

Chapter 1 : “1906/47 - Edmund ...”

King Carl XVI Gustaf (CG) is the fifth child of Swedish heir apparent (2nd in line) Gustaf Adolf Oscar Fredrik Artur Edmund Bernadotte (1906-1947), son of Swedish heir apparent (1st in line) Crown Prince Gustaf VI Adolf (1882-1973) and English Princess Margareta of Connaught (1882-1920).

The Prince, here called Edmund, was the eldest of five siblings. His childhood is mainly known through his brother Sigvard's autobiography. Edmund was energetic, full of zeal but from childhood shy and quiet. His main interests were machinery, sports and outdoor life. He was an outstanding fencer and horseman. After studying at Lundsberg's boarding school, a sort of sports high school according to the English model, he graduated as a private student in 1925 and then underwent an officer training in the army. In preparation for the office, he studied history, political science, constitutional law, German and French at Uppsala University and economics and industrial and social science at Stockholm School of Economics. He also had an extensive industrial practice.

During the 1930s, Edmund engaged in a military career interspersed with representation and honorary assignments. For a long time, his duties were so light that he could devote half his time to training. For example, he attended the Spanish Riding School in Vienna. Edmund was a very successful athlete. In the 1936 Berlin Olympics, however, things went less well. The horse refused to jump and he was disqualified. During this time there were many rumours about his women's affairs but I have not investigated the matter. [According to part 2: appendix 4 they were false.] As a speaker, Edmund sounded like a more nasal version of his brother Bertil with the same kind of phrasing so that his voice would carry in the field. During his student years he sang in Orphei Drängar (the Uppsala university Choir) and was otherwise very interested in music.

In the autumn of 1938 until early summer 1939 he practised at the county administrative board in Stockholm. The then mayor Torsten Nothin perceived him as a reasonable person entrenched behind his role. Edmund listened to reports and made excursions to all possible places: The county jail, the forensic institute, bachelor shelters, diners of the unemployed, shelters etc. The intention was to continue his social studies next year but the war intervened. Nothin suggested that Edmund do military service so that the officers and, therefore, the people would come to know him.

But we could not push our will through. It came up against resistance, not from the old king with whom I spoke about the matter, but it met this diffuse resistance, which does not allow itself to be localized but is tough as pitch, for it never lets go. Did it derive from the court with its conception of the way in which the position of a royal person should be asserted? Or was it feared by the military that such a service by a prince might create a precedent that would be uncomfortable for other soldiers? What I do know is that if the prince had been assigned the post of a company commander and shared the life of the officers and the men, they would have learned to understand him. And he would have been known by countrymen. Now they knew him not.¹

Instead, Edmund was placed on the Defence Staff as adjutant to the future commander-in-chief Colonel Nils Swedlund. He was responsible for the brochure “If there be War” which from 1943 was distributed to all Swedish households. He also worked on the field training of

¹ Torsten Nothin. *Från Branting till Erlander*. 1955.

the Norwegian and Danish voluntary police forces who after the end of the war would maintain order after the Germans surrendered.

According to Nothin the origin of Edmund's bad legacy derives from the demand for a republican form of government at the 1944 Social Democratic Party Congress. At the Congress, chairman of SSU (the social democratic youth organisation) Bertil Johansson spoke and said the following: That the next man in the line of succession, we may well have to endure, but then comes a person who must never become king. Nothin learned of the matter and asked for a meeting with Edmund, told him of the congressional decision and also of the criticism that Edmund was too one-sided focused on his military duties.

The Prince took it very hard. He sat quietly for a long time. Then came his reply with roughly the following words: "The only profession I know is the officer's. As long as there is war, it is therefore my duty to serve the country in that capacity. It can't be helped, if they don't understand who I am." The atmosphere was depressed. Neither of us saw any way out of the impasse, where he ended up partly through lack of accessibility but also through an excessive sense of duty and people's lack of comprehension.²

In 1947, Edmund died in a plane crash. At the time, CG was only a year old, so he had no personal memories of his father. Much later, when asked about his role model in life, he said: "It has been told to me that my father always strived to do the same things, [but] preferably a little better, than his equestrian comrades and associates in order to be a role model. I have been struck by this approach. I have also been told that my father was very shy. There too, I resemble him."³ Neither CG's mother Sibylla nor his sisters seem to have told him anything else. His father appears to have existed mostly as a photograph in the genealogy.

In 1951 a memoir on Edmund was published with contributions by mainly his military colleagues.⁴ Some reviews:

- The young prince won no quick victories by shining and dazzling. With hard work and solid knowledge he eventually made his mark.
- It was the will, seriousness and conscientiousness that made the prince a capable General Staff Officer.
- I don't know anyone who I would rather have as comrade on a dangerous mission than the prince.
- He won on a longer acquaintance.

