



## Dialog om Operation Paul

***Response to John Turesson's note "An unalerted and poorly defended Swedish port' – Operation Paul from the viewpoint of Luleå" by Peter Hore***

I have read John Turesson's note "An unalerted and poorly defended Swedish port' – Operation Paul from the viewpoint of Luleå" (in *Forum navale* 78) with great interest, but I beg to differ.

*Firstly, was Luleå unprepared for the possibility of an attack by Royal Navy torpedo bombers in the late spring/early summer of 1940?*

There was absolutely no strategic warning of such an attack, and there was no precedent that lead anyone to expect such an attack: in 1940, a long-range attack by carrier-borne aircraft was beyond the imagination of most attackers and defenders. Even if Swedish defenders had heard or seen at dawn (there was no radar) a large number of aircraft entering Swedish airspace and been able to give some tactical warning, the defenders would have had no idea what the aircraft were or what their destination was. Further, that the knowledge of Operation Paul has escaped the attention of most historians since the Second World War, until I discovered the sources in the archives, is more proof that Luleå was and would have been unprepared.

*Secondly, was Luleå poorly defended?*

In my original article (FN 70), I was negligent when I did not fully examine the defences of Luleå in 1940, and I am grateful to John Turesson for correcting me. He lists a number of 75mm, 40mm and 8mm guns

defending the port and its approaches, but where were the searchlights and barrage balloons, where were the warships with their batteries of anti-aircraft guns, and where were the land-based fighter aircraft? No, I'm sorry, but Luleå was poorly defended compared to, for example, when the intent and determination behind Operation Paul was manifested later in 1940 at the Battle of Taranto, when a score of Fleet Air Arm aircraft pressed home a night attack, crippled the Italian navy, and changed the strategic balance of power in the Mediterranean.

My main conclusion remains that if Operation Paul had been executed, it would have succeeded. The consequence may only have been the closure of the port of Luleå and an interruption in iron ore exports to Nazi Germany for some days or weeks, but the event would also have changed the strategic, operational, and tactical course of the war in the north and it may even have brought Sweden into the war on the Nazi side.

Principally, I'm glad Operation Paul didn't happen: it would have embittered Anglo-Swedish relations for generations (as the British attack on the Vichy French fleet in Mers-el-Kebir, also in 1940, still does today), and there would be many Swedish friendships that I personally would not now enjoy.

### ***Reply from John Turesson***

Swedish air defences were prepared to defend Luleå against any intruder. British interests to cut the iron ore supply was well known from many sources: Allied press debate during the winter war; Operation Wilfred – the mining of Norwegian territorial waters on 8th of April; and Swedish police capturing the "Rickman gang" planning to sabotage Oxelösund harbour on the 19th of April. During the winter war Soviet naval aviation had dropped mines in Finnish harbour entrances. The most surprising bit with operation Paul would be the use of slow and vulnerable Swordfish biplanes.

As the plan narrowed down in scope the three minefields that remained were the one closest to Swedish air defences. Thus, the planning unin-

tentionally maximized the air defence's efficiency. To ensure that the mines are distributed evenly the aircraft must fly in a formation at slow speed and low altitude. Like an air show fly-by within 2000 meters of the Swedish guns.

In comparison, the attack on Taranto was well reconnoitred and executed on a pitch-black Mediterranean night in November. The shore based Italian anti-aircraft guns were poised against level bombers and were not permitted to fire directly at the low flying torpedo bombers due to the risk of hitting their own ships. An attack on Luleå in June at 5 AM means bright daylight and at least one AA-battery with an unrestricted arc of fire to the drop zone.

It would undoubtedly have been a British tactical victory; the port would have been closed for some period. But strategically just a minor inconvenience for the German iron ore supply.