

Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu

Johtamisen ja sotilaspedagogiikan laitos

Julkaisusarja 3: Työpapereita nro 2

THE FINNISH DEFENCE FORCES AS PART OF A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Jaakko Valtanen



MAANPUOLUSTUSKORKEAKOULU
JOHTAMISEN JA SOTILASPEDAGOGIIKAN LAITOS
JULKAISUSARJA 3: TYÖPAPEREITA NRO 2

NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY
DEPARTMENT OF LEADERSHIP AND MILITARY PEDAGOGY
SERIES 3: WORKING PAPERS NO. 2

THE FINNISH DEFENCE FORCES AS PART OF A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

JAAKKO VALTANEN

MAANPUOLUSTUSKORKEAKOULU

Johtamisen ja sotilaspedagogiikan laitos

HELSINKI 2017

The Series 3 Working Papers of the Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy of the National Defence University are preliminary works in progress that have been posted or published to stimulate discussion and comments. In addition, they provide information to the general public. The views, opinions, findings, and conclusions expressed in these papers are strictly those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy or the National Defence University. Neither the Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy nor the National Defence University assume responsibility or liability for the statements, opinions or conclusions expressed in these papers. Although checked by the departmental publishing board of the Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy, these working papers have not been through a process of blind peer-review.

Jaakko Valtanen

The Finnish Defence Forces as Part of a Democratic Society

Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, Johtamisen ja sotilaspedagogiikan laitos

Julkaisusarja 3: Työpapereita nro 2

National Defence University,

Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy

Series 3: Working Papers No. 2

Uusimmat julkaisut pdf-muodossa:

<http://www.doria.fi/>

Kannen kuva: Pasi Väättäinen

ISBN 978-951-25-2885-1 (PDF)

ISSN 2489-2769

Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu – National Defence University

Johtamisen ja sotilaspedagogiikan laitos – Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy

THE FINNISH DEFENCE FORCES AS PART OF A DEMOCRATIC SOCIETY

Jaakko Valtanen

General (ret.) Jaakko Valtanen was Chief of Defence (CHOD) of the Finnish Defence Forces between 1983 and 1990. In 1999, General Valtanen held a presentation in Tampere at the concluding seminar of the research project "*Democratic Security Building in the Baltic States*". The research project was organized by the Tampere Peace Research Institute and the University of Aberdeen. All the presentations held at the seminar, in addition to that of General Valtanen, were to be published after the seminar, but this was never done. Even though the presentation is already 17 years old and does not contain source references, the Department of Leadership and Military Pedagogy publishes the presentation, due to its important perspectives vis-à-vis Military Sociology as one of the disciplines of the Department.

1. It is natural that under normal conditions, the role of armed forces in society is always somewhat problematic. The problems are due to the fact that the question is about the position of troops trained and organised to use weapons – in other words an organisation of violence. In societies based on the political role of the armed forces, the position is perhaps “more clear”, but in a democracy the matter is complex. There is a kind of permanent tension between an authoritarian military organisation and a democratic society – especially in peace-time. As to society, the question is thus about enduring something unpleasant but necessary, and of minimising the possible disadvantages caused by it. Even in the Finnish Defence Forces’ role and in its integration into society, the question is precisely about this.

2. From an historical perspective it can be said that until the French Revolution, the armed forces in almost all European countries were established based on enlisted mercenary troops. On the other hand, as early as at the end of the 17th century, a most exceptional system of armed forces

was created in Sweden, of which Finland was a part at the time. The system was called the military tenure establishment. Farmers formed a group of two or more farms with the obligation to provide, in case of war, an equipped soldier for the military units to be established in the area. A tenure soldier was given a croft and arable land in addition to a small sum of money. During peace-time, the tenure soldiers lived and worked among other people. This system made it possible to avoid a rootless mercenary army isolated from the rest of the society.

3. When Finland was annexed to the Russian Empire as a Grand Duchy in 1809, the military tenure establishment was abolished and enlisted troops were formed instead. In 1878, the first Conscription Act came into force in Finland. Under it, military personnel had to be Finnish and the tasks of the armed force were restricted to defending the territory of Finland only. However, for the mother country Russia, a nationally-based army had separatist effects that she considered dangerous. In the early 20th century, the Russification of Finland was start-

ed with harsh measures, and as part of this, the Conscription Act was amended. The measures taken in Finland resulted in refusals to report for service on a large scale when called up. The Russians responded to the Finns' insubordination by disbanding the Finnish Army in 1901. After that there were only some 100,000 Russian soldiers in Finland.

