

Why Make a Special Platoon for Women? An assessment of *The Jegertroppen* at the Norwegian Special Operations Commando (NORSOC)

Frank Brundtland Steder and Nina Rones
Instituttveien 20, 2027 Kjeller
Author Address
NORWAY

Frank.steder@ffi.no Nina.Rones@ffi.no

ABSTRACT

In 2014, the Norwegian Special Operations Commando (NORSOC) established a pilot project named Jegertroppen (The Hunter Troop) to recruit more women for operative military service. This unusual approach, integration of women by separating men and women during education, brought national and international attention, including admiration and wonder. This article explores why NORSOC segregated male and female operators, and assess the effectiveness of the segregated approach for recruiting, selecting, and retaining female operators.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Ever since the dissolution of the union between Norway and Sweden in 1905 has Norwegian women been organized and participated in Norwegian Armed Forces (NorAF). The positive experience with women in NorAF during the Second World War gradually formed the modern role of the Norwegian military leaders as promoters of women in the armed forces, especially in non-combat positions. With more women in non-combat positions, more men could be recruited to combat positions (Steder, 2015).

However, this rather opportunistic version of a gender based resource allocation management model was not agreed upon with the Norwegian politicians. Despite some drawbacks every now and then in the principle discussions that followed in the postwar period, there was a positive trend for more equal treatment of men and women as well as increased opportunities for women in NorAF. Forty years after the end of World War II, in 1985, the Norwegian Armed Forces, as one of the first NATO countries, opened up all military positions to both men and women (Steder, 2015).

One remaining and major issue to resolve was equal terms in regards to military service for men and women. NorAF had more or less practiced military conscription for men since 1814 and opened up all positions for voluntary women in 1985. After the end of the cold war the number of male conscripts slowly dropped to an all-time low in 2002 which boosted the principal discussion of equal treatment in regards to military service. Finally, in 2013, the Norwegian politicians decided to change current practice and introduced the selective gender neutral conscription service in Norwegian Armed Forces, expected to be fully implemented by fall of 2016. All men and women at the age of 17 are to complete a self-assessment and later evaluated, interviewed and tested (cognitive and physically) by the Norwegian Armed Forces (Køber, 2017). Only those who are found eligible and motivated, currently about 10-15 percent of the cohort, will be selected for 1-year military service. After this one year basic training period they are free to apply for a position as profession soldier or further military education.

Despite the fact that all military positions has been open for qualified Norwegian women since 1985, the share of women has always been low or absent in the combat units. About one year after the political

decision to introduce selective gender neutral conscription in NorAF, the commanders of the *Norwegian Special Operations Commando (NORSOC)* decided to introduce an all-female platoon; *Jegertroppen* (The Hunter troop). This decision generated a rather binary debate. How can the Norwegian Armed Forces promote selective gender neutral conscription at the same time as they are establishing an all-female platoon, denying men to participate?

This article will examine the main reasons for why NORSOC chose to organize a separate (pilot) platoon for women only. Then it will be explored whether the Jegertroppen, that is a pilot project that ends in 2019, seems to be a good approach and measure to recruit, select and retain women for combat positions. Why did women apply to the Jegertroppen and what were their expectations of the 1-year military service? Given that gender-differentiated physical requirement, special treatment and affirmative action for women have been considered by many to be unfair, how does it feel to complete a separate selection process and serve in a separate platoon for women? And finally, it will be looked into their motivation and desire for future military service. It will also be explained how the “gender-segregated selection and education” was organized, and why it was organized this way.

2.0 THE JEGERTROPPE; A PILOT PROJECT BASED ON NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCES

The Jegertroppen – the all-female SOF-platoon – is one of three platoons in the Training Wing at NORSOC. In addition to *Jegertroppen*, the Training Wing consists of the “traditional” *Fallskjermjegertroppen* (Paratrooper Platoon) and the more advanced 2nd-year education for SOF-operators¹. *The Fallskjermjegertroppen* was established in 1965 and recruits conscripted soldiers to undergo their first year of military service. To become part of *The Fallskjermjegertroppen* one needs to complete a physically and mentally demanding selection process where as little as one percent of the total number of applicants is taken up as aspirants in the platoon. *The Fallskjermjegertroppen* opened formally for women in 1985 when all positions in the Norwegian Armed Forces (NorAF) opened for women. Some women have attended the rigorous selection competition, but no women have won a position among the selected few in this hard competition. This is the main reason for why *The Jegertroppen* was established in 2014 as a separate platoon for women only (Rones & Steder, 2017).

Jegertroppen is in many ways a unique and groundbreaking project, and the platoon has gained a lot of media attention; both nationally and internationally. For example, an article in *Foreign Affairs* declared that *Jegertroppen* is "the world's first all-female special forces" and "the world's first all-female military training program" (Braw, 2016). However, this is a truth with some modifications.

Women have been used for special and secret operations in relationship building, intelligence gathering and analysis, reconnaissance, human intelligence, courier service and sabotage for many years (Aleksijevich, 2014; Hatledal, 2011; Lemmon, 2015). Several countries have also had own units and/or training programs for women within the special forces, and one can find mention of such capabilities from South Korea, China, and Russia. Furthermore, we know that The United Kingdom has extensive experience with female operators in the Special Operations Executive (SOE) during WW2² as well as in their Special Reconnaissance Regiment since 1973³, and Lemmon (2015) show that the United States has used women in so-called Cultural Support Teams, in support of their special operations.

