

***The  
fantastic  
life of***

***Harry  
Söderman***

***1902-1956***



He learnt the subject working with the famous Dr Locard in Lyon and became the first director of the National Forensic Science Institute, the predecessor of SKL - The National Laboratory of Forensic Science.

He had an enormous capacity, as he was, at the same time, leading the Institute, writing books and performing many extra tasks because of his reputation as an expert and organiser. Being true entrepreneur, he was more devoted to development than to administration, but he had the right feeling for gathering the necessary co-workers to maintain his enterprise.

When we at the SKL wanted to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Harry Söderman's birth, we soon found that it was impossible to give only one view of such an extraordinary achievement.

We have therefore chosen three different angles.

The first is that of a journalist who takes into account what the general public of today might want to know about the fantastic life of Harry Söderman.

The second is more of a formal account for Harry Söderman's work written for the journal Police Science when he was still alive, and the third is a view from one of today's European forensic scientists, who has looked into some of the archives.

We hope these three aspects will give, not only a reasonable coverage of the life and achievements of Harry Söderman, but also good reading.

INGVAR KOPP  
PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR, SKL



HARRY SÖDERMAN 1934, PHOTO: LIBRARY OF INGRID SÖDERMAN

## Foreword

**Harry Söderman lived an extraordinary life. Few have accomplished as much as he did.**

**He can be considered as the father of Swedish “kriminalteknik”, which encompasses the whole Forensic Science laboratory area except forensic medicine and toxicology.**

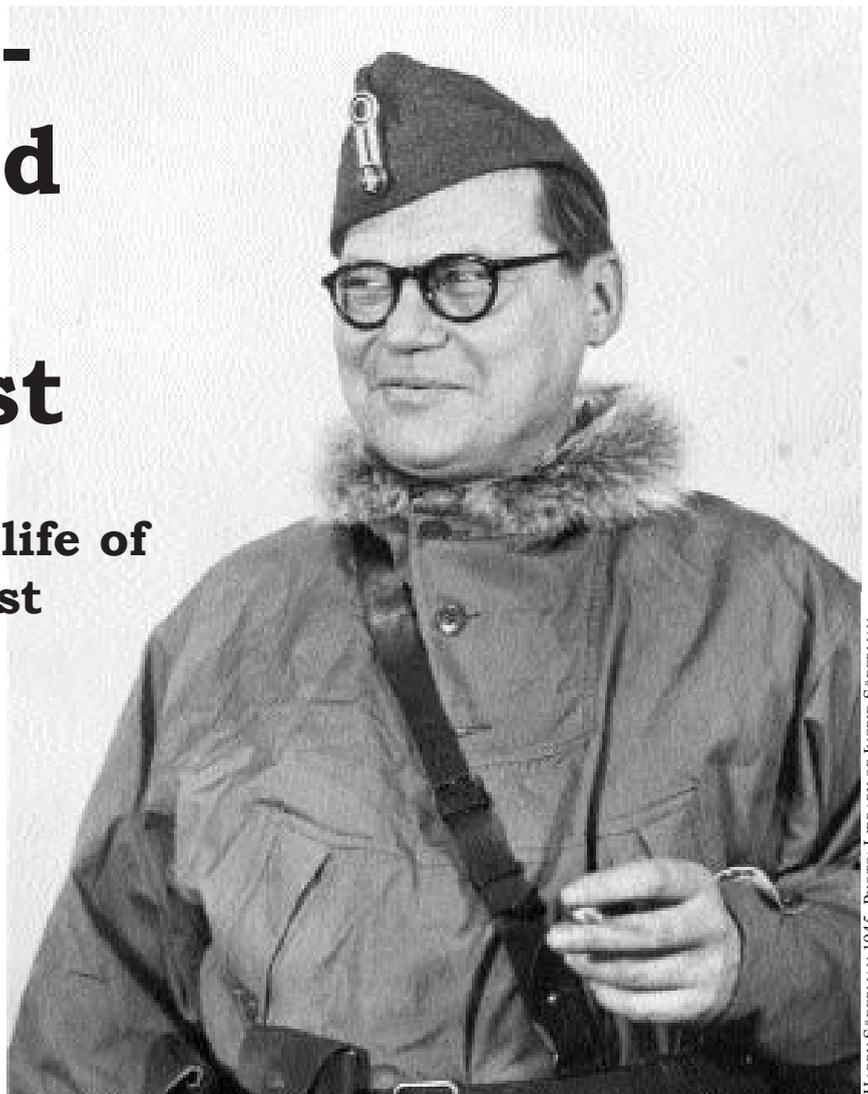
# Revolver- Harry and Kalle Blomqvist

**The adventurous life of  
a forensic scientist**

BY: KAIANDERS SEMPLER  
TRANSLATION: INGELA DELLBY

**It is told that by the end of the Second World War, May 1st 1945, he took the night train from Stockholm to Oslo, walked straight up to the German commandant and declared that continued resistance would be madness.**

**Together with a German motorcycle messenger he then went out to the dreaded German prison camp Grini and personally released the imprisoned Norwegian resistance men.**



HARRY SÖDERMAN 1945, PHOTO: LIBRARY OF INGRID SÖDERMAN

In Norway he was considered a national hero, and at Furudal north of Rättvik there is a bust in remembrance of him. In his native town Nora, a square is now named after him.

Actually, his name was Harry Söderman, but after he had become a doctor of philosophy by test shooting weapons and comparing the grooves of the bullets, he was generally called Revolver-Harry. He was an ardent democrat and anti-fascist and he meant that the free society could only

be sustained by legal security. And legal security in turn needs access to the unambiguous technical production of evidence, for convicting the guilty as well as for acquitting the innocent.

By the end of the 1900th century northern Sweden was to a great extent a lawless land. Harry's father, Pehr Söderman, had been a county sheriff in Delsbo. His work as the guardian of the law seems to have had much in common with the work of the sheriffs in the films of the Wild West.

If we can trust his posthumous reputation, Mr. Söderman senior showed quite a few similarities with Wyatt Earp, the legendary sheriff of Dodge City. The county sheriff was in a perpetual state of feud with the illicit distillers in his region, and both parties always had their guns ready to fire. It is astounding that Mr. Söderman senior survived all the ambushes, assaults and nightly fighting in the forest where they shot savagely at each other with their shotguns.

However, when young Harry was born in 1902 the family had moved to more civilised areas farther south in the country. Harry started school, but he did not show any great inclination for studies. The only subjects he was interested in were chemistry and physics. The result was that he later entered the chemical vocational training school in Malmö from which he graduated in 1923.

## Wood chemistry

The intention was that Harry should become a chemist in the wood industry. But after he had practised for some months at a wood company he realised that in order to get anywhere in the world of timber, pulp and sulphate lye he had to add to his theoretical knowledge. So he went to Altenburg in Germany and studied wood chemistry in the very midst of the worst years of inflation in the Weimar Republic. After a year he had his exam - and in addition, he had learnt to speak German.

But it wasn't forest chemistry that Harry dreamed about, but criminology, and he devoured everything he could lay his hands on in this subject. But how could he ever become a criminologist? For getting a job within the police, you had to study law, something that was definitely not in his line.



