

MANLINESS, DEDICATION, AND LOYALTY:

Military Masculinity and Peasant Soldiers in Sixteenth-Century Sweden

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During the Early Vasa period, the 1520s to the early 1600s, Sweden was transformed from a decentralized polity into a fully-fledged fiscal-military state, organized for territorial expansion. This development coincided with the Swedish peasantry being recognised as a political estate, while peasants were labelled as capable men of the realm ready to defend their families, their homesteads and ultimately their fatherland.

This essay argues that masculine notions of violence and domination were essential both for the ruling Vasa dynasty and for the soldiers that filled the ranks of the domestic army. Military violence was recognised as an attractive career path open for commoners, and the belligerent discourse of the Vasa monarchs gradually permeated local societies as demobilised soldiers returned from military service. The status of being a loyal servant of the king, risking life and property for the sake of the fatherland, might be an asset –but also a liability– for soldiers seeking to assert their status on their home turf.

The investigation explores royal propaganda, the military experiences of peasant soldiers as well as protests and grievances from those who came back from war. The development will be analysed as a struggle for hegemony between conflicting masculine ideas. The military status that had traditionally been reserved for noble warriors was successfully appropriated by commoners, now sanctioned by the monarch.

The following problems will be addressed: how did royal propaganda help promoting masculine ideals of violence, autonomy and

self-assertion among the Swedish peasantry? In what ways were these notions internalised by soldiers on campaign, to be used as an argument in conflicts with their superiors? How was military masculinity perceived and valued in local societies when discharged soldiers returned from campaigns on foreign soil?

This article is based on original sources: royal decrees and letters combined with soldiers' grievances and written testaments, all from the National archives of Sweden.¹

Military masculinity and the early modern state

The research on masculinities is rich and covers a wide area of topics. The focus, however, has predominately been on the modern period, particularly on the last two centuries. Raewyn Connell, who played a pivotal role for establishing the field of masculinity studies in the late 1900s, worked mainly on contemporary social conflicts between groups of men. Her main contribution was focusing on the importance of violence and contestation, while highlighting the struggle for status among men from different social strata. Connell phrased the concept 'hegemonic masculinity' to characterize the ideals of a male white elite group who occupied the highest position on the status ladder. However, this masculine hegemony is constantly under negotiation, challenged by various opposition groups promoting contesting ideals of masculinity. The concept of hegemonic masculinity has received its fair share of criticism for being too simplistic, and Connell has herself modified her position on the subject. From my perspective, Connell's focus on the role of masculine ideals in the struggle for status still holds a key to understanding the violent behaviour of military men in the early modern period.²

The critics of Connell's model have targeted plurality and practice as two problematic areas of analysis. Masculinities often seem to be multiple and overlapping, which means that the notion of hegemony might seem too monolithic. Is there really just one dominant masculine ideal in society or are there in fact a number of competing masculinities, that might be dominant in different settings? Perhaps Connell's scheme of hegemony, subordination, complicity and marginalisation is too reductive for describing the multiple struggles among

¹ Parts of the empirical basis for this article has been published in Mats Hallenberg and Johan Holm, *Man ur huse. Hur krig, upplopp och förhandlingar påverkade svensk statsbildning under tidigmodern tid*, Lund, Nordic Academic Press, 2016. Thanks to Magnus Linnarsson and Martin Neuding Skoog, of the History Department at Stockholm University, for helpful comments on this manuscript.

² Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1995, pp. 67-71; Raewyn W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, «Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept», *Gender & Society*, 19/6 (2005), pp. 829-859.

men for status and recognition. Scholars have also reacted to the fact that Connell puts the emphasis on ideals rather than practices. From this position, the focus of the analysis should be what men *do* not what they claim to *be*. In a recent article, Ben Griffin has argued for the concept «communication communities» as a way to open up Connell's theory of hegemony to the historic diversity and multiple practices of masculinities. Historians should study communities as social settings, where masculine ideals are articulated as collective norms and social practices. These structures are often specific for a certain place or environment, and provide the individual with restrictions as well as possibilities.³

Inspired by Griffin's article, I propose to study military masculinities in three social settings that correspond to the notion of distinct communication communities. *First*, I study the propaganda of the king, directed towards tax-paying peasants as well as conscripted domestic soldiers. Swedish kings repeatedly evoked ideals of manliness, loyalty, and military capacity when addressing the different communes of the realm. This discourse may be analysed as a hegemonic ideal, internalised by soldiers through the common oath of fidelity. *Second*, I am interested in how soldiers, during long and arduous campaigns, negotiated and manipulated this ideal of manliness in order to secure benefits and improve their (often desperate) situation. The campaigns of the Russo-Swedish war (1570-1595) were long and wearying, and could only be accomplished at an enormous cost. Mutiny or desertion was the desperate way out, but many soldiers used their position to bargain for compensation and recognition from the king. *Third*, I will address the situation of demobilized soldiers. The violent military masculinity that might be considered hegemonic in the military setting was perceived of as highly problematic when the soldiers returned home.

My contribution will be to discuss how changing notions of masculinity influenced, and were influenced by, the formation of fiscal-military states during the sixteenth century.⁴ Raewyn Connell has described the early modern period as the time when a new, violent notion of masculinity was established; first in the colonial periphery then later in the European centres of power. This ideal eventually served to strengthen the patriarchal order as well as the emerging power of the centralised state.⁵ Connell's view of the early modern is backed up by

³ Ben Griffin, «Hegemonic Masculinity as a Historical Problem», *Gender & History*, 30/2 (2018), pp. 377-400.

⁴ On the concept fiscal-military state see Christopher Storrs, «Introduction», in *Idem* (ed.), *The Fiscal-Military State in Eighteenth-Century Europe: Essays in Honour of P.G.M. Dickson*, Farnham, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 12-14.

⁵ Raewyn W. Connell, *Masculinities*, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-191.

substantial scholarship who have demonstrated that violent notions of masculinity played a pivotal role in the social and political upheavals of Reformation Europe.⁶

By the end of the medieval period, the military dominance of the mounted, aristocratic knight was effectively over. Although the aristocratic culture of chivalry still held sway at the princely courts, the rising strategic value of heavy infantry was mirrored in the aggressive culture of the German *Landsknechte*. The impact of professional troops of trained foot soldiers was particularly strong in Northern Europe, where rulers employed mercenary bands to establish military forces that were less dependent on the domestic elites. However, the troops deployed in military campaigns also contained urban and rural militias, recruited by rulers to fill the ranks behind the hired professionals. B. Ann Tlusty has thoroughly investigated how the civic ideal in early modern Germany was closely linked to a martial ethic where male householders both owned and carried weapons, and knew how to use them as well. This violent culture was actively encouraged by the state, who depended on local militias to sustain public order in town and country while occasionally deploying them in regular warfare. Although Tlusty focuses on urban militias, she argues that similar ideals were relevant in the peasant communes as well.⁷