¹ Counter terrorism (CT), Direct Action (DA), Special Reconnaissance (SR) and Military Assistance (MA). In order to start this education one must complete another rigorous set of selection tests.

² See: <https://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/HistoryofBritain/The-Female-Spies-Of-SOE/>

³ See: <http://www.eliteukforces.info/special-reconnaissance-regiment/> and <http://www.eliteukforces.info/the-det/>

In short, female special operators are not a new thing. However, their stories and contributions are rarely known or written about and often the women have been put in service without operational training before deployment and operations (Aleksijevich, 2014; Hatledal, 2011; Lemmon, 2015). Given this history of women in the military, especially in the special operations and intelligence community, it can be said that what's new and sensational about *Jegertroppen* is that NORSOC establishes a separate education for women at the same time as it is known to the public⁴.

2.1 Method and data collection

When we studied *The Jegertroppen* in the first three years of its existence we found it useful to use a mixed-method approach (Creswell, 2008; Creswell & Clark, 2010). In this period, both *The Jegertroppen* and *The Fallskjermjegertroppen* participated. Parts of the longitudinal survey have been in common with the Army Brigade survey (Hanson, Steder & Kvalvik, 2016). It gave us a great opportunity to compare the (quantitative) answers from the respondents in *The Jegertroppen* with female respondents in NorAFs Army Brigade.

This article is using only parts of the collected data material and will refer to the selected and used quotes, interviews and data material from report written in Norwegian (Rones and Steder, 2017). Whether the gender-segregated approach is a good measure to educated women has been discussed in two other articles (Rones, 2017 and Rones & Steder, in review), while this article is dedicated to the issue of female recruitment, selection, and retention.

3.0 WHY DID NORSOC CHOOSE TO SEPARATE MEN AND WOMEN?

The Jegertroppen appears, at first glance, the *Fallskjermjegertroppen's* female twin. On the surface, the purpose of the two platoons seems the same. A year in the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* prepares the soldiers for the selection process to the more advanced Special Forces education (the following year – if selected), but this is not the goal for *The Jegertroppen*. So, what is the goal?

The first time *The Jegertroppen* was made official to the public was at a conference in May 2013. The arguments used at the establishment of *The Jegertroppen* were that NORSOC is not diverse enough. *We are a male-dominated unit consisting of members with similar backgrounds* said the NORSOC commander Eirik Kristoffersen when he received the Chief of Defence (CHOD) equality award in 2014 (Forsvaret, 2014) and continued:

We seek increased flexibility and increased understanding of tomorrow's challenges. I think that increased diversity can contribute to this. Having said that, we have experienced in a number of conflict areas, among other in Afghanistan, that there is a specific need for women on the front line (Forsvaret, 2014).

Kristoffersen also pointed out that "the need for women has proved particularly clear in the work of training the Afghan Special Police Unit", a separate unit with female special police officers. In NORSOCs mentoring work with this police force, it proved to be absolutely necessary with "*Female mentors to assist the female special police*".

⁴ On the webpage strategypage.com it says: «Nearly all the major special operations organizations of the 20th century have had some female operators. What was unusual about Norway was that they issued a press release» (www.strategypage.com, March 2nd 2016)

The goal of the Jegertroppen is to increase our own capabilities. We believe that recruiting women to Special Forces through an attractive conscription period can contribute to increased diversity and improve our operative capabilities. We do not want to alter the requirements in the selection process, but let the women systematically work towards the same requirements throughout the education period⁵(Forsvaret, 2014).

These arguments suggest NORSOC promotes increased capability through the establishment of the *Jegertroppen*. The recruiting information for the unit, however, conveys a different message. On NorAFs webpage (Forsvaret, 2018) for the *Jegertroppen*-applicants, it says that after completion of the education⁶period in the unit, the candidates will be "well qualified for further education in NorAF...[and] combat role contracts in all branches."⁷ The website describes further service in NORSOC in conditional terms: "an opportunity when the unit has open positions available" (Forsvaret, 2018). The message here stands in contrast to the one for male applicants for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*: "After completing conscription in NORSOC you are well prepared for the advanced SOF-education and a career as an operator at NORSOC. You are also qualified for the NORSOCs reserve and follow-up force." (Forsvaret, 2018b)

Given these major differences of the future career advancements for female and male operators, it is tempting to assume that the possible vacancies in NORSOC that qualifies from spending on year in the *Jegertroppen* are not in the combat structure, but in the combat support or non-combat support structure. This observation suggests that the overall aim of *The Jegertroppen* has changed since it was initiated, or silently adapted to the outcome that further career opportunities in NORSOCs combat structure are still limited for women.

When asked about this point in interviews, different leaders in NORSOC claimed that increased capability in the combat structure is perceived as the main purpose of the *Jegertroppen*. All other interpretations of the project "*Jegertroppen*" are only supporting the main purpose: preparing and education women in different SOF and combat roles, inside and outside NORSOC.

Leaders interviewed explained that NORSOC has defined infantry skills such as shooting as a very basic and crucial military core competence and promotes the *Jegertroppen* as a result of that women have not necessarily gained good enough access to this field of competence. Given this perspective, the purpose of the *Jegertroppen* is educational in nature and is simply about making sure that women possess necessary and basic skills (Rones, 2017).