PHOTO: FROM THE BOOK "POLICEMAN'S LOT"

After he had returned home and done his military service in Sweden, he decided to start his career as a chemist by taking a "Wanderjahr" - a year of wandering the world. Perhaps something would turn up in the meantime.

First he stayed for some time in France and then he worked for a couple of months as a fireman on a North Sea tramp steamer. But Harry was a young man with a will of iron and an unusual talent for innovative and unconventional thinking. He wanted to go farther away, he wanted to see the Orient. He went home and turned to the manager of a Swedish bicycle factory with a radical suggestion:

- Lend me a bike and I'll ride it to Constantinople and in that way I'll boost your firm, he said.

## A bicycle trip to Asia

The bicycle factory owner was so surprised that he consented, and Harry quickly packed his knapsack. Before he went away he also took the opportunity to arrange with the

*Bicycle, elephants, canoes and camels were Harry Söderman's means of transportation from Stockholm to Constantinople via Persia through the Baluchistani desert to India and China.*

Swedish Police Magazine and another Swedish weekly magazine to send them a travel diary, which would make his travelling funds last longer.

Harry's trip turned out to be longer than he originally planned for. From Constantinople, nowadays Istanbul, he continued eastwards. Through Persia, the Baluchistani desert, India and Burma he went all the way to Thailand and China. Everywhere he was keen on seeing the local police authorities and reporting home.

It isn't quite the regular thing that people should bike to China. At least not in Sweden. Here Harry's exploit would not be repeated until the 1990s. Then a young Swede named Göran Kropp cycled from Sweden to the Himalayas. There he climbed the peak of Mount Everest and then cycled back home again.

Although, Harry never climbed the highest mountain in the world, but he spent one and a half years of his journey in the east. Then he turned back home. But what would become of him now?

## A meeting on a mountain peak

In his autobiography "Policeman's Lot" (published posthumously in 1956 in the USA) Harry Söderman tells that he decided to ramble in the Swedish mountains for some days after his return home. He went north and took lodgings at a small boarding house.

One day he made a tour up to a mountaintop nearby. The landlady wondered whether he could consider taking some of the other guests at the boarding house up there. The whole thing ended by forming a small expedition consisting of Harry, a clergyman, a lawyer and a Frenchman. After some hours they reached the top of the mountain. There was one of the Swedish Touring Club's cabins for over-night accommodation, and where they had their picnic and stayed the night.

However, the next morning the weather was bad with fog and snow, so the party had to stay in the cabin for several days. They passed the time with card games and conversation while the storm howled round the doors. Then it happened that Harry talked about his secret dream - to study criminal investigation for the famous French criminologist Edmond Locard in Lyon.

"How interesting", said the Frenchman. "Locard is a good friend of mine. If you wish, I could write him a letter of recommendation and ask if he would take you on as a student."

Some weeks later Harry had a letter from Mr. Locard wishing him warm welcome to Lyon as a temporary student.

## The Lyon years

Harry Söderman, now 24 years old, promptly left for Lyon. The Swedish

wood industry missed a competent chemist.

From this we learn to take advantage of the opportunity and the importance of polite conversations with strangers on mountain peaks!

In Lyon Harry learnt modern criminal investigation from the ground up.

Locard assumed that the criminal always leaves some traces, something which is now called the Locard principle: "Every contact leaves a trace!" Mr. Locard claimed.

The marks a forensic technician looks for are such things as hair, textile fibres, fingerprints, nail dirt, bloodstains, sperm, shoe- and wheel traces, dust and gravel, glass splinter, paint flakes, chemical substances. Harry learned all about chemical analyses, identification of fingerprints, investigation on the scene of a crime and many other things.

PHOTO: FROM THE BOOK "POLICEMAN'S LOT"



*Locard's staff at the forensic laboratory in Lyon in 1928. Edmond Locard is the second from the right in the bottom row and Harry Söderman is the second from the right in the upper row.*



*The monkey had been trained by his cunning owner to become a master cat burglar.*

PHOTO: FROM THE BOOK "POLICEMAN'S LOT"

While in Lyon Harry also took the opportunity to take a doctor's degree at the University of Lyon. His research work naturally concerned criminal investigation. It was about analysis and identification of pistol bullets. He was the first to make a scientific study of the individual markings on fired bullets that originate from the grooves in the barrel and the cartridge case due to the firing pin.

In order to examine pistol bullets quickly, he invented an apparatus he called a Hastoscope. It was a comparison microscope where the bullets investigated could be turned and rotated, either together or individually.

After six years with Mr. Locard in Lyon he thought himself skilled enough and returned to Sweden. Once back home he started a small private bureau in Stockholm where he offered forensic services, and above all, certificates of authenticity of documents. His work progressed more and more successfully, and soon he was appointed docent in criminology at the University of Stockholm.

He got a grant and went to the USA to make contacts and study the forensic progress of the new world.

## Forming of SKA

In 1939 Doctor Harry Söderman became head of the recently formed SKA - The National Forensic Science Institute - in Stockholm. The purpose of the institute was to give the police means and competence to make accurate analyses and investigations on the scene of a crime, and that was a predecessor to today's SKL - The National Laboratory of Forensic Science in Linköping.

- Because the criminal always leaves marks, Harry told his new colleagues and pupils. It is only a question of having methods sophisticated enough to detect them.

PHOTO: FROM THE BOOK "POLICEMAN'S LOT"



Harry Söderman investigates a sub-machine gun in his office at the National Forensic Science Institute.

## One of the founders of Interpol

Harry Söderman was now considered one of the leading forensic technicians in the world, and lectured both in the USA and at Scotland Yard in London. In New York he took part in the development of a new forensic laboratory. Thanks to his excellent knowledge of languages - he spoke fluent German, French and English - he naturally became a prominent figure in the international police collaboration, and he was one of the founders of Interpol.

During his journeys all over Europe and the USA he collected the latest findings concerning criminal investigation. He summarised it all in "The Handbook of criminal investigation", a thick book of 680 pages, which accounted for forensic methods from antiquity to our own time. Here he discussed matters, such as identification of individuals by fingerprints, the collection of traces on the scene of the crime and photographic documentation, witness psychology, analyses of powder stains, pistol bullets and bullet-holes, analysis of writing and other such things.

*Harry Söderman's "Minnesbok för Kriminalpolismän" (Memo book for police detectives) was first published in 1938.*

*It was considered to be a memorandum for the police detective in his fieldwork.*

*The author was very clear that the contents of the book were exclusively for policemen "because of the occurring descriptions of the working methods of criminals, etc."*



PHOTO: BO LUNDQUIST

## Astrid Lindgren as secretary

In 1939 he looked for a secretary for his voluminous correspondence. A young lady named Astrid Lindgren got the job. Nobody knew then that this young lady in course of time would become one of Sweden's most beloved writers of children's books and internationally famous.

Astrid Lindgren wrote in 1946 a book titled "Bill Bergson, Master Detective", the first of what would become a sequence of three exciting books for young people. The books are about the twelve-year-old Kalle Blomkvist - or Bill Bergson, as is his English name - who is dreaming of becoming a detective, and who gets involved in a succession of nasty criminal cases together with his friends.

