assault to begin. According to Schlippenbach more than 5000 Russian soldiers landed at the same time, almost surrounding the fortress and raising their ladders. The main assault was however directed against the breaches. After a few hours of fighting the assault was repulsed. A second assault soon followed, but with the same result. It was, Schlippenbach writes, clear daylight when the third assault began and the fighting continued until 4 p.m. According to enemy statements, he claims, 2 Lieutenant Colonels, 4 Majors and 2000 soldiers had been killed in the fighting along with many officers and non-commissioned officers, while others had drowned.

However, now the remaining garrison was quite small and there was a lack of both hand grenades and muskets. The Russians had also been able to take up position below one of the towers and had started mining. Another Russian force had managed to capture some houses just outside the gate, but these were set on fire by a Swedish detachment. According to Schlippenbach the officers now approached him, pointing out the difficult situation and the impossibility of withstanding a fourth assault. After discussions and in light of the possibility of a general massacre during a successful new assault, it was decided to ask Sheremetev for terms.

The inquest

After the surrender Schlippenbach tried to go to Narva by boat, but bad weather forced him back. When he finally arrived in Narva on 21 December, Schlippenbach immediately went to see Horn and asked for an official inquest. Horn tried to dissuade him and said the matter could wait until the war was over, but Schlippenbach believed it was necessary to settle the matter while important witnesses were still alive. After repeated requests by Schlippenbach the inquest finally started on 5 February 1703. The records show that the issue aroused very intense feelings, possibly partly because Nöteborg was the first major Swedish fortress to fall and did so quite fast (in just over two weeks). The matter was possibly never fully decided, as one of the volumes ends with a memorial apparently received by the King as late as in October 1705²². By then many of those who had been closely involved, for example Major General Horn, were in Russian captivity.

¹ Riksarkivet (RA). Livonica II, vol. 634. The memorial is undated, but Muhlman had in November 1649 been ordered to inspect the fortresses in Ingria and a map he made of Keksholm is dated October 1650.

² Lappalainen, J. *Finland och Carl X Gustafs ryska krig*. Stockholm, 1979. P. 37, 95–97.

³ This statement can however be questioned, as the garrison commander Jacob Sprengtport in the same year presented a detailed list of the repairs made during the previous five years, see Krigsarkivet. Krigskollegiets brevböcker 1681–82, P. 341 ff. An undated description of the fortress (with a very plain drawing) made by Sprengtporten can be found in RA, Livonica II, vol. 201. It seems to be from about the same time.

⁴ Dahlbergh's observation is corroborated by a testimony from the summer of 1679, when Johan Staël von Holstein informed the Governor General in Narva that there were five major cracks in the tower, see RA. Livonica II, vol. 360. The recommendation was followed and the tower entirely rebuilt.

⁵ Krigsarkivet (KrA). Försvars- och befästningsplaner, vol. 7. The memorial is dated 10 December 1681.

⁶ RA. Riksregistraturet (RR) 20 December 1681.

⁷ KrA. Försvars- och befästningsplaner, vol. 7. Memorial dated 16 July 1695.

⁸ *Ibid.* Memorial dated Narva, 7 June 1697.

⁹ Dahlbergh's final word on the condition of the Swedish fortresses came in a large memorandum, presented in February 1698. In this he again mentions the rebuilding of «Svarta Rundeln», but makes no specific recommendations for Nöteborg, see KrA, Försvars- och befästningsplaner, vol. 7.

¹⁰ RA. E. 3500. Carl Magnus Stuart to Erik Dahlbergh, Nyen 14 July 1699 and Dorpat 11 September 1699. Among the items Stuart mentions are: a map of the area

around Nöteborg, a field map of Nöteborg's «situation», a general plan of the fortress, a plan for repairs and plans for field works on both the north and south shores of the Neva/Ladoga.

¹¹ RA. M 1376. Sub A. Copy of memorial by Stuart, dated Nöteborg 10 July 1699.

¹² RA. Livonica II, vol. 201. Gustaf Wilhelm Schlippenbach to Charles XI, April 1696. Schlippenbach was most likely born about 1650. He was made an ensign in 1666, a lieutenant in 1673, a captain in 1675 and a major in 1679. In 1688 he succeeded Jacob Sprengtporten as commander of Nöteborg. The well-known general Wolmar Anton Schlippenbach was the son of his eldest brother.

¹³ RA, Livonica II, vol. 634. Muster roll dated 4 April 1678. For «soldiers' sons», see Gullberg, T. & Huhtamies, M. På vakt i öster. Vol. 3. Helsingfors, 2004. P. 165–206.

¹⁴ RA. M. 1376.

¹⁵ Ibid. Sub. A. Copy of letter from Otto Vellingk to Gustaf Wilhelm Schlippenbach, dated Narva 5 May 1700. In August 1700 Schlippenbach asked Horn for reinforcements, but was on the 25 told that this was a decision Vellingk had to make. Furthermore, Horn did not believe them necessary, as every report from Russia was positive and nothing suggested that an attack was imminent.

¹⁶ RA. Riksregistraturet 21 December 1700.

¹⁷ Ibid. 13, 15 January and 27 May 1701.

¹⁸ RA. M 1376. Sub A.

¹⁹ RA. M 1376. Sub A. Schlippenbach's relation dated 10 February 1703.

²⁰ Some of the testimonies state that the reinforcements arrived on the 29, which seems more likely.

²¹ Major Leijon also happened to be the brother of Schlippenbach's wife, a fact which likely made his position quite delicate. Wendela Rosenlindt, one of the civilians who had sought refuge in the fortress, vividly describes how Leijon just before the surrender cursed the day he set foot in Nöteborg, see RA. M 1376. Sub A., no 155.

²² RA. M 1376. The box contains five folders of testimonies, minutes of the proceedings, copies of letters etc., altogether about 900 pages.