Reds Eye Swedish Iron

Peril Seen in Soviet Air Base Plans

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Stockholm, Sweden.

WITHIN recent months several newspapers in Scandinavia have published remarkable articles concerning certain operations in soviet Russia aiming at the creation of air force bases in connection with the Murmansk railway at the frontier of Finland.

Some of these articles apparently have been inspired by German authors, who try to persuade Swedish opinion that great dangers menace from the east. Typical of these alarming stories are the following lines quoted from different sources:

"The Murmansk railway has been built out with double rails. Three strategic railways are constructed against that railway from the east, and from the Murmansk railway new lines have been built against the Finnish frontier at Repola and Uhtua."

Other writers have found that the construction of the new canal system from the White sea to Leningrad has created a new strategic naval situation, since it opens possibilities for the transport of men of war into the Baltic sea independent of the usual channels between Sweden and Denmark (Oresund and the Little and Great Belts).

The general situation in Europe also has created a new interest for the defense among the northern states, and a hot discussion now is on foot as to the possibilities for Sweden, Denmark, Norway, and Finland to assist each other in case of a new European war between certain groups of powers.

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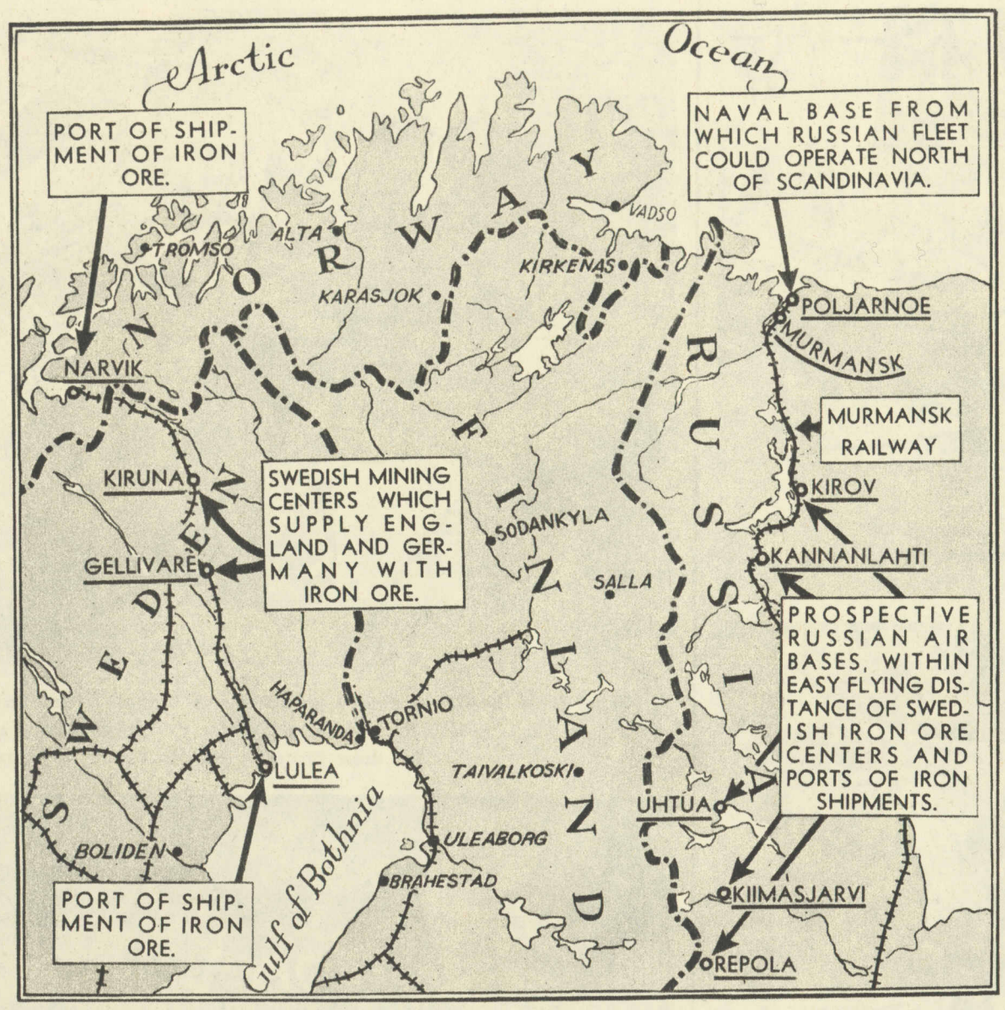
The interesting nucleus around these startling articles is the vital fact that the war industry of Germany in the highest degree is dependent on secured import of Swedish iron ore from the rich mines in Lapland, and that in consequence thereof the desire of soviet Russia to plan measures to blockade the naval routes of the ore transports coming from the Swedish harbor, Lulea, and the Norwegian harbor, Narvik, is steadily increasing.

