

## **Sweden's Role on the Korean Peninsula Since 1950**

***John McKay***

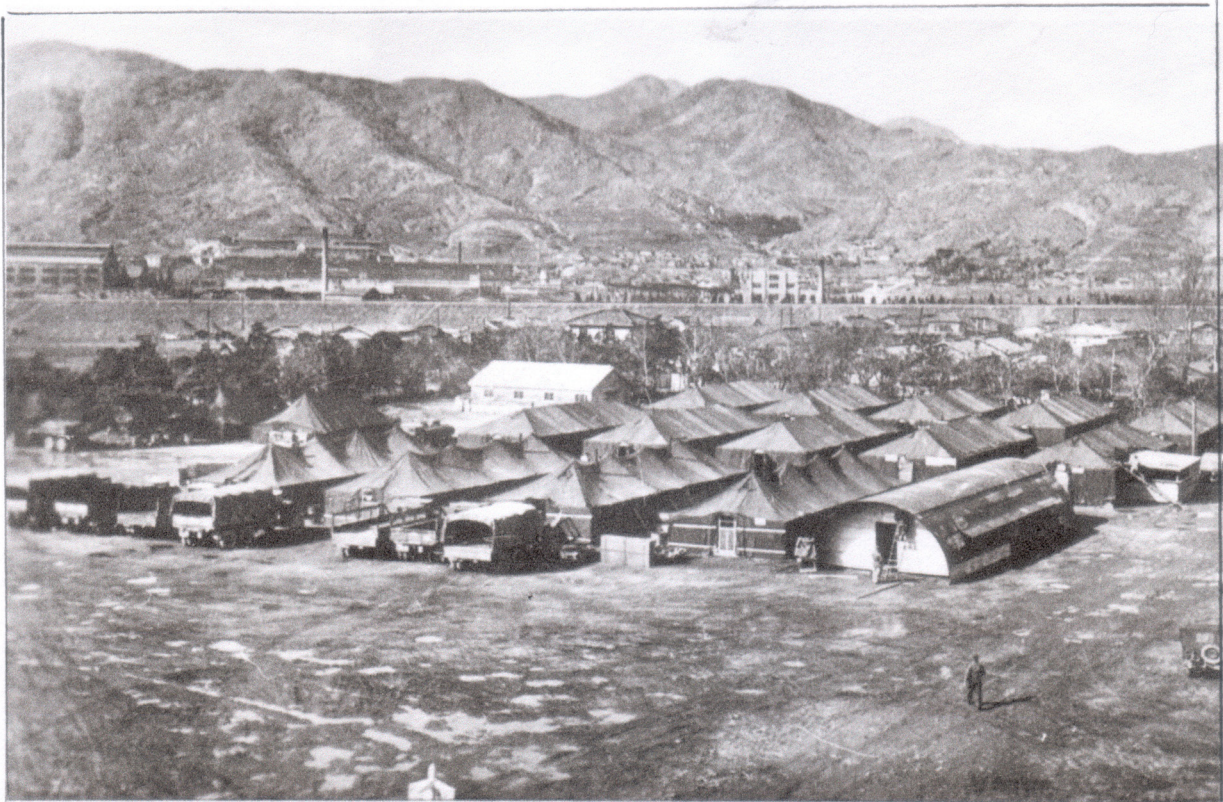
When on 25th July 1950 the forces of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) invaded the South, the world was faced with one of the most serious crises since the Second World War. As part of the agreement that brought the Soviet Union into the war against Japan, the Red Army had been allowed to occupy the northern part of the Korean Peninsula, but this division of the former Japanese colony was expected to be only temporary pending the organisation of elections to form a government for the unified nation, however the Soviets installed a Communist government in the north under the control of Kim Il Sung, who had spent the war in the Soviet Union being trained for just such a mission. After several years of uneasy peace, and a number of provocations from both sides, North Korea now attempted to unify Korea under Communist rule. We now know, following the opening up of the old Soviet archives, that Kim had travelled to Moscow to gain the blessing for the invasion from Stalin and Mao Zedong, in the expectation that victory would quickly be gained. Indeed, the greatly superior forces of the North quickly captured the capital Seoul and occupied almost all of the country except for a small area around the southern port city of Pusan. An alarmed United States, which had not been expected by Kim to make any kind of response to the invasion, quickly proposed that a multinational force be sent under the banner of the United Nations to intervene in the conflict on the side of the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Normally the Soviet Union would have vetoed such a resolution but at this time it was boycotting the UN in protest against the continued recognition of the Republic of China (Taiwan) as the legitimate holder of a seat in UN General Assembly, and a force drawn from 21 nations was established under the leadership of the United States.

