

Selection, Training and Repatriation of Finnish PSO-Personnel

MSc Antero Johansson*, Lt (N) Markku Laine** and Col, M.D. (retired) Matti Ponteva***

* Finnish Defence Forces Education Development Centre, Behavioral Sciences Division

** Finnish Defence Forces International Centre, SO Trg Div (KFOR)

*** Finnish Defense Forces Central Military Hospital

INTRODUCTION

The Finns have taken part in peacekeeping activities since 1956. Since 1969 some 31,000 persons have served on peace support operations (PSO's), i.e. approximately 900 to 1,000 persons per year. The largest contingents have served in Cyprus (1964-77), Sinai (1973-79), Golan (1979-93), South Lebanon (1982-2002), Namibia (1989-90) and the former Yugoslavia (1992-). The exact number of Finns serving on PSO's in April 2003 was 971. The major part of them serve in Kosovo (820) and Bosnia (78). The rest are deployed in Africa and The Far and Middle East.

SELECTION AND TRAINING

The Finnish Defense Forces International Centre (FINCENT) is responsible for the selection, training and rotation of all Finnish PSO-troops. FINCENT was established in 2001.

Finland has no peacetime units for PSO's. Every person entering a PSO-mission is a volunteer. The main part (90%) of the personnel on PSO-missions is drawn from reservists with a suitable civilian training. The remaining 10% are regulars. They are also volunteers.

The number of applicants (Fig.1) for PSOs has steadily declined since the recession years 1992-1993 from 10,000 per year to some 4,500 in 2000-2003. About 2,500-3,000 are accepted for duty and offered a 1+1- year standby contract. Of these a thousand will enter the service each year.

Selection criteria

Selection criteria include passing the national military training with a 4/5 rank in field worthiness and a 4/5 efficiency rating plus good health and a suitable civilian training for the mission. Personality and ability tests were introduced to the selection criteria in 1984. General ability and emotional stability are assessed during the military training. General ability rating must be at least 4/9 and emotional stability at least average. In addition the applicant must have a suitable civilian training and a work history but no criminal record. Some exceptions apply to the female medical personnel. In their case no military training is required but for the other criteria they are assessed during the application process and the training.

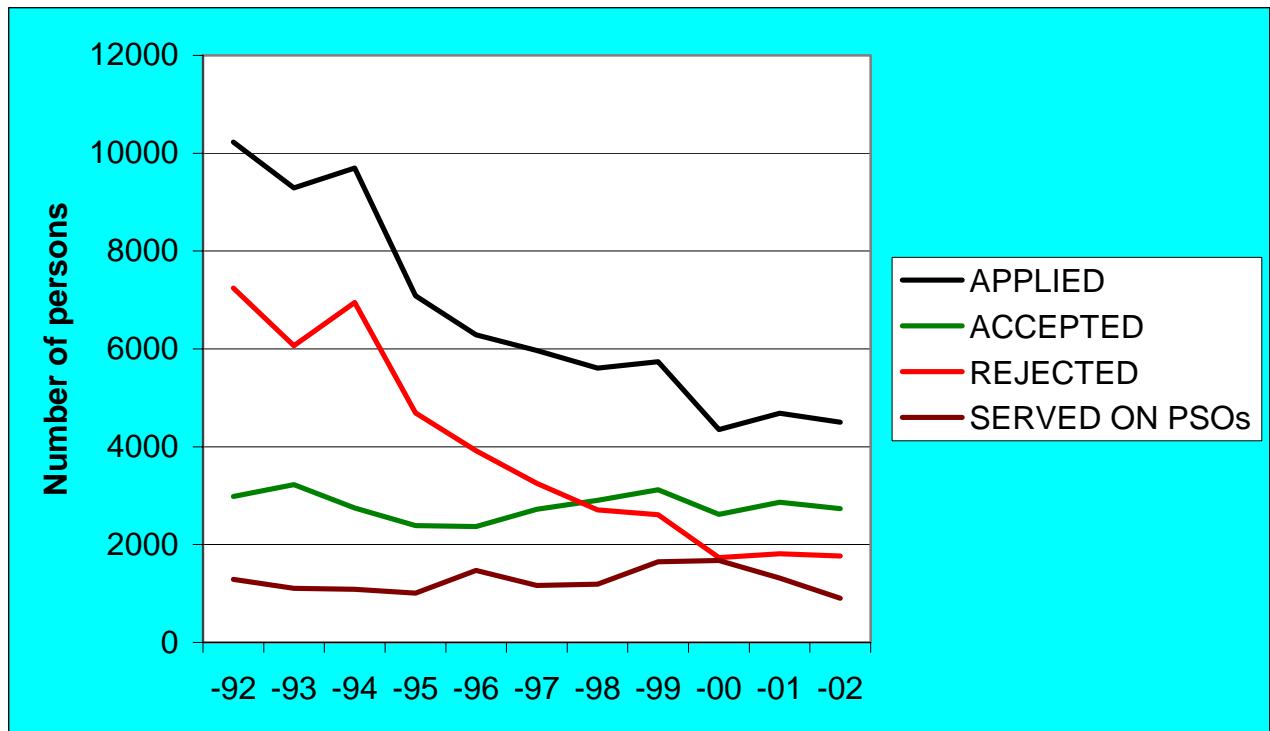


Figure 1. Number of applicants, accepted, rejected and those that served on PSOs 1992–2002.