4. Finland's War of Independence of 1918 changed into a bloody Civil War between the so-called Whites and Reds, and it divided the people of Finland deeply and for a long period of time. The political left had a negative attitude towards the Defence Forces of independent Finland, which was formed of the White Army that had won the war. This negative attitude was not unfounded, as conscripts from the left were treated with suspicion.

For this reason, a provision included in Finland's Penal Code in 1922 was of great significance. It prohibited soldiers from engaging in party politics. It promoted the implementation of general conscription and had a positive impact on the internal climate prevailing in the whole society in the 1920's and 1930's.

The so-called Mäntsälä coup, attempted by the extreme right in 1932, measured the social importance of general conscription in a concrete way. The Defence Forces' loyalty to the Government relieved people's minds and contributed to a peaceful solution.

The Winter War that a unanimous nation fought against the Soviet Union in winter 1939-1940 showed how the social development in the 1930's and general conscription had united

different circles of population and removed social animosity dating from 1918. During the Second World War, more than 600,000 men performed their military service within the Finnish Defence Forces. It was natural that at the time it affected the whole society most extensively and almost every Finnish home. Some 100,000 Finnish soldiers died during the war, and of the around 200,000 wounded, over 5,000 were permanently disabled. In relation to the population of 3.5 million at the time, the losses were extremely heavy.

5. After the Second World War, it took a long time before a regular way of life could be resumed. Prior to that, Finland had to pay war reparations to the Soviet Union, resettle half a million war refugees from Karelia, and finish rebuilding Lapland, which had been destroyed by the Germans. In spite of the fact that the Defence Forces' position in society was weak well into the 1960's, general conscription was, however, implemented continuously as provided by law. Every age class received training, and unlike several Central European countries, we had no untrained age classes. The Defence Review Committee of 1945 recommended that general conscription be continued. All political and military reports of later date have arrived at the same conclusion.

6. The conscription system is of course based on the legislation concerning it. Finland's Constitution provides that all citizens have the general liability to participate in the defence of their native country and that all males are liable for military service. On the other hand, the Conscription Act decrees how this liability is implemented and the general rights and responsibilities of a soldier. There is a separate

Act on unarmed and civilian service, and provisions on conscientious objectors. The Act on Voluntary Military Service for Women came into force in 1994.

7. Although the Finnish Defence Forces have a tradition of general conscription dating back to the days of the military tenure establishment, and clear legislation concerning conscription, they are by no means the only factors integrating the Defence Forces into society.

As I have already said, the military organisation has been, and still is, an authoritarian system built according to the requirements of possible war and combat. Besides authoritarianism, military discipline, based on special regulations, and using sanctions and punishments, is a typical characteristic of a military organisation. When the system has to function in situations where there is a contradiction between the implementation of the task, as it is based on the advantage of the whole, and the mortal danger the individual is confronting, discipline based on obedience must make troops act in the right way. For this reason the military organisation uses, in addition to sanctions, a great number of norms, symbols and modes of behaviour with a unifying function. It should also be noted that the structures and features of military organisations are similar throughout the world. The differences in the social systems have barely affected them.

Societies are, however, in a constant state of change. There have been especially great changes in the individual's position and rights in democratic societies. While the individual citizen's rights and position are emphasised in society, in the military organisation the

stress lies on the troops that are the target of the training. Class distinctions are blurred in society, while a strict hierarchy prevails in the military organisation. In society, the possibility to select and influence is improved, whereas the military organisation requires obedience. In society, permissibility and the approval of difference is increased, while military education aims at uniformity, and so on.

8. Even in a democratic society, the most important interest regarding the defence forces is that the establishment fulfils the task given to it and uses the resources allocated to it correctly. In other words, the defence forces have to prepare to defend the country and its citizens in case of a possible war. Essential factors are the security policy pursued by the country and possible military crisis and threat factors. The threat analysis whereupon the activity of the Finnish Defence Forces is based, as well as the assessment of the resources needed by the Defence Forces have been made in parliamentary committees during the last three decades. In them, members of parliament and elected political officials of all parties – the opposition of the time as well – together with security-policy and military experts have been engaged in assessing the most probable threat scenarios. The Act on the Defence Forces and the requirements set on the performance of the services, arms of service and branches are examples of the results of these assessments. Based on reports on security and defence policy (white papers), Finnish Parliament has allocated the appropriations needed to maintain and develop the Defence Forces. The level of appropriations is low in international comparison, but for decades, largely thanks to the parliamentary reports, the Finnish Defence Forces

have not been the object of significant party-political disputes regarding economic questions.

