

THE SECRET LOAD ON THE ESTONIA

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After a program on the 10th anniversary of the sinking of M/S Estonia, a critical review of the state of the investigation, Lennart Henriksson contacted the reporter of Uppdrag Granskning, Lars Borgnäs, with information about military transports on the ship. Henriksson was, in 1994, a customs officer, head of Värtaenheten, i.e. the unit responsible for the ferries arriving to Stockholm. He was employed by the Swedish customs authorities for 38 years, and is now retired. The relevant parts of the program aired on Dec 3rd follows verbatim:

LH: I had to do with most of the crew on all the ferries, especially the Estonians. Mostly I had contacts with captain Arvo Andreson. He by and by learnt to speak Swedish. He communicated with ease, a real man.

(Henriksson even visited Andreson at his home, bringing a gift to his son, and was taken on a sightseeing in Tallinn.)

LH: Around mid September ... I was summoned by my immediate superior, and he said we had to meet with the customs superintendent. So I turned up (in his office) and we went over to the customs superintendent, and he told me: A car will arrive with the Estonia, and he said which plate number, and it will not be searched. Who said so? I asked. It's an order, he said. From whom? From the top, from as high up you can get. And I asked a silly question: From the king? No, he said, but from very high up. And I sighed and moaned and said it was wrong, you can't do that. That's the way it is, he said. My boss said: Come on, catsup, let's move. (*Alluding to an old joke.*) He meant I had been run over.

LH: This was on the 14th of September. It should not be searched. I found it wrong to be ordered to commit a breach of duty. But an order is an order. I mean, normally we checked all cars, especially from Estonia, as smuggling was rampant.

Lars Borgnäs (LB): Have you ever experienced anything similar before?

LH: No, I haven't, not under such circumstances. Not that they should pass without examination.

LB: What then happened on the 14th?

LH: You shouldn't involve others, so I was standing there in my uniform when the car came, I went up and spoke to the driver. I had got his name, too, but it sounded faked.

LB: What name?

LH (*Reluctantly*): Frank Larsson. He came in a Volvo 745, station wagon. I said, customs inspection. He didn't really ask any questions. I wanted to look around a bit. It will be a fake search, (I said). Whatever I see, I'm the only one to see. I opened a few cardboard boxes. As far as I could understand there was military electronic equipment in those boxes. It was a bit odd.

LB: What did it look like?

LH: Grey-brown-green, square objects with gauges. It looked like radio sets.

LB: How many boxes were there in the Volvo?

LH: The back seat was down, so it was loaded to the height of the back-rest. It was not filled up. Then I gave him clearance to leave.

LB: Military electronics? How do you know that?

LH: Everyone who spent a year in military service knows what those things look like. But how old, in what condition it was, what it was, these are things I cannot have an opinion about.

The reporter now presents the superiors of Henriksson, the Customs collector Stig Sandelin (SS), and the head of Region East, Inge Lindunger (IL). The day of the first transport Lars Henriksson got a print-out from the car registry of the vehicle in question, dated Sept 14th, 10.58: A Volvo 745, registration number KUH 914, owner Ericsson Access AB, a subsidiary of the telephone company Ericsson.

Next transport was on Sept 20th. The same procedure, Sandelin called Henriksson and said a car would be on the ferry.

LH: It was a blue van, one size bigger. But I didn't care to write down the number, I felt let down. It was more than twice as many cardboard boxes.

LB: Normally, what would you have done?

LH: Sent him to customs clearance.

LB: Had he been allowed to bring it into the country?

LH: Not military goods, no, I don't think so. Then you need a licence.

LB: What did you think? This was the second time.

LH: It was a peculiar procedure, but when you get an order you do it.

LB: This was on the 20th. What happened then?

LH: I don't remember the day, but I was on vacation the week that followed, walking in the mountains in the North. I returned only the day before the accident.

LB: Do you know if there was some similar car on board the night of the accident?

LH: No, I don't have a clue, I know nothing about that.

LB: Did you ever speak with anyone about those things?

LH: I called Sandelin a couple of times, telling him I was worried and that I felt bad about it. I asked him if he had any doubts about it. No, he said, and you have an obligation to secrecy. I have checked what professional secrecy means, but it hardly applies in this situation, when you are ordered to commit a breach of duty.