Astrid Lindgren has afterwards told that it was during the time she was Harry Söderman's secretary that she got inspiration and forensic material for the books. In "Bill Bergson, Master Detective" (Mästerdetektiven Blomkvist) Bill takes the fingerprints of a sleeping scoundrel according to all the recognised rules.

In the following book, "Bill Bergson Lives Dangerously" (Mästerdetektiven Blomkvist lever farligt), he carries out an advanced chemical analysis - the Marshian arsenic test - and discovers that a bar of chocolate is poisoned with arsenic. It is all breathtaking, especially for young readers at the age of twelve.

The books were radio serials in the 1950s, and were later also transferred to movies. Thus the forensic laboratory technician and detective



Revolver-Harry Söderman in the guise of Bill Bergson became an idol for all the boys in Sweden.

But that was not enough. The police, and particularly the forensic laboratory technicians, have never had such good standing in Sweden as during the time when the Bill Bergson-fever raged.

## Well-read columnist

But it wasn't only in the shape of Bill Bergson that Harry Söderman reached the public. By this time, many popular weekly and monthly magazines readily told about horrible crimes and legal cases. These magazines hired Harry Söderman as a columnist and he told astounding stories in the best Sherlock Holmes-manner from the exciting world of criminal investigation.

Much of the material was from his time with Mr Locard in Lyon. Here was, for instance, the story about the burglar with the strange fingerprints. Nobody could understand how the cunning jewel thief could get through a window on the third floor. Finally it was discovered that a trained monkey



Front page of the Swedish magazine *Lektur* från 1952.

It says:

“New series of articles!

The head of the National Forensic Science Institute, Mr Harry Söderman, shares his memoirs with us.”

had committed the thefts. No wonder the fingerprints were unusual.

Many of the stories published in the Swedish magazines "Kriminal-journalen", "Lektör", "Rekordmagasinet" and other popular press also appear in "Policeman's Lot".

But let us return to the wartime.

## Training of Norwegian policemen

In the spring 1942, whilst the war was raging, Harry Söderman had a request from the Norwegian minister for justice in London. In Sweden there were quite a few Norwegians who had fled the Nazi occupation of Norway, the minister explained. Would it be possible to start a discreet training of Norwegian policemen in Sweden? The idea was that after the war, these men would replace those policemen that had become compromised by working for the Quisling administration.

Certainly, said Harry, and with his usual capacity for unconventional and innovative methods he took care of the matter. A number of "health farms" were opened where the Norwegians were trained with the consent of the Swedish authorities.

In reality it was not the matter of policemen but pure military training, this in flagrant violation of Sweden's formal status as a neutral state. But after Stalingrad the political winds in Sweden had shifted concurrently with the fortunes of war.

From the point when neutral Sweden was left with no alternative and was forced to be a puppet of Germany, the Swedish government was more and more keenly sympathetic to the cause of the allies. The fact that Harry Söderman in some inscrutable way managed to find arms for the Norwegian police detachment can be seen as a definite proof of this.



*An expedition with members of the Norwegian resistance, the military, doctors and a chauffeur to save war captives at the Saltford in May 1945. Harry Söderman is the third man from the left.*

Altogether 17 000 men were trained between 1943 and 1945 at Harry Söderman's "health camps". One of which was in the wood at Gottröra, not far from the present international airport of Stockholm, Arlanda.

January 12th 1945 the first Norwegian police troops were airlifted by the Americans from Luleå to Kirkenes on the Norwegian Arctic Ocean coast. The whole of Finnmark had been burnt and betrayed by the retreating Germans during the autumn of 1944, and Russian troops had occupied the eastern Finnmark up to the Tana River.

Harry Söderman's police troops now took over from the Russians, who compliantly pulled away to their side of the border one month later. This was in accordance with the treaty at Jalta between Churchill, Roosevelt and Stalin.

This and many other things you can read about in "The Battle of the

Arctic Scandinavia" by Lars Gyllenhaal, Historiska media 2001.

One of the Norwegians who was flown up to the north of Norway from Sweden was Thor Heyerdahl, the man who later became world-famous for his voyages with the rafts Kon-Tiki and Ra. Another was the father of my brother-in-law, a young man called Arvid Holte, who had fled Norway two years earlier.

## International commitments

In 1953 Harry Söderman decided to resign as head of the National Forensic Science Institute to dedicate himself totally to his international commitments. He moved to the USA with his family, and as a consultant he participated in the organisation of police organisations in a number of countries.

1956 he was struck by heart infarction during a commission in Tanger. An adventurous life was at an end.

PHOTO: LIBRARY OF INGRID SÖDERMAN

# Harry Soderman of Stockholm: Master Criminologist

BY: CEDRIC LARSSON

FROM: THE JOURNAL OF CRIMINAL LAW,  
CRIMINOLOGY AND POLICE SCIENCE,  
1952.

**The name of Söderman is almost legendary in European police circles, and it is no exaggeration to say that today he is Europe's leading criminologist and authority on police systems.**

While Söderman's name is familiar in American police circles also, due largely to his writings in police science, his very distinguished career is all too little known.

The writer has had the privilege of several interviews with the eminent criminologist in the course of his most recent visit to America, and obtained from him the story of his life, which has been supplemented with extensive readings into his considerable published works.

The career of Dr. Harry Söderman once more illustrates the ancient proverb that truth is stranger than fiction. One might almost suspect that such a biography had been conjured up from the fertile mind of a Conan Doyle or Baron Münchhausen.

Dr. Söderman was born August 28, 1902 in Stockholm in a maternity home, although his family did not live in that city. He was one of ten children. His father, Per Söderman, was a Landsmann, a kind of sheriff, in Delsbo, Helsingland, in northern

Sweden. This area was once regarded as the most "hard-boiled" province in Sweden. Per Söderman was married twice, with seven children by the first marriage and three by the second. Harry was the eldest by the second marriage.

Dr. Söderman says with a twinkle in his eye that his interest in criminology dates from the time that his mother was still nursing him, because twice in his infancy enemies of his father unsuccessfully tried to put explosives in the Söderman house to destroy it.