9. The second interest of society regarding the Defence Forces is that it also obeys, in addition to other laws, legislation on freedom of religion among citizens. In Finland, ever since the 1920's, it has been possible to substitute armed service with unarmed service in the Defence Forces or with civilian service in establishments of public administration. Only for Jehovah's Witnesses is it possible to be exempted from military service by using a process of deferment for a period of about 10 years. Due to the liberal legislation, the total number of those that perform substitute service and of conscientious objectors has remained fairly low in Finland. For the time being, the number of conscientious objectors has not become a social or military problem, but the increase in the number wishing to perform civilian service could be a symptom of the direction that the development has taken.

10. The third factor integrating the Finnish Defence Forces into society is the fact that military personnel are not allowed to participate in party politics. Regular military personnel have the right to cast their vote in national elections of course, but they cannot be members of political parties. This is not prohibited for conscripts and reservists, but they cannot be engaged in party politics while wearing uniform, while within barracks areas or while on duty. This prohibition dates back to the events of 1918. The prohibition is perhaps somewhat strange in a democracy, but it has had a levelling effect in several crisis situations in our society. Although the expediency of the prohibition to be engaged in poli-

tics has been discussed from time to time, Parliament has repeatedly retained this legal provision because of the positive effect that it has on the integration of the Defence Forces into society. However, some kind of mitigation of these provisions is presently under preparation.

On the other hand, the professional organisation of military personnel and their membership in labour market organisations has not been restricted in Finland. Regular personnel are members of national interest and labour organisations through their own unions. In military units there are so-called Conscript Committees, whose representatives are elected by the conscripts themselves. The objective of the committees is to improve the conscripts' service conditions and to promote their other interests. The Union of Conscripts operates outside the Defence Forces as a free civic organisation.

11. The fourth factor having an impact on the Defence Forces' relationship with society is the leadership and political control system that is in use. This system differs from the ones used in most other countries. While the highest administrative and also military authority of the Defence Forces is generally vested in the Minister in democracies, in Finland the President of the Republic is the Supreme Commander. The Chief of Defence as holder of military authority is directly subordinate to the President. The Chief of Defence is directly responsible to the President for the Defence Forces' military readiness, equipment, training, mobilisation and other matters related to defence. The status of the Minister of Defence is, of course, politically important. The Minister is in charge of appropriations,

legislation, construction, social affairs, etc. concerning the Defence Forces. The “dualism” of our system also originates in the serious events of our independence. It has functioned well until now, and for its part, it has strengthened the non-political character of our Defence Forces, and thereby also the approval of our system among all circles of the population. Recently, however, in connection with the reform of Finland’s Constitution, there has been discussion on the authority of the President of the Republic and the Chief of Defence.

The Defence Council, where the majority of members are Government Ministers, and the parliamentary Defence Committee also exercise political control over the Defence Forces. In Finland the internal legality control of the Defence Forces is exercised by the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

12. The fifth influential factor is the Finnish system, which differs from the practice in many other countries. In Finland, conscripts entering service remain in their units for the first training period of 2 to 3 months as uniform, “equal” units. There the young men coming from different social and educational backgrounds learn to know each other and they all experience the conditions and pressures of the same military system. The friendly relations established in the first training period, as well as the relations between future leaders and their subordinates, have proved to improve the team spirit and to have a positive effect on the capability of the organisation to function well. The positive effects were clearly seen in the wartime years and have been seen even in the social life of peacetime.

Aptitude tests for conscripts are carried out in many countries, and also the Finnish Defence Forces conduct them in order to find suitable placements and tasks for the men. Because the training during the first months is adjusted according to the average level of learners, the more knowledgeable and advanced conscripts are often frustrated. It would of course be easy to place the conscripts in training groups of different levels according to their previous education and training, as well as aptitude tests. However, because of the positive social effects of the current system, there has been no interest in adopting this kind of placement system.

