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'WHISKEY ON THE ROCKS' - THE SUBMARINE INCIDENT OFF KARLSKRONA --ETC(U)
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'WHISKEY ON THE ROCKS' - THE SUBMARINE INCIDENT OFF KARLSKRONA

[Westerlund, Karl-Erik. "Whisky on the Rocks" - Der U-Boot-Zwischenfall vor Karlskrona. Marine-Rundschau No. 1, 1982, pp. 30-35. German]

Our Swedish contributor describes the course of the most serious violation to date of Swedish territorial waters by a Soviet submarine in the restricted military area of the military port of Karlskrona.

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Late in the evening of 27 October 1981, a Soviet WHISKEY-Class submarine (No. 137) commanded by Captain Third Rank Anatolij Gushchin was sailing eastward in the military restricted area between Sturkoe and Senoren Islands in the reefs off Karlskrona, in the middle of a bottom mine field. On board was also the Flotilla Commander of the Baltiysk (formerly Pillau) Submarine Base, Captain First Rank Avchukievich. What Gushchin and his 25-to-30-year old submarine was actually supposed to be doing in the Karlskrona reefs we can only guess. There are several possibilities.

1. The final examination of the young submarine commanding officer with his flotilla commander as the examiner.
2. Investigation of the Swedish bottom mine fields, which are identified with violet lines in all Swedish charts, perhaps even a search for the cables to the firing stations of the moored bottom mine field, in order to mark them.
3. To lay out bottom listening devices or other electronic markers in order to provide safe navigation in the event of a conflict or in order later to be able to guide remote controlled torpedoes with the aid of electronic beacons.
4. Observation of Swedish exercises, during which new antisubmarine torpedoes were to be dropped from helicopters.
5. Testing of Swedish readiness and reaction time.
- 6, 7, and 8. Various missions.

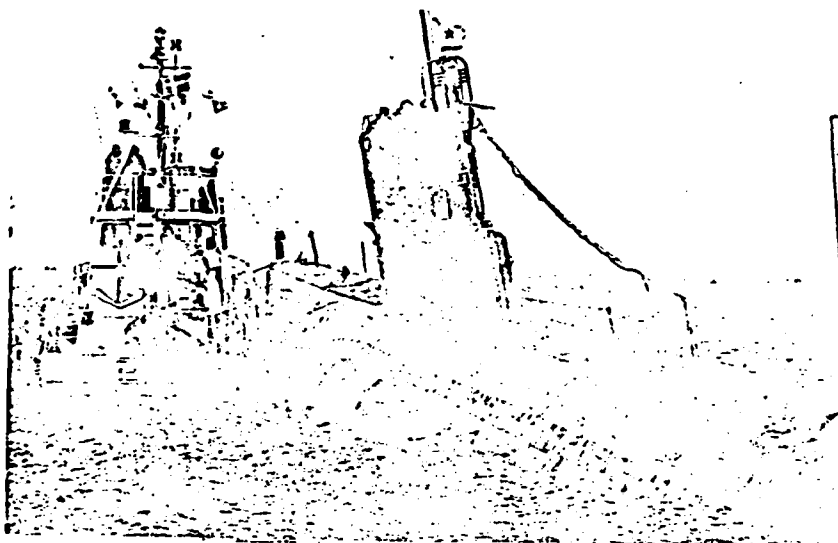
Admittedly, the submarine commanding officer claimed that all the compasses aboard his submarine had broken down and that the radar was unserviceable. He believed that he was off Christiansoe northeast of Bornholm, when he struck a rock in Gasefjord in the middle of a restricted military area prohibited to aliens, more than 12 nautical miles within Swedish territorial waters. He held stubbornly to that claim even during the interrogation on board the Swedish torpedo boat VAESTERNIK, at which two representatives of the Swedish Embassy were also present, Military Attache Yuriy Prosvorin on the one hand, and the Second Secretary, Boris Grigorev, on the other, the latter probably being the KGB Resident in Stockholm.