Henriksson has a telephone conversation with Stig Sandelin, which is taped. It is preceded by an attempted telephone interview with Sandelin by Lars Borgnäs, which doesn't yield much. The Henriksson conversation evidently takes place before this aborted interview.

LB: I am calling about that military equipment, that was taken through customs in a special way. What can you tell me?

SS: Nothing. (*Pause.*) It's secret, security of the state. It's classified.

LB: How come Ericsson was involved?

SS: I've never seen that.

LB: Do you know who was behind the transport?

SS: Yes, the military authorities.

LB: But it hasn't been known until now, that military equipment was carried on board the Estonia, shortly before she sank. Some people are worried that might have something to do with the shipwreck.

SS: I can't comment on that.

LB: Are you worried?

SS: No. I have seen what it was. I mean, I cleared it.

LB: But what came on the night of the accident?

SS: I know nothing about that. I had no report about anything coming that night.

LB: Does that exclude the possibility that cargo was on board that night?

SS: That excludes nothing, because I don't know what was loaded onto the ship. We have no such information. We only inspect what is landed here. I don't know what was on board when she foundered.

Henrikssons earlier telephone conversation with Customs collector Sandelin:

LH: Do you know what was in the cars?

SS: In the first nothing, for what I know.

LH: Oh yes, military electronics. And in the second one more of the same, a lot more.

SS: To me it looked like junk.

LH: But Lindunger, who gave the order, must know more about it.

SS: No, I don't think so. This was strictly between me and the DG (*director general of the Swedish Customs*), he knew nothing about it. It was an agreement between the DG and the CC (*Commander-in-Chief*), that when something arrived, I and NN on Arlanda (airport) should handle the customs clearance of those secret gadgets.

LH: In any case I don't feel good about it.

SS: You don't have to feel that way. That they have found out, you know, they have seen there were no holes in the ship. Perhaps we should have cleared it, but it was of no value.

LH: What was it?

SS: But it wasn't explosives, I could see that. At that time it might have some value, but today it's worth nothing. In the beginning some rumours circulated, that there were explosives on board, but I don't believe that. They saw that much, while they were doing photo jobs down there, that there was no hole in the bottom of the ship.

LH: Was any car on board when she sank, too? I was on vacation then, you know.

SS: No.

LH: I took a print-out on the first car, I know which company it was.

SS: Yes, it was a rental car. The secret guys rented one, so nobody would know who they were.

LH: Who wanted those things?

SS: It was the military, intelligence I guess. I don't know if they saw anything in it. It's history, to them it was thrilling to lay their hands on some old Russian gadgets.

The reporter states that the JAIC knew nothing about those military transports. He then presents Sören Lindman, at the time the Swedish military attaché in Estonia. Not much of interest, military-wise, was to be found in Estonia in 1994, as most of the Russian installations had been dismantled. But in the Leningrad military district a lot of advanced technology was around, especially the SA-10 Air Defence System.

SL: There was a lot of goods in Russia, that could be brought over the border to Estonia, that was not difficult at all. Then it could be transferred to Sweden, and it might even be, that the Swedish authorities knew nothing about it.

SL: The SA-10 is a very advanced system. The Russians kept a close guard on that. But of course, some Russian might have stolen it and sold it on. But I don't know anything about that.

The reporter visits Alexander Einseln in Tallinn. Einseln is a former US general, in 1994 he was the first Commander-in-Chief of the Estonian Army. Today he is retired.

LB: At the time, was the situation in Estonia such, that it was possible to smuggle military equipment on the ferry?

AE: Oh yes. No question about it. Almost anything could be done. I don't think there were any controls at all at that time ... I can say with certainty that the controls were so minimal, that anybody who wanted anything aboard could do that.

LB: Anything was possible?

AE: It was, absolutely everything. This was a madhouse, sir, everything was loose. There were no controls. That's a time for all kinds of people to play around and do what the hell they wanted, and they did.

Back to the military attaché, Sören Lindman. He claims to have no knowledge about the military transports of September 14th, and 20th. He is of the opinion, that as he didn't know about them, it might be that the most secret part of the Swedish Army was involved, the KSI, or *Kontoret för särskild inhämtning*. This was part of the military intelligence organization, MUST, and a tool of the Commander-in-Chief to get intelligence by extraordinary means.