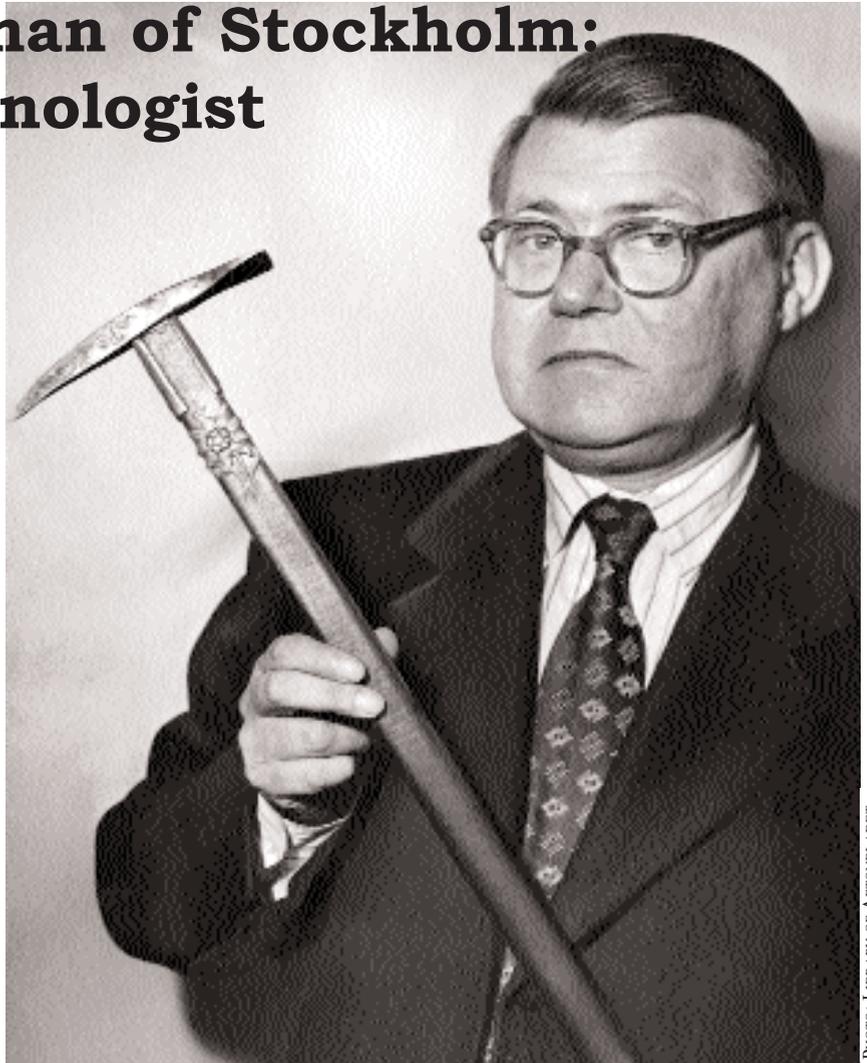


PHOTO: LIBRARY OF AFTONBLADET

## A promising student

Harry showed unusual promise in school, and his father determined to give him a good technical education and make him a chemist. His elementary schooling was had in northern Sweden, and when he finished elementary school, his father sent him to the Chemical Institute of Malmö where he was graduated with honors in 1920. At the age of 18 he went for special training to Germany, where he studied legal chemistry as well as pulp and paper chemistry at the Technical Institute of Altenburg, from where he was graduated in 1922.

Although his father wanted Harry to have a solid occupation as a chemist in a Swedish paper mill, such a prosaic life held little challenge to this dynamic youth. While in Germany, he became a keen student of criminology, first more as a hobby than anything else. Soon he was studying it seriously and became known as a capable person in this field.

## Two years in Asia

Harry had been an avid reader of travel books in his adolescent years, and always cherished a dream of one day travelling through Asia. He was now able to realize his fond ambition, for after returning to Stockholm, he persuaded the Swedish Police Journal to send him on an Asiatic tour from 1924-26.

He served as a correspondent for this paper and reported on Asiatic police systems and crime and delinquency in these countries. He spent over two years travelling extensively in Asia, from Turkey through the entire continent to China. He journeyed through Syria, Mesopotamia, Persia, Baluchistan; and traveled on camel-back through India, Burma, Siam, and French Indo-China.

He was not content merely to visit the large centers of population of these countries, but constantly pushed back into the hinterland in his criminological hegira. His dispatches were read with great interest throughout Scandinavia and by criminologists of all the leading capitals of Europe. When he returned, he found himself already famous at the age of 24.

## Back in Europe

Returning to Europe, he became assistant to Dr. Edmond Locard at the French State Police Laboratory at Lyons from 1926 to 1928. While there he took the degree of Doctor of Science at the University of Lyons, getting that degree with "Tres Honorable" mention.

He now embarked in earnest on his life's work in criminology. He was elected a member of the International Academy of Criminal Science in Vienna, in 1929. That same year he was elected assistant editor of *Revue Internale de Criminalistique*, published in Lyons, a post he held for many years. In 1929 he spent several months in France as a special instruc-

tor to a mission from Siam under Prince Vongsa Nirajra teaching these Siamese modern scientific police methods.

Returning to Sweden in 1930, he was made chief editor of *Nordisk Criminal Teknisk Tidskrift* (Nordic Journal for Police Science) the most noteworthy publication in its field in northern Europe. Besides teaching at the University of Stockholm, he was also appointed by a Royal Swedish charter to become an instructor in police science to the higher officials in the Swedish Royal State Police.

In the years that followed his fame grew by leaps and bounds. He was assigned by the Swedish government in dozens of instances to investigate cases of arson, serious theft cases, and murder, throughout the whole of Scandinavia, when the local police authorities could not cope with them.

In a surprising percentage of all these cases, through the use of scientific detection methods, he would track down the perpetrator of the crime.

*The famous Sir Basil Thomson, earlier Head of the Central Intelligence Division at the Scotland Yard and Harry Söderman, flanked by the two Siamese men then studying criminal investigation in Lyon.*



PHOTO: FROM THE BOOK "POLICEMAN'S LOT"

In 1931 he was named a member of the Royal Parliamentary Technical Committee which investigated the riots at the sawmills in Ådalen, Sweden. In 1934 he was made a special investigator into the celebrated Reichstag Arson case which made history. The criminologist reported his findings, in this case for a leading Stockholm paper. He was the only person other than the Nazi officials to speak with the suspect, Van der Lubbe, in prison.

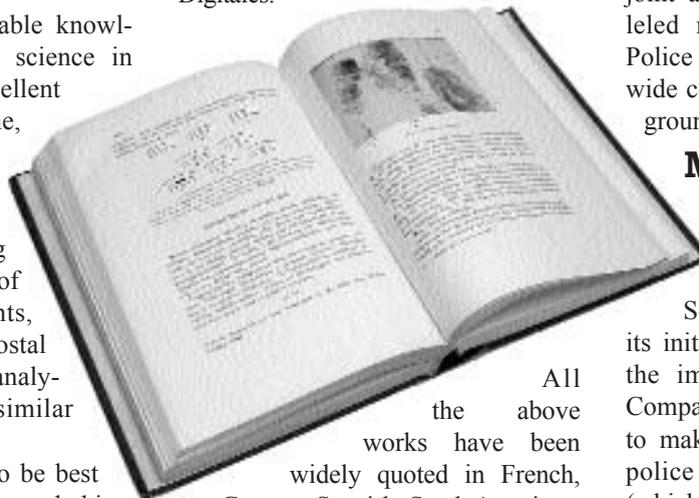
Söderman's considerable knowledge of chemistry and science in general were put to excellent use in combatting crime, and he devised many new methods or applications of science in crime-solving, involving ballistics, fingerprints of dead bodies, footprints, burglary investigation, postal theft investigation, dust analysis, espionage, and similar fields.

He came, however, to be best known internationally through his writings. His first book was published in Stockholm in 1927 when he was but 25 : *Brottets Värld* (The World of Crime). The following year another work appeared under his name in the French language and published at Lyons: *L'Expertise des Arms a Feu Courtées*. He published also a large number of technical monographs in learned journals and specialized periodicals.

