

May 2008: Visit to Sweden

Last year, about this time, I took a trip to [Sardinia](#) in support of the Italian Army's recertification of TOW2A on their HeliTOW-equipped Agusta helicopters. Now the Belgian Ministry of Defense wants the same fix for theirs. Since Saab is the maintenance activity for HeliTOW, they held a "design review" in Sweden, and invited DRS and Raytheon to attend.



(The Saab company logo. I never really looked closely at it before, just thought it was a red blob, but now I can see the crowned eagle.)

Unlike a test firing campaign, in which there is plenty of down time, this was a short working trip, with most of the time spent sitting around a conference table, and very little time for sight-seeing. Unlike a test firing campaign, in which the location is usually remote and there aren't many sights to see, this trip was to the literal heart of Sweden. Unlike a test firing campaign, in which there aren't drinking establishments and sidewalk cafes that your travelling companions want to spend their free time in, this trip had lots of attractions for beer drinkers. In other words, this trip was somewhat frustrating, in that there was things to see, but I didn't get a chance to see much of it. But I did see some.

Jönköping (pronounced Yun-chu-ping) is pretty much in the middle of the country, on the south shore of the deepest lake in Sweden. It has an airport, but domestic air service in Sweden is rather unreliable, so we were advised to fly into Göteborg, and take a two-hour taxi ride. Thomas Johansson, the Saab project manager, was going to bring the Belgian representatives to meet us at a cafe and then go to dinner. So while I was waiting for the other Raytheon guys to come down from their hotel rooms, I looked around a little bit.

The lake connects with a smaller lake (which used to be Jönköping harbour) by a canal, which is now a public park area. On the other side of the canal is a park square in front of the government building, with this beautiful fountain.





Looking back across the canal to the hotel we stayed at. This is a historic hotel that has been very successfully modernized, but all the rooms on the front were still under construction. There was some sort of convention going on, and most of the hotels were full, hence our use of this old-fashioned and rather expensive place.

Like Fort Collins, Jönköping has converted their downtown area to a mall for foot and bicycle traffic only. Here is the view back toward the canal. Note the Subway shop! There was also a McDonald's here - disgusting creeping American low culture!



Looking up the street, with the "mall directory". Lots, LOTS of young women pushing baby strollers. Sometimes accompanied by a tattooed young man. I have heard that the state of marriage in Sweden is very poor, but the production of children, at least in Jönköping, is doing well.

I returned to the hotel plaza, and my friends were already in the Bishop's Arms cafe. After about an hour, Thomas and the Belgians appeared, and we left to find a restaurant in the downtown area, ending up in a Chinese place. It was strange to hear orientals speaking Svenska! The food was different... influence of Sweden?

The restaurants stay open late, but the shops close early, around 5:00. My mentor Hans wondered how the people could do any of their shopping, when the shops close and work ends about the same time. But this isn't 5:00, this is 9:00, returning from dinner. The dusk that Zonies would associate with 7:00 happens around 10:00 this time of year in Sweden!



The next day, while the Belgians and the Swedes discussed the business part of their project, Raytheon visited Saab Training Systems, which had produced a very impressive TOW training system, and wanted to get our feedback. Saab Training is in Huskvarna, considered to be the "twin city" to Jönköping - the chain saw factory was pointed out on our ride in. We had lunch with them (the Swedes are nothing if not hospitable),

then returned to Saab Avionics for the technical discussion. At the end of the (long) day, the entire group went to a fancy downtown restaurant for a three-course dinner of caviar for appetizer (accompanied by schnapps - yes, I tried some, don't see the charm), steak for the main course (accompanied by wine - yep), and sherbets and yogurt for dessert. It was 10:30 before we left - still light outside, but too dark for photos. No sights that day.

The next day we started with Saab Avionics and the Belgians planning the test firing campaign for Belgian HeliTOW at a range in Germany in October. This took all morning, and for lunch, Saab feasted the crowd at a golf course country club. Lunch was a buffet (various wierd meats) followed by the traditional Scandanavian Thursday meal of potato pancakes and Lingonberry Preserves. Very tasty!

After lunch, and a bit more discussion, the Belgians left for the airport with a new friend, Miguel Ramos of NAMSA, which supports NATO and other member countries with their weapon systems, including TOW. Miguel is a native and citizen of (duh) Spain, but lives with his family in Luxemborg. He speaks Spanish, English, French, and a bit of German. His kids speak Spanish at home, French at school, Luxemborgese (apparently a patois of French, Dutch, and German - not surprising, considering where Luxemborg is) with their friends at play, and will be learning English in a few years. I was constantly amazed at the fluidity of Europeans with language - the airplane crews gave their safety presentations in Dutch, French, and English, personnel in the airports all spoke English, just about every Swede would start talking to you in Swedish, but switch to very good English upon learning you were an ignorant American. It was fascinating to talk with the Belgians and learn that everyone is supposed to learn Dutch and French (and many also learn English), and the Dutch-preferring Flemish people in the north are willing to do this (even though there is concern that Dutch, spoken by so few in the world, is in danger of extinction), but the French Walloons in the south are not so much willing.