SL: It would be close to misconduct if the KSI had not been in the Baltic states, digging wherever they could, when the Soviet Union was falling apart. But what they found, I don't know.

LB: Did you cooperate with them?

SL: I know they were around. Cooperation? I leave that in the open.

Back to Alexander Einseln:

LB: We have information, that on two occasions prior to the disaster, there was military technology on board the Estonia.

AE: That doesn't surprise me. I have not heard that before.

LB: This was only weeks before the disaster.

AE: Was it in any paper? In what channels? Intelligence?

LB: No, it's not been made official in any way. This is information we have.

AE: If your information is correct, that gives another reason, a good reason, why this investigation should be reopened (? *slurred*). To find out who did it. Why. We have over 800 people that perished there. That is serious. We are not living in a totalitarian system, we live in a democracy. I think the people have the right to know, the Swedes, the Finns, the Estonians, the world has the right to know.

The reporter calls Inge Lindunger, head of Region East, and the GD of Customs, Ulf Larsson, neither of them remembers a thing. He proceeds to call Owe Victorin, from July 1st 1994 Commander-in-Chief, today retired. Asked what he knew about the September transports he says:

OV: I find nothing in my notes. I can only ascertain that there was no military equipment (on board) of such importance, that I had to be notified, neither in connection with the Estonia disaster nor afterwards. That's just the way it is.

LB: Might some other part of the military be involved, like the KSI?

OV: Then you'd better talk to those responsible within the KSI, if they know about any decision made below the CC-level. I can't answer that question.

The reporter talks to Erik Rossander, head of the MUST 1993-99, and he of course cannot say anything about KSI activities, and neither will anybody else, he adds.

The last lead is the company the smugglers used, Ericsson Access AB. Within the Ericsson group there is a lot of military production. The EA built base stations for mobile phone networks, the NMT standard, mainly in East Europe and Russia. The reporter interviews Ulf Mimer, manager in 1994:

LB: One of your cars came back with the Estonia in September.

UM: I've never heard about it.

LB: Did you have employees with a military background in the sales department?

UM: Yes, we had, from time to time. It was a source for recruitment. (Most Russian-speaking Swedes learn the language in military academies.)

LB: Who, below you in the company, could take a car, go to Russia, and bring home military equipment?

UM: Anyone could do shady things (while on a trip).

LB: Does the name Frank Larsson ring a bell?

UM: No, never heard that name either. Then it must have been illegitimate.

Back to Alexander Einseln. The speaker puts forward the hypothesis, that M/S Estonia carried some secret load on the night of the accident. Einseln responds.

AE: I think if they knew there was something there, that may be the reason why they so hastily covered up the site and kept everybody away. To me it was uncommonly suspicious, that a country like Sweden, which is a democratic country with all the values of democracy, would act as hastily as they did to cover the wreck and not allow anybody there. And I saw the same attitude very much by the Finns and the Estonian government. This is what raised a question in my mind, whether there was something to hide. Why such a hurry?

The car deck was never examined. That is quite astonishing, says Werner Hummel, for several years the chief investigator of the German shipyard, Meyer Werft, that built M/S Estonia.

WH: Well, taking in mind the general behavior of those concerned with the Estonia investigation, the JAIC, Sjöfartsverket, and so on, one can only conclude they did everything to avoid that the public could get knowledge about what was on the car deck. By behaving like they did, they even underlined that there was something of importance and of relevance on the car deck, that they tried to hide.

LB: Would that be normal, to go in there?

WH: Yes. That has been done before under similar circumstances, it's still being done. It will be done in the future. That they didn't go down on car deck, officially, that raises suspicions.

The reporter says he's got evidence, that the ferry was used for military transports.

WH: It is a confirmation of what I personally have believed for many years, that there was a military component in the sinking of the Estonia.

Hummel then says, that an impartial investigation is called for, with the countries involved excluded from the proceedings, including Germany. The same opinion is expressed in the closing statement of Alexander Einseln:

AE: We need to bring it up, find out, and make a thorough investigation. I would not allow the interested countries to participate in it. The world is full of maritime nations. Allow Japan, The Philippines, Africa, whatsoever, to come here. They have no national interest, no national pride to protect.

Translation: Knut Carlqvist, Jan 17th 2005