Despite its criticism of the NorAF, and in particular the Army, for failing their ability to recruit and educate women to combat roles, NORSOC accepts little self-criticism, especially on the subject of women's access to military core competence. The lack of acceptance leads us to the main category of reasons for establishing the *Jegertroppen*, namely challenges with physical gender differences in the recruitment, selection, and education process.

NORSOC acknowledges that physical selection criteria and male-dominated selection process have denied women getting access to the basic military education at the traditional *Fallskjermjegertroppen*:

The Fallskjermjegertroppen has always been open to women. But the women haven't succeeded to win a position. It is ten out of thousand applicants that are admitted. (Instructor Training wing) (Rones and Steder, 2017, p31)

⁵ 1 year of military conscription

⁶ After one year in Jegertroppen

⁷ Army, Navy and Airforce

NORSOC emphasize that it is neither the formal standardized physical tests nor the requirements that prevented women from entering the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*, but the competition in the selection process itself. The selection process at NORSOC is intense and its purpose is to identify the best candidates in terms of attitude, collaborative skills, situational understanding, etc., among the physically fittest applicants. Women and men's results on the military fitness tests in the selection process for military conscription⁸ illustrate which group NORSOC selects "the best" from given their minimum standards (usually around mark 7 on a scale to 9), and how few women it is in this group compared to men. In the top interval (between mark 7 and 9) for endurance you will find about 41 percent men and only 3 percent women. For muscle strength the share is lower, only 24 percent men and 1 percent women. The males competing for a position at NORSOC and "Fallskjermjeger-troppen" are all in the top performance group for men at the physical test (Sesjon) before the conscription period starts. There is just a small fraction of women that are in this group (Køber, 2017).

In the three years we studied the selection process at NORSOC, there have been about 1,400 qualified male applicants for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. Approximately 300 qualified and participated in the five-week long selection process where they competed for one of the 15 available positions—as little as one percent of the applicants, or approximately four percent of those who showed up for selection qualified for basic SOF-education. The men who compete are in the upper part of men's normal distribution of physical tests, illustrated by a red line and arrow.

According to an instructor in NORSOC "it should be self-evident" (Rones and Steder, 2017, p33) that basically no women can be evaluated fairly when competing in the same selection process with the fittest men through several weeks of physical trials. A potential woman candidate must be an extreme "statistical outlier" in the women's normal distribution in order to qualify or be selected for service at NORSOC. If a woman should be so extraordinary that she competed against the extreme fit men, it is likely that she became a lone woman in a male-dominated environment. Accordingly, as Kristiansen (2017) also points out, she will most likely operate individually or as a member of a regular (male) SOF-team, not as a member of a female SOF-team, which was the NORSOCs argument in order to increase its recruiting pool of candidates.

NORSOC employees started to ask themselves the question: "How can we recruit and select the best women for SOF?" (Rones and Steder, 2017, p33) NORSOC leaders exhibited no preference for using affirmative action and let a group of selected women compete on male territory and terms. As a result, they came up with the idea that targeted women eligible for military service should compete with each other, not against men. The education should be based on the same physical and operational requirements as earlier, but the selection process is based on women's physical terms and capabilities. Therefore the process in the *Jegertroppen* will select and educate the best and most motivated women based on women's physiological criteria, while the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* will select and educate the best and most motivated persons on men's. The recruitment and selection process for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* is still open for women, but the *Jegertroppen* is for women only.

One can claim that the *Jegertroppen* is based on an operational need for women who possess military core competence for combat operations where gender matters. One can also claim a pragmatic and partly pedagogical discussion on how to select, prepare and educate women for a male-dominated arena. Instead of a demand-based recruitment of eligible women, who are then put them into operational use without appropriate training, NORSOC has supply-based their recruitment of eager and eligible women well qualified for military education.

⁸ Based on a mandatory self-assessment among 17 year olds (Egenerklæringen) the NorAF selects 20,000-25,000 motivated and eligible candidates for physical screening (Sesjon). As a part of this screening process, about nine-to-18 months before service, they have to complete a set of physical tests (endurance and strength).

4.0 WHY DID WOMEN APPLY TO THE JEGERTROPPEM AND WHAT ARE THEIR EXPECTATIONS?

The *Jegertroppen* is not only an unusual tool of recruitment and selection of women for combat roles (in Norway). A mixture of a transparent and objective presentation of SOF combined with personal invitations/letter to women with effective results from the physical tests, active posts on social media⁹, a three-day welcome-and-training camp, participating with an information booth at different educational fairs and school visits¹⁰ has proven to be an effective recruitment strategy, with 319 applicants at the beginning of 2014, 174 applicants in 2015, and 222 qualified applicants in 2016. These numbers exceed the results of other recruitment strategies used by the NorAF.

In the month of April every year, applicants to the *Jegertroppen* are invited to a three-day welcome-and-training camp at Rena military camp. The applicants get a tour of the area, the military base and they are presented for some of the activities that *The Jegertroppen* offers. The primary objective of this weekend camp is to prepare the applicants on what awaits them a few months later, demystify the selection process, and guide them into the physical training exercises to prevent injuries at a later stage. With the right amount of physical training in a 10-week period before selection, one is better prepared and the risk of injuries occurring reduced.