His fame reached much higher in 1930 upon the appearance of what promised to be a definitive work on police science: *Handbok i Kriminalteknik* (Handbook of Police Science) in which he collaborated with Ernst Fontell, Police Commissioner of Gothenburg. This Handbook - totalling

675 pages - was the precursor of his classic *Modern Criminal Investigation*, later to make such a success on both sides of the Atlantic. The 1930 Handbook is written in clear, readable Swedish prose, and well illustrated, but was handicapped by the fact that its audience was limited to persons who could read Swedish.

In 1930 Söderman published in French an authoritative volume on fingerprints: *Etude sur les Empreintes Digitales*.



All the above works have been widely quoted in French, German, Spanish, South American, and English works on crime.

### **Studies in America**

In 1933 Söderman obtained a fellowship from the Swedish American Foundation to study American police systems. He spent a whole year in the New York City Police Department studying their methods, and made a wide circle of friends, among them John J. O'Connell, late Chief Inspector.

After a year with the New York Police, Söderman and O'Connell were entrusted with the task of founding the new police laboratory. This consumed about another year. Söderman, meanwhile, had used the time to good advantage to visit police departments of other large American cities, and the offices of the F.B.I. in Washington.

Söderman all this time felt that there was ample room for a good basic work on criminology for police students everywhere, written in English, which would parallel in content his 1930 Handbook whose utility had been greatly circumscribed by the fact that it was in Swedish. He talked the matter over with his friend O'Connell, and after many exploratory conversations, the two decided to team up and produce a book under joint authorship, using the unparalleled resources of the New York Police Department and Söderman's wide continental experience as background.

### **Modern Criminal Investigation**

Thus it was that *Modern Criminal Investigation* by Söderman and O'Connell made its initial appearance in 1935 under the imprint of Funk & Wagnalls Company. This volume was destined to make history in the literature of police science. The first edition (which is now a collector's item) had 24 chapters, bibliography and index, and totalled 461 pages.

It was well illustrated with photographs and line-drawings and won almost instantaneous acceptance as a standard in its field throughout the police world. Sales of the first printing were so rapid that it was quickly exhausted. Many other printings followed in quick succession. In the next five or six years the book went through three editions and 18 printings.

Total sales were never officially divulged by Funk & Wagnalls, but from informal conversations with officials of that firm, the writer estimates that sales in America alone must have totalled close to 75,000.

"HANDBOK I KRIMINALTEKNIK" PHOTO: BO LUNDQUIST



*Statens Kriminaltekniska Anstalt at Bergsgatan, Stockholm 1939*

Besides the English editions, however, the book was translated into a half-dozen different languages, including French, German, Swedish, Spanish, and Japanese.

In 1939 a South American edition was published in Buenos Aires, some 3 700 copies being printed. It was translated by Germán Salgado of the Buenos Aires Police Department and Dr. Antonio L. Beruti, a judge in the Supreme Court of that city. Although no exact figures are obtainable, a conservative estimate would place foreign language copies of the Söderman-O'Connell book at about 25,000. This would place total sales of the book in the 100,000 bracket, thought to be a record for a work in this field.

A completely revised and rewritten edition, comprising thirty chapters and 576 pages, was published in February, 1952. It was issued as under the joint authorship imprint on the title-page, although O'Connell

passed away in 1947, so virtually the entire burden of revision has fallen on Söderman's shoulders.

But to get back to Söderman's career in the thirties-after leaving New York in 1935 he again returned to Sweden and taught at the University of Stockholm. He managed to find time to do some work for the International Police Commission dealing with the issuance and standardization of passports, designed to combat illegal traffic in this field.

The year 1937 Söderman spent in Dublin, where he was principal adviser in the reorganization of the Irish State Police.

## **SKA**

In 1939 the Swedish Parliament created a kind of Swedish version of the F.B.I. called Statens Kriminaltekniska Anstalt, or National Institute of Technical Police. Söderman was named its first director, a post which he has retained to the present time,

although he is gone so much he has to have competent understudies to carry on in his absences. Dr. Söderman was given a free hand in setting up the National Institute, which he divided into two units. The first division was the laboratory division and dealt with all kinds of scientific and technical methods for combatting crime. The second division was administrative in character and carries on the multifarious paper work inevitably entailed in efficient criminological investigation.

The National Institute acts as a clearinghouse throughout Scandinavia for fingerprint registrations, criminal records and data of all types, and related functions. Besides this, the Institute has extensive archives of crime records, a "Rogue's Gallery," serves as a central passport institution for the country and handles all relations with foreign police, publishes a police bulletin, and sends out specially trained agents for the examination of scenes of crime at the request of local authorities. It has extensive and modern laboratories which are considered to be among the best in Europe.

## **Swedish Police**

The Police School in Stockholm (where Dr. Söderman teaches) is one of the most extensive in the world. The passing of its examinations is compulsory for every rank up to commissary of police (superintendent, English style; captain, American style).

The Swedish state police set-up is rather unusual. This force is chiefly concerned with policing the rural districts and has branch offices in every one of the 25 provinces. The detectives and patrolmen are loaned out from the local forces for a certain time but paid by the government, and the

different state police forces are mainly handled by the chief public prosecutor of the province. The head of the state police is formally an assistant commissioner in the Stockholm police department. The police forces of Sweden number about 7600 men.

## World War II

During World War II, Söderman was placed by his government in charge of a then very confidential project of organizing Norwegian and Danish police troops raised in Sweden during that conflict. The Norwegian contingent numbered about 15,000 and the Danish 3,000. Their mission was to be ready the day Germany capitulated to rush into their respective countries and preserve law and order. This they accomplished capably, in close cooperation with the Swedish General Staff and the Allied authorities.

Shortly before the ending of World War II Söderman was sent to occupied Oslo on a bold mission. There were at that time about 7,000 political prisoners



*Harry Söderman in Norway, 1945.*



PHOTO: LIBRARY OF INGRID SÖDERMAN

*Harry Söderman advocated that the German police should be armed. This made the East German press call him "Revolver-Harry", a nickname that followed him till he died and even afterwards, presumably because it seemed so appropriate. As we all know, he had both taken his doctor's degree in the identification of firearms and armed the Norwegian police troops. Here at the farewell party in Germany in 1951, he makes a joke about his nickname. (Source: Erik Söderman)*

held by the Gestapo in Norway, and Söderman was busy bargaining on how to get them out and into Sweden in buses, when the war suddenly ended. Söderman in a characteristic decisive fashion, seized the initiative and freed these unfortunate prisoners on his own responsibility and for a time was a sort of police chief in Oslo until the Norwegian authorities could move in and take over. Later the King of Norway decorated him with the Distinguished Service Medal of Norway for this feat. This medal is normally reserved for bravery on the battlefield.

In the post-war years, Söderman has acted as Reporter General to the International Criminal Police Commission, a post which requires travel, correspondence, and writing. This supra-national organization has among its members police organizations from all over the free world, such as Scotland Yard and similar groups. It has as its aim the cooperation of the police systems of the free world in combatting international crime.