The Vasa kings of sixteenth-century Sweden incorporated the peasant militias into the military organisation to form the nucleus of the royal army. These infantry units were recruited locally, and they were transformed into regular, provincial regiments during the following century. The Vasa kings relied on a core of mercenary elite troops, supplemented by regular troops consisting of conscripted peasant soldiers. In addition, the rulers continued to mobilize local militias to fight alongside regular troops on several occasions. Martin Neuding Skoog has demonstrated the details of this slow and cumbersome process, which in effect meant that the Swedish army was constructed «from below» by utilizing the military capacity of the peasant com-

⁶ Pieter Spierenburg (ed.), *Men and Violence: Gender, Honor, and Rituals in Modern Europe and America*, Columbus, The Ohio State University Press, 1998; Alexandra Shepard, *Meanings of Manhood in Early Modern England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003; Scott H. Hendrix and Susan C. Karant-Nunn (eds.), *Masculinity in the Reformation era*, Kirksville, Truman State University Press, 2008; Mats Hallenberg, «The Golden Age of the Aggressive Male? Violence, Masculinity and the State in Sixteenth-Century Sweden», *Gender & History*, 25/1 (2013), pp. 132-149; Gunner Lind, «Arms, War and the Early Modern Concept of Manliness», in A. Ahlbäck and F. Sundevall (eds.), *Gender, War and Peace: Breaking up the Borderlines*, University of Eastern Finland, Joensuu, 2014, pp. 108-119.

⁷ B. Ann Tlusty, *The martial ethic in early modern Germany: Civic duty and the right of arms*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, pp. 6-10.

munes.⁸ I argue that this makes Sweden an interesting case of study, as the conscripted peasant soldiers were expected to embrace a new military identity while still retaining their status as male householders. Swedish rulers did encourage violent notions of masculinity, but they wanted to harness this ideal to their own imperial project. The peasant soldiers brought with them notions of manliness, autonomy, and capacity for violence that had underpinned their status in local society. My ambition is to analyse what happened when the recruited soldiers also had to internalize the military ethos promoted by their superiors in the royal army.

Why focus on military masculinity? Jeff Hearn has argued that there is not one but multiple military masculinities. However, he also holds that it is important to analyse the dominant constructions at any historical moment. There is also a close connection between the state and militaristic identities that makes the armed forces a special arena for social power, and an obvious place to look for patterns of domination. Further, it may be argued that armies are coercive structures who create tension with other institutions in the larger society. Soldiers must be induced into fighting and this makes it all the more interesting to study the construction of military masculinities during the period of the first great wars.⁹

Ilya Berkovich has studied the military motivation of soldiers in eighteenth century armies. He stresses that military service was a process of socialisation, where soldiers gradually internalized the values of their superiors and their brothers-in-arms in order to function as loyal soldiers in the king's army. Berkovich argues that this socialisation into a broader military culture was often successful. Experienced soldiers, having accepted the desired identity, then turned into agents of socialisation themselves. The culture of honour in the military corps was also the result of a horizontal process, where common soldiers adapted to norms and values shared by their peers.¹⁰ It seems reasonable that similar mechanisms were at work in the Swedish army two centuries before, when commanders had to train and discipline peasant recruits to perform side by side with experienced mercenary soldiers. However, the acquired military ethos might easily turn to a disadvantage when the discharged soldier returned home and had to face the norms and demands of the established householders in peasant society. This

⁸ Martin Neuding-Skoog, *I rikets tjänst Krig, stat och samhälle i Sverige 1450-1550*, Stockholm, Bokförlaget Augusti, 2018, pp. 355-427.

⁹ Jeff Hearn, «Foreword: On men, women, militarism, and the military», and Marcia Kowitz, «The roots of military masculinity», in Paul R. Higate (ed.), *Military Masculinities: Identity and the state*, Westport, Conn., Praeger, 2003, pp. xi-xv and 7-8.

¹⁰ Ilya Berkovich, *Motivation in war: The experience of common soldiers in old-regime Europe*, Cambridge, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2017, pp. 169-172.

clash between conflicting ideals cannot be fully explored in this article. However, I will discuss some examples that indicate how military identity did function in different communicative communities.

Sixteenth-century Sweden: from civic strife to military expansion

At the beginning of the early modern period Sweden was a conflict-ridden society where various power contenders –royal, aristocratic and ecclesiastical– competed with each other for political and social influence. The increasing scale of domestic conflict meant that peasant and urban militias were mobilized to take an active part in these struggles, being recognized as political subjects capable of understanding and acting on behalf of the realm. When Gustav I (Vasa) was elected king in 1523, he set out to consolidate his position by attacking the wealth and power of the Holy Roman Church as well as curbing the independence of the provincial aristocracy. In 1544, he made the national diet declare the crown hereditary with the Vasa dynasty, thereby effectively establishing the first domestic royal dynasty in Sweden for two hundred years.¹¹

For the purpose of this article, I want to highlight two important moments in Swedish history. In 1542 the peasants of southern Sweden rose in open rebellion against the king. The uprising was led by Nils Dacke, a common leaseholder from the border province of Småland. Although Gustav I eventually managed to crush the rebels with a combined force of noble cavalry and hired mercenaries, the conflict had wide implications. During the conflict, Gustav I started to mobilize militiamen from other parts of the realm to support his cause. The king continued to recruit peasant soldiers to fill the ranks of the royal troops even after Dacke and his men were soundly defeated in 1543. The militiamen were offered a cash payment and were then enrolled in provincial infantry units where they received rudimentary training. At the diet in 1544, the king enforced a decision to augment these local troops with new recruits, and transform them into a standing army of peasant soldiers. In effect, the new infantry units functioned as reserve troops. The soldiers supported themselves on their own farms, ready to be mobilized in case of military conflict. Although their military

¹¹ Michael Roberts, *The Early Vasas: A History of Sweden 1523-1611*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1968; Jan Glete, *War and the state in early modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as fiscal-military states, 1500-1600*, London, Routledge, 2002, pp. 174-212; Gary Dean Peterson, *Warrior Kings of Sweden: The Rise of an Empire in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries*, North Carolina, McFarland & Co., 2007, pp. 33-66.

capacity might have been shaky at first, they would constitute the backbone of the Swedish army in the wars to come.¹²