These developments presented Sweden with a difficult dilemma. The nation was a strong supporter of the UN but was also firmly neutral, so what should be its position? It solved this problem by despatching a medical unit and a field hospital to Pusan, but this contribution was not considered to be part of the UN armed forces. In the first part of this article I show a number of examples of mail to and from Swedish personnel serving in this hospital, and these covers illustrate the mail system that was put in place to allow these staff to communicate with the outside world. In the second part of the article I move to the involvement of Swedish personnel in the eventual settlement after the end of fighting.

### **The Swedish Field Hospital in Pusan**

The Swedish government authorised the establishment of the hospital on 26 August 1950, or about one month after the North Korean invasion, the first staff arrived on 23 September and just two days later the first patients were accepted. By the end of hostilities the hospital had 600 beds and was staffed by 174 Swedish doctors and nurses. After the end of fighting in 1953 the hospital also became a civilian facility and was eventually closed in April 1957. Overall, 1124 Swedish men and women served in the facility and treated 19,100 United Nations personnel and 2,400 Koreans.





*The Swedish Field Hospital in Pusan*



*US Privates Daniel Segura and Eugene Rust say goodbye to Swedish medical staff member Captain Edsinger, 5 October 1950.*



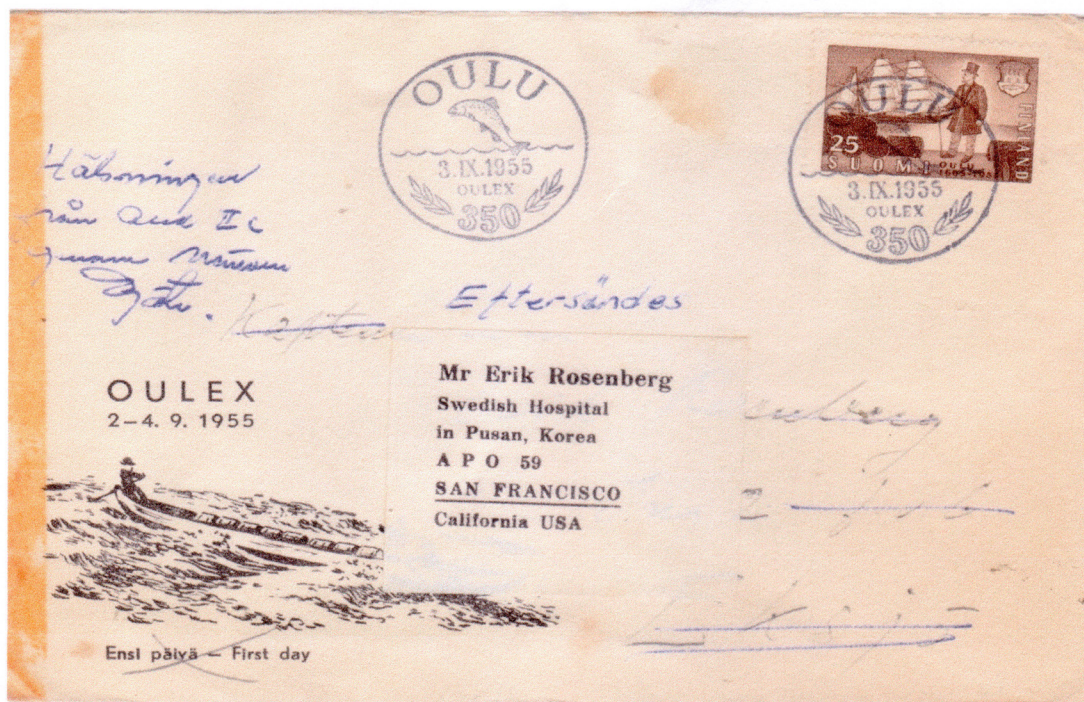


*Adjusting a traction splint on the leg of a North Korean prisoner of war in the Swedish hospital, 1950*