## Reorganization of German Police

Dr. Söderman had an interesting assignment during the year 1951. Since 1946 the Germans in the Allied sections ran their own police under Allied supervision. However, when the Bonn Republic was set up, it became apparent that there was need for the reorganization of the German police by an impartial outside expert. Dr. Söderman was chosen for this tough assignment, and from March to December 1951 spent most of his time and energy at this formidable task.

There was established in Wiesbaden a Federal Office of Crime Investigation (Bundeskriminalamt). This office maintains large laboratories, publishes the Police Bulletin, keeps a central file of fingerprints and other crime records, and sends out trained agents to aid the local police if so requested.

The Office has limited executive powers. It maintains in the capital, Bonn, a special squad of detectives for

the protection of the president, cabinet members, and the diplomatic corps. The Federal Office of Crime Investigation handles all relations with foreign police and is the connecting link with the International Criminal Police Commission. Needless to say, Dr. Söderman is the principal architect in this reorganization of the German police system.

## **Personal life**

As for his personal life, Dr. Söderman was married in 1935 to Ingrid Beckman. They have two sons: Pehr born in 1936 and Erik born 1946. The Södermans live on an estate 30 miles south of Stockholm. Politically Dr. Söderman has wisely never been active.

He is a member of the Swedish "Farmers Party" and was once persuaded to run as a candidate from his district to Parliament, but was not elected, probably to the disgust of the criminal world where they would prefer to see him do anything but chase criminals. In conversation, Söderman loves to refer fondly to his "farm," crops, and animals. In his somewhat rare uncriminological moments, he styles himself a "farmer."

During his distinguished career, Söderman has won a host of honors and conferments by foreign governments, police societies, and learned bodies, too numerous to mention. Söderman never displays any of his awards, even to intimates, or talks about his honors, since he is a man of considerable modesty. He dresses very simply, and one would never surmise just from looking at him casually that he was the foremost criminologist of Europe. Söderman is a prolific writer and indefatigable researcher, and if some ambitious librarian ever made a complete bibliography of his writings there would probably be 150 to 200 titles to list.

Söderman today, at fifty years of age, stands at the apex of his career, one

which has been of great benefit to mankind throughout the world. Söderman's great contribution to criminology has been to adapt and extend the discoveries of science, chiefly biology, physics, and chemistry, during the past three decades, to the field of police science. He is no armchair criminologist, either, but to perfect his knowledge of criminal investigation, has visited hundreds if not thousands of scenes of crime of every known type. His skill, patience, tact, industry, and thoroughness have also made him quite popular with all police groups he has worked with. He has personally solved scores of baffling crimes in his lifetime, by the use of scientific methods of criminal investigation, and many cases could be set forth if space permitted.

## **A genial knack**

Söderman is an affable, forthright individual, with a saving sense of humor and a genial knack of making friends wherever he goes. On one or two occasions when in New York City, he has given entertaining and diverting lectures before such groups as the Mystery Writers of America, Inc., drawing anecdotes and stories from his rich fund of personal experience, which are as breath-taking as any Sherlock Holmes yarn. Like most Swedes of education, he speaks English with ready facility.

In Western civilization in the past few decades there has gradually developed a new science which in America is called criminal investigation or police science.

In Europe it is usually termed police scientifique or technique policiere. As for the continental terminology, it is rather difficult to say which of these terms is preferable. The former refers to a given, definite science and the latter to the practical application of that science. Both are important phases in preserving law and order.

It is a sad truth that criminals always seem to take advantage of the latest discoveries within scientific progress in the perpetration of many of their crimes. Therefore society owes a great debt of gratitude to men like Söderman, who seek to utilize the latest advances of science in combatting crime. It is a basic tenet of Söderman's philosophy that the police, fighting as it does an often uneven battle to protect society, has every reason in the world to keep in step with the latest developments of science.

Söderman's niche in the criminological hall of fame is assured, and it is a considerable niche. His career, it is hoped, is far from over, but his fame would be assured on the basis of what he has already done. His name is as familiar in Sweden as that of J. Edgar Hoover in America. His name takes its place with that honored group who have done so much to protect society from the ravages of evil and misguided men who form the criminal fringe of every generation.

## **A tribute to Söderman**

It is a tribute to Söderman to say that he is far more than a great Swedish criminologist. He does, in fact, belong to the entire world of free society, for his researches, discoveries, and achievements have been made available to the free world. His eminent name belongs with that honored company of Bertillon, Gross, Galton, Locard, Heindl, Balthazard, Wentworth, Van Ledden, De Rechter, Minovici, Osborn, Mitchell, and many others - all great names in the annals of criminology - and who have left society far safer and stronger because they have lived.

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# Harry Söderman

## A Great Pan-European Criminalist

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**HARRY SÖDERMAN is a name that I first heard when I was a student of forensic science in Lausanne some 25 years after his death. It did not come up attached to a specific field like Bertillon (anthropometry), Galton (dactyloscopy), Goddard (firearms), Osborn (Questioned documents), but more like the name of his master Edmond Locard, a generalist, a criminalist in its pure dimension looking at evidence not only as a means of proving in court, but also as lead-giving in the investigation.**

This is also probably why he became known in circles where forensic scientists are rarely known : in police circles.

This, in my mind, is an indication that he had a clear, modern and forward looking vision of the role of forensic science; a vision that many forensic scientists still lack today enconced in their specialist's views of "their" science for the law, rather than science in its broadest sense as a process useful in determining truth (identity, cause, circumstances) as much as possible for the judiciary.

This needs polyvalence, observation capabilities, intelligence, to transform data into meaningful information. Curiosity and the development of a multilingual culture helped make Harry Söderman one of the foremost mind in forensic science.

Not knowing him directly, it is by researching through archives that I started to understand the importance of his contribution and to regret his early disappearance. Forensic scientists of today should be aware of a rich contribution whose validity is still evident some 50 years later!

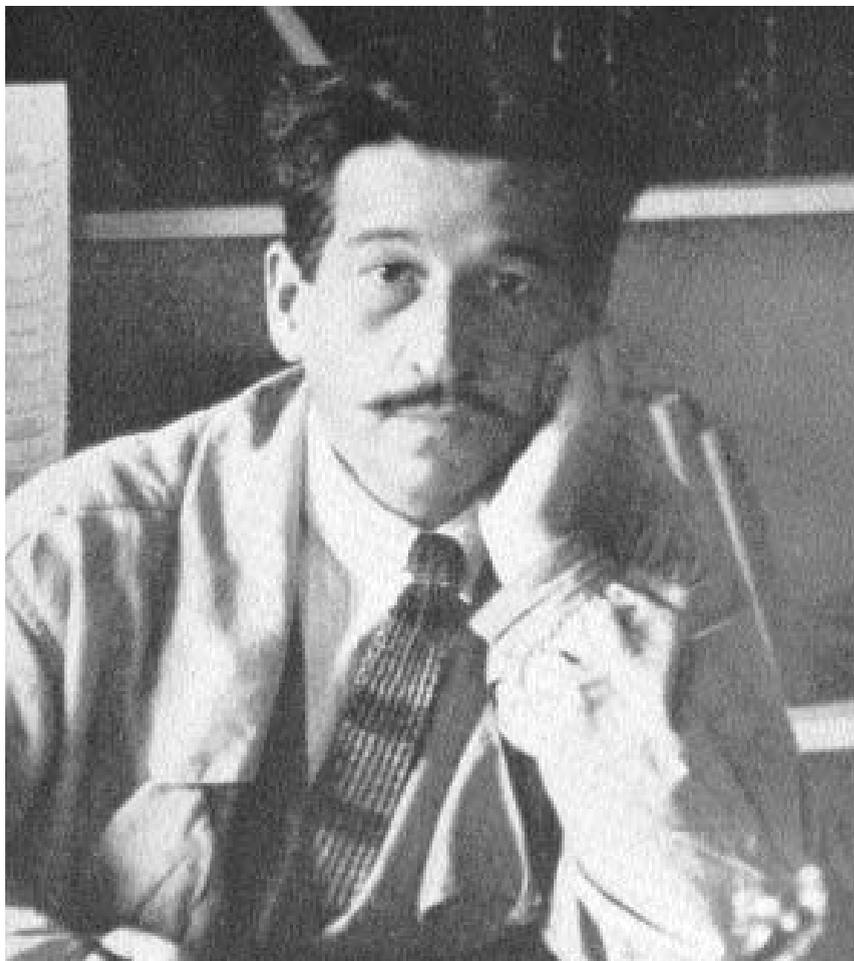
My contribution here is minimal, but shows through anecdotes, notes, contributions by his peers (which do not appear in most published material I have seen in English) how highly regarded Harry Söderman was and how innovative he could be, facing pragmatic problems.