Another crucial event occurred in 1560, when the important trading city of Reval (Tallinn) approached the Swedish king, the burghers pleading for protection against tsar Ivan of Muscovy. The young monarch Erik XIV (r. 1560-1568) responded by sending a small army unit to man the fortress in Estonia, and this was the start of a long process of Swedish expansion on the eastern side of the Baltic Sea. While Swedish kings began to look eastwards for territories to conquer, this inevitably placed them at odds with rulers in Russia and Poland. Professor Sven A. Nilsson has labelled Swedish history between 1560 and 1720 as «the period of the great wars», when armed conflict became the normal condition and times of peace were few and short. With Jan Lindegren he also coined the term «military state» to characterize how the Swedish state organized the economy to pay for expansionist war projects. Up until the mid-seventeenth century, Swedish rulers conquered new territories in the east, in the south and in the north. The Swedish intervention in the Thirty Years' War marked the peak of the country's military aggression, and made Sweden one of the protecting powers in the Westphalian peace treaty of 1648 (together with France).¹³

Not all the wars were successful. The first great struggle for power in the Baltic region, the Northern Seven Years' War (1563-1570) between Sweden, Denmark and Lübeck, ended with a humiliating defeat. Although the Swedish ceded no territory, the peace treaty of Stettin stated that the Swedish monarch must shoulder the full responsibility for starting the war. King Johan III (r. 1568-1592) was compelled to pay a huge ransom to the Danish king Frederick II in order to retrieve the important fortress of Älvsborg on the west coast of Sweden.¹⁴ The seemingly endless struggles of the Russo-Swedish War (1570-1595) did

¹² Lars Olof Larsson, «Gustav Vasa och den "nationella" hären», *Scandia*, 33 (1967), pp. 250-269; Mats Hallenberg, *Kungen, fogdarna och riket. Lokalförvaltning och statsbyggande under tidig Vasatid*, Eslöv, B. Östlings bokförlag Symposion, 2001, pp. 194-202; Neuding Skoog, *I rikets tjänst, op. cit.*, pp. 453-477.

¹³ Jan Lindegren, «The Swedish "Military State", 1560-1720», *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 10 (1985), pp. 305-336; Sven A. Nilsson, *De stora krigens tid. Om Sverige som militärstat och bondesamhälle*, Uppsala, Uppsala University Press, 1990, pp. 9-28; Jan Glete, *War and the State, op. cit.*, pp. 181-200; Mary Elizabeth Ailes, *Courage and grief: Women and Sweden's Thirty Years' War*, Lincoln, University of Nebraska Press, 2018.

¹⁴ Robert I. Frost, *The northern wars: War, state, and society in northeastern Europe, 1558-1721*, Harlow, England, Longman, 2000, pp. 23-43; Jason Edward Lavery, *Germany's northern challenge: The Holy Roman Empire and the Scandinavian struggle for the Baltic, 1563-1576*, Boston, Brill Academic, 2002; Mats Hallenberg, «A state of aggression? Swedish peasant elites and the art of bargaining during the Nordic Seven Years' War (1563-1570)», in Ulla Koskinen (ed.), *Aggressive and Violent Peasant Elites in the Nordic Countries, 1500-1700*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, pp. 145-170.

provide the Swedish rulers with new territories in the east. This, however, could only be achieved at enormous cost.¹⁵

The wars of the late sixteenth century marked an important shift in Swedish military strategy: from defensive operations in the border regions, to aggressive campaigns far into enemy territory. This period also saw a decisive turn towards mass conscription. The great wars were fought primarily by infantry troops consisting of peasant soldiers, commanded by officers stemming from the same rural background. Thus, Sweden's imperial project depended on the sons and grandsons of former militiamen entering into military service and placing themselves under royal command.¹⁶ In the next section, I will demonstrate how the Swedish monarchs made this mass mobilization possible by promoting ideals of manliness and aggression.

Manliness and conquest: The royal propaganda

The Northern Seven Years' War got off to a kick-start in 1563 when, after a longer period of preparing for conflict, Danish troops attacked and conquered the border fortress Älvsborg in the province of Västergötland. Erik XIV of Sweden responded by advancing into the Danish province of Halland but failing to take the important port-town Halmstad. The war continued in this way for several years, with both sides conducting regular army campaigns ravaging the countryside in the border provinces. The war scene was concentrated in the southern and western parts of the Swedish realm, but there were also military operations in the more sparsely populated areas of the north as well as large-scale naval warfare in the Baltic Sea.¹⁷

Importantly, the war against Denmark could be described as a just war against a well-known foreign invader, who (once more) wanted to subjugate the Swedes. For Erik XIV, the first-ever Swedish ruler to inherit the crown by his birthright, the war meant an opportunity to prove himself a worthy military leader. His first attempt to lead his troops personally against the enemy in 1563 ended in some kind of an anti-climax. Erik returned hastily to Stockholm before the campaign against Halmstad was under way, and rumours had that the king

¹⁵ Lars Ericsson Wolke, *Johan III. En biografi*, Lund, Historiska Media, 2004, pp. 246-310.

¹⁶ Mats Hallenberg and Johan Holm, *Man ur huse: Hur krig, upplopp och förhandlingar påverkade svensk statsbildning i förmodern tid*, Lund, Nordic Academic Press, 2016, pp. 247-268.

¹⁷ For a detailed description of the military operations see Bertil C:son Barkman, *Kungliga Svea Livgardes historia, Band II: 1560-1611*, Stockholm, 1939, pp. 48-177, 230-268. On maritime warfare see Ingvar Sjöblom, *Svenska sjöofficerare under 1500-talet*, Malmö, Universus Academic Press, 2016.

had lacked the courage to face the enemy.¹⁸ He had his revenge when he led the attack against the Danish town of Ronneby the following year. The campaign achieved its purpose, the town was stormed by the Swedish army, and the king described his victory in triumphant terms in a proclamation to all his subjects. Erik XIV boasted of having ordered his troops to «burn, plunder and kill all that came in their way between Lyckå castle and Ronneby». According to the king, the ravaging would continue until local women approached the Swedes to plead for mercy. The Swedish troops then took the town of Ronneby by storm and Erik described the conquest in expressive words:

First there was a great murder [...] they [the enemy troops] were all slaughtered by the cavalry that we commanded to the place [...] so that the water in the river became red from blood of all the dead bodies.¹⁹

For the Swedish king then, prowess in battle was the mark of greatness, and military conquest a sign from God that he was capable of leading his people. The violence in Ronneby was justified by the claim that the people there had supported the Dacke rebels against Gustav I some twenty years before. Although Erik XIV might have treated the conflict as a personal project to prove his manhood in aggressive combat, he needed the support of the Swedish peasantry to achieve his purpose. Therefore, the king supplemented the military campaigns by a string of proclamations to the peasant communes, urging them to support the royal troops with provision and transport, but also by providing militiamen for strengthening local defence.²⁰

In general proclamations, the king called on commoners from every part of the realm to prove their manliness and assist the armed forces. The fact that most of the regular troops stemmed from rural backgrounds served to promote solidarity from the peasant communes. When demanding an extra tax in kind from the peasants of Västergötland in 1563, Erik XIV argued that they should provide the goods willingly, while they all «had friends and relatives in the service of the realm».²¹ In the following spring the king ordered the commoners in the Northern provinces to help recruiting more soldiers for

¹⁸ Erik Jöransson Tegel, *Konung Eric's den XIV:s historia*, Stockholm, Utg av Anders Anton v Stiernman, 1751, p. 108.