It is quite true that the reconquest of Alsace-Lorraine by France has made Germany's situation in connection with iron ore import more critical, and some authors claim that Germany could not fight more than three months if the Swedish iron ore import could be stopped by its enemies. The question of Swedish neutrality in a new war should therefore be much more complicated and riskful than during the war of 1914-'18, when Swedish diplomacy succeeded in keeping a balance between the fighting powers and dividing its ore export between Germany and England.

The Swedish ore company, Grangesberg-Oxelosund, is quite aware of these dangers and, according to certain rumors, negotiations have been made during the last few months concerning an increase of Swedish iron ore export to England.

As for the rumors of strategic construction of railways and air bases between Archangel and Leningrad, most of the alarming reports seem to be exaggerated. It is true that the Murmansk railway has been improved, but no new rails seem to have been added.



Map of portions of Russia, Finland, Sweden, and Norway, showing locations of Swedish iron mining centers, ports of shipment of Swedish iron, and prospective air bases of Russia along the Murmansk railway near the frontier of Finland.

The construction made can easily be defended by the economic developments in far Carelia and the Murmansk district, but of course the increased capacity of the railway can also be used for military purposes. Some projected construction also will surely be effectuated in the future. The military importance of the White sea canal also has been exaggerated. It can be used by submarines and small destroyers, but very unlikely by battleships and greater fighting units. It also is open for ships only five or six months every year and is a rather easy target for bombers.

(© Photo from Chicago Tribune London Bureau.)
A Swedish anti-aircraft gun and its crew.

In the vicinity of Murmansk at a place called Poljarnoje (formerly Alexandrovsk), at the northwestern beach of Kola bay, a naval base has been constructed, and in a future war Russian naval forces thus could operate in the Arctic sea north of Scandinavia. Poljarnoje is guarded by coast artillery batteries, which also defend the approach to Murmansk. As Murmansk is the only Arctic harbor of soviet Russia that is ice free, it is quite natural that the naval base has been built at its approach and that a sea force of about ten submarines and some destroyers has been placed there.

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Of course, such a naval force can also be said to have a defensive task, but very often during war defensive measures can be changed into offensive measures.

The vital importance of the Swedish iron ore export to Germany during war makes it, however, not at all improbable that a future Russian enterprise may be made either against transports leaving Lulea or Narvik or directly against the ore mines concentrated around Kiruna and Gellivare.

Some of the writings mentioned in the beginning of this article state that Russian plans already are made to build air bases at the towns of Repola, Kiimasjarvi, Uhtua, Kannanlahti, Kirov, and Murmansk. The flying time from these places to Lulea, Gellivare, Kiruna, and Narvik is only a few hours. The mines thus would be targets of bombin expeditions and also could be reached in a rather short time by landed parachute jumpers, according to the tactics which the Russians are developing in far Siberia.

(© Photo from Chicago Tribune London Bureau.)
Steamships at the ore dock at Narvik, Norway, ready to load iron ore from Kiruna, Sweden.

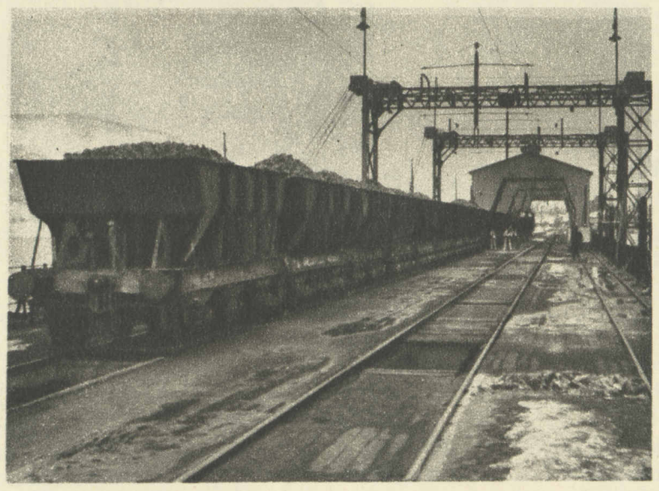
It is quite natural that the Swedish defense authorities have their attention directed against such possibilities as mentioned.

