

Chapter 6 : “1912/97 – 2nd in line”

Prince Bertil's background was like Edmunds. He attended Lundsberg's boarding school. The grades were poor but he was good at sports - a total of 137 prizes of various kinds. The last year he was taken out of school - practised a couple of years at a factory and in the navy - resumed his studies and in 1931 received his high school diploma. In the same year, he entered the Naval Warfare School and in 1934 earned his naval officer degree. From 1935 to 1937, he was assistant naval attaché in Paris combined with language studies and a civil professional practice. In 1938 it was “castle practice”. From 1939 to 1941, he served in the Navy as a torpedo officer, and from 1942 to 1945 continued as assistant naval attaché in London. At the end of the war, he was captain and number 3 in the line of succession after his father and Edmund. It was not a position that justified him to anything. He therefore intended, like his brothers Sigvard and Carl Johan and his cousin Lennart, to marry a commoner and continue with a civil career. His résumé was industrial, accountancy and banking practice, experience of investigation and negotiation and he had led two much-publicized “delegations”: In 1938, a several-week public relations trip to the Swedish settlers in the United States and in 1940 a purchasing delegation of military equipment, also in the United States. He was also known for his unpretentious style and talents for socializing and speaking. An acquaintance's judgment in 1946 was that “The Crown Prince is, as is well known, a most extraordinarily modest man, who is keen not to cause any trouble.”¹ - Woe, however, to somebody who took liberties.

On the debit side, he is said like Edmund to have suffered from dyslexia and lacked professional experience outside the military. According to close relatives, his dyslexia was of a milder nature but it made him rather listen to oral drawings than read on his own. His intellectual horizon was thus limited by the environment and he was perceived as rather restricted in his views. The journalist Åke Ortmark summarized his character as: Prince Bertil has no views. He has only prejudices.

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The Ministry of Foreign Affairs had since the end of the war discussed a trade delegation to Chile - it appears initially to have been an initiative by Trade Minister Gunnar Myrdal within the so-called Latin America Agency - but the plans did not take shape until autumn 1946. The Chileans, however, wanted such high level industrialists that the Foreign Ministry had to include another six countries to attract a suitable delegation. Prince Bertil and the chairman of the Swedish Trade Council, Rolf von Heidenstam, were asked at the end of September 1946 if they wanted to participate. There was a tradition in the navy to interact with the export industry. The switch from naval officer to trade ambassador was a natural. Rolf von Heidenstam, who also was gentleman in waiting, spoke to Bertil's father, who approved the assignment on behalf of his son as long as it did not clash with his other duties.

I trained myself to become some kind of ambassador for Sweden and the Swedish export industry, it was a job that amused me and that I learned from the ground up. I speak several language (the Prince speaks English literally as if born there, French and German perfectly, Spanish and Italian if necessary), I like people and have no difficulty in getting along, and I had an intimate knowledge of Sweden and the Swedish business community. When the so-called The Prince Bertil delegation had

¹ Åke Wiberg. PM, 1946-11-15. Svenska affärs- och industrimän (delegation) till Sydamerika 1946-1949. UD 1920 års dossiersystem volym H2771.

completed their - I think quite successful - tour of South America in 1947, I thought - when we recuperated in Punta del Este [Uruguay] and reviewed the result - that I had found my vocation.²

The delegation consisted of Prince Bertil, Rolf von Heidenstam, CEO Helge Ericsson at LM Ericson, manager Elof Ericsson at Åtvidaberg's industries, member of the 2nd chamber industrialist Åke Wiberg, a secretary from the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and a few other people. Later delegations have had up to 50 participants, but this first was very small. The journey took place on November 30, 1946 and they were gone for two months. They visited Chile, Peru, Colombia, Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay. Afterwards, they had vivid memories of what it was like to be thrown around in the gusts over the Andes in one of Panagra's DC-3s. They ended up having to make an emergency landing and continue by car.

During the trip, political and economic contacts were established and they took the opportunity to meet larger customers and suppliers. A further important task was to reconnect with the local representatives of the companies who had been left by the wind during the war years to keep the business alive. One immediate effect of the trip was two agreements on telephone and air connections. The delegation was very satisfied: "It is important to emphasize the extraordinary importance of a royal Swedish prince leading the delegation. Prince Bertil - with his deep interest in the task, his simple and natural way - made a strong impression on everyone we came into contact with."³

At the end of the journey, they received news of Edmund having died in a plane crash. Prince Bertil shouldered many of his duties. What should have become a civil profession as a trade ambassador was instead included in the representation.

I think I have a certain talent for dealing with businessmen. For the Swedish export delegations, it can also be an advantage to have me as a kind of figurehead - it guarantees in any case a polite and interested reception and contacts at the very highest level. We usually meet with presidents, trade ministers, industry ministers and other official figures, together with leading representatives of the foreign country's largest industries and banks.