On average there are around 60 applicants present at the welcome-and-training weekend every year. In one of the sessions over the weekend, they are being asked to answer a short electronic survey on their telephone, which most applicants do. Here we asked not only about the training camp itself but also about their motivation and thoughts about the *Jegertroppen*. One of the questions was: “Why did you apply for Jegertroppen?” They could use their own words in the answer and the vast majority responded. On average, their responses were short: 125 characters or 22 words. The shortest was less than 30 characters and the longest was over 300 characters (60–75 words). The latter described several reasons in detail:

I have always found the Norwegian Armed Forces as an attractive workplace and now I have the opportunity to be a part of it. I seek a challenging military service that can provide me the best foundation for a further career in NorAF, for example as a conventional soldier i.e. in Telemark battalion¹¹. I feel that the Jegertroppen is something that suits me well and I love challenges and enjoy physical activities. I regard myself to be a little rough, tough and an energetic girl (tomboy) (Rones and Steder, 2017, p37)

As illustrated with the example above, we conclude women seek the *Jegertroppen* primarily because they want a challenging, varying and exciting military service where they get to test their own physically and mentally limits. Several respondents also mention that they seek “something extra” from their conscription, not just complete it or “been there, done that.”

Approximately 10 percent of the survey responders explicitly mention the increased possibility for a further career in the NorAF as one of the main reasons for seeking the *Jegertroppen*. Other reasons mentioned they mentioned were “to be a part of a military unit that obviously regards women as a valuable asset” and that “the Special Forces are a unique asset which I now have a chance to be a part of.” A final reason mentioned is that “it will be a harsh military education together with other women with similar interests and values” (Rones and Steder, 2017, p38). In other words, the responder found comfort in completing a military service with women as the majority-group, not as a minority group which is the usual case in the military.

⁹ From NorAF, NORSOC and employees in NORSOC

¹⁰ Military information meetings at different high schools

¹¹ The only professional conventional mechanized infantry unit in Norway

In the following qualitative interviews, among those candidates that qualified and completed the five-week selection process, the reasons for applying and staying motivated throughout the selection process were much the same as the reasons given at the welcome-and-training camp. One difference, however, is the pride of having completed the selection process and being a visible member of a unique unit. Statements in interviews like “it is a hard and demanding selection process that very few are able to complete – something that very few are able to do” and “the opportunity to get a great action-based education in a selected group without the focus on executive training” (Rones and Steder, 2017, pp. 41-42). Another difference was the acknowledgment that the *Jegertroppen* was tailored for women and that it was a tough selection process.

The reasons for applying to *The Jegertroppen* and their expectations for a future career in NorAF are similar to those women applying to officer training schools (Rones, 2015). The women passing initial screening and the selection process for non-commissioned officer candidate school (OTS) are also motivated by similar but also different reasons. Responders mentioned the difficulty of the selection process but the women in the *Jegertroppen* are different in three key areas: most applicants to the *Jegertroppen* had little or no interest in NorAF before it was an option; they did not seek executive training in NorAF; and they were attracted to the idea that the *Jegertroppen* was comprised entirely of women.

Through previous research, debates in literature and newspaper articles in Norway we have seen several arguments for that woman in the NorAF should be equally treated and not given any kind of special treatment. The NorAF are considered meritocratic, where both women and men have argued for affirmative action and that different physical requirement is unfair (see, for example, Edström, Lunde & Matlary, 2010; Eide, Lauritzen, Olsvik & Stokke, 2014; Gustavsen, 2011; Harsvik, 2010; Hellum, 2010; Olsvik & Lauritzen, 2014; Steder, 2015b; Steder, Hellum & Skutlaberg, 2009; Rones, 2015; Rones & Fasting, 2011; Rones & Hellum, 2013). Based on this consideration, we ask two research questions: How is a separate and gender-based selection perceived among the candidates themselves and how is it perceived among those observing the selection process from the “outside”?

5.0 THE COGNITIVE AND PHYSICAL REQUIREMENTS IN THE SEGREGATED MODEL

In order to get selected for the *Jegertroppen*, the women must go through a selection process similar to the selection process for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. The candidate’s cognitive and physical capabilities are evaluated before and during the education at the *Jegertroppen*.

Cognitive capabilities for candidates are measured on a nine-level scale before the conscription period starts; where nine is the highest score (see Kjøber, 2017). The cognitive requirements to be considered for the *Jegertroppen* are actually higher for *Jegertroppen* than for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* due to the requirement¹² for the non-commissioned officer education, one of the educational options after completion of *Jegertroppen* (conscription) at NORSOC.

The physical requirements, on the other hand, are adapted to women's difference in physiology and prerequisites. The main argument used by NORSOC is that a number of men have trained and prepared themselves for the selection process from their early teens.¹³ This option makes a number of men more robust and motivated to pass this phase of selection. NORSOC believes that few or no women have had similar preparations, mainly due to the newly created *Jegertroppen* as an option within the Norwegian conscription system. For these reasons NORSOC concludes the standardized physical tests for the *Jegertroppen* must differ somewhat from the standardized *Fallskjermjegertroppen* ones.

¹² One year later

¹³ See, for example, the background description in the book *Jæger - in war with the elite* written by the Danish SOF Operator Thomas Rathsack (2011)

This difference in preparation from early teens is reflected by inserting a principle of progression (see increasing requirements in Table 5-1) for the candidates to the *Jegertroppen* until the "identity-statement" static course in late November, about five months into their education. Applicants to the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* must pass the requirements at the primary selection process in June in order to proceed.

Table 5-1: There is a planned progression of the physical testing requirements throughout education (1-year) for Jegertroppen (FMS, 2018). Applicants to Fallskjermjegertroppen must pass the final requirements upfront at the initial selection process.