¹⁹ «Proclamation to all common men in the Swedish realm», 15/9, 1564, Riksregistraturet (RR), 1564:2, fol. 169, National Archives of Sweden (RA). For the expedition against Ronneby see Erik Vejde, «Erik XIV och ödeläggelsen av Ronneby 1564», *Scandia*, 2/1 (1929), pp. 54-64.

²⁰ Letters to various districts: Vadsbo 3/9, Östbo 8/9, Skånings etc 9/9, Bergslagen 11/9, Dalsland 12/9.

²¹ RR, 3/9 1563, RR, September 1563, RA.

the regular army troops. He explained that he preferred Swedish men in his army, so that the allotted payments would benefit the realm rather than filling the pockets of foreign mercenaries.²² The Swedish monarch assured his subjects that those who fell fighting for their fatherland would achieve eternal bliss. Military service and loyalty to the king was also an obligation to God. Regular praying days, when the priests had to read royal proclamations on the necessity of war in all the churches of the realm, served to strengthen the connection between national sentiments and religious ideology. These churchly gatherings would remain the main outlet for royal propaganda for the following centuries.²³

The discourse of mobilization addressed the peasants as masculine, God-fearing Swedish men with the wit and sense to act for the good of the realm. However, military mobilization entailed more than fancy words. Erik XIV combined the frequent appeals to aid the fatherland with explicit threats for those who refused to heed the call up or even assisted the enemy.²⁴ The practices of conscription relied on a mix of patient persuasion and brute coercion. When the officer Knut Haraldsson came to the Northern provinces to recruit more soldiers in 1564, the peasant freeholders of Hälsingland at first refused, claiming that they had already agreed to several conscriptions and now lacked both the money, the means and the men to contribute. Knut Haraldsson tried to appeal to the peasants' manliness and sense of solidarity: he argued that their masculine honour, as well as their status as loyal subjects, would suffer if they refused to help the Swedish soldiers fighting in Norway. Eventually, the peasants of Hälsingland agreed to form a posse of every third man, but only on condition that the conscripted soldiers still left in the province joined the militiamen for the campaign.²⁵

The freeholders in the province of Ångermanland proved even more difficult to persuade, so Knut Haraldsson had to revert to harder measures. He rounded up the peasants in three groups and ordered them to draw lots to decide on who would follow the army campaign:

²² To Gästrikland, Hälsingland, Ångermanland and Medelpad on conscriptions, RR, 22/5 1564, RA.

²³ RR, 5/6 1564, RA. Similar messages: to the bishops of the praying day 21/4; to the archbishop on thanksgiving 1/9; to master Peder in Kalmar 12/6 and 7/12; RR, 1563, RA. On war propaganda and religious services see Anna Maria Forssberg, *The story of war: Church and propaganda in France and Sweden in 1610-1710*, Lund, Nordic Academic Press, 2016.

²⁴ To the commoners in Västbo, RR, 26/8 1564, RA. To Gustav Olsson on deserters in the districts of Mark and Kind, RR, 12/1 1564, RA.

²⁵ Knut Haraldsson later stood trial for treason, accused for letting the prolonged negotiations delay the army campaign. The protocol was published as *Historiska Handlingar 13:1, Konung Erik XIV:s nämnds dombok*, Stockholm, 1884, pp. 146-151.

The man who lost the lottery then had to get himself ready, or else there would have been great rioting among the common men, and one would have been struck dead by the other.²⁶

The army commander thus forced the Ångermanland peasants to provide militiamen by pitting one man against the other. On top of this, Knut Haraldsson demanded that all the farmsteads in the province that still had more than one able-bodied man working back home would be subject for further conscriptions. However, the bargaining with the commoners over military contributions had dragged on for weeks, and the militiamen from the neighbouring province of Dalarna failed to turn up altogether. The peasants had turned their backs on the commanders, claiming that they preferred to fight by their own homes rather than «die of starvation and hunger in front of another man's door». Eventually, the proposed army campaign against Norway had to be called off altogether.²⁷

The Swedish monarch did in fact deliver a double message to the peasant freeholders. From the beginning of the war, the king urged them to help conscripting their sons and farmhands so that they would not have to go to war themselves. As the war dragged on, the regular troops had to be reinforced and soldiers replaced by new recruits. On top of that, Erik XIV repeatedly called upon local militias to fill the ranks in both defensive positions and on army campaigns. Small wonder that discontent grew in the local communes as the conflict wore on. The common foot soldier Nils Larsson lamented this state of affairs in the summer of 1566, when charged of treason in front of the king's high court. Nils boldly claimed that the king was now conscripting women and farm girls, since all the men had been taken away.

Such measures will only cause widespread trouble, for when the peasant can no longer rely upon his wife or his daughter, you may expect nothing else than rebellion and discord.²⁸

This assertion was of course untrue, but it probably does represent widespread feelings of anger and defiance over the rising costs of incessant war. Nils's statement also points to another component of the masculine ideal: for the peasant freeholder, protecting his women and

²⁶ «Vilken lotten föll uppå, måtte då vara vederrede, eljest hade vuxit ett uppror den menige man emellan, så att den ene hade slagit den annen ihjäl inbördes». *Historiska handlingar 13:1*, *op. cit.*, p. 148.

²⁷ Mats Hallenberg, «A State of Aggression?», *op. cit.*

²⁸ 'Så måtte och därutav eljest allt obestånd sig förorsake, att när bonden icke skulle nyttja sin hustru eller dotter, hade man intet förmode annat än uppror och tvedräkt'. *Historiska handlingar 13:1*, *op. cit.*, p. 246.

his farmstead was just as important as proving loyal to the king and capable of defending the realm. There was a recurring tension between the men called out to do the actual fighting, and the established householders who remained back home to see to their crops and pay their taxes. The peasant soldiers, meanwhile, had to negotiate their position of being masculine warriors in the royal army with the more civic ideals of peasant authority being expressed in Luther's catechism.²⁹

Nils Larsson's prediction eventually came true when duke Johan, the younger son of Gustav I, disposed of his brother Erik and claimed the throne for himself in 1568. Johan III sued for peace, and eventually succeeded in ending the Nordic Seven Years' War in 1570. By this point, however, Sweden was already at war with Russia and Johan had to remove his troops from the southern front and ship them over to the eastern side of the Baltic. The conflict with Russia would continue for the next twenty-five years, posing enormous military and logistic challenges. The war scene focused on the recently acquired province of Estonia, and the campaigns were fought with regular troops while peasant militias from central Sweden could not be called upon to fight outside of the realm.³⁰ The Russian war posed a political problem: Erik XIV had described the conflict with Denmark as defending the realm against an aggressive intruder, but king Johan faced the problem of motivating his soldiers to fight for new territory far away from their native provinces. The rank and file of the Swedish army consisted of conscripted peasants that had to be shipped over the Baltic Sea. The royal propaganda inevitably came to focus on dynastic ambition, but horizontal solidarity between the provinces of the realm remained important.