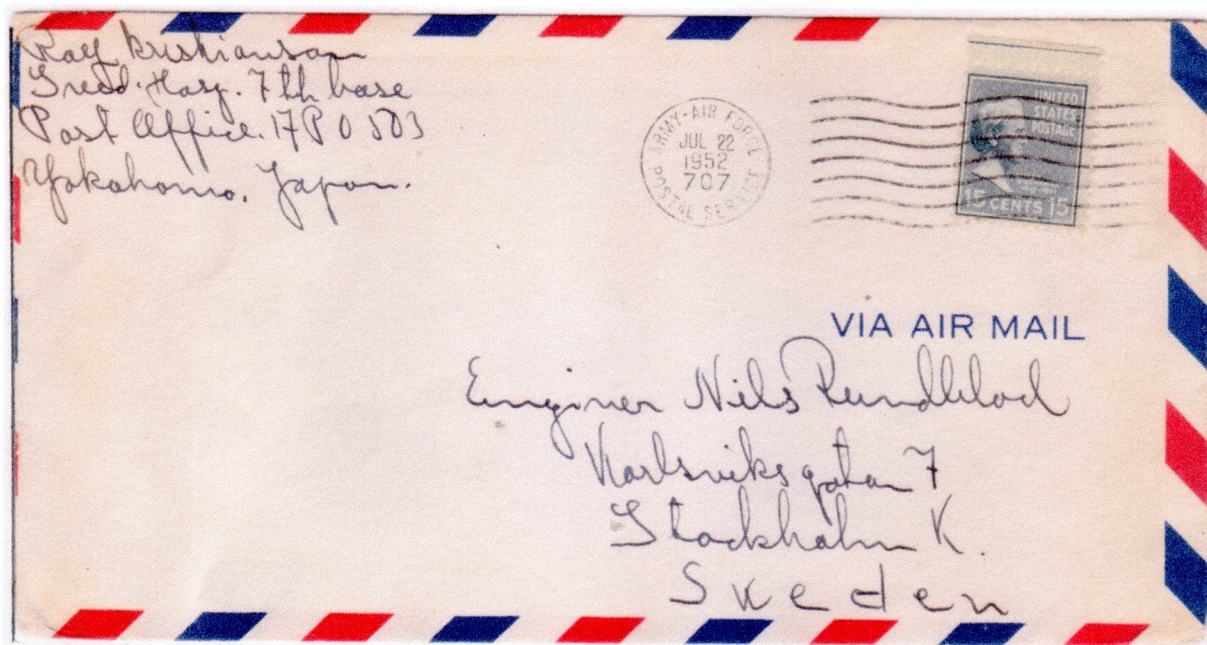


*A letter from a Swedish staff member in the field hospital posted via the US Army Air Force Postal Service \*APO\*707 October 1 1951. Smaller contingents in the UN forces used the American Military Postal System to send letters back home from Korea. The return address on the reverse of the envelope is given as APO 503, Yokohama, Japan. Letter sent to a family member in Hälsingborg tied with an American Prexie 15 cent stamp.*