Swedish Defense Readiness in Peacetime

The Karlskrona Naval Base cannot be monitored throughout the year in every section. In view of the eight-month period of compulsory military service--

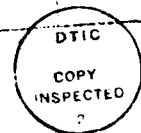
*Numbers in right hand margins indicate pagination in the original text.

plus the refresher exercises every fourth or fifth year--the batteries, the bottom /31 mine fields, and the observation positions from which the bottom mines can be fired can be fully manned only then. Bad weather with unfavorable location conditions in the night of 27 October was another reason that the submarine was not discovered promptly. It can be said with certainty that Captain Gushchin would have struck one of the many rocks much earlier under these conditions if he had not received a bearing from the Utklippan Lighthouse, and then, with the aid of his gyro and magnetic compasses, his depth sounder and his radar, he penetrated into Gåsefjord with his available charts. The small rock island of Christiansoe northeast of Bornholm is about 45 nm distant from the stranding site in Gåsefjord: a navigation error which is hard to believe of a trained submarine commander in peacetime despite the current conditions in the Baltic Sea.



The listing WHISKEY-Class submarine stranded on the rock off Torumskaer Island in the Gåsefjord, with a Swedish coastal patrol vessel alongside. Photo: Dan Hansson/ Svenskt Pressfoto 29 October 1981

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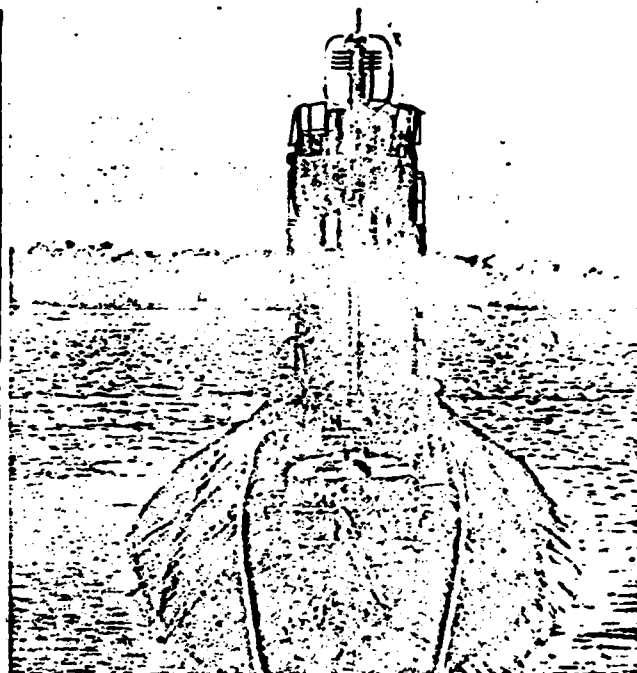
Gushchkin in all probability was steaming smoothly at dead-slow speed when he suddenly detected breakers on the starboard bow. He probably tried to avoid the shoals with a hard turn and by maneuvering his propeller, but, it is common knowledge that the dielectric submarines designed for submerged navigation, like the German XXI Class or the Soviet WHISKEY Class with their twin screws, handle very poorly at the surface, and so the submarine ran into the Swedish granite rocks in the middle of a turn. During the entire night the submarine tried to back out of the rocks using both diesels at full power, but it failed. The fishermen on the neighboring islands believed that the noise, as so often in the past, was coming from the diesel engines or the gas turbines of the Swedish torpedo boats or the coastal patrol boats which sailed through this passage when outward or homeward bound.

When early in the morning of 28 October some fishermen were sailing off the reefs to their nets, they saw a submarine with a Soviet flag stranded on the rocks far inside Gasefjord, in the middle of the bottom mine field. They immediately sounded the alarm to the "Oerlogsbasstaben" [sic] in Karlskrona, whose chief of staff, Commander Karl Andersson, sailed to the site of the accident in coastal patrol boat V02 SMYGE. Other Swedish warships, torpedo boats, minesweepers,

coastal patrol boats, etc., were also ordered to the accident site on the basis of the alarm. The icebreaker THULE was anchored in the mouth of Gåsefjord diagonally opposite the channel, so that submarine 137 was hemmed in; "Whiskey on the rocks" is how a Stockholm newspaper described the situation.



