

9-1-2009

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Recommended Citation

Sward, Paul D. (2009) "The search for Swedish ancestry," *Swedish American Genealogist*: Vol. 29 : No. 3 , Article 6.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.augustana.edu/swensonsag/vol29/iss3/6>

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The search for Swedish ancestry leads to the carnage of a Napoleonic War battlefield

PAUL D. SWARD

The *Dragon* Pehr Pehrsson Svärd was born, as Pehr Pehrsson, in Köpinge #37, Köpinge parish, Kristianstad län on October 15, 1860, to *Husman* Pär Pärsson and Bengta Tufvesdotter.

On November 12, 1880, Pehr Pehrsson was enrolled as Pehr Pehrsson Svärd (Svärd being a soldier's name meaning sword) into the *Livkompaniet* (Life Company) of the *Skånska Dragonregementet* (Scanian Dragoon Regiment) under *Rusthåll* – Köpinge #37. He served until his discharge on December 9, 1886.

Köpinge parish records indicate that he emigrated on March 4, 1887. The *Emigranten Populär* reveals that he departed Malmö on March 17, 1887, destined for New York, New York.

After arrival in the United States, Pehr settled in Kewanee, Illinois, and went by the name of Peter Sward. He married Karna Nilsdotter, also from Köpinge parish, on March 14, 1888. Peter's father, stepmother, and his only two siblings also immigrated during the same time period. Peter eventually became a foreman for the Kewanee Boiler Company which was one of the largest producers of commercial boilers in the U.S. at that time.

Family legend has it that when Peter was serving in the Life Company of the Scanian Dragoons, he became part of a squadron that demonstrated "trick horseback riding" and had performed before the King of Sweden. Whether this is accurate is unknown; numerous family members did attest to his acrobatic talent and exceptional personal strength.

A Military Tradition

Dragon Pehr Pehrsson Svärd was my paternal great-grandfather and was the starting point for my genealogical research on this family line. Robert Nelson, an acknowledged expert on the Swedish-American genealogy of the Bishop Hill Colony, was my mentor and provided guidance on researching Swedish parish records. As an interesting side note, it was found that Peter Sward's son married a descendant of an original Bishop Hill colonist, but that is another story.

Armed with Peter Sward's basic information it was relatively easy to trace his path through the Köpinge parish records and gain additional information about his father, Pär Pärsson. Pär Pärsson had been born in nearby Everöd parish. Quickly I discovered that Pär Pärsson's father had also been in the military, but was an infantry soldier rather than a dragoon. He was Pär Pärsson Pyk (Pik), under *Rotehåll* - Everöd #23. An examination of his military records revealed that he was enrolled in 1812 in the Gärds Company of the *Norra Skånska Infanteriregementet* (North Scanian Infantry Regiment). He served in this unit until he was granted a disability pension due to deafness on June 16, 1828.

In the Napoleonic War

The record indicated that he had taken part in the Napoleonic War 1813 – 1814 and in the war with Norway in 1814. It also indicated that he had a distinguished service record. This in itself captured my imagination, but the household examination



Pehr Persson Svärd.

records for Everöd parish also revealed that his father Pehr Pehrsson Hurtig was in the military and that his death occurred in 1813. Could his death be related to the Napoleonic War?

Who was Per Hurtig?

I subsequently obtained Pehr Hurtig's military record which revealed that he was enrolled in the *Livkompaniet* of the *Skånska Karabinjärregemente* (Scanian Carabineer Regiment) on July 12, 1792, under *Rusthåll* – Everöd #31. This regiment was eventually renamed the Scanian Dragoon Regiment which was the same regiment that Peter Sward had served. To my astonishment, the record indicated that Pehr Hurtig had served in the

Napoleonic War and died of a gunshot wound at Bornhöft, Tyskland (Germany), on December 7, 1813.

Father and son in the Napoleonic War

Like most Americans, my knowledge of the Napoleonic Wars was limited. I was aware of Sweden's struggle with the Russians over Finland. I was also aware that subsequently Sweden joined the alliance opposing Napoleon and that Crown Prince Carl Johan¹ led one of the armies against Napoleon's forces. However, that was the limit of my knowledge and I had never heard of Bornhöft, Tyskland.

It became clear that I needed to educate myself concerning Sweden's involvement in the Napoleonic Wars. I was soon to discover that is not an easy task. Very little of the history of the Napoleonic Wars that is written in English deals with Sweden's involvement. Combined with the fact that my comprehension of Swedish is minimal, it became a struggle to gain this education. Nevertheless by deciphering the Swedish sources and reviewing the limited English sources, I was able to gain the understanding I needed to piece together this genealogical inquiry.

Swedish troops to Germany

In May of 1813, Crown Prince Carl Johan arrived in Germany with Swedish troops and soon took command of the allied Army of the North.

Swedish troops saw minimal combat until the Army of the North joined other allied armies in confronting Napoleon at Leipzig in October which resulted in the "Battle of the Nations" and a defeat for Napoleon. Swedish troops played a limited role in this battle². Historical records identify both the North Scanian Infantry Regiment and the Scanian Carabineer Regiment at Leipzig.

Battle of Bornhöft

In December the Army of the North was pursuing the retreating Danish

army, the Danes being allies of Napoleon. On December 7, General Skjöldebrand, commanding the Swedish cavalry vanguard, attacked two brigades of Danish troops and their Polish lancer escort at the village of Bornhöft (also known as Bornhöved) located in Schleswig-Holstein in modern day Germany. Although outnumbered five to one, Skjöldebrand launched a massive cavalry charge which routed the Danes and Poles. However, they regrouped and subsequently repulsed the Swedish troops. In a subsequent charge by a squadron of Scanian Carabineers on the Danish flank, the carabineers suffered significant casualties. This was a bloody affair in which neither side gained a clear victory. The battle resulted in both sides retiring from the field. By Napoleonic War standards this was a relatively small battle. There is some confusion as to what the actual losses were for the forces involved. The highest estimates place the Danish and Polish losses at 66 dead and 75 captured, and Swedish losses at 80 dead with an untold number of wounded from both sides.

Perhaps Pehr Hurtig died in the initial charge, or in the subsequent flank charge by the Scanian Carabineers. Regardless, he died at some point during this battle. However, his son, Pär Pik, survived the Napoleonic

War and the subsequent war with Norway.

A father and son served their country on the battlefields of Europe. The father died in the carnage of a cavalry charge, but the son survived the horrors of war, for which I am thankful. Otherwise, I would not have been here to write this article.

Editor's Notes:

- 1) The French marshal Jean Baptiste Jules Bernadotte was elected Crown Prince of Sweden in 1810. His name was then changed to Carl Johan, and in 1818 he became King of Sweden under the name Carl XIV Johan. In private, the family kept the surname Bernadotte, which since has been used by members of the family that have lost their royal status by marrying commoners.
- 2) The reason for the Crown Prince to save his troops is sometimes explained by that he was already then thinking of war with Denmark, which ended in 1814 with the Danes ceding Norway to Sweden.

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The Storming of Leipzig 1813, by Carl Johan Ljunggren.