Johan III needed to present himself as a sovereign of peace and therefore blamed tsar Ivan for starting the war and refusing to stop the hostilities. The King asserted his will for peace, and described Ivan IV as the «muscovite tyrant» who hated the realm and wanted to spill the blood of honest Swedish men.³¹ Johan claimed that the fighting in Estonia was defensive in its nature and therefore a just war. The tsar would not stop with conquering Reval; if successful the Russians would soon threaten the provinces in Sweden and Finland as well. Therefore, the war in the Baltic was a matter of promoting the welfare of the realm. All Swedish men must rally to aid the king's subjects in Estonia, who would suffer under Russian rule.³²

²⁹ For peasant masculine ideals in Early modern Sweden see Kekke Stadin, *Stånd och genus i stormaktstidens Sverige*, Lund, Nordic Academic Press, 2004.

³⁰ Bertil C: son Barkman, *Kungliga Svea Livgardes historia, II, op. cit.*, pp. 269-323.

³¹ Royal letter on the contribution, RR, 27/7 1576, RA; to the commoners of Västergötland, RR, 16/4 1575, RA.

³² RR, 31/8 1575. To the bailiffs in Norrland, RR, 9/8 1576, RA.

From 1580, the Swedish troops succeeded in conquering new territory in Ingria and Carelia. For Johan III, triumph in war bore testimony of the loyalty and masculinity of all Swedish men. At the diet of 1587, the king declared that the Swedes must hold on to the conquered lands at any cost:

Many capable Swedish men have sacrificed their lives for these castles and fortresses that have now been conquered and placed under the Crown of the Swedish realm. [...] Therefore, we cannot give them away, to the shame and disgrace of all Swedes. We will instead strive to hold them, which will be accomplished as long as we Swedish are united and avoid domestic strife and insurgency.³³

The royal propaganda weaved together military masculinity, rights of conquest and the dynastic claims of the Vasa family into a strong argument for territorial expansion. The glory of the realm was ultimately dependent on the manliness of the peasant soldiers. Even in his later years, Johan III claimed to be a fearsome warrior who would lead his troops to battle and «pull the Russian beard».³⁴ While that never happened, the belligerent discourse of manliness and conquest was diffused to the army commanders and, by the oath of allegiance, to the officers and the common soldiers. The commander Pontus de la Gardie declared his ambition to conquer as much land as possible to put them under Swedish rule, and the other officers expressed similar views. The lust for war booty also played a part in the drive for territorial expansion.³⁵ I will now focus on the soldiers who were conscripted and then sent away to fight for their king in foreign territories: how and in what ways did they internalize the discourse of masculine prowess and how did they express this ideal when dealing with their superiors?

The misery of military campaigns: rights and obligations

To some men in local society, military service might well have presented an attractive opportunity. They received some cash payment after enlisting, had to undergo some rudimentary training on a

³³ «Thett hafve många redelige svenske män satt sitt lif till för the landh och fäster, som nu äre intagne och under Svergies rikies erono liggie [...]. Kunne vi förthenskull them inthet bortgifve, oss Svenske till evig skam och neso, uthan vi ville heller beflita oss om them att beholla, hvilket vell ske kan, ther vi Svenske äre samhollig och taghe oss till vara för inbördhes krig och upror». Report from the King's speech to the estates, *Svenska riksdagsakter*, serie 1, afd. 1, 2:2, Stockholm, 1891, pp. 743-746.

³⁴ The King's speech to the estates 7/3 1590. *Svenska riksdagsakter*, serie 1, afd. 1, 2:2, Stockholm, 1891, p. 901.

³⁵ Pontus De la Gardie to the king, 7/11 1580, the same to duke Karl, 9/6 1583; *Handlingar rörande Skandinaviens historia*, 36, Stockholm, 1855, pp. 241-253 and 302-309.

regular basis, but for most of the year they could stay home tending to their own farmsteads. The peasant soldiers kept their own weapons and that probably singled them out from other men in local society. They all enjoyed the official status of being a king's man, which may have boosted their confidence and provided an asset in conflicts with their neighbours.

However, the long and gruesome campaigns far away from home were hardly popular with the common foot soldiers. A fair number of them escaped or failed to turn up when the call-up arrived, while those who could afford it hired a stand-in to fill their place in the ranks. In 1574, the army commander Sven Gästrike reported problems mobilizing foot soldiers in the Northern provinces for the expedition to Estonia. The experienced men who were supposed to form the core of his infantry unit preferred to stay away. Instead, they had hired «a host of incapable people» to do their job.³⁶ Documents from the royal archives present further evidence that the custom of hiring stand-ins had become widely spread. That same year, the vicar of Orsa in central Sweden and four peasants of his parish wrote a letter of verification for the hired foot soldier Olof Larsson. They stated that Olof had served faithfully for many years as a foot soldier in place of others. However, the men who hired him had now claimed back «their money, clothing and weapons» so Olof lacked the means to fulfil his duty for king and country.³⁷

Olof Larsson's letter demonstrates how established parishioners could act on behalf of a common soldier, illustrating the social bond between military men and the peasant freeholders. It also provides evidence that the landed peasants of Dalarna possessed the necessary means –weapons as well as ready cash– to hire stand-ins so that they did not have to go to war themselves. The system of hiring replacements had become something of an institution by the turn of the sixteenth century into the seventeenth. We have evidence that common foot soldiers demanded a collective vote of approval before accepting a new stand-in among their ranks. The system of hired stand-ins had become standard procedure in the Finnish part of the realm during the seventeenth century.³⁸

³⁶ RR, 4/12 1572, RA.

³⁷ Letter for Olof Hansson, 29/12 1574, Strödda militiehandlingar, vol. F1, RA. Other examples include verification for Palle Persson of Nyekull, 11/6 1582; «The grievances of the footsoldiers from Småland» (no date), both in the same volume, RA.

³⁸ Testimony for Håkan Jonsson, 6/5 1607, Strödda militiehandlingar, vol. F1, RA. Nils-Erik Villstrand, *Anpassning eller protest. Lokalsamhället inför utskrivningarna av fotfolk till den svenska krigsmakten 1620-1679*, Akad., Diss. Åbo, 1992, pp. 219-228; Mikko Huhtamies, *Knektar och bönder. Knektersättare vid utskrivningarna i Nedre Satakunda under trettioåriga kriget*, Helsingfors, 2004.