Planned Progression in the Physical Testing	Welcome-and-Training Camp (April)	1-year Conscription Period			
		Initial Selection (June)	Selection process (July)	Static Course (November)	Hunter-mark (July)
<u>Backpack Run</u>					
- Length (km)	7	7	7	7	15
- Weight (kg)	15	15	22	22	22
- Time Requirement (min)	no	yes	yes	52	135
Hang-ups	1	1	1	5	6
<u>Sit-ups</u>					
- Time Requirement (min)	35	35	35	35	50
	no	no	1	1	2
Push-ups	20	20	20	30	40
Hyperextension	20	20	20	20	25
<u>Swimming</u>					
- Length (meter)	200	200	200	no	400
- Time Requirement (min)	no	no	no	no	11
- Under Water (meter)	no	no	no	no	25
Introduction to Tests		Increase in Minimum Requirements			

The static course as "identity-statement" can be understood as a transitional ritual from aspirant to *Jeger* (hunter). Above all, passing the requirements for the static course gives the right to wear the distinctive parachute emblem on the uniform. This emblem is an important identity symbol, and serves as a "quality stamp", as NORSOC does not want anyone to wear it that has not passed the milestone. The physical requirements to the static course are referred to as absolute, and it was never an option to lower the requirements for wearing the "wing" when the *Jegertroppen* was established in 2014. Instead, NORSOC introduced the principle of planned progression for women and trained them for the absolute requirements in the static course, see static course column in Figure 1.

The main reason for the principle of planned progression in physical testing, according to our informants, is that they were worried that NORSOC would have too few women to choose from if the requirements were too difficult up front (see initial selection column in Figure 1). In other words, if there were too few women that came through the initial phase of selection, NORSOC would not succeed in creating the "healthy competition" that the rest of the selection period is characterized by. According to other research on special

operations forces, such competition is an important factor for upholding the reputation and myth of some SOF as “tier one units” (Ben-Ari, Turnley & Michael, 2018; Danielsen, 2015; Resteigne, 2018; Turnley, Ben-Ari & Michael, 2018).

6.0 THE GENDER-SEGREGATED SELECTION PROCESS

The competitive part of the selection process begins with a hectic recruitment period. During the recruitment period, the recruits acquire skills and knowledge necessary to complete the admission exercise. The five-week recruitment period includes basic training in land navigation (map reading and the use of a compass), weapon education, combat technique, combat medic and physical training. This period involves self-selection because those who do not “make it” or lose motivation are withdrawing voluntarily. Some also drop out for medical reasons and there is a great risk of being selected out if it is obvious that the candidate is unsuitable. Reasons to be selected out may be the inability to follow progression, awkwardness, unwanted attitudes, and like.

At the end of the recruitment period, in the physically and mentally final exercise referred to as “hell week,” all candidates are judged on both individual and team-player achievements in small teams. The final exercise is relatively similar for the two segregated platoons. Even though co-operation and team spirit are required to get through the final exercise, it is still a competition for acceptance into the *Jegertroppen*. It is in this competitive part of the traditional selection process (before the *Jegertroppen* was established) that no female candidate has competed against men sufficiently to be selected for *The Fallskjermjegertroppen*. This is NORSOCs main reason for arranging a separate selection process and final exercise in which women compete with other women. Anyone who wants to take part in the competition for the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*, regardless of gender, can still do so.

Over the three year period we followed the *Jegertroppen*, the number of applicants ranged from 319 to 174, of which about 60–70 women were summoned to compete for about 15 positions in the platoon. Although there has been some variation in the application number and the number of participants in the recruitment and selection period to *The Jegertroppen*, the “dropout curve” is relatively stable in the period. This curve is illustrated in Figure 6-1.