The programs are quite tough, but nowadays we can cope with our long journeys and finish them within a couple of weeks. ... How I manage my job as a travelling salesman for the firm of Sweden must surely others assess. [You do what you can. And that's it.] But it seems that both the Swedish Trade Council and the Federation of Industry are quite satisfied with my efforts. ... In Sweden, we sometimes underestimate the importance of social contacts and informal interaction in bringing international business to a successful conclusion.⁴

Diplomacy was often decisive. Axel Iveroth (Federation of Industry): "He is the head of the delegation. He is very active. He is involved in deciding who we should meet, who should meet with whom and what to say and not in various speeches."⁵

² Gunnar Unger. Prins Bertil fyller 50. Svenska Dagbladet, 1962-02-18.

³ Elof Ericsson. Äventyr i Sydamerika, del II. Vecko-Nytt, 1947:9.

⁴ Prins Bertil, Bo Bengtsson, Lars Ekegren & Uno Grönkvist. Prins Bertil berättar. 1983.

⁵ Anders Hasselbohm. Prins Bertil på ny PR-resa. Vecko Journalen, 1974:47.

Hans Werthén (Ericson): “In the larger contracts for Ericson, for example, he has been very helpful. We have had very strong opponents because our American competitors have often come with vice presidents and whole hordes of people. And the prince has been able to match them quite well.”⁶

Over time, it became a hundred shorter and longer journeys. It is difficult to portray them. All information is in the form of anecdotes. Prince Bertil claimed that his own store would fill several volumes. There appears to have been no press coverage. The delegations, claimed to be Prince Bertil's most important achievement, can thus not be described in detail. They were also officially low key. Prince Bertil's official status has not been possible to establish. He was a private citizen when it suited him, royal when it suited him better. He is not mentioned in the public archives until the 1960's.

The sales delegations were ordered or at least sanctioned by the Department of Commerce. The decisions about the trips were taken in the cabinet and communicated to the Foreign Ministry in retrospect. The protocol department would have liked to have seen a little more consultation to facilitate the planning.

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After the end of the war, Prince Bertil became involved in his two major leisure time activities sports and cars. During his time in France he raced incognito. During his time in England he played golf. His royal duties were accordingly: He became chairman of the Swedish Automobile Federation (1945-1962) and of the Swedish Golf Association (1946-1947). After Edmund's death, he became chairman of the Swedish Sports Confederation (RF; 1947-1991), in the Swedish Olympic Committee (SOK; 1947-1997) and in the Royal Automobile Club (KAK; 1947-1993). He also had a lot of lesser involvements - at least 50-60 of them. The largest among these was as chairman of the board of the Rifle Association and its continuation the Voluntary Shooting Movement (1948-1997), Grand Master of the Freemasons (1973-1997) and member of the Gastronomic Academy (1958-1997; plate No 17).

Prince Bertil's princely duties consisted of replacing his father in the cabinet meetings when he was on holiday or on a state visit and relieving him of excessive representation. His usual daily routine was to read the mail, keep up to date through the newspapers, investigations and oral reviews and to have meetings and telephone conferences during the afternoon. The job was about keeping up with everything that took place. Even evenings and weekends were consumed. The most difficult period was immediately after the transfer of the throne in 1950. Before and after the cabinet meetings, he received private reviews from the various departments so that in each case he knew what decisions he signed. His duties also included an endless number of dinners. By 1954 he had gained weight to such an extent that he was prescribed slimming.

On his 70th birthday, Prince Bertil summarized his life as his greatest contribution being to the sports movement: After the end of the war, it expanded strongly. New special federations were founded which were to be incorporated into the central RF. It was constant work with statutes, facilities, the economy, leadership issues and conflicts of interest. As with the state departments, he was at first poorly informed and RF's board were frequent visitors to the castle for day-long briefings of the issues. Beginning in the 1960s, the RF also sent

⁶ Minnesprogram om prins Bertil. SVT1, 1997-01-05.

delegations to neighbouring countries. The first such country was the Soviet Union. The work with SOK also became important. The 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico were universally regarded as a great failure - four meagre medals. Prior to the Munich Olympics in 1972, a series of begging letters were sent signed Prince Bertil. The grants from companies like Stora, MoDo, Folksam and Asea amounted to three million SEK. A number of promising athletes received 20 thousand kronor each for food, travel and training. There were no fewer than 16 medals: four gold, six silver and six bronze. There are many anecdotes about Prince Bertil crossing Munich to embrace the laureates. He had invested much of his prestige and was obviously relieved that the venture fell well out. Sponsorship of Swedish sport by large companies has since continued.