The rural elites sometimes backed the unhappy soldiers wanting to escape from military service. The priest of Tolg from the southern province of Småland travelled in 1572 all the way to Stockholm to plead for the soldier Per Klausson. Guesting army troops had left Per's farmstead devastated, so the soldier needed the king's permission to return home to help restoring his property.³⁹ A couple of years later, the peasants of Julita wrote to Johan III to plead for the peasant Per Olofsson. His son had been away for military service for several years, and the father was now old and lacked strength to support himself on the farm –let alone his son's wife and children–.⁴⁰ Mass conscription had its risks: The king wanted capable soldiers, but he also needed the peasants to farm their land and pay their taxes. And while the bulk of the soldiers had to support themselves on their own in times of peace, a large number had both property and family to worry about when doing service away from home.

The practice of war in the sixteenth century may be best described as a prolonged process of bargaining. Bailiffs bargained with peasants to retain more conscripts, commanders bargained with soldiers during mobilizations, the soldiers banded together to defend their rights. A recurring theme was the lack of resources in the army camp: no salary, scanty clothing, and precious little food. To argue for their rights soldiers repeatedly referred to their status as householders, responsible for their families and farmsteads.

In the summer of 1581, the soldiers of Nils Sonesson's infantry unit wrote a letter to the king begging him to release them from their service and let them return to their homes. The men claimed to have served for two years in Estonia without receiving any salary, and that there were rumours of a severe crisis back home:

Our homes are in a pitiful state, while God almighty have called our wives, children, and house servants away from us by pestilence, therefore our homesteads and property are now all but neglected.⁴¹

For this reason, Nils Sonesson's men needed the king's permission to return to Sweden and see on their own. However, they also promised that after this temporary release they would serve the king even better, «humbly offering our life and blood for His Royal Majesty

³⁹ Recommendation from Petrus Johannes, 12/6 1572, Strödda militiehandlingar, vol. F1, RA.

⁴⁰ Testimony for Per Olofsson i Tredsland, 20/7 1578, Strödda militiehandlingar, vol. F1, RA.

⁴¹ Letter from Nils Sonesson's foot soldiers, 23/7 1581, Skrivelser till Konungen, Johan III, vol. 1, RA.

and the Swedish Realm as long as we live». ⁴² Interestingly, the common foot soldiers referred both to their status as peasant householders and to their identity as men of combat. Their compatriots in Abram Nilsson's army unit, from the district of Möre in southern Sweden, wielded similar arguments when they tried to obtain relief from garrison service at Narva on the Russian border in 1582. They claimed to be the victims of injustice: while they had had to pack their things and leave for Estonia, their friends and neighbours had been able to do all the autumn work, harvest their crops and store all their grain and hay safely away. The poor foot soldiers argued that they lacked the means to hire any help for their wives and begged the king to grant them temporary leave, «unless we poor soldiers will perish along with our wives and children and all that we own». ⁴³

Like their compatriots in Nils Sonesson's company, the men from Möre only asked for a temporary leave that would allow them all the better to serve the king in the future. However, they also claimed to be ready to surrender their military status altogether if the king would prefer them «to stay at home and pay Your Majesty taxes and rents like we have done before». ⁴⁴ Such claims address the conflict between the traditional temporary service of peasant militias and the permanent hardships endured by regular army units. To some of the soldiers deployed in war on the eastern side of the Baltic, privileges of tax exemption and military status probably carried less and less weight as the Russian conflict continued with no arrangements for peace.

The examples above demonstrate how the discourse of combat and loyalty to the king was intermixed with references to the duty and honour of the freeholding peasant. Military masculinity intermixed with the identity of being head of the households and responsible for the people back home. Discursively, the peasant soldiers positioned themselves as capable men, loyal soldiers *and* authoritative householders able to pay their taxes when needed. However, these ideals became at odds with each other when the military campaigns kept the soldiers away from home for long periods of time.

In the army camp or on military expeditions, loyalty within the group became more marked. Berkovich has described how the socialisation in army units was pivotal to the construction of military masculinity in the eighteenth century. ⁴⁵ This is also evident in the correspondence of Swedish soldiers of the Vasa period, who had to suffer long periods of campaigning in extremely harsh conditions. The

⁴² From Nils Sonesson's foot soldiers, 23/7 1581, RA.

⁴³ Letter from Abraham Nilsson's foot soldiers, no date (1582), *Skrivelser till Konungen*, Johan III:1, RA.

⁴⁴ From Abraham Nilsson's foot soldiers, 1582, RA.

⁴⁵ Ilya Berkovich, *Motivation in war*, *op. cit.*, pp. 165-194.

common foot soldiers needed to band together in order to survive, and when opportunity appeared they collectively protested to the king. Military expeditions during the Russo-Swedish war were often hampered by troops obstructing marching orders unless offered appropriate compensation. The Swedish attack on the Russian fortress of Nöteborg [Shlisselburg, Schlüsselburg] in Carelia in 1582 had to be abandoned when officers and soldiers alike refused to participate. In a joint letter, the military men stated that they lacked both weapons and the necessary provisions. To prove their honest intention the soldiers referred to their oath of allegiance, and swore to sacrifice blood, life and property for the king when they received proper support. Johan III eventually had to allow the Swedish troops to return to their quarters on their side of the border, but he was not able to reach any lasting agreement with the Russians.⁴⁶

Like so often happened with hired mercenaries, the domestic Swedish troops stuck together to enforce their claims. By explicitly referring to their oath of allegiance, they managed to stall the military operation while still maintaining their status as loyal servants of the crown. The king had to tread carefully: he would not risk a clampdown that might provoke a widespread mutiny. The story repeated itself in 1589, when both officers and common soldiers pleaded the king for bringing the war to an end and make peace with the tsar. This time, the noble and common officers wrote their own collective grievances expressing their loyalty and identification with the royal troops. They claimed that the war could not go on, while the troops were weary from years of service with insufficient provisions:

For it must be known to Your Royal Majesty their conditions and their repayment; how they have suffered willingly for 28 years the blood shed and the lives lost by many an honest Swedish man, and no Lord in Christendom could have better and more willing soldiers for that kind of support.⁴⁷

The common foot soldiers followed suit it with complaints of their own. Their representatives asserted that the army remained loyal to the king, but they also insisted that they would not be able to engage in any combat with the Russians unless they received major reinforce-

⁴⁶ The grievances of the soldiers at Nöteborg, October 1582, *Skrivelser till Konungen*, Johan III:1, RA. The peace negotiations resulted in a temporary truce in 1583, prolonged in 1586. Bertil C:son Barkman, *Kungliga Svea Livgardes historia*, II, *op. cit.*, p. 313; Lars Ericson Wolke, *Johan III*, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

⁴⁷ «Huru godvillige de i 28 år med mongen ärlig svensk mans blod spillande och lifs latende hafver uthärdat och ingen herre i christenheten för sådant underhåll bättre och välviligare krigsfolk hafva kan». Grievances from councillors, commanders and common officers, 5/9 1589, SRA, serie 1, afd. 1, 2:2, pp. 822-835.

ments from the Swedish side. The soldiers vowed that they would not stand down from this claim, even if it would cost them their lives.⁴⁸ Both the officers and the common soldiers referred to the manliness, integrity, and cohesion of the Swedish troops in order to back up their claims for a peace agreement. Their protests turned out to be of little avail given that war operations started again the following year.