Left: Commanding officer of the stranded submarine, Captain Third Rank Anatoliy Gushchin on the way to the interrogation. Svenskt Pressfoto 31 Oct 1981 Right: Chief of Staff of the Karlskrona naval base, Commander Carl Andersson, who conducted the negotiations with the Soviet submarine crew. Photo: Stefan Lindblom/Svenskt Pressfoto 1 Nov 1981



Submarine 137 being towed free from astern in Gåsefjord. Photo: Stefan Lindblom/Svenskt Pressfoto 3 Nov 1981

Swedish Demands to the Soviet Union

The alarm was sounded in Stockholm, too. Soviet Ambassador Yaklovkev was summoned to the Foreign Ministry, and Cabinet Secretary Leif Leifland made the certainly astonishing announcement to him that Soviet Submarine 137 was inside the restricted military area prohibited to aliens and was being guarded by Swedish naval forces. The ambassador had nothing to say in response, and was later summoned a second time to the Foreign Ministry to receive a note of sharp protest. He, himself, made another visit to the Foreign Ministry and submitted the following request: Moscow wished to retrieve its submarine with salvage ships and warships. /32

Sweden refused this request. No foreign warship or craft is permitted to enter the Swedish military restricted area.

The Swedish government in turn made the following demands of Moscow:

1. The recovery was to be conducted by the Swedish Navy.
2. The submarine commanding officer was to be interrogated on Swedish soil (the torpedo boat VAESTERVIK was proposed).
3. The Swedish commander-in-chief will conduct a thorough investigation as to how it was possible that the submarine was able to penetrate so deeply into the Karlskrona reefs.

4. The submarine is to be checked by Swedish experts in order to determine, if possible, whether a navigation error could indeed have been made.

5. An express and clear apology was demanded of the Soviet side for this unprecedented violation of Swedish territory.

After compliance with these demands, the submarine would be able to be salvaged by the Swedish side, then escorted to the limits of the territorial waters and there returned to its owners.

Those were tough demands for the superpower Soviet Union. But a few days later, possibly after internal discussions between the political and the military authorities in the Soviet Union, Ambassador Yakovlev returned to the Foreign Ministry to announce that the Soviet Union was prepared to accede to all Swedish demands. Politically, the incident was a hard blow for the propagandists in Moscow, who were so ready to pay lip service to the term "Baltic Sea of Peace" and who were desirous of demonstrating the Soviet desire for peace now before the arms limitation negotiations beginning on the 30th of November.

Two representatives of the Soviet Embassy drove from Stockholm to Karlskrona. They were not permitted to go to the submarine themselves, however, since it was in the restricted area. Therefore, the commanding officer of the submarine had to be removed from the restricted area by helicopter and interrogated on board the torpedo boat VAESTERVIK in the presence of the two diplomats.

"MAYDAY, MAYDAY" from the Soviet Submarine

While this interrogation was being conducted for hours on end on board the torpedo boat, the weather turned very bad. The submarine took on a heavier list, the crew fired distress flares, and sent out the international distress signal "Mayday, Mayday". Quickly the waiting Swedish fleet tugs were made fast to the submarine and a half hour later Submarine 137 was again on even keel and was towed deeper into Gåsefjord, while Swedish warships took over the guard duty and the icebreaker THULE continued to block the exit.

It was later said that there was no real emergency condition on board. It was the crew which for a week had eaten only cold food and had to endure in the cold and in the bad air of the submarine. They had half-way mutinied to reach calm water so as to be able to light the stove and get some warm food to eat.