That soviet Russia is interested in the situation in northern Scandinavia is shown by several remarkable incidents.

"The ghost flyers," that is, rumors concerning mysterious airplanes in northern Scandinavia, have been standing headlines in Scandinavian papers since a year and some weeks ago when a Norwegian worker named Belgonen was arrested in the vicinity of Narvik, where he tried to send out messages to Russia with a short wave apparatus. Belgonen, who had visited a relative in Murmansk, also has disclosed that he got paid for his work, and it is believed that Belgonen has comrades in northern places in Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

The Russian spies in Sweden before the war were called "knife grinders," and obviously both Germany and Russia are spying against each other in these northern areas, which contain about a billion tons of the best iron ore in the world.

The iron ore centers, Kiruna and Gellivare, and the two harbors, Narvik in Norway and Lulea in Sweden, are connected with a special railway which for the last year has been rumbling day and night with filled cargoes of iron ore destined for the armament factories in Germany and England.



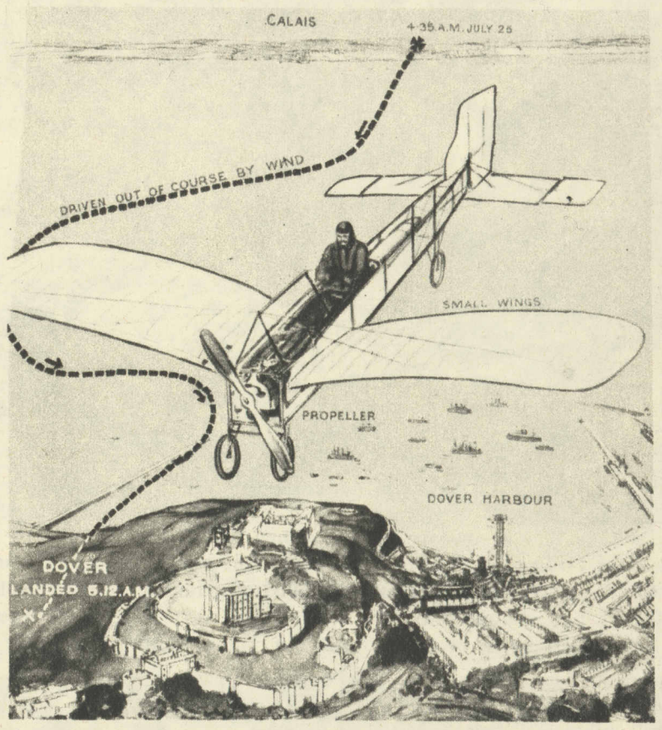
An ore train from Sweden at the docks in Narvik.

Bleriot's Famous Flight of 28 Years Ago

First Across Channel in Airplane

AIRPLANE flights across the oceans, around the world, and over the top of the globe via the north pole route do not create as much amazement today as did a flight of a mere twenty-three and a half miles twenty-eight years ago.

It was just twenty-eight years ago today that Louis Bleriot, a French aviation pioneer, flew to everlasting fame across the English channel from a point near Calais to Dover in a spidery little monoplane. Bleriot is dead—he died in Paris last Aug. 2—but his name and his great achievement in being the first to fly the English channel will be remembered as long as there are people left in the world who are interested in the progress of aviation.



Diagrammatic drawing of Bleriot's famous flight across the English channel on the morning of July 25, 1909. It was the first airplane flight across the channel, and it consumed 37 minutes.

(Associated Press photo.)
M. Bleriot in his plane just before the takeoff of his historic flight.

Bleriot was born in Cambrai, July 1, 1872. As a young man he opened a small factory in Paris for the manufacture of motor accessories. By merest chance one day he happened to pass through Issy-les-Moulines while Henri Farman was experimenting with one of his flying machines. So thoroughly interested did Bleriot become that he immediately abandoned his other work and set about the task of constructing his own flying machine. He sold his only property besides his small factory, a small estate near Orleans, and invested all of the proceeds of the sale in his new undertaking. His first airplane was smashed into pieces when he attempted to fly it. His second refused to leave the ground on its first test, and the disappointed inventor shoved it away into a storehouse. Later, however, he brought it out, and to his amazement it left the ground when he gave it full power.