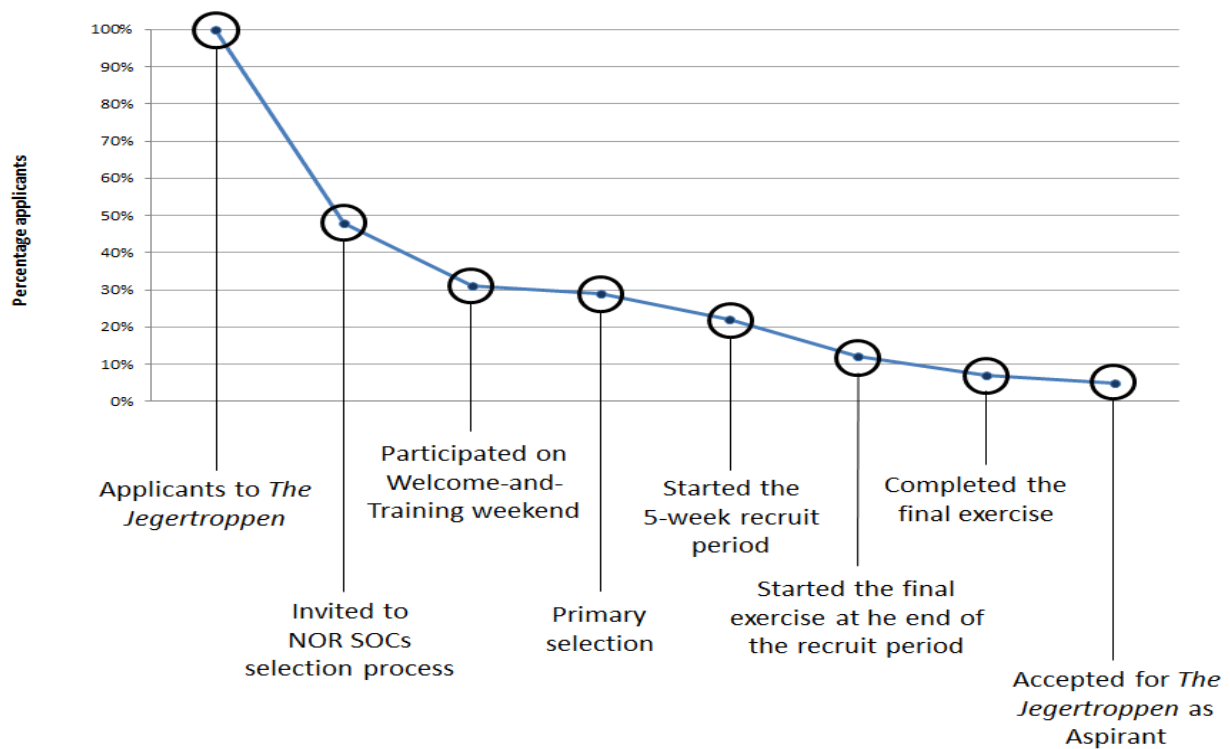


Figure 6-1: There Illustrated dropouts in the selection process from submitted application and final selection for *The Jegertroppen* based on the average drop-out in the period 2014–2016.

The illustrated dropout rate in the selection process is based on the average dropout for the period 2014–2016. Figure 2 clearly illustrates that about 70 percent fall from relatively objective assessments, such as preliminary test results,¹⁴ security clearance, standardized tests, medical and gradually lack interest and motivation for *The Jegertroppen*. Most people who drop out of the 5-week recruit period are volunteer dropouts without any special negative pressure or assisted “pressure” from NORSOC.

When the final exercise begins, at the end of the five-week recruitment period, NORSOC is left with about 10–20 percent of the original number of applicants of *The Jegertroppen*. At this stage in the selection process, the instructors from NORSOC begin its subjective assessments of the candidates. Based on clear preferences as to who is best suited, as well as the candidate's performance and rating on the different tests, each candidate is assessed throughout the final exercise. Those who complete the final exercise, but are not given a place in a platoon after an evaluation in the selection council, are usually negatively assessed on their collaborative skills and the relationship with fellow soldiers and instructors. How these subjective criteria are used varies with the number of available candidates, their performance as well as number of seats available.

7.0 UNIFORMITY OR DIVERSITY

Edström et.al (Edström, Lunde, & Matlary, 2010) argue uniformity (equality) is important in the military context and that this can be justified in operational need for functionality. Diversity, on the other hand, relates allegedly to political ideas of representation, especially women, in societies where it is possible to ignore operational needs (functionality).

¹⁴ From the selective conscription process before conscription starts; self-assessment questionnaire, physical and cognitive tests as well as interview with an officer

In previous studies of women in the Norwegian Armed Forces, and in line with these arguments, the authors suggest that both men and women must be selected and evaluated through equal tests with equal requirements (uniformity), regardless of education, function, and role for which they are being evaluated (Steder, 2015; Rones, 2015). The "best" person is the one that can walk long distances with a heavy backpack, or successfully struggle through a muddy obstacle course. This argument is based on the belief that everybody, both men, and women, must be able to rotate between function and role after a basic education, and everyone must be ready to meet the "requirements of war."

It is this understanding of fairness that NORSOC violates when they established the *Jegertroppen*. Given the *Jegertroppen's* specialization in urban special reconnaissance the need for muddy obstacle courses and long walks with heavy backpack are not needed. Hence, NORSOC ranks the uniformity argument behind increased diversity and specialization perspective through prioritizing complementary features in their unit. Diversity is justified through the operational need for personnel with different skills and abilities, including gender, because women are different than men (see Rones & Steder, in review, for an elaboration of how the different view of fairness and functional need affected on the women in *The Jegertroppen*).

7.1 Equality, diversity and special treatment; The creation of two A-teams

Since NORSOC's goal was to recruit women, the difference in the selection process and "special treatment" of women is justified. Had the goal been to recruit a higher capacity in carrying heavy backpacks over great distances they could increase the recruitment and size of *The Fallskjermjegertroppen* instead.

I do not see anything wrong with it [the segregation / special treatment of women] that's the goal here, right? We create an arena for women because it is women that we need. It's not because we want a larger platoon of parachute jumpers [The Fallskjermjegertroppen]. (Instructor in Training Wing) (Rones and Steder, 2017, p56)

Another reason and justification for the difference in the selection process, or the "special treatment," is that NORSOC established the *Jegertroppen* and the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* to serve two different purposes. If NORSOC had selected men and women for the same platoon through different requirements one would risk creating two different teams; an internal A-team (the men) and one internal B-team (the women). In order to reduce this risk, they established slightly different roles and functions through introducing two parallel platoons.

Since the education and training in the *Jegertroppen* are intended for a separate role and functions at NORSOC, they also have a different specialization period from the one of the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. Interviewees perceive the specialization period in the *Jegertroppen* as more exciting and action-filled than the specialization period in the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. The main reason for the variety in disciplines between the two platoons is explained by the fact that *The Jegertroppen* have to reach the educational requirements of urban special reconnaissance, requirements that *The Fallskjermjegertroppen* do not have. These disciplines are traditionally a part of the more advanced SOF education the following year.