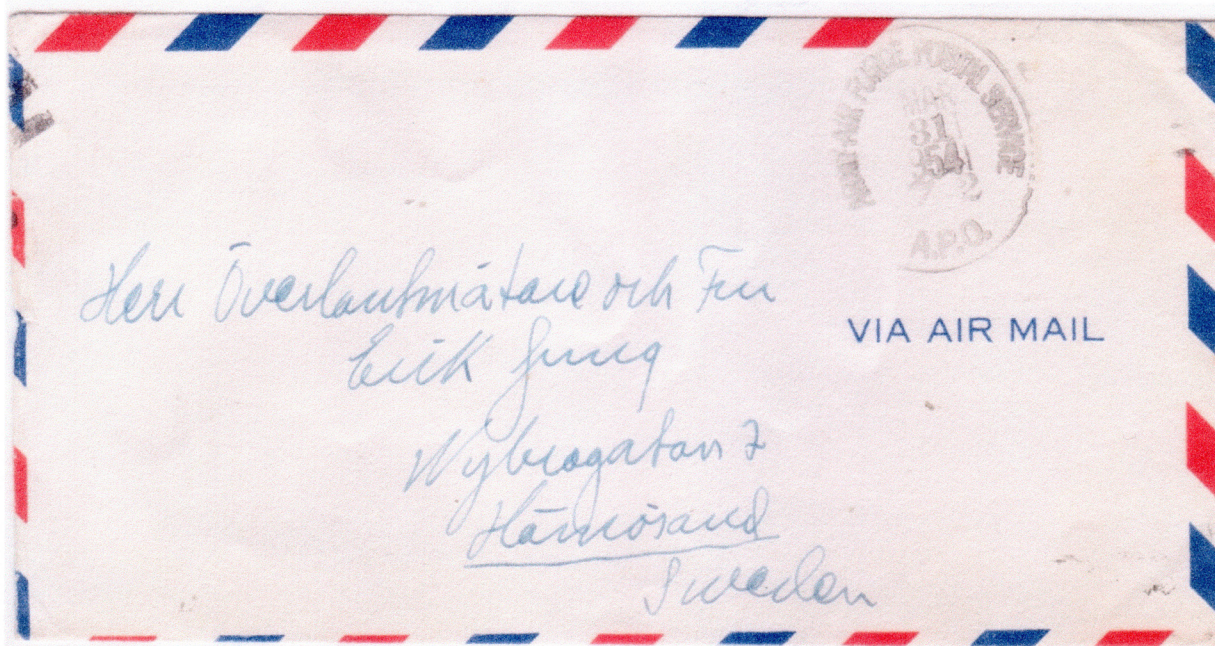


***Letter sent from Finland in September 1955 - note the special postmark - sent originally to Eksjö where it was redirected to the Swedish hospital in Pusan. Sent to a Captain in the Swedish medical staff via the American Postal System using the address APO 59, San Francisco, California. No additional postage was charged***



*Letter sent from Swedish staff member in the Pusan Hospital to Stockholm. Tied with a 15 cent Prexie and franked with US Army-Airforce Postal Service APO 707, 22 July 1952. Return address given as APO 503, Yokohama, Japan.*



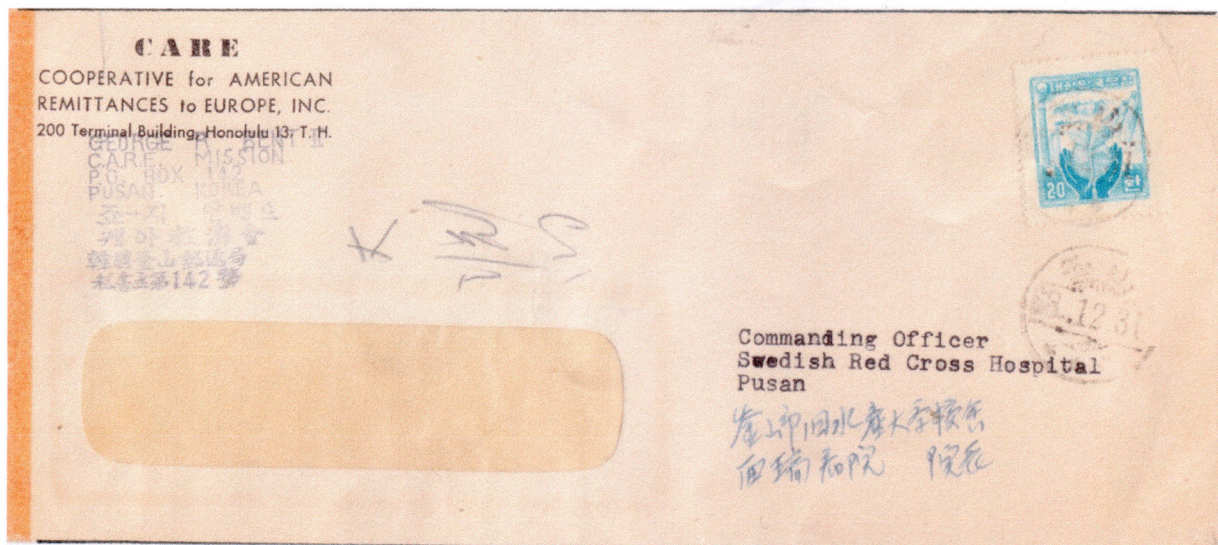


**Letter sent from a Swedish staff member in the Pusan Hospital franked from APO 72 on 31 March 1954**



**Letter sent from the same Swedish staff member in Pusan to the same address in Sweden on 8 May 1954, again franked from APO 72, but redirected to Karlskrona.**