Anyways, after a few more hours chatting with Saab and DRS about the implications of TOW-RF for HeliTOW, we ended our two-day meeting and left. A taxi had been called for the trip back to Göteborg, and would be at the hotel when we arrived on foot. So on the way back, I did a bit more of hurried tourist stuff.



There was a downtown church, labelled simply "Christian Church" (or so I interpreted the Svenska), but I didn't really get any closer than the clock tower. There was a much larger, cathedral-size church building on the other side of the canal, in the "deeper" part of Downtown. I sure wish I could have looked closer. Maybe some day...

On the ride to and from Jönköping, there were church buildings in the small villages we passed. Lutheran, I suppose. There was no sign of other Christian or indeed any other religious activity - not, like I said, that I had much opportunity to look for it. Like most state churches, the Swedish Lutheran church is by all reports not particularly Christian any more. However, the Gideons are still active!



Downtown had a few squares with fountains. Here's one (fountain not working) with some important-looking and historical buildings, with marker plaques that we couldn't read and didn't have anyone to interpret.

And another. Both buildings' marker plaques had dates in the 1700s. In the first park, opposite the canal, there was a bronze model of historical Jönköping with post-gunpowder fortifications.



Upon arriving at the hotel, we discovered a huge crowd of people lining barricades around the drive, and a jazz band. Young people in dresses and tuxedos were being driven up to the hotel ballroom entrance on classic (usually American!) convertibles, smiling and waving. We thought at first this was some sort of celebrity thing. We soon found out, no, this was high-school prom, Swedish style!

We found out taxi in all this mess, and left to return to Göteborg. A harrowing ride; our driver was playing rap music (most radio stations play English music with Swedish-speaking hosts and DJs) and apparently dozing at the wheel. We were very glad to arrive at the airport hotel alive. Afterwards, we took the advice of

our Saab friends and hired a taxi to take us to "The Avenue" in Göteborg.

At the head of The Avenue is the Concert Hall. Göteborgians love their music. The picture does no credit to the size of the statue or to the enormity of the building.



Oh, yes, this was about 8:00.



The Avenue is a broad street running down to the harbour, with shops and sidewalk cafes at least as far as the river. This is not exactly a high-class cafe.

The Avenue is obviously old historic downtown Göteborg, characterized by buildings like this. On the side streets, as far as could be seen, are similar buildings that are apparently apartments, always at least four stories, always as decorative. Note the Göteborg flags - yellow crowned lion with a sword on a blue field. This motif was everywhere; apparently, Göteborgians are proud of their city.





We passed through a crowd of young men in tuxedos smoking cigarettes and young women in party dresses posing for pictures. Up on the balcony of this building is a similar party. A large crowd of cheering onlookers was also present. More Swedish Prom, in the heart of the Old City.

Looking up The Avenue, toward the Music Hall. See how wide it is, and how tall the buildings. Tremendous volume of foot traffic, as well as constant busses and frequent trolleys.



Small park with a fountain. The big buildings are on the other side of the river. This shot was taken from in front of what apparently was an old theatre, now converted (in spite of the classical statuary on the walls) into an upbeat dining establishment, where we would have our dinner outside, until it started getting dark, at 11:00

Looking up The Avenue again, while a trolley passes by. My DRS friend Mike is squinting into the 9:00 sunlight.





Standing on the bridge, looking down the river. Cruising boats are moored, their work today is done. Past the bend in the river is visible a green park with people enjoying their evening.

On the other side of the bridge was this plaza with a statue of King Carl Gustav XIV. He must have been a most Christian knight, if the God-honoring inscription (latin) truly reflected him. The rest of the inscription was incomprehensible Svenska. No tour books, rats. From here, down The Avenue, were visible the masts and spars of tall ships. If only time had permitted another half mile's walk to the harbour...



We finished our dinner and fumbled about with our cash to pay the bill. For the four of us, it was 1056 kr, or about \$45 per person. This of course includes the numerous glasses of beer my companions consumed. They had laid in enough cash at the airport to pay; I did not have enough, and did not pay my fair share at this meal. Not that it really matters, since Raytheon was funding this trip, and it didn't really matter whose expense report included it, but I would rather have split the bill and paid with my Master Card, which works throughout Europe, and the conversion from kronor to dollars appears on the credit bill. I finally figured it out, "krone" is svenska for "crown", and one krona of money is one "crown", and kronor are "crowns". The coins have King Carl Gustav's image on one side and a crown on the other! The paper money is just the typical European monopoly money kind of thing. I'm very pleased that the Swedes have retained their monetary system. One more thing to like about this country where most of the inhabitants speak English about as well as you do!