In our interviews, we did find some skepticism among the members of the *Fallskjermjegertroppen* towards the women in the *Jegertroppen* upon entry. That skepticism, however, was tempered over the course of the one-year training period:

[...] now that I've been admitted myself, I've seen the added value of them[women]. They are incredibly good, the girls, to lift, carry and push themselves. Having women in certain roles at NORSOC, I think it's of great value (Paratrooper Fallskjermjegertroppen) (Rones and Steder, 2017, p58)

An important factor that made the separation of the two platoons a success was the equal allocation of resources in the form of materials, training arenas, and skilled instructors. Several women told that they had expected to be perceived as “the B-team,” in accordance with previous experience from high school and in sports. In group conversation with the members of *The Jegertroppen* at the urban shooting course, they enthusiastically mentioned that they “never ever” thought that they should be so highly prioritized. One tells us that she suspected that it could be as it had been on the football¹⁵ team where the girl's team had had to practice on an outdoor gravel without light, while the boy's team was given practice time in the new, well-lit indoor hall. The feeling of being prioritized in the same way as the guys, as well as having access to the best equipment, the best training arenas, and the best instructors, have most likely been an important factor in establishing the observed sense of equal status.

There were also notions among the instructors. In sum, these notions were important in establishing the sense of equality among the women in *The Jegertroppen*. For example, both platoons received a booklet with instructions for the common parachute course (static course). In this there was a “man in front”-drill to be repeated, prior to jumping out of the airplane. When the instructor introduced them to this drill, he said, “now that we have women here too, we say “parachuter in front” not “man in front” and they consistently used the gender-neutral phrase “parachuter in front” rather than the gender-biased phrase “man in front” in the static course.

Given the sum of all action points completed when establishing the *Jegertroppen*, it seems that NORSOC has succeeded in equipping the women with a sense of equality and high priority, as well as an experience of fairness despite a level of “special treatment” in Training Wing (see Ronnes, 2017 and Ronnes & Steder, in review for an elaboration on this topic).

8.0 THE GRADUAL ACCEPTANCE

The authors have presented NORSOC's conscious steps to create a sense of equality between the women in the *Jegertroppen* and the men in the *Fallskjermjegertroppen*. It can be argued that NORSOC has taken sufficient steps to prevent unwanted resistance internally in the unit, although everything was not been thought out or planned for in advance.

The proposal to establish the *Jegertroppen* was first launched by NORSOC commander Eirik Kristoffersen at the Chief of Defence (CHOD) Gender Conference in 2013. Those interviewed in Mørkved's (2017) project at the Norwegian Business School (BI) state that most staff members in NORSOC, including the staff function responsible for planning the department's activity, had not heard or read about the project before it was suggested at this Gender Conference. In the period immediately following the launch of the *Jegertroppen*, according to those we interviewed, there was a rancorous discussion within NORSOC. During the discussion many arguments were made both in support of and against the suggestion of establishing a segregated platoon for women at NORSOC.

Mørkved (2017), however, found the initial project quickly gained support from both managers and others at all levels in the unit. The reason for this rapid support can be explained by three reasons. First, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) had seen a need for women in SOF over several years. Second, the top management in NORSOC suggested it themselves. Third was the creation of “change agents”. These “change agents”, innovators at all levels, were exploited in the planning and anchoring process in the unit and thus giving ownership to the female platoon. One of the most important measures to the managers of NORSOC was to pull key people from multiple levels into the design of the platoon, including the choosing the symbolic patch and the name of the platoon.

¹⁵ Referred to “soccer” in the US

To investigate different attitudes towards *The Jegertroppen*, FFI chose to conduct a survey of all NORSOC staff members¹⁶ and platoon commanders in NorAFs Army Brigade in August 2014. At this point, the first platoon of *The Jegertroppen* had been in service for about three weeks. From these answers, it appears that the majority of NORSOC employees regard *The Jegertroppen* as a good measure. However, we also found a significant group of respondents who tended to regard *The Jegertroppen* as a "completely worthless proposal". This statistically proven difference in attitude¹⁷ may be explained by the difference in exposure and understanding of *The Jegertroppen* internally in NORSOC than outside of NORSOC. At this point in time, there was very little objective information about *The Jegertroppen*¹⁸, mostly different rumors or stories that was presented by military members that had some sort of interaction with NORSOC. Over time, given improved flow of information regarding *The Jegertroppen*, this difference in attitude is reduced.

9.0 IMPROVED RETENTION?

Whether NorAF will succeed in keeping the women from the *Jegertroppen* is difficult to answer now. It is just been three years since the first women finished the education at the platoon. Our indications of success are based on interviews with most of the graduates from the first cohort (n = 7) from the *Jegertroppen* after 8–10 months in continued service, either on a working contract (professional soldiers/or support positions) or in further military education in NorAF (Rones and Steder, 2017, p97). All of the women continued in the NorAF after graduation from the *Jegertroppen* because they enjoyed the training and education they received. They hoped that continued military service would offer more of the same opportunities and experiences.

The graduating women also talked about the *Jegertroppen* as the best year in their lives, a period that further service most likely cannot measure. Those graduates who opted for further military education realized some of the factors they have experienced earlier: a demanding selection process that resulted in motivated colleagues willing to make an extra effort, new tests they must stretch against, a demand for progression, and the feeling of being valued or being part of a privileged unit. Accordingly, they were still motivated and satisfied.