*Letter sent from the Pusan office of an American charitable organisation to the Swedish Hospital. The South Korean stamp is franked 28.12.31 which is the old Korean calendar, and translates as 1956 in the Western system.*



*Postcard sent from a Swedish staff member at the Pusan hospital to Sweden franked with US Army-Air Force Postal Service APO 59, 6 May 1956*





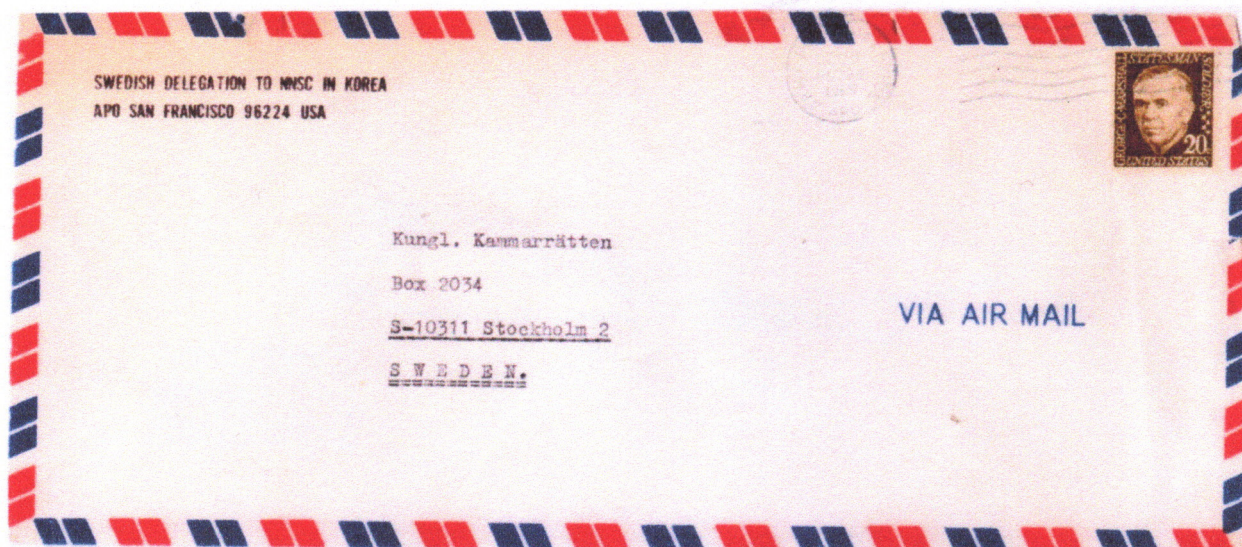
*Letter sent from the commanding officer of the Pusan hospital LtCol Erik Rosenberg just before its closure. Franked with US Army -Air Force Postal Service APO 59 on 12 March 1957. Addressed to a family member care of a company in Kobe, Japan.*