The great wars of the sixteenth century operated by a constant process of negotiation. The troops joined together to claim their right and the army command had to listen to their demands. Military sociability and cohesion were crucial assets when trying to win support for their claims. Permanent service away from home probably served to strengthen the collective identity of the peasant soldiers. Concordance –to decide with one voice– was an important ideal in any traditional society. The peasant communes acted collectively when protesting against local or national authorities in order to avoid reprisals against individual members.⁴⁹ New recruits brought this culture of bargaining with them to the military troops. The ideal of military camaraderie also extended to the army officers, most of which were of non-noble origin. In fact, there was a widespread understanding that the common foot soldiers should have a say in choosing their commanding officers. When Sigvard Jakobsson, commander of the foot soldiers at Kexholm, went lost during a war expedition in 1581 the remaining officers and foot soldiers wrote a letter to the king demanding a transfer of command to the second lieutenant, Staffan Mikkellsson.⁵⁰

Army units could also rally together supporting their officers against false accusations. In 1582, two common soldiers from Dalarna accused their commander Lasse Jöransson of having misappropriated provisions during an army expedition. The rest of the officers, 28 persons from lieutenants to drummers and quartermasters wrote a letter to the king claiming that Lasse had done no such thing. They testified that their commander had always looked after them, even providing the troops with provisions at his own expense. His fellow officers also stated that Lasse Jöransson had always led his troops afield, proving himself in every way as an honest and capable soldier. The king must have been sympathetic to their claim, because Lasse remained in com-

⁴⁸ Complaints of the common foot soldiers cited by royal councillor Ture Bielke, SRA, serie 1, afd. 1, 2:2, pp. 852-854.

⁴⁹ Hugues Neveux and Eva Österberg, «Norms and Values of the Peasantry in the Period of State Formation: A Comparative Interpretation», in Peter Blickle (ed.), *Resistance, representation and community*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1997, p. 155-184; Kimmo Katajala, «Conclusions», in Kimmo Katajala (ed.), *Northern Revolts: Medieval and Early Modern Peasant Unrest in the Nordic Countries*, Helsinki, Finnish Literature Society, 2004, pp. 262-263.

⁵⁰ Letter from Sigvard Jakobsson's foot soldiers, Kexholm 24/7, 1581. *Skrivelser till Konungen*, Johan III:1, RA.

mand of this infantry unit for several years on.⁵¹ This case is especially interesting, while the foot soldiers from Dalarna were demobilized and had travelled back to their home province. Obviously, social cohesion and military identity remained important to these peasant soldiers even when repatriated to their home turf.

This section provides evidence that the belligerent masculine ideals promoted by the king was passed down to –and were also internalized by– army officers and common foot soldiers. We can of course not be sure if the soldiers fully believed in the military ideal or not. However, evidence suggests that many of them came to identify with the ideal of being «a strong and forceful soldier». Long army campaigns promoted this collective identity, of which willingness to sacrifice life and blood and meet the enemy in full combat were highly valued components. Still, we have also seen that the common foot soldiers identified with being heads of households, compelled to look after their families and secure their property back home. The next section will discuss the possible conflict when the military men returned to local societies and had to adjust to the civic ideals of peasant communes.

Military men in local society

Demobilized or fugitive soldiers produced a latent threat to peasant society throughout the early modern period. In the seventeenth century especially, runaway soldiers often played a leading part in riots and local insurrections.⁵² The regular soldiers of the previous century were supposed to have small farms or homesteads to return to when called out of service, and the monarch expected them to settle back to their lives as part-time peasants. Yet, as the war period dragged on, the king had to recruit young men of lesser status to fill the army ranks. Many of those had no secure position to return to when their services were no longer required. Straying bands of deserters sometimes caused havoc in local communities. In early 1573, Johan III received reports that a contingent of runaway soldiers was troubling the peasants in the Northern provinces, pillaging their stores and causing widespread discontent. The king reacted by ordering his local officials to arrest the culprits and send them back to the war scene. However, the Swedish monarch also offered to bargain with the deserters, suggesting that they send two men from every file to forward complaints

⁵¹ Testimony from the officers in Lasse Jöransson's army unit, Husaby parish in Dalarna, 5/11 1582; Krigshistoriska handlingar M 1277, RA. Gunnar Artéus, *Till militärstatens förhistoria. Krig, professionalisering och social förändring under Vasasönnernas regering*, Stockholm, Probus, 1986, p. 151.

⁵² This is demonstrated by Mats Hallenberg and Johan Holm's research, *Man ur huse*, *op. cit.*, pp. 159-198. In the preceding centuries, the landed peasants had been dominant in local risings against the crown; Kimmo Katajala (ed.), *Northern revolts*, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-266.

and negotiate their terms for returning to service. Johan III was painfully aware that he lacked the resources to discipline his warriors, for he pleaded with the local peasants for assistance.⁵³ The king addressed the Finnish peasantry with similar words that same year, demanding that the commoners must use «all their strength and power» to help royal officials return fugitive soldiers to their army units.⁵⁴

Johan III tried to encourage his soldiers by offering them tax exemptions and temporary leaves from service. Such privileges were of course a point of envy for the other peasants. In the fall of 1573 the governors in the province of Västergötland reported that a number of discharged foot soldiers had refused to pay taxes on their farmlands. The soldiers were also accused of agitating their neighbours into disobedience against their ruler. In this case Johan III ordered their bailiffs that all soldier must pay their rents like the other peasants.⁵⁵ But on other occasions, the king had to be lenient to retain the loyalty of his army followers. In 1575 he ordered the bailiffs in the southern provinces that all foot soldiers, even those who had not done active service, must be exempt from taxes and other dues.⁵⁶ This freedom was a cherished privilege and probably a necessary condition for families of absent soldiers to support themselves on their farms.

At the beginning of the Russian war the regular army corps seems to have consisted mainly of cottage farmers. References to soldiers' wives being allowed to confirm the hire of their farmsteads or foot soldiers performing work services to the crown suggest that they might have been crown tenants rather than freeholding peasants.⁵⁷ Tenant farmers were hardly among the wealthiest men in peasant society but they were by no means marginalised poor. However, the enduring strains of the Russian war forced the Swedish rulers to formalize army recruitment by bargaining with the wealthy farmers to conscript their less fortunate neighbours and servants into army service. In 1575 the army commanders were instructed to cooperate with bailiffs and peasant representatives to ensure a fair distribution so that no farmstead was left fully bereft of manpower.⁵⁸ The following year, army commander Klemet von Isleben suggested to the king that the peasants in Småland should be organized in files of ten to sixteen men,

⁵³ Letter to Per Johansson, RR, 5/2 1573; to the bailiffs of Norrland, 9/3 1573, RA.