During the previous day Commander Andersson had spoken several times with the commanding officer aboard the submarine. Certainly the logbook was put "in order". Nothing was thrown overboard, for Swedish combat divers had carefully searched the entire bottom without finding anything. But there were other ways to make documents disappear. The hours-long interrogation produced nothing. Captain Gushchin stubbornly kept stating that all his navigation instruments had broken down, and he repeated that he thought he was in the vicinity of Christiansoe near Bornholm when he struck the rocks on the southwestern end of Torumskaer Island with his rudder on "hard to port" and the starboard diesel on "full speed".

During the later salvage and towing, another man apparently assumed command of the submarine. He had concealed himself earlier during the visits of the Swedish chief of staff. But the head of the salvage operation, Commander Thor Widell, had an encounter with him. He was Flotilla Commander Captain First Rank Avchuvievich. The two men were able to converse only briefly, and the Russian

spoke only poor German. But that did not keep his arrogance from coming through: "Sweden--small--pfui--nothing, Soviet Union--great--powerful." Not quite diplomatic, but perhaps a measure of the master race mentality of certain Soviet military people.

Soviet Demonstration of Power

When the alarm was sounded, all conceivable measures were taken by the Swedish commander-in-chief. Not only the ships of the naval base were placed in readiness and remained in the Gåsefjord area, but a torpedo boat division was dispatched to Karlskrona, as was a division of the new guided missile patrol boats. Fighter and reconnaissance aircraft from the Kalling military air base about 30 km west of Karlskrona were constantly airborne. The boundary of the territorial waters, 12 nm from the so-called baseline, was under constant watch. A second Soviet submarine was located inside the limits, but was immediately turned away.

An entire Soviet "Eskadra" gathered at the limits of the territorial waters in the stormy fall weather. Some were salvage ships, one tanker, but especially a unit with one KASHIN guided missile destroyer, one KILDIN-mod. guided missile destroyer, and later some new NANUCHKA guided missile corvettes, etc. Was this gunboat diplomacy in the making?

The coastal batteries in the Swedish skerries were readied for action, and on the islands around the stranded submarine so-called coastal infantry and even parachute troops had taken up firing positions and manned bunkers. The Prime Minister and the Commander-in-Chief had made it clear: If necessary, force will be used.

The Soviets Accept the Swedish Conditions

After a rather long delay, certainly caused by an internal discussion in Moscow between the top political and the military leaders, finally, on 29 October and on 1 November agreement to the Swedish demands came from Foreign Minister Andrey Gromyko:

1. Sweden was able to conduct the salvage operation for the submarine; /33
2. The submarine commanding officer was to make himself available for an interrogation, as was the navigation officer and other crew members;
- 3-4. After the aforementioned inquiry by the Swedish commander in chief, the Soviet Union was prepared to take over the submarine from the Swedish Navy outside the limits of the territorial waters;
5. The Soviet Union delivered a public apology for the violation of the Swedish territorial waters.

When on 1 November Ambassador Yakovlev visited the Swedish Foreign Ministry, he regretted that the response was delayed so long, but that was the result of certain misunderstandings between various Soviet officials: in plain language: The Defense ministry probably wanted to bring more demonstrations of power to bear, but Gromyko did not. Perhaps the decision even had to be made by Secretary Brezhnev. From the highest authority an instruction must have passed via the Navy High Command and the Main Navy Staff to the Commander-in-Chief of the Baltic

Fleet in Kaliningrad, and was then forwarded to one of the destroyers lying off Karlsfrona and from that destroyer transmitted to the submarine over the single wavelength permitted by the Swedes. Such a process certainly takes time, especially if all the echelons forward such instructions reluctantly.

The submarine crew was closed up in its submarine for six days, and only now and then were a few people able to breathe fresh air up on the sail. A list, no warm food, cold, storm, crowded space, perhaps no cots for all the crew members. The morale, as Swedish chief of staff Commander Karl Andersson was able to determine on his visits, was at rock bottom. But Sweden was not in any hurry.

Nuclear Weapons Aboard?