### **Swedish Role in Peacekeeping Operations in Korea After the War**

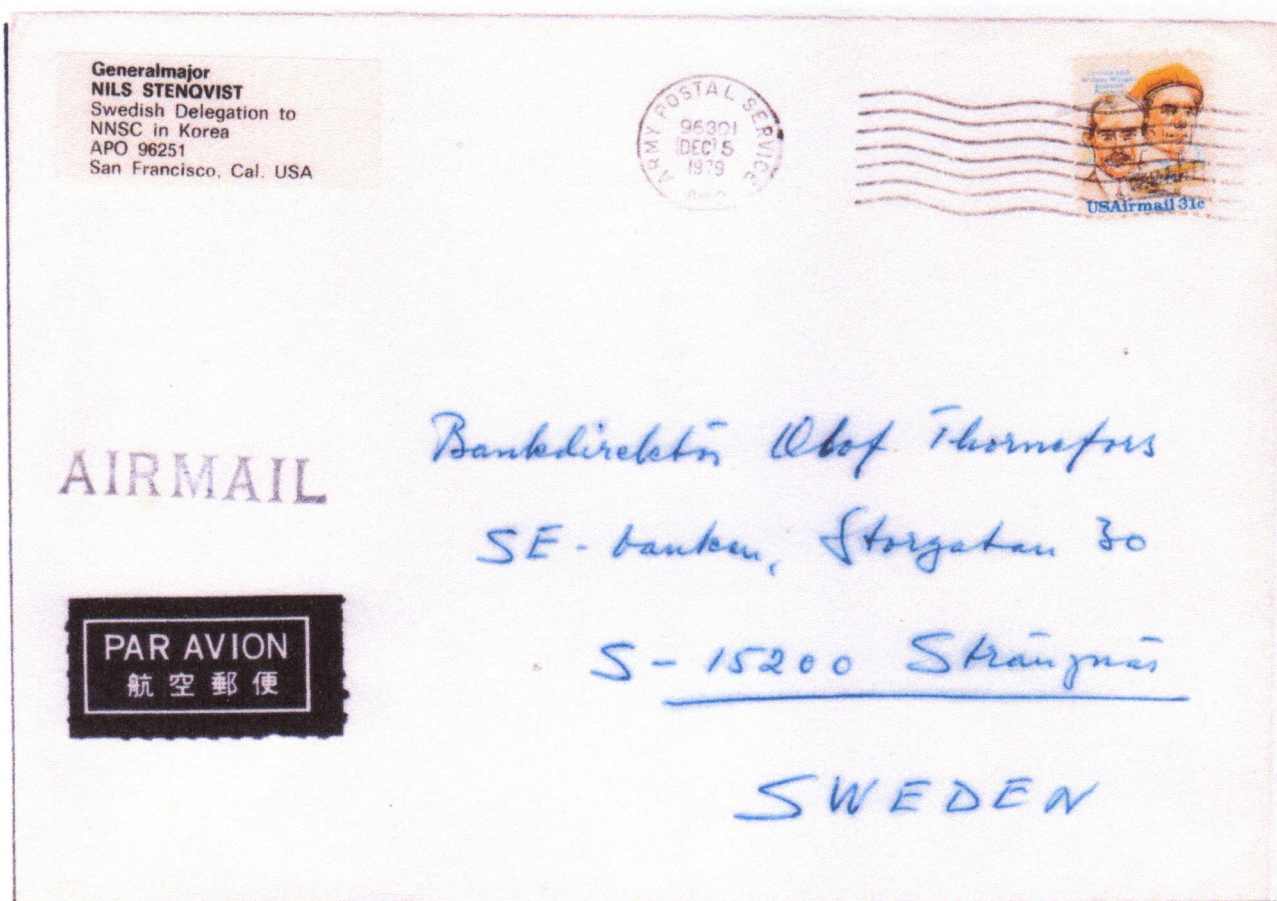
In the early phases of the war the front moved quickly from one end of the peninsula and back again. A daring landing at Inchon near Seoul by UN forces commanded by US General Douglas MacArthur resulted in a rapid retreat by the North. Pyongyang, the North Korean capital, was quickly taken and UN forces moved right up to the Chinese border along the Yalu River. Mao Zedong responded to what he saw as a direct threat to China by sending in a large force of 'volunteer' soldiers, and this turned the tide yet again, with Seoul falling once more to the North. The North Korean and Chinese forces were eventually pushed back to more or less the original border and there then followed several years of stalemate.

The Korean War eventually ended in July 1953 with an armistice being signed between the combatants, but to this day there has been no formal peace treaty, and hence the two parts of the peninsula still remain in a state of war. Under the deal reached in Panmunjom a demilitarised zone was set up along the 38th parallel and a four nation Neutral Nations Supervisory Commission (NNSC) was given the task of monitoring the ceasefire. For this role the United Nations Command nominated Sweden and Switzerland, while the North Korean and Chinese side chose Poland and Czechoslovakia. In total 914 Swedes have served there, and five are currently still deployed. The role of the NNSC has undergone some changes since 1953, and there are now serious difficulties in maintaining relations with North Korea, which seems determined to develop its own nuclear weapons capability.





