

Before Junkers –AB Aerotransport’s Unknown Pre-History

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It is well known that for a number of years the Swedish airline company AB Aerotransport (ABA) was associated with Junkers in Germany. Aircraft were built in the Junkers factory at Dessau and in the parent company’s subsidiary AB Flygindustri at Limhamn in Sweden, and the airline services operated by ABA were in fact part of the Junkers network. However, it is almost unknown that in the very beginning ABA was closely connected - not to Germany, but to Great Britain.



In connection with the International Aviation Exhibition in Gothenburg (*Internationella Luftfartsutställningen i Göteborg - ILUG*) in 1923 many of the European aircraft manufacturers exhibited their products to tentative customers. One of them, the British manufacturer de Havilland Aircraft Co, Ltd, participated with three aircraft: a D.H.34 (G-EBBQ) that just came along for a short visit, a D.H.37 (G-EBDO) and a D.H.50 (G-EBFN). The D.H.37 and D.H.50 participated in the contest that was part of the exhibition and were flown by company pilots Alan Cobham and H Hemming. Both the larger D.H.34 and the smaller D.H.50 were designed for passenger transport and the D.H.50 won the air traffic contest. The two German Junkers F 13s that came second and third were as such modern aircraft, but had less powerful engines than the British aircraft.

The brothers Adrian and Carl Florman, who operated a general agent and insurance company in Stockholm, had started to plan for air traffic between Malmö (Sweden), Copenhagen (Denmark) and Hamburg (Germany). During the ILUG exhibition they made contact with de Havilland and already in August 1923 they started to discuss their plans with the British company. At that time Carl Florman was assistant military attaché at the Swedish embassy in London. The brothers showed interest in the D.H.34, but were discouraged from ordering it, as the smaller D.H.50, with seating for four, was regarded more suitable for Swedish demands. This biplane was powered by a 230hp Armstrong Siddeley Puma engine and had a maximum speed of 180km/h. Its cruising speed was 150km/h. It had an empty weight of 1,020kg and a maximum take-off weight of 1,770kg. Its ceiling was 4,450m and its maximum range 610km.

In October the Florman Brothers chartered one aircraft in order to obtain publicity by flying photographs of the wedding of the Swedish crown prince in London to Sweden. Alan Cobham was assigned as pilot and the flight was hailed as a success.

In January 1924 de Havilland had offered to make a total of five D.H.50s available for operations on an air service between Copenhagen and Hamburg. It was still uncertain, however, if the scheduled airline would be subsidised by the state or a completely private venture. In November 1923 the brothers suggested that they would hire two D.H.50s for another project: air traffic between Malmö and Göteborg (Gothenburg), but when this came up de Havilland responded that no aircraft were available. They stated that their subsidiary de Havilland Aeroplane Hire Service, where Alan Cobham was manager, had just the number of aircraft at its disposal that was needed for the services that it already operated.



On 21 January 1924 the Florman brothers became de Havilland's official representatives in Sweden and by the end of that month their plans for air traffic were taking shape. They now wanted to charter three D.H.50s between 20 May and 20 October 1924 for the Hamburg service. On 27 March the Florman brothers formed AB Aerotransport and on 9 April a firm offer arrived from de Havilland for three D.H.50s and three spare engines. The aircraft would be hired from the de Havilland Aeroplane Hire Service that would also be responsible for the operation of them.

There was a problem, however. It could prove difficult to operate British-built aircraft on an air service in Germany. The restrictions set up by the Inter-Allied Aeronautical Control Commission that were aimed at German aircraft, was regarded by the German authorities as restrictions for *all* aircraft operating inside Germany, i.e. also British as well as French aircraft.

On 16 April the Florman brothers accepted the contract, but underlined that the aircraft had to be registered in Sweden in order to avoid their confiscation in Germany. Two weeks later they wrote that Swedish registrations possibly would not help and de Havilland then suggested that the aircraft could perhaps be modified so that the Germans accepted them. At the beginning of May the registrations S-ATAA, S-AUAA and S-AWAA were reserved for the three D.H.50As that were intended for ABA and de Havilland informed ABA that they would be delivered on 21 June. An

agreement had been signed with the Swedish postal authority covering the transportation of airmail between Malmö and Hamburg from 1 July 1924 so the service would have to be inaugurated by that date.

Meanwhile, the Florman brothers had taken up contact with Junkers in Germany. Junkers had participated with no less than eight aircraft at ILUG: a Typ A (J 20), three Typ F (J 13), two Typ K (J 16) and two Typ T (J 19). The two F13s, as the aircraft was to be known later on, ended, as already mentioned, on second and third place in the air traffic competition. After discussions with Junkers' representative Hauck in Stockholm, Junkers asked the brothers on 14 April to take care of Junkers' interests in Sweden until ABA had been organized and made clear that the company was ready to participate in the airline. In addition the Florman brothers were invited to become Junkers' official representatives in Sweden.