### **Relation to Locard**

It is obvious, throughout his writing, that Harry Söderman had an admiration for Edmond Locard, his thesis director, mentor, colleague, friend.

This relation and admiration can be felt while reading the first 190 pages of the book *Policeman's Lot* (Söderman 1956).

What is less obvious and less well known is that this admiration was reciprocal, arose from the time Harry Söderman was a student of Locard in Lyon, and remained after the dreadful tragedy that split Europeans in WWII. There are two "preface" written by Locard in 1928 (Söderman 1928) and in 1956 (Söderman 1956) that never appear in English editions or versions, but that are telling witnesses of this close relationship. It is perhaps better to start with the preface written in 1956, when Locard learns of the death of his friend. I freely translate the whole preface which I will try to relate to other documents later in this presentation.



Doctor Edmond Locard, the famous head of the forensic laboratory in Lyon, Harry Söderman's friend and tutor, expert on crimes, but also on music and theatre.

"At the very moment I was going to write this preface, I learn with such a deep sorrow, the death of my dear friend Harry Söderman, who disappeared, still very young, when he was going to be able to take, finally, such a well deserved rest.

What a magnificent life he has had, or better, what a story! Harry Söderman, traveller without rest, has not only gone round the vast world, but has explored all the fields of knowledge. I feel honoured to have had him as a student, the most brilliant of all my students. But this great

criminalist has learnt many other things than the art of detecting and confounding criminals. Chemist, graphologist, prodigiously polyglot, enriched by an immense reading, he had accumulated in his unique brain what would have been the richness of twenty elite's intelligences.

Moreover he was a producer/a doer. He had the art of drawing from what he knew for the better good of his friends and others. During the many years he spent near me what I have got to do due to his initiatives! I should say his darings. It is him who,

literally, made me create the *Revue Internationale de Criminalistique*. Beside me, he has pushed to create the *International Academy* that Van ledden Hülsebosch, Popp, Türkel and Bischoff could perhaps not have managed to organise, nor to maintain without him. And how to forget that, when I was backing from the terrifying enterprise of composing the seven volumes of the *Traité de Criminalistique*, it is him who decided a careless editor, my friend Joannès Desvignes, to risk the dangerous adventure "PM addition (Locard 1931)!"

Since then, Harry Söderman has played a historical role where his courage without capitulation joined his spirit of initiative. But at the heat of the action, he never ceased to be a very great criminalist.

Secretary of the *International Commission of Criminal Police*, he insured the liaison between countries. Locally, he has founded for the Scandinavian countries this journal where so many pertinent articles have appeared, among which the bests carried his signature.

With this, always wandering. His letters would enrich a stamp collection: and I was not more surprised to see on his letters the stamp of Tanger rather than that from New York or Stockholm.

Harry Söderman has had the wisest idea when he started to write his memories, as if he had been foreseeing that his days, so full, were counted. I am glad to vouch here that nothing that came out from his pen should be neglected by men who wish to know what can the alloy of such an intelligence combined to such a magnificent energy ."

Edmond Locard (Söderman 1956)



The second preface appears at the beginning of Harry Söderman's thesis and is telling, if not an early admiration of the master for the pupil, at least the clear vision that the pupil was destined for a great future. I leave in the beginning of the preface which demonstrates a facet of Locard's vision of science used in the judicial process.

*"I don't know a more tragic image than that which represents Themis with her eyes covered. I understand well that the ancestors of classical Mediterranean, Greeks and Latins, have wanted to mean by that that Justice did not want to know the purpur of kings, nor the splendour of naked Phrynea.*

*But how not to worry that this bandage, after having saved her from the prestiges that she would risk by imposing her the contemplation of the "greatness of the flesh", as would say Bossuet, would stop her distinguish the narrow road that would take her to the truth. And since, furthermore, she would risk to be deafened in temples where so many people make with their larynx formidable concerts,*

*human Justice, that was already lame according to mythological traditions, would be the real figure of a cripple.*

*Really, she is a dame that there is no charm to frequent. It is better to forget that one was given a leathering than ask her for any compensation or vengeance. This goddess without eyes and hearing, and limping, would certainly add more blows of her own. But if you are accused of having stolen the tower of Notre-Dame, and had not been able to flee prudently in due time, as was the counsel of this wisest amenable person, that Panurge was, one has to think to put ones affairs in order with her. When one has a pure heart, one would like her to see that, and that she took away for one moment her bandage in order to see that well.*

*So has been created the recent myth of a Justice seeing clearly. What do I say, some daring people have dreamt to substitute an acute vision from eyes armed with magnifying glass and microscope to a legendary blindness. One would like a learned Themis who, after having gone through the faculties where one speaks, she had spent some time in those where we learn to observe. So the civil or criminal inquiry has become scientific. And the expert has collaborated with the judge, after helping the policeman.*

*This co-operation has not always been received as enthusiastically as it was offered. One of the most distinguished magistrate who presided the debates with a praiseworthy effort in a difficult case, summarised experts' testimonies in these very careful terms: "when science goes one step forward, truth goes back two steps".*

*Despite this pyrrhonian pessimism, techniques are created that not all magistrate turn up their nose*

*to, nor all amenable persons. And even magistrates, such as Hans Gross and Robert Heindl, have collaborated to these developments. It is true that they are not from our country. And little by little, criminalistics has shown what could be expected from the study of marks, prints, stains, dust, written documents. Among all these problems, that of the identification of firearms is one where the results are the clearest and the most conclusive.*