*Letter sent from Swedish Delegation to NSCC in Korea to Stockholm. Again the APO shown is 96224 and the postmark is 8 December 1969. Tied with a 20 cent US stamp.*



*A later letter from Generalmajor Nils Stenqvist from the Swedish Delegation to NNSC in Korea using the return address APO 96251, San Francisco. Posted on 5 December 1979 and franked with the US APO 96301. US 31 cent stamp.*





*The letter from Generalmajor Stenqvist contains an official Christmas Greetings card from the Swedish NNSC Delegation based in the Demilitarised Zone in Panmunjon for Christmas 1979.*





*A very rare letter sent to the Swedish NNSC Observation Group in South Pyongan Province in North Korea. The date of postage is unclear, but the North Korean stamps were issued between 1951 and 1953 hence this is probably from the very early period of NNSC operations after the ceasefire in 1953.*



*Cover sent from a Swedish member of the NNSC via the American APO system. Cancelled at Travis Air Force Base on 25 September 1954. Return address on reverse given as APO 6500, Post Master, San Francisco.*



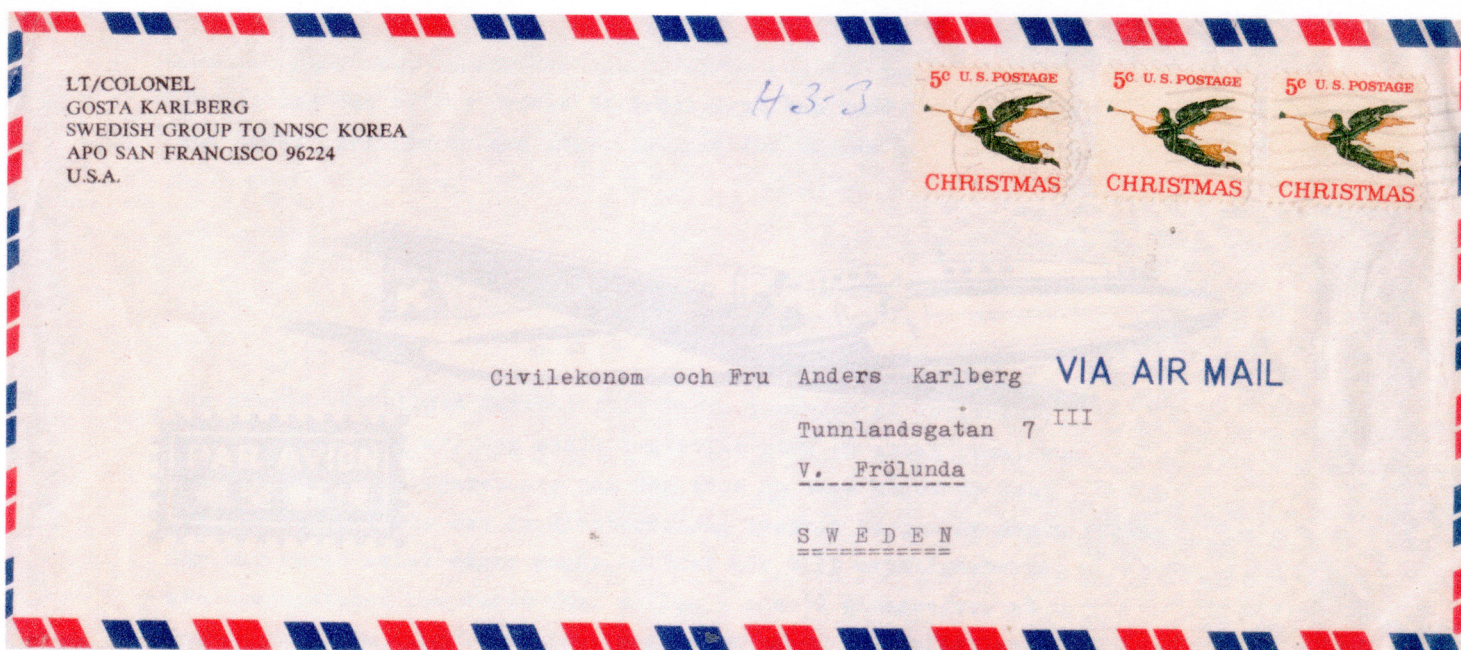
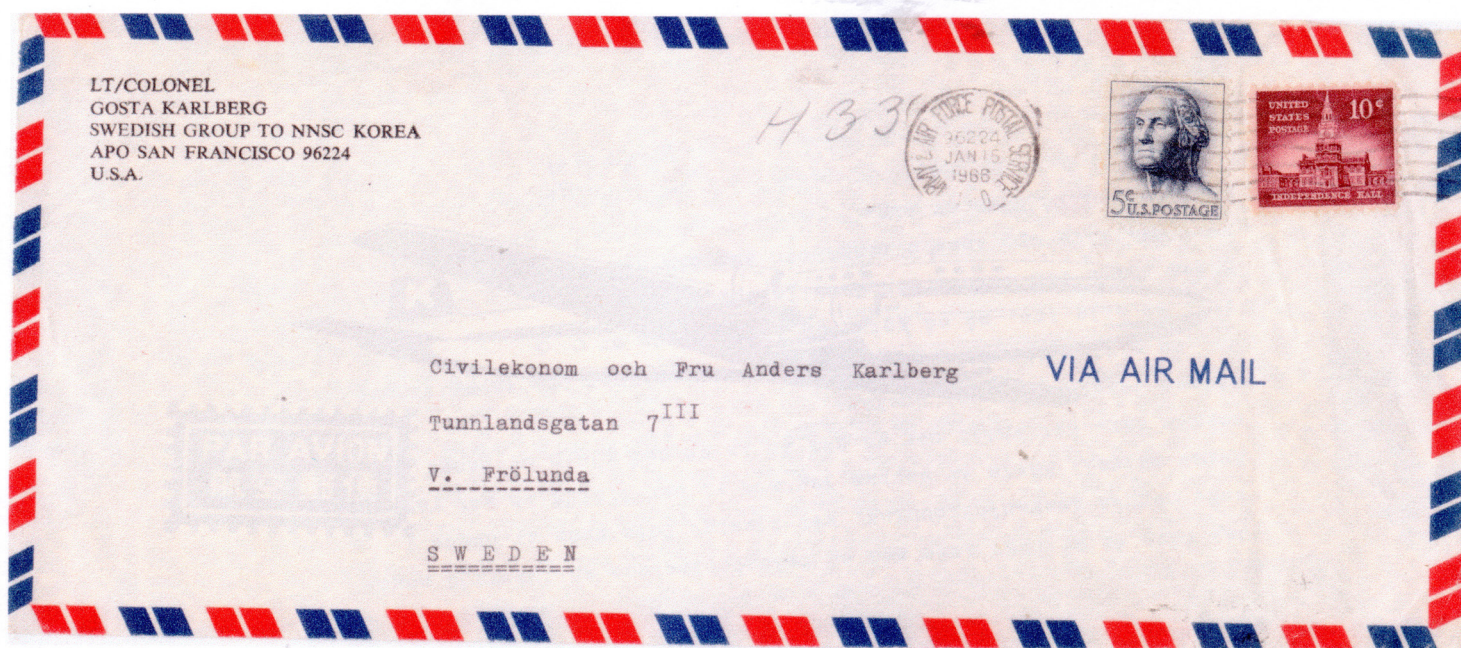


**Letter sent from Major C.G. Laudergren of the Swedish NNSC to his wife in Falkenberg. Posted in Japan with the date shown as 31.6.20 on the old Japanese calendar which translates as 1956. Return address on reverse is Swedish Group NNSC Korea, Poste Restante. Tokyo, AMF.**



**Letter sent from Lt/Col Gosta Karlberg of the Swedish Group to NNSC postmarked 16 June 1966 from US APO 96224, San Francisco to his wife in Sweden.**





*Two more letters sent from Lt/Col Gosta Karlberg of the Swedish Group to NNSC to his wife in Sweden, again franked from US APO 96224. Both letters have a total of 15 cents in United States stamps, the lower one with Christmas stamps from 1965. The upper letter was posted on 15 January 1966, and the lower one on 17 February 1966.*