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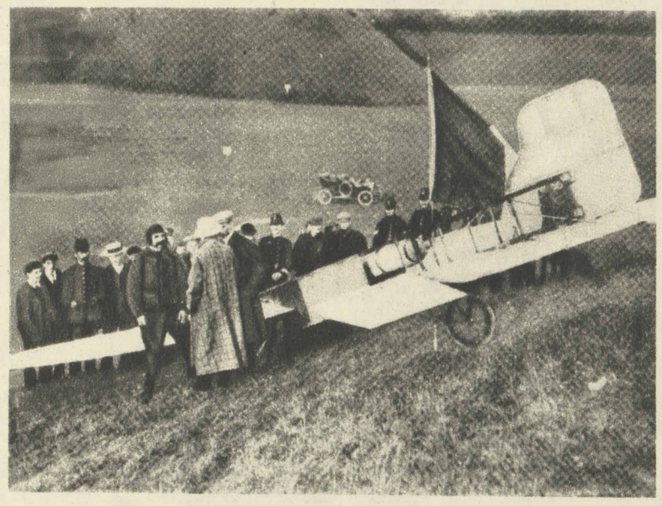
In the air Bleriot was so confused that his only thought was as to how he would get back to earth again. Involuntarily he shut off the motor. The next instant the fragile plane fell. It was a complete wreck. But Bleriot continued with his experiments, and in 1906, aided by two friends, he founded the first airplane factory in France. In September, 1907, he actually flew about 200 yards in a plane built by his own hands.

Then, less than two years later, came the great experience. Bleriot caused a sensation with his announcement that he intended to fly across the English channel. He accomplished this feat early on a Sunday morning, July 25, 1909, spanning the twenty-three and a half miles between the French coast and Dover in thirty-seven minutes in a monoplane almost as delicate as a dragon fly. The tiny ship was nothing more than a pair of fabric wings and a tailpiece, held together by open framework, and mounting a small 22-horsepower petrol engine. Two wheels afore and one in the rear constituted its landing gear.

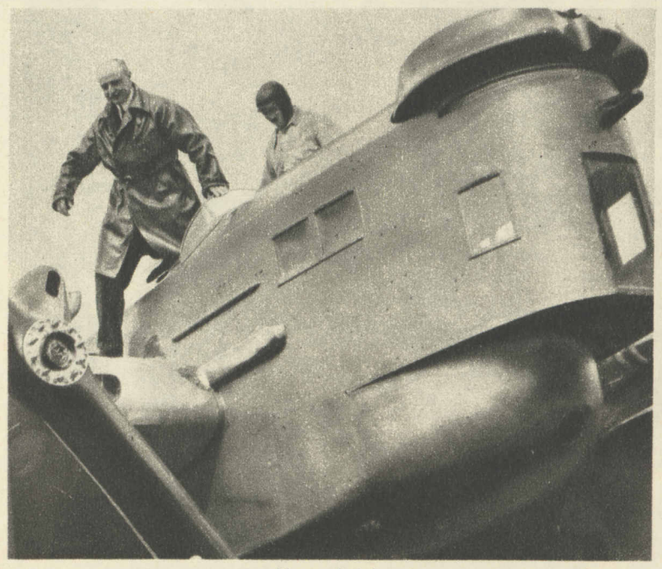
The French destroyer Escopette was assigned to steer the course for Bleriot's crossing of the channel. Obviously the idea that the airplane might move faster than the destroyer never entered anyone's mind. The courageous flyer took off, moving above the Escopette. Then, apparently bothered by the smoke from the funnels of the craft below, Bleriot veered to the right. Little by little the plane drew away from the destroyer. A strong west wind blew it off its course, but it finally landed close to the walls of Dover castle.



Bleriot and his monoplane near the walls of Dover castle after the flight across the channel.

(Associated Press photo.)
Bleriot's reception in Paris after his flight to Dover. Arrow indicates flyer.

Twenty years later Bleriot flew over the same route across the channel on the anniversary of his famous flight. In this second crossing, however, the famous inventor flew as a passenger in a giant bombing plane of his own design.



(Acme photo.)
On the twentieth anniversary of his first flight across the channel Bleriot retraced his course as a passenger in a bombing plane of his own design. He is shown here stepping from the bomber.