Those women on a working contract viewed their experience, and continued opportunities in the NorAF, quite differently. Many are now considering to leaving the NorAF:

Researcher: Did you ever consider leaving the Jegertroppen?

Graduate: No, I never considered quitting. [...] Except that [the thoughts spinning in your head when you're exhausted on exercises], I never considered quitting.

Researcher: Have you considered quitting your current military position?

Graduate: Eh - yes. But again, I do not know what to do either. I feel that I [negatively] judged this service a bit fast, that I perhaps need to give it more time. But I realize that I am not that fond of it (Rones and Steder, 2017, p99).

There are several reasons why the graduates of *The Jegertroppen* who continued in a working contract are dissatisfied with the current service as a professional soldier. First and foremost, they have an "elite

¹⁶ Most of them in no direct contact with The daily activities of *The Jegertroppen*. The employees of NORSOC and NorAFs Army Brigade responded to an anonymous survey, which was sent on the NorAFs internal network. The final response rate was about 50 percent, with 107 respondents from NORSOC and 97 from the Army Brigade.

¹⁷ One of many questions proving difference in attitude, using t-test assumed unequal variance, ANOVA and dummy variables in a regression analysis of the survey results

¹⁸ Less than five major articles in national papers presented the platoon before the first cohort started their education in July 2014. It was after a 2 hour TV documentary of the second cohort of the platoon that most people, inside and outside of the military, got a good impression of the activity "inside of the fence" at NORSOC

orientation”, or performance motivation that does not match the more relaxed requirements of current service. Second, they miss the privileged status inherent in elite units, the feeling of being involved, prioritized and being part of a close and cohesive community. In addition, they experienced in the NorAF sexist "men’s humor" as well as ridicule and "comments" on their background in an “experimental” SOF unit. The graduates from the *Jegertroppen* also experience that there is insufficient requirements to be a professional soldier compared to their time in NORSOC. In addition, they view the training as “not serious enough,” that the opportunities for advancement are lacking, and the service cultures are too "sluggish" compared to NORSOC.

In sum, these stories suggest negative experiences by contracted as a soldier in the NorAF. Graduates from the *Jegertroppen* who have continued as a professional soldier, and especially in operational positions, do not thrive as much. This leads former *Jegertroppen* to the desire to leave NorAF and get back where they want to be, namely in NORSOC. We can conclude from all of our interviews that it is highly uncertain whether NorAF is able to retain the women from the *Jegertroppen* after graduation. The graduates claim to be assigned tasks below or at different levels of their competence, being poorly treated, and in addition experiencing degrading or negative comments about their performance (Rones and Steder, 2017, pp100-102).

9.1 Should NorAF continue *The Jegertroppen*?

Most of SOF leaders, instructors, and platoon commanders we interviewed believe that *The Jegertroppen* is a success. Such beliefs are mainly due to that the young women in the platoon have become impressively skilled in key operational core disciplines and that most of them signed up for continued service or military education in NorAF. There is nevertheless one reservation that every in interviewee mentioned: the primary weakness of the all-women SOF-project lies in further opportunities within the NORSOC.

Researcher: Do you have any arguments that the Jegertroppen should continue as a permanent unit/education?

Graduate: What should I say? Right now, it's not really a very good argument for them to keep it. We were somehow thrown out, or not thrown out, but there was no position for us at NORSOC (Rones and Steder, 2017, p106).

Instructor: It might as well be that the model is determined to continue, but it may not necessarily be continued here at NORSOC. This unit does is not aimed to educated soldiers for the NorAF. We produce soldiers for ourselves, and that's what we have the capacity for, as of today (Rones and Steder, 2017, p107)

Those we interviewed told us that the *Jegertroppen* was originally implemented because of the operational need for women with military core competence for SOF operations where gender plays a significant role. By creating an arena where women competed with other women, the *Jegertroppen* grant women access to skills needed for NORSOCs operations (see Rones, 2017).

10.0 SEGREGATED, EDUCATED, INTEGRATED AND RETAINED?

Based on our analysis over a three year period, the *Jegertroppen* has succeeded in recruiting women who would not otherwise have chosen a military career. The new and for many a surprisingly concept of segregated education has appealed to women usually not interested in the military, in part because they do not believe they would thrive in a male-dominated environment. Thus, NORSOC has attracted (military) women who express a far more positive attitude towards other women than we have seen in previous studies. A very common observation in the male-dominated NorAF of women suggests the latter take the role of

"one of the boys," distancing themselves from other women as a result from the so-called "queen bee" phenomenon (see Rones and Steder, in peer review).

The scheme of a tailored selection based on women's own physical premise and another tailored selection on men's own physical premise has created a sense of creating "two A-teams" at NORSOC. After the one-year conscription period and segregated education at the *Jegertroppen*, the women are far more motivated for further military service than we find in other NorAF units.

No further career ladder, however, has been established to retain these skilled and specialized women at NORSOC. The women are therefore referred to further military education and contract as a professional soldier in regular military units. With such a "dead end" within NORSOC, it is difficult to believe there was a real need for women in special operations that formed the basis of establishing the *Jegertroppen*. It is also uncertain whether the NorAF will succeed in retaining these skilled, development-oriented and partly elite-oriented women. In sum, we can conclude that the *Jegertroppen* has been a very good measure to recruit, select and educate competent women to NorAF, but we are very uncertain whether NorAF will succeed in retaining them.

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