The evening of the 5 November, Prime Minister Thorbjørn Fälldin held one of the most exciting press conferences since the Second World War in the new governmental headquarters at Rosenbad. His announcement hit like a bombshell: "The Soviet submarine very probably has nuclear explosive aboard. With a probability which borders on certainty, we have found that there is Uranium 238 aboard."



Meeting of the Swedish Cabinet on the submarine incident held on 5 November 1981. From left to right: Asling, Friggebo, Foreign Minister Ullsten, Prime Minister Fälldin, Wikstroem, Dahlgren, Wirthen, among others. Photo: Lennart Nygren/Svenskt Pressfoto 5 Nov 1981

What was so sensational? Uranium 238 alone is still not a nuclear weapon. But this material is used as a shell for plutonium or enriched uranium in nuclear weapon detonators in order to shield against radiation. Submarine 137 had about 10 kg of Uranium 238 in the torpedo tubes on the port bow, above the surface of the water, which came out of the water when the submarine was grounded. There is no other explanation for the presence of this uranium. WHISKEY-Class submarines are so old that they definitely cannot have any Uranium 238 for other purposes in the hull or in the torpedo tubes.

The truth is probably very simple: All Soviet submarines have one, two, or more torpedoes or torpedo mines with nuclear warheads as a standard armament on board. It obviously stands to reason that, even with such a dangerous special mission, it did not occur to anyone to remove these torpedoes or mines from the submarine.

The background for these Swedish statements sounds like a James Bond novel.

The Foersvaraets forskningsansalt, the Defense Ministry research installation, was routinely called out to conduct a nuclear check around the submarine. The research installation dispatched the head of the nuclear explosives section, Chief Engineer Lars Beckman. The commanding officer of the customs cruiser, which was moored alongside the submarine, received an order not to ask any questions, but just do immediately what the chief engineer demanded. A small boat was lowered, and silently approached the submarine. The Geiger counter began to register directly in front of the torpedo tubes. If the submarine were lying in the water normally, then this would not have been possible, but now the forward part of the submarine was high out of the water. It was the night of 29 October. After about a quarter of an hour, they were discovered by people in the conning tower of the submarine. Searchlights and machine pistols were aimed at the engineer and his colleagues, and something was shouted to him in incomprehensible Russian. The Swedish scientists withdrew.

During the 30th of October, special technical instruments were brought by a special aircraft from the research installation to the Kallinge Air Base under the strictest secrecy, and then brought by helicopter to coastal patrol ship TV 103 alongside the submarine. Additional equipment was shipped from Lund University in order to be able to measure the neutron radiation, and nuclear physicist Ragnas Hallbord was brought from the Physics Institute of the University.

Early in the morning of 31 October, the crew of the coastal patrol vessel was forbidden to use the electrical power, because the instruments would not tolerate any changes in the current voltages and fields. In the night of 2 November, gamma radiation was measured.

The crew of the coastal patrol vessel was naturally a little irritated, but, after they heard about the Prime Minister's press conference, they understood the curious activities of the people from the research installation. The scientists forwarded their report to the commander-in-chief, and he, in turn, via the Foreign Ministry, to the Prime Minister. They were all in agreement that the whole scandal could not be made public immediately. The Soviet ambassador was again summoned ¹³⁴ to the Foreign Ministry and he was asked whether there were nuclear weapons aboard the submarine. After repeated delays came the response: "Aboard submarine 137, as on all other Soviet warships, there are the necessary weapons and ammunition. But that had nothing to do with the unintentional penetration of the submarine in Swedish territory." The Swedish government interpreted this intentionally vague explanation as an indirect admission that submarine 137 also had torpedoes equipped with nuclear warheads aboard. Indirect proof is also provided by the fact that the Swedish interrogation officer, Commander Karl Andersson, was on board the submarine frequently, and was able to inspect most of the spaces, but sailors armed with machine pistols prevented him from entering the torpedo space in the forward part of the submarine.