When Carl Florman discussed the airline plans with his companions John Lithander, Dan Broström, Cramér and Cervin in December 1923 he had just requested the offer for air traffic on the route Göteborg–Malmö from de Havilland. He suggested to his companions, however, that in case a co-ordination of air traffic between Malmö, Hamburg and Rotterdam was desirable it would be an advantage if Fokker aircraft were purchased instead. Junkers would possibly be a cheaper alternative, wrote Florman to Lithander on 8 December 1923, but was of no interest, as 'their type of aircraft (...) certainly is good, but inferior to both the de Havilland and Fokker with regard to its engine's reliability'.

It was the Junkers F 13's lower engine power, 185hp that he referred to. To let Junkers take care of the air traffic was no option either at this stage and the short-lived Sveriges Luftpostlinje AB (SLPA) that operated a single flight with a couple of Junkers F 13s in June 1923, could not be used for this purpose. On 9 December Florman informed Lithander that he was working on the foundation documents for AB Aerotransport. These considerations show that the choice of aircraft for the new airline was an open question. The Fokker aircraft that was considered was the Fokker F.III.

Already on 16 April, Adrian Florman sent "Report Number 1" to Junker, in which he discussed the future Junkers air service Stockholm–Helsinki (Finland)–Petrograd (Soviet-Russia). Florman then sent these reports regularly to Dessau. On 9 May he applied for permission for Junkers to operate the Stockholm-Helsinki section of the route and on 2 June the service was inaugurated with two German-registered Junkers F 13s.

The co-operation with Junkers certainly looked more promising than the project with de Havilland that was already in operation. The German firm already had an effective organisation and could offer

favourable economical conditions. It was now time for the Florman brothers to find a suitable excuse for a cancellation of the de Havilland contract.

Carl Florman travelled to the United Kingdom to take delivery of the D.H.50-aircraft, but 'just at the right moment' there were delays. On 20 June the Florman brothers sent a telegram to de Havilland that they were cancelling the contract due to delayed delivery. The British firm answered that they would have been able to deliver the aircraft before 1 July and that they could not understand why ABA had cancelled the contract and chosen Junkers instead. In fact, ABA had come to the final conclusion that the Germans would not accept flights with British-made aircraft to Hamburg, while there would be no problems if they used aircraft of German origin. The last ties with de Havilland were cut at the end of September 1924, when the representative agreement was cancelled as well.



As replacement for the D.H.50As three Junkers F 13s were made available and they took over the registrations S-ATAA, S-AUAA and S-AWAA that had been reserved previously. However, their Certificates of Registration were not issued until 1 July (for S-AWAA) and 11 July (S-ATAA and S-AUAA). It seems likely that the Florman brothers arranged the final details with Junkers on 22 June, when a trust agreement between the Junkers-Luftverkehr AG and Adrian Florman, Carl Florman, Alice Florman, Friedrich Treitsche, John Björk and Carl Bonde was signed. The purpose of this agreement was to formally transfer shares owned by Junkers to these persons in order to make ABA appear as a Swedish company rather than a German-owned Junkers subsidiary.

The next day ABA applied for a German approval to fly over Germany. Furthermore, on 25 June ABA applied to the Swedish authorities for a permit for the Junkers pilots Joseph Funk, Karl Hense and Karl Zellmann to fly in Sweden. The permit was valid from 30 June, the same day that two of the aircraft were inspected in Malmö by the Swedish civil aviation authorities. They had arrived from Dessau two days earlier. The third aircraft arrived on the 30th.

On the same day Karl Hense made an unofficial flight to Copenhagen and back with five non-paying passengers. On 1 July, around 8.30, some seventy invited guests gathered at Bulltofta airport near Malmö to attend to the hand-over of the airport to ABA by representatives of the city of Malmö. Among the speakers was Junkers' representative Gustav Nordt.

After the official programme Joseph Funk departed for the first flight to Hamburg with S-AUAA. Albin Ahrenberg joined as second pilot and the only passengers on board were Carl Florman and the Gustav Nordt. In addition to Funk and Ahrenberg, Junkers pilot Witte operated from Malmö for a while, but Swedish personnel replaced the Germans during the summer: Albin Ahrenberg, Ernst Roll and Robert Holmén. These three pilots had already gained experience when operating from Bulltofta with an LVG C VI (S-AXAA) and an Avro 504K (S-ABAA). Just like the German personnel the Swedish pilots were listed by Junkers-Luftverkehr as their employees. On 6 June Karl Hense with Ernst Roll as second pilot inaugurated the short route between Malmö and Copenhagen.

Most of the D.H.50 aircraft that were built were sold to Australia. The three intended for Sweden might well have been part of a batch with constructor's numbers 134-137. These aircraft were later delivered as A8-1 (Royal Australian Air Force), 135 (New Zealand Air Force), G-EBQI and G-AUAY.

Sources:

Mainly the AB Aerotransport archive (Riksarkivet, Stockholm)

Junkers-Archiv (Deutsches Museum, Munich)

Luftfartsmyndighetens inom kommunikationsdepartementets tredje byrå arkiv (Riksarkivet, Stockholm).