Training

FINCENT plans, coordinates, arranges resources and executes all training. For every mission (e.g. KFOR, SFOR, ISAF) there is a desk officer who is responsible for the training. Instructors helping him have service experience in mission including current KFOR, SFOR and ISAF. Role-players in the Theatre-Specific Training (see below) are experienced peacekeepers.

All get a three week basic training package; special groups and key personnel get one extra week. By “special groups” is meant: officers, senior NCOs and specialists such as medical, technical and administrative personnel. All special groups have their own training

Officers and senior NCOs are trained by Theatre-Specific Training in e.g. mission briefings, negotiation and use of interpreters. They are also given extra instruction in live firing and operative planning.

The main body remains on training for three weeks. These three weeks include two days of instruction on law and conduct, one day for communications, map reading etc. and seven days of platoon training including mine awareness, weapon training, patrolling, medical training etc. Practical exercises take eight days. These include a training route (2 days), live firing (2 days) and operational exercises (4 days).

The training route has five positions: 1) foot patrol ambushed, 2) minefield/UXO, evacuation, 3) VPC under fire when inspecting, 4) vehicle patrol ambushed, and 5) hand grenade incident site. Live firing includes several different weapons: heavy and light machine guns, pistols, shotguns and mortar. In addition there are practical exercises in mine awareness. Operational exercises include basic incidents, use of interpreters, escort, guard duty, search operations and co-operation with different other troops and groups (e.g. GO's, NGO's, civilian police etc.).

REPATRIATION

By 1996, Finnish men and women had served some 34,000 periods in the UN forces as peacekeepers or observers. For the period 1969 – 1996 their number was 26,295. Of these men and women 7 % interrupted their service (Table 1). Almost two of three interrupters did so by their own request and slightly less than one third were considered as not fitted. Poor health was the reason in less than 9 % of the cases. There was approximately one death per year.

Reason	N	% of causes	% of all in service
Own request	1040	56,7	4,0
Not fitted	558	30,4	2,1
Poor health	159	8,7	0,6
Death	26	1,4	0,1
Data lacking	52	2,8	0,2
Total	1835	100,0	7,0

Table 1. Cause of repatriation 1969 – 1996. Official data (adapted from Ponteva et al., 2000).

Ponteva et al. (2000) studied the reasons of repatriation by questionnaire. They sent questionnaires to 1,692 interrupters and 1,745 controls in the 1969-1996 cohort. The response rates were 64% and 77% respectively. They asked the interrupters whether they repatriated due to the superior's initiative or their own. The figures are given in Table 2. The sum of percentages in Table 2 is more than 100% indicating that either the interrupters did not remember the reason correctly or that in some cases the initiative may have been a joint one.

THE SUPERIOR'S INITIATIVE	N	%	OWN INITIATIVE	N	%
			Economic, positive	208	19,5
Crime or offence	153	14,3	Economic, negative	13	1,2
Abuse of alcohol	108	10,1	Family, positive	128	12,0
Difficulties in adaptation	9	0,8	Family, negative	138	12,9
Trauma or disease	34	3,2	Difficulties in adaptation	37	3,5
Mental disorder	10	0,9	Health problems	63	5,9
Other cause	60	5,6	Other cause	197	18,5
Total	374	34,9	Total	784	73,5

Table 2. Cause of repatriation 1969 – 1996, own opinion (adapted from Ponteva et al., 2000).

The research by Ponteva et al. gives a slightly different picture of the reasons than the official statistics. The proportion of own requests is much larger and the reasons more variable over all. There is probably a selective bias in the answers. Those answering the questionnaire were probably those that had less or minor problems in their lives and those not answering were the ones that were experiencing more serious problems. This conclusion is supported by the fact that of the 1,830 people in each of the groups 160 persons in the interrupter group were unattainable by mail due to death, living abroad, mail returned or having an unknown address whereas only 94 persons in the control group were unattainable by mail.

Reason	N	% of causes	% of all in service	Own request	N	% of causes	% of all in service
Own request	623	82,6	7,9	Personal reasons	325	43,1	4,1
Not fitted	88	11,7	1,1	Got a job	191	25,3	2,4
Poor health	39	5,2	0,5	Family affairs	86	11,4	1,1
Death	4	0,5	0,1	Studies	21	2,8	0,3
Total	754	100,0	9,6	Total	623	82,6	7,9

Table 3. Cause of repatriation 1997 – 2002. Official data.

Probably due to improved selection and training procedures the proportion of those not fitted has steadily decreased during the later years (Table 3). During the period 1997-2002 less than 12% of the repatriations were due to adaptation/conduct problems and some 5% due to poor health. The overall number of repatriations has risen from 7,0% to 9,6% probably due to a more liberal policy towards repatriations as seen from the right-hand side of Table 3. Getting a job or starting studies were the reasons in 28,1% of the repatriations. There were no suicides during the 1985-2002 period.

DISCUSSION

Finland has a long history in peacekeeping operations. The nature of the Finnish participation has been traditional peacekeeping and the tempo of operations has usually remained low, but sometimes the onset of the operation has been rapid and during many operations stressful periods have occurred. However, the negative effects of UN peacekeeping service have remained considerably low (Ponteva 2000), even internationally as measured by the UN peacekeepers stress test (1995).

There are probably several reasons for the low figures of repatriation. The first is the above mentioned participation in traditional peacekeeping operations which for the most part do not give rise to high stress. However some higher stress levels have been observed among younger peacekeepers in Kosovo (Ponteva 2000).

The second reason is probably the fact that all Finnish peacekeepers are volunteers. They are selected from among a larger group of persons fulfilling the set requirements. Based on their training they also know where they are going and what they are supposed to do and how to do it.

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