The Sharpest Note since the Second World War

The Swedish note to Moscow was the sharpest sent by Sweden since the end of the war. Diplomatic language is, of course, something special, but here it said, among other things:

"The investigation which was conducted by the commander-in-chief makes clear that a navigation error is to be excluded as the main reason for the penetration into Swedish territory. The Swedish government draws the conclusion from the investigations conducted that the Soviet submarine intentionally violated Swedish territory in order to carry out unpermitted activities there. With dismay and indignation the Swedish Government is also compelled to state that the submarine grounded in the Karlskrona reefs probably has one or more nuclear charges on board...

The Soviet government has ignored the demand of the Swedish government for elucidation on that point. The Swedish government must interpret this to mean that the Soviet government believes it is unable to dispute the presence of nuclear weapons aboard the submarine.

The Swedish Government, therefore, lodges against the Soviet Government its sharpest protest against the violation of Swedish territory and of the Swedish restricted military area which was committed intentionally by Soviet Submarine 137. The Swedish Government considers this gross violation of Swedish territory all the more grave and more serious because the submarine in great probability introduced nuclear weapons into the Swedish area.

The Swedish Government demands that the Soviet Union prevent a repetition of the gross violation of Swedish territorial rights and of the fundamental principles of international law."

The ambassador was once again summoned to the Foreign Ministry. Upon leaving the Ministry, he presented a calm and nearly friendly appearance and said that he hoped that now this incident which was caused by the navigation error of the submarine would be considered settled and that good relations could be resumed.

The Submarine Is Released

The Swedish Government decided that all or at least most of the Swedish demands had been satisfied. The commander-in-chief was, therefore, able to release the submarine.

A small Swedish armada lay already to tow the submarine to the limits of the territorial waters and to transfer it there to Admiral Alexey Kalinin, the Chief of Staff of the Baltic Fleet aboard the KASHIN mod. destroyer.

All the democratic parties of Sweden stood behind this line of action of the Government. The moderates (Justice Party), the Agrarian Party (with Prime Minister Faellidin), the so-called People's Party (the liberals with the Foreign Minister), as well as the opposition (the Social Democrats). They were all united on the wording of the notes and the settlement of the incident. Everything was cleared up in a diplomatically and militarily straightforward manner. There was no navigation error, it was a case of an intentional penetration into a restricted military area and of espionage. As a warship, the submarine, as well as the crew, had diplomatic immunity. It was now able to be handed over, although the commanding officer had made up a story about the breakdown of his navigation equipment.

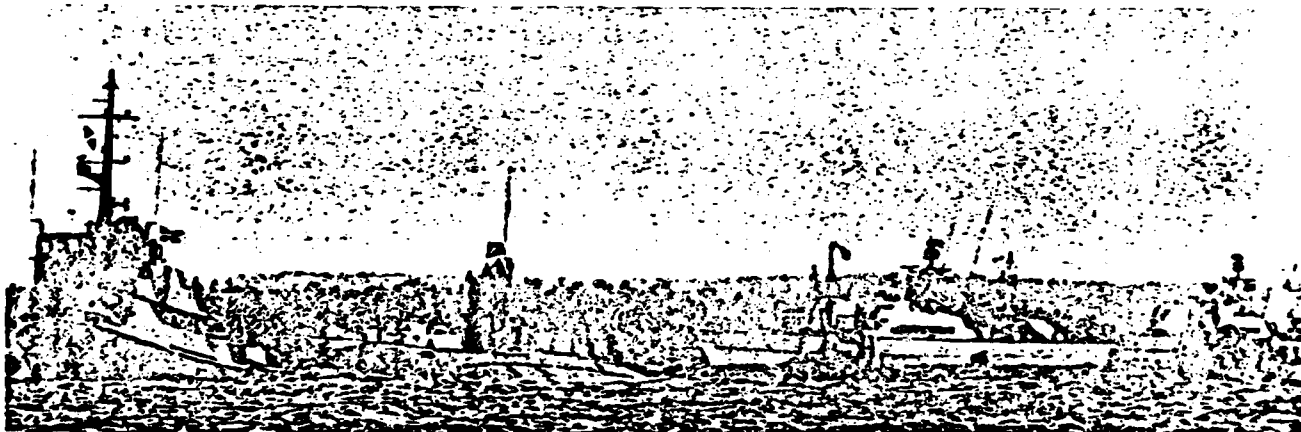
On 6 November the Swedish commander-in-chief ordered Submarine 137 to be towed from Gåsefjord and escorted to outside Swedish territorial waters and there to be delivered to the Chief of Staff of the Soviet Baltic Fleet. The Swedish Navy tugs