In the Gastronomic Academy he made himself famous for luxurious everyday dishes à la prins Bertil as crêpe with a filling of dill-stewed shrimps in hollandaise sauce, hamburger in chanterelle sauce and leaf steak with a filling of onion, blue cheese and mustard. At the villa Les Mirages, guests were treated with a bouillabaisse on eel, fish and seafood seasoned with salt, pepper, saffron, garlic, tomato and orange peel. French bread drenched in white wine or brandy was served as a side dish.

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The reason why Prince Bertil sacrificed his marriage and personal independence for a position of “adjutant” to his father has been discussed on and off the entire post-war period. Republicans have suggested economic motives or something sick in the family relationships. Prince Bertil himself has referred to duty. He had privileges but with them followed obligations. CG and Silvia have often complained about their situation. Such was Prince Bertil completely alien:

Being a royal prince can sometimes be problematic. But the thing about Bertil is that he; unlike some other royal people, is also aware of the “job's” many benefits. He never complains, at least not to the media, about his woes. His “situation” is generally described as positive.

At some rare point, he can, in private, complain that people do not keep their distance. It has happened that when Prince Bertil sits in a restaurant he is “courted” in a strange way. People have approached the table where he sits and looked at him unremittingly while he is eating - perhaps to study whether royal jaw muscles work in any particular way during the chewing process?⁷

Prince Bertil was moderately amused by long dinner speeches. “He was able to show his discontent in his own way. After a tiring parade of lousy dinner speakers it was the prince's turn: - A good speaker should talk so that he can be heard . (The Prince raises his voice enormously.) - He will also make sure that he is seen. (The Prince steps up on the table.) - If he wants to be popular, he will then quickly sit down.”⁸

The closest he has come to “whining” is the following anecdote from his youth:

There was a time when Prince Bertil himself told his friends: “It's awkward experiencing the Swedish Flag Day at least if you're in my clothes. First Grandpa

⁷ Michael Jägerblom. En prins som vet hur han ska sköta jobbet. Vecko Journalen, 1972:19.

⁸ Knut Grahnquist. En prins med glimten i ögat. Expressen, 1997-01-01.

comes and they scream: Long live the king! Then Dad comes and they applaud as if their life depended on it! But when they see me in the third wagon they cry: Down with the royal house!"⁹

Questions about his relationship with his father were constantly raised. The answer used to be that they kept a distance. Normally they met once a week during meetings. They also had lunch. If he felt the need to consult his father, he did. After his father's death, he expressed some bitterness at the consequences of fulfilling his duty had had on his private life. However, he did not go as far as to criticize his father. Apparently he considered himself and his father as victims of circumstances and his two brothers Sigvard and Carl Johan as traitors to the throne. He did not hold a similar position in CG's organization as in his father's. The details are unclear, but until his death he had three office rooms at the castle and helped out when necessary.

At the end of his life, Prince Bertil was often asked about his role in a car accident during his school years in 1928. One of the passengers died of his injuries. It seems to have been caused by the car getting too near the wayside and the deceased becoming so scared that he grabbed the steering wheel and thus himself caused his own death. This is however contested. Prince Bertil was fined 500 kronor for driving without a license. The licence he had only applied to motorcycles. There was also much talk about his 14 car races in France time under the assumed name Monsieur Adrian.

The politician Carl Bildt (m) summarized his obituary:

* What is your comment on Prince Bertil's death?

– Deep sadness, of course. If one can use the expression “love of the people”, there is almost no person in Sweden who fits that concept better than the Prince did. For generations of Swedes he was the sports prince. For an older generation also the motor prince. He symbolized the continuity of the royal house and the societal development. For me, he became somewhat of a friend. We had many long warm conversations about social problems which interested him but which he in his public works could not comment on.

* What did he mean to the Swedish monarchy?

– I think he meant a lot for continuity. During a transitional period it was Prince Bertil who with both dignity and popularity represented the continuity and stability of the royal house. He was also a distinguished representative of Sweden around the world. He represented both sports interests and business with the openness and warmth that characterizes Sweden.¹⁰

If this seems to be a bit too much, Prime Minister Persson's (s) judgment was almost identical. Prince Bertil had no enemies. There is probably a lesson buried in this. Edmund, who was the heir to the throne, must of necessity show that he existed - despite bad conditions and an early death, he did in fact make a mark - and for this he has been hated by republican posterity. Prince Bertil, on the other hand, is like a walking void - known and loved for his adaptability and lack of qualities. It has actually been impossible to find any single episode when he stood up for something he believed in. Obviously, he had a low opinion of himself - and as the saying goes: “The safest way to hide your limitations is never try to exceed them.”

⁹ Bertil Lagerström. Prins Bertil går in för sitt yrke. Året Runt, 1957:17.

¹⁰ Minnesprogram om prins Bertil. SVT1, 1997-01-05.