



WEEKEND

TO WRITE THE NOTICE OF LOSS ON HIS SOUL

On 6 February 2018, I was in PyeongChang, South Korea. Specifically, in the Olympic Village Dining Hall where McDonald's had its counter. I had ordered in a Chili Chicken Burger. crowns0 was written on the receipt - everything was free with an accreditation badge around my neck. In five days' time I was due to compete in the 5 metre 000skate, but today I do push-ups. I had the biggest challenge of my life ahead of me. In just two weeks I was going to the KP (supplementary examination, ed. note) at the Army Hunter Battalion.

I was one of the recruits140 who moved in that June11, in a place mainly characterized by mosquitoes and bogs.Glowing140 souls reflected the light of the sun that never went down. We fell in line, we did our best. Not to do right, but not to do wrong.

During the second week of training, we stood on the squadron field and watched as the fighter platoons loaded the buses that would take them to the firing range. No bus came to us in the reinforcement platoon. In our ranks were dragoons40 with black bags under their eyes and combat packs on their backs. In front of the line was Sergeant Major Henriksson, with a rucksack much larger than ours. Later it was revealed that it contained sandbags which he carried for exercise.

GOT NO CREDIT

We walked along roads and paths before we set out the targets at the Rälsmålsbanan at Arvidsjaur shooting range. At the end of the day, Henriksson took us on a trip over the Robot Mountain on the way home. There he explained that in the reinforcement squad would have to climb all the peaks of the firing range before the summer

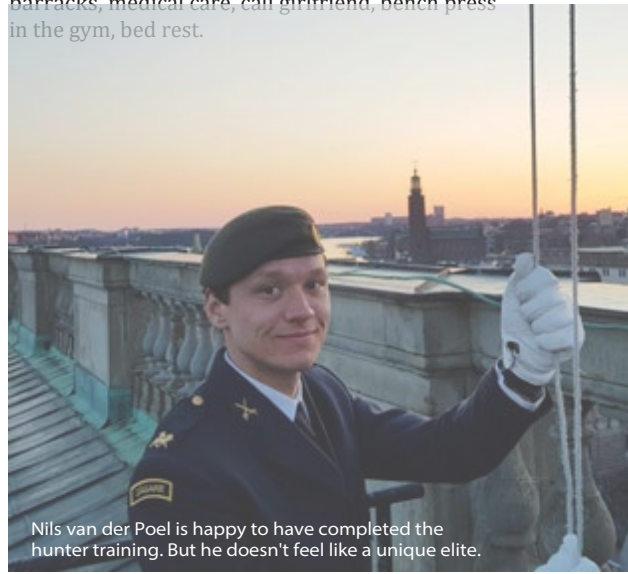
school was over.

The procedure was repeated day after day in the following weeks. We never got any credit for marching more than the others, but it straightened my back in a significant way.

Henriksson knew what he was doing. He created toughness, pride and inspiration. But above all: he led.

Everyone did their best in the first few months. At the end of the summer, we would be assigned to our positions based on our performance

barracks, medical care, call girlfriend, bench press
in the gym, bed rest.



Nils van der Poel is happy to have completed the hunter training. But he doesn't feel like a unique elite.

so far. I didn't really care what position I would get, all I wanted was to be placed on a hunter's platoon. But I didn't want to be a signalman, the signalmen were the bottom of the barrel. The ones who weren't good enough to be squad leaders, who couldn't shoot and weren't trusted with medical service.

When summer school was over, I was placed as a signalman on a hunter platoon. Feverishly I hunted for receipts at night and my disdain for the liaison service quickly disappeared. The backpack was the heaviest and it sucked to crawl out of the tent in the middle of the night to work the antenna - sucked in a very satisfying way.

But it bothered me that the other signalmen were so good. Couldn't someone just give up for me?

DARKER AND DARKER DAYS

The days in Lapland grew darker, as did the eyes of the recruits that had previously reflected the sun's rays. Finally, we could no longer see the sun. The backpacks became heavier than I had dared to imagine.

The days were set: morning routine, deployment, wipe toothpaste off the roof of the mouth on the ensign's orders, march to the firing range, wait, freeze, conduct exercise, freeze, march to

going way too late. Repeat.

When the Christmas holidays came, we were still recruiting¹²⁵. Our motivation was blown away. Almost everyone had made it. "A unique elite" was written on the placards at the dining hall of Detachment Norrlands Dragoner. I guess we were, but I didn't feel unique, most of the time I felt cold.

It was at its toughest when we came in from the exercises. We were hugely sleep-deprived, but not hugely enough to feel unique. The Reinforcement Platoon soldiers had always slept the least, their infiltration was always the longest, and they looked like something out of an apocalypse when we met them in the medical facilities.

Our rucksacks were a few kilos heavier, but we in the hunting platoons had hardly anything to complain about. We had walked far and carried heavy, but not far enough and not heavy enough for anyone to choose to put their pack down and give up. Almost everyone made it. Even the littlest guys were able to carry their packs and two girls from the hill eventually got their hunting bows as well.

Almost no one gave up, but my motivation probably needed it. My ego was too big and my peers too strong.

ASKS FOR NEW LIGHT AND SOUL

At the beginning of spring I wrote my first loss report. I had lost my lamp and couldn't find it. In an attempt to get my AFSE (Notification of Lost Injured Self-judgment, ed. note) through, I took a humorous approach and filled out the form with a vivid description of how I lost my lamp and my soul.

"... I have long longed to set out on a long march to find them, but such a march has not yet taken place. I hope now instead that you can provide me with new ones..."

The following week, I was visited by the tutor who gave me the field edition of the New Testament. I had to do without a lamp.

My report was written as a joke, but a part of me died there at Arvidsjaur's southern firing range. The part of me that froze with the searing chafes and aching shoulders. The part of me

" That part of my soul lies buried at the bottom of a pond, polluting the water for future generations."

LACKED PRIDE

I was a good soldier, it says so in my service records. But unfortunately, I was not always a proud soldier. After headquarters cancelled our final ski march due to too cold weather, I was indifferent to the ceremony where we were awarded the hunter's bow. We were compensated with other tough moments during the final exercise, but pride could not be compensated.

There I was, standing in a line, with one of the finest Defence Force training badges on my shoulder, feeling just like everyone else. How I wished we could have gone on a long march - long enough for a couple of us would have dropped the backpack and resignedly said "I don't give a shit about this!". How I wished that one day the command would

have stood in front of the troop and separated one third. Perhaps then I would have been proud enough to feel like a unique elite too. Maybe I would have tried my hardest to be a pioneer. Maybe I would have volunteered to take the toughest post passes. Maybe I could have inspired someone to take a detour via Ro- botberget, just to see the view.



ego that hoped I was unique in doing something the others couldn't. That part of my soul lies buried at the bottom of a pond, polluting the water for future generations of recruits.

The military service in the Army's Hunter Battalion is the most demanding thing I have done. I don't understand why almost nobody gave up, but I'm glad to be among those who did. I love my comrades and I am eternally grateful to my commanders. Every day I miss the backpack, the comradeship and the task.

Dragon VAN425

Nils van der Poel is one of Sweden's greatest skating talent ever. until 2018 he took 2020 a break from his sporting career to concentrate on the Olympics. Among other things, he did his military service in Arvidsjaur. In February he won

sensationally won two World Cup golds - Sweden's first since 1976 - and set a new world record in the metres 10000.