13. The sixth factor, which may be the most controversial one in integrating the Defence Forces into society, is the attitude of citizens towards the special features of the military organisations. As individualism and the choices available to the individual have increased, new problematic issues have arisen. They are largely caused by the reduced capacity of modern youth for tolerating norms that restrict their individualism. A number of factors causing mental pressure, which are related to the changes taking place in society, may find an outlet in the strange, new and sometimes even hard life experienced in the military.

During the past decade it has been seen that scheduled service tasks, requirements of punctual and uniform behaviour, restricted freedom of movement and penalties as a result of breaking these rules have led to an increase in conflict situations and mental disorders. Another element putting strain on the Defence Forces even today is hazing by older servicemen. A great deal of work has been done to root this out, but it has found

more and more subtle forms. Although the number of reported cases is very low today, preventive work is continued since derogatory behaviour towards one's fellow men finds less and less understanding in our society.

14. Finally, I would like to discuss an aspect that is important for the integration of a defence forces into a democratic society. The tasks of the Finnish Defence Forces as prescribed by law include the defence of the prevailing judicial system and the living conditions of citizens. Although this naturally refers to repelling an external threat in wartime, the statue has sometimes been interpreted as if it also meant repelling internal threats against the social order. I would like to point out that all assistance, including maintaining order, shall always happen under the leadership of the civilian authorities. Anti-riot training has never been given to soldiers by the Defence Forces.

15. Distinguished participants, I hope you do not misunderstand me when I say that also according to outside estimates we Finns have succeeded quite well in adjusting our armed forces to being an organic part of our democratic society. This is shown, for example, in that our citizens have tolerated and understood rather well the military organisation, which by its very nature is undemocratic. According to opinion polls carried out over several decades, over 80 % of Finns have expressed their positive attitude towards defence almost irrespective of how the questions have been posed. The geographic location of Finland has understandably contributed to the positive result. It is natural, however, that the Defence Forces are subjected to continuous observation and control by society. Critical statements are pub-

lished almost on a daily basis in the media. This is a sign of a functioning democratic system.

16. It is understandable that the "democratisation process" of the Defence Forces has not taken place without friction. The changes in the status of the conscript have sometimes been seen as a threat to the superior's authority and rights and to the maintenance of good military discipline and order. It is difficult to simulate the conditions of battle and war and their requirements in a secure peacetime situation. Therefore, soldiers have been motivated in different ways to absolute obedience, which is necessary in a battle, as strange as this may be to the young people of today.

Conscription ties the Defence Forces to society. Conscripts bring with them their outlook on life as well as social variation. As a matter of fact, through conscripts, society is ever present in the Defence Forces where it controls and observes the functions of the organisation and provides stimuli for its development. In this sense, conscription can be seen as democracy's way of guaranteeing that the armed forces are not used against the will of the people and democratically elected state bodies.


17. Like armed forces in other countries, the Finnish Defence Forces face continuously differing challenges and pressures. They are generated both by changes in security policy and the inner development within societies. The social pressure on the Defence Forces reflects the changes in people's values, of which the development of individualism and individualistic thinking is perhaps the most influential. Because of the nature of their tasks, the Defence Forces are always to a certain

degree a closed community, restricting the life of a private individual through their organisation and set of norms. The appearance of so-called “soft values” also has an effect on the activities of the Defence Forces; they question the goals and importance of a military organisation and arouse criticism amongst the general public against the methods of the military organisation and the values it represents.

For conscription, and thereby for the functioning of the entire defence system, it is vital that the Defence Forces continue to take into account the new phenomena in society and aim at adapting to them in a way that does not give rise to conflict with the goals that citizens see as important. On the other hand, the Defence Forces have to make sure that the requirements of military activities are clearly defined. Conscription is, even with some shortcomings, the most important defence potential of a small country. In addition, it is the most economical and the most suitable system for a democratic society.

Previously Published in This Series

Kouri, Suvi (2017) *Elämäkertatutkimus – totta vai tarua? Elämäkertatutkimus ja sen käyttö sosiologiassa*. Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu, Johtamisen ja sotilaspedagogiikan laitos Julkaisusarja 3: Työpapereita nro 1. [<http://urn.fi/URN:ISBN:978-951-25-2859-2>]



Maanpuolustuskorkeakoulu
Johtamisen ja sotilaspedagogiikan laitos
PL 7
00861 HELSINKI

ISBN 978-951-25-2885-1 (PDF)
ISSN 2489-2769



Puolustusvoimat
The Finnish Defence Forces