made their lines fast, and with a Swedish representative of the Coast Guard (Kustbevakningen) on the bridge of the submarine set out from Gasefjord at about 8 o'clock in the morning, after the submarine had lain on the Swedish rocks for 230 hours and Swedish guards had isolated it from the outside world. Out there at sea there was heavy weather, and finally they cast off, so that the submarine with 135 the Swedish escorts was able to steam to its comrades outside the limits of the territorial waters under its own power. The public relations officers of the information center on Swedish history since the Second World War were satisfied, but the foreign press, radio, and TV reporters were somewhat angered, just as were the unwanted Soviet submarine guests and just as were the gentlemen of the Soviet Embassy. The restricted area in which the submarine was located was prohibited to aliens, but there were hundreds of Swedish colleagues who were pleased to give their accounts and who made hundreds, yes, thousands of photographs available to their photographers, including fine close-ups of the submarine sail with Soviet naval personnel with slung machine pistols, and photos of the commanding officer and of the salvage personnel.

Some Statistics on Violations of the Territorial Waters

A summary of the incidents of the year 1980 was published by the Intelligence Review of the Swedish High Command for the year 1980. It is evident from it that from 1975 to 1980 a total of 60 submarine incidents occurred within Swedish territorial waters. In the year 1980 there were a total of 11, five of them certain (see Marine-Rundschau No. 1, 1981, pages 34-35), four possible, and two, other. But those are the submarine incidents established reliably by the Navy or by other agencies. In reality, the violations are probably much greater in number.

When detecting submerged submarines, it is difficult to establish their nationality reliably. Thus, now and then in the sixties and the seventies there was a suspicion in the Swedish High Command that they could be submarines also of other countries, even of NATO countries. But now there is convincing, clear proof that especially Sweden's neighbor to the east has all too great an interest in the Swedish skerries and especially the restricted areas with coastal defense installations.



The released Soviet submarine 137 is towed out of Gasefjord by the Swedish naval tug A251 ACHILLES escorted by two guided missile patrol boats, P159 KAPAREN and P162 SPEJAREN, and coastal patrol boat 262. Photo: Dan Hansson/Svenskt Pressfoto 6 November 1981



The Soviet WHISKEY-Class submarine 137 being cast loose by the Swedish tug under its own power en route to meeting the Soviet naval formation waiting at the limits of the 12-mile zone. Photo: Svenskt Pressfoto 6 Nov 1981

There could very easily have been a real accident, for example, at the time in question the coastal artillery refresher exercises were being conducted or if the observation station in Gåsefjord had been manned and then had seen or detected a foreign submarine attempting to penetrate into the restricted area. The crew of the observation stations would then have had plenty of opportunity to make the submarine run right over one of the bottom mines and then push a button and blow up the submarine with its crew. What would have happened to the nuclear torpedoes then?

But the Soviet Union naturally knew that at the time there were no refresher exercises going on there, and that they were able to locate the observation stations and the installations and to plot the mines on charts, and perhaps lay out the guidance and control gear for later torpedo attacks or for their own navigation purposes. Therefore, the Swedish Navy is now monitoring every square centimeter of the bottom with combat divers, underwater TV cameras, etc., in "Operation Vacuum Cleaner."

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