*Harry Söderman has arrived from Scandinavia to study criminalistics in a French laboratory. I have followed step by step this clear intelligence, helped by a tenacity without shortcomings and the very firm love of work. I believe in the success of only those who join the merit of the character to those of the mind. Harry Söderman is one of them. It is not indifferent that a young man who is dedicated to an intellectual life has started to cross the deserts of Central Asia and to hunt the tiger in the Mekong. Nothing mediocre to expect from him. It is very sweet to me to be the godfather of Harry Söderman at the beginnings of a life which I pretend will be prolific, and to present to the public this first scientific work of a man for whom my esteem equals my affection.*

*This work is first a state of the art. One can find a clear and complete summary of what has been done on short firearms with the criminalistics point of view. It is also to a large extent, the presentation of original and very sound techniques. So this monograph is the most commendable work that exist today on a very important and difficult question. I can recommend it to technicians in conscience"*

*Locard p. V-VII in (Söderman 1928)*

## Harry Söderman, the paradigm of a European

Student in Sweden, then Germany, his knowledge of languages extended to French (as evidenced by his thesis) and English (his activities with O'Connell in New York), a true polyglot he was able to communicate and publish proficiently in all these languages (Söderman 1928; Locard, Söderman et al. 1929; Söderman 1931; Söderman 1938; Söderman and O'Connell 1952), this led him to become one of the most sought after scientist and consultant in matters of forensic science and criminal investigation and one of the most active forensic scientist on the international scene. Made a member of the newly created International Academy of Criminalistics (seat Vienna) in Lausanne (1929) at the early age of 27 (wrongly called International Academy of Criminals Science from Vienna by Larson (Larson 1952)) he became a leading European figure with editorial responsibilities besides Locard in the official organ of the Academy "la Revue Internationale de Criminalistique" (1929 - 1939).

The name of Söderman appears as a contributor to the second general assembly of the Academy in Vienna in 1930, and the typewritten summary appears on page 14 of the notes made by Bischoff. It appears just after a contribution by Heess (Stuttgart) (well known in the field of firearms identification with Mezger and Hasslacher) and before a contribution by Prof Popp (Frankfort a/M). His paper concerned methods applied to the identification of projectiles, cartridge cases and powders. He made the proposal that manufacturers of firearms develop specific signs



PHOTO: LIBRARY OF PIERRE A. MARGOT

*Founders of the Academy: Prof Marc-A. Bischoff, prof Siegfried Türkel, C.J. van Ledden Hülsebosch, Prof G. Popp and Dr Edmond Locard, in Lausanne, 1929.*

that would be identifying marks on fired cartridge cases, and that the system should be compulsory and generalised! It is ironical that in 2001 this was (still?) debated at the UNO in New York in order to be able to trace firearms and their origin!

In the meantime he had founded, with others, the "Nordisk Kriminalteknis Tidskrift" in 1931 (Söderman 1931) and become a professor of criminalistics at the University of Stockholm that same year, also publishing in *Archiv für Kriminologie* (founded by H. Gross) (Locard, Söderman et al. 1929). A

prolific author he also travelled extensively and helped set up or reorganise police laboratories and organisations in many countries (see Larson (Larson 1952) besides his own. Connections with the International Criminal Police Commission before WWII, were revived in 1946 when he became Reporter General to the ICPC with President Louwage, Secretary General Ducloux and two other Reporter General Howe and Müller.

He was still active with the ICPC and had a working meeting with the Directorate of the ICPC still one week before his untimely death.



PHOTO: LIBRARY OF PIERRE A. MARGOT

*The last meeting of the Academy took place again in Lausanne in 1938 and Söderman appears in the official photograph.*



*General Assembly of Interpol, Rome 1954 with Pope Pius XII.*



*The Executive Committee of the ICPC with Ducloux, Harry Söderman, Nepote, Howe, Müller and Lowage in 1947 (above) and in Bern (General Assembly) in 1949 (with Müller and Lowage).*



## **HARRY SÖDERMAN, the doer and crafts- man**

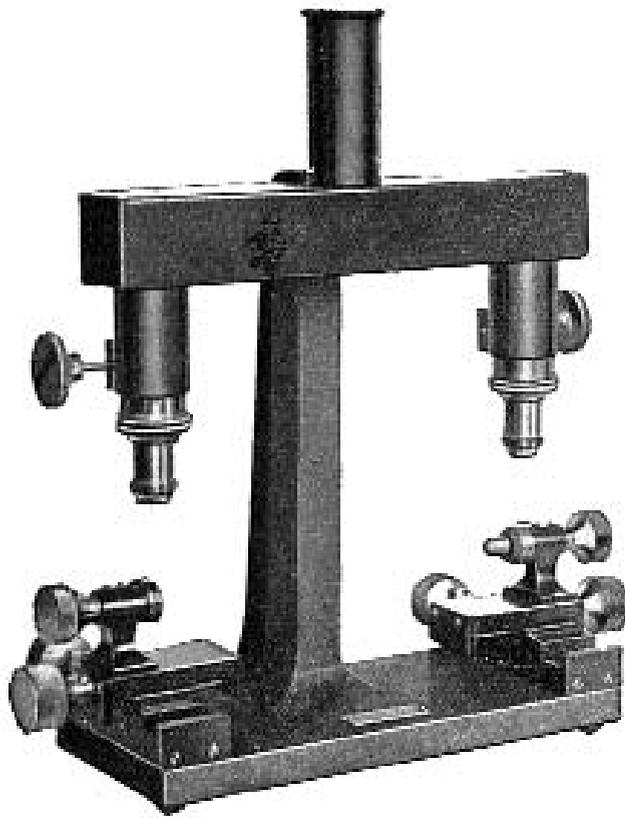
Locard mentions that Harry Söderman was capable of developing, from his ideas and those of others, tools and methods useful in criminalistics.

One such tool was the Hastoscope, based on Goddard's ideas (comparison process in firearms identification, used in the Sacco and Vanzetti's case by Goddard and Waite).

It is an improved comparison microscope with a special sample holder designed to hold bullets horizontally and to turn them around their axis to observe and compare rifling marks. The origin of the name itself is mysterious but my hypothesis is that it came from a contraction of Ha(rry)S(öderman)toscope with the pun that it helps get results much quicker than before (as in haste)..

This became the basis of the development of comparison microscopy in the identification of firearms used in criminal activities (Locard 1929).

Another such development, was the creation of a dust collector connected to an Electrolux vacuum cleaner (Söderman 1931) called thereafter the "Söderman-Heuberger filter", its use was adopted by Locard in its extensive writings about dust (Locard, Söderman et al. 1929).



L'Hastoscope

### Harry Söderman, missions during the war

There is one specific indication that Hastoscope had a mission from the Swedish government in 1942, when he was sent to Switzerland.

There he spent (Feb 1942) a week with the chief of Intelligence in the Swiss army, Colonel Werner Müller (who was to become one of the members of the directorate of the ICPC too), before travelling to Geneva and France where he met, for the last time, his friend and master Locard (Söderman 1956; Söderman 1956) (p. 26).

### Harry Söderman, regular contacts with Bischoff in Lausanne

Unfortunately, personal correspondence of Bischoff does not exist anymore at the IPSC.

Bischoff himself cleared his archives when retiring in 1963, but I could find a few tokens showing contacts with Bischoff starting in 1928 and lasting until Harry Söderman's death in 1956 as evidence by auto-graphed books.

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