Further testimony was that he was extremely thorough in everything he undertook and that "Someone who knew Prince Edmund very well said that he seemed to be two people at once: Outwardly a little tense, quite serious and sometimes because of his shyness somewhat succinct, but in private at home and among friends a pleasant and almost weak man."⁵

² Torsten Nothin. *Från Branting till Erlander*. 1955.

³ Henrik Frenkel. *Jag som chef*. Chef, 2007:4.

⁴ Archibald Douglas (red). *Prins Gustaf Adolf : en minnesbok*. Stockholm : Norstedt, 1951.

⁵ Husmodern, 1954:41.

CG has since often commented on his mother's silence as a way of protecting him from a terrible experience. The silence went so far that the memoir almost wasn't published. That it came into being Nothin attributed to the sisters:

The fatherless children - the eldest daughter was only slightly over twelve years old - mourned their worshipped father. The children could not understand that not all the country felt the same and it became for them an ever stronger desire, that the person and the deeds of the father should receive his signature. Then the public would surely learn to understand and appreciate their father. Friends of him were asked to write down their recollections. I made my contribution. Others did the same. But as time went by, it became harder for the editor to get the others in. A couple of them, whom I had believed to be his honest friends during their lifetime, recklessly and incomprehensibly spoke about him after his death. It became clear to me that friendship after death, is a rare commodity. Finally, various statements were compiled into a book in which the dead Prince, his character and activities were depicted with appreciation. But the portrayal were colourless. It was not the prince but what the editor believed that an heir apparent should be. The book's edition was probably not large either. The book was in any case not a success and it did not have as wide a circulation, as the real initiators, the children at Haga, had hoped and desired.⁶

My personal conviction is that Sibylla was paralysed by the family conflicts. All the male members of Edmund's family, including CG's grandfather Gustaf VI, seem to have been in conflict with each other. For political reasons, Sibylla neither talked about her own German family. CG and the sisters grew up without family on both their father's and mother's side.

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In the summer of 1993, CG organized an exhibition at the summer house Solliden about his father. On January 2, 1994, he was interviewed by SVT (Swedish state television≈ BBC) and portrayed Edmund as a good family man, interested in sports and with a traditional officer education. He might seem arrogant but this was due to his shyness. CG was asked if he missed his father. CG: "I missed someone I could lean on, look up to and find out what was permitted."⁷ The program was afterwards criticized for not touching on the rumours of Edmund's Nazi sympathies that were circulating.⁸ CG asked the head of the Bernadotte family archive to check if there were any documents that proved the case but none appear to have been found. [Not entirely correct; see part 2: chapter 88, Alm 2010.] No regular biography was published until 2006.⁹ The biography showed that Edmund was pro-German and during his visits to Germany met several high-ranking Nazis. Perhaps not much to criticize, but it has been considered serious enough. The final verdict was quite severe:

And the heir apparent Gustaf Adolf, the king's father, was he a Nazi? The question has been asked incorrectly. Gustaf Adolf was not a conscious political person. He was a grumpy and inhibited career officer from the Swedish upper class with for his background and time typical approaches, preferences and prejudices. He was raised in

⁶ Torsten Nothin. Från Branting till Erlander. 1955.

⁷ Thomas Sturesson. Min far - prins Gustaf Adolf. SVT1, 1994-01-02.

⁸ Annette Kullenberg. Prins Gustaf Adolf och nazismen. I: Urp! sa överklassen : eliten i Sverige. 1995, s 203-215.

⁹ Per Svensson. Han som aldrig fick bli kung: [berättelsen om Carl XVI Gustafs pappa]. Norstedt, Stockholm, 2006.

an environment where authoritarian arrogance, reactionary resentment and conservative prejudices were mandatory. An unreflective admiration for everything German was included in the basic mental equipment. In the Prince's case, the Germanophilic inclinations were reinforced by his marriage to Princess Sibylla. As a member of one of Germany's most Hitler-friendly houses, the prince was probably fed Nazi propaganda and as a good son-in-law he probably swallowed most of it.¹⁰

The author concludes his accusations with “But about this we really know nothing. Prince Gustaf Adolf was not a writing and speaking person.” Edmund suffered from dyslexia and, like all royals at this time, kept silent about his views. Edmund is so anonymous that he probably never revealed anything about himself to the public. From various sources, one can otherwise obtain that he was interested in jazz music, home movies and hunting, that he was an avid stamp collector and forced his family to share his interests, that he and his adjutant sometimes sneaked out to socialize with people incognito and that if he seemed to be on the verge of losing a discussion he became stiff, dismissive, his gaze chilly and he ended the discussion. Shy or not - royal he was.

¹⁰ Per Svensson & PJ Anders Lindner. Nej : monarkin har aldrig varit farligare än nu. & Ja : monarkins bästa tid är nu. Stockholm : Bonnier, 2010.