⁵⁴ To Henrik Fleming och Henrik Klasson (Horn), RR, 12 maj 1573, RA.

⁵⁵ To Charles de Mornay and Knut Posse, RR, 3/10 1573; to the bailiffs in the Southern provinces, RR, 28/2 1574, RA.

⁵⁶ RR, 4/3 1575, RA.

⁵⁷ Letter to Lasse Topprider och Mikkel Sigfridsson, RR, 2/7 1573; to Nils Gyllenstierna, RR, 10/1 1576; to Klemet von Isleben on the freedom of footsoldiers to pay hire, RR, 28/8 1576, all in RA.

⁵⁸ Orders for the army commanders to recruit more foot soldiers, RR, 28/6 1575, RA.

each file responsible for supporting one foot soldier from their own district.⁵⁹ This proposal seems quite reminiscent of the military tenure system established in the late seventeenth century, the so-called *indelningsverket*.⁶⁰

The organized recruitment of farmhands, lodgers and men with no permanent position created a social distance between the landed peasants and the conscripted foot soldiers. The former were obliged to control and discipline the latter. Thus, the military expansionism of the Vasa kings served to promote the authority of the landed peasants over marginalized groups in local society. The recruitment system was further developed in the royal decrees of 1577 and 1583, which targeted younger men without property for army service: younger sons, labourers and local craftsmen. The king's bailiffs were instructed to hold regular meetings with the trusted peasants in every parish to decide which men should be conscripted for military service.⁶¹ Although the system was designed to curb the widely spread practise of offering bribes in return for permanent discharge, the royal officials were dependent on the freeholding peasantry to provide manpower for the Swedish army. In the local context, this system pitted the strong against the weak.

As demonstrated above, military men returning from war often caused havoc in their home provinces. The Vasa kings then had to mobilize the resident peasant householders to engage and disarm the culprits.⁶² This might be analysed as a clear-cut conflict between the civic ideals promoted by the established members of peasant society, as described by B. Ann Tlusty, and the masculine ideals nurtured in the military ranks. The freeholding peasant possessed his own weapons and could be trusted upon to use them to defend his family and property. Well into the seventeenth century, Swedish monarchs had to call on peasant militias to defend the fatherland in times of enemy attack. Peasant masculinity still possessed a strong martial ethic.⁶³ Nevertheless, the violent masculinity of army soldiers often came at odds with the civic ideal of local society. The great wars of the late sixteenth

⁵⁹ RR, 28/8 1576, RA.

⁶⁰ Gary Dean Peterson, *Warrior kings*, *op. cit.*, pp. 233-241; Lars Ericson Wolke, *Svenska knektar. Indelta soldater, ryttare och båtsmän i krig och fred*, Lund, Historiska Media, 2014.

⁶¹ Royal decree on conscription, RR, 4/1 1577, RA; Sven A. Nilsson, *På väg mot militärstaten. Krigsbefälets etablering i den äldre Vasatidens Sverige*, Uppsala, Uppsala Univ., 1989, p. 5. Warrant for army commanders, RR, 6/4 1583, RA.

⁶² Letters to Per Johansson and the bailiffs of the Northern provinces referred to in the beginning of this section; to the riders of Mats Larsson and Joen Tyrensson; to Herman Fleming and Bertil Eriksson; RR, 22/10 1574, RA.

⁶³ B. Ann Tlusty, *The martial ethic*, *op. cit.*, pp. 171-175; Kekke Stadin, *Stånd och genus*, *op. cit.*, pp. 265-296.

century frequently placed military men in quarters in local villages, dependent on the support of resident farmers for their livelihood. During the Russo-Swedish war, peasants in the Finnish part of the realm suffered heavily from the violence of soldiers. The conflict eventually exploded in a full-scale rebellion (or series of rebellions), the so-called Club war in 1595-1597.⁶⁴

There are fragments of old folk tales and ballads expressing this conflict between army soldiers and resident people. Heikki Ylikangas cites a poem relating how the peasants sharpen their weapons in secret, storing them in dark corners before embarking on a winter raid against the detested army soldiers.⁶⁵ Various sources from early modern Sweden mention the legend about the Hunahär (literally the army of the Huns), a story about the greatest peasant rebellion of all time. In a version from 1626, a peasant catches an army soldier forcing himself upon the peasant's wife while in the bathing hut. The peasant chops off the offender's head, then he walks up to his neighbours urging them to offer the same treatment to the other soldiers:

And they went on until they became strong enough to rise against the lords of Sweden and Denmark, and then they went even further to stall their horses at the gate of Rome. And so it is foreseen, it must come to this again, and now is the time, because the burden is so heavy.⁶⁶

Military masculinity could be at odds with the civic ideals of peasant society, but it might also be turned into an asset to strengthen one's position in local society. We have seen how the peasant foot soldiers of the Swedish army collectively embraced the military ideal in their struggle for social and political recognition. This struggle to uphold manly honour might be fought with words as well as with violent means, as it is demonstrated by the case of Sven Nilsson from the village Malingsborg. Sven had served as a foot soldier in Estonia and Russia under the commander Erik Helsing. However, since his return to his home district there had been evil rumours that Sven Nilsson had not done his service to king and country as expected of an honest and

⁶⁴ Sven A. Nilsson, *På väg mot militärstaten*, op. cit., pp. 119-135; Heikki Ylikangas, *Klubbekriget. Det blodiga bondekriget i Finland 1596-97*, Stockholm, Atlantis, 1999; Rainer Fägerlund, *Bönder, krigsfolk och borgläger. Den militära tungan i Egentliga Finland under äldre Vasatid*, Åbo, 2003.

⁶⁵ Heikki Ylikangas, *Klubbekriget*, op. cit.

⁶⁶ «...och så vidare till dess de blev så starka att de satte sig upp emot herrskapen i Sverige och Danmark och gick så vitt att de stallade sina hästar vid Roms port. Och är spått / att/ det skall ännu så ske och nu är där till fullbordat, eftersom bördan är så stor». The legend of the Hunahär, in an excerpt from the court protocol of Allbo härad 1626. From Ingrid Söderlind and Eva Silvé (ed.), *Ett annat Sverige. Dokument om folkets kamp 1200-1720*, Stockholm, LT, 1980, pp. 165-167.

capable man. To counter such slander and defend Sven's personal honour, his army commander provided him with a written testament. The letter describes a serious mutiny in the Reval army camp, where some soldiers in Erik Helsing's army unit had attacked their commander and stolen his banner. The banner was the ultimate symbol of authority and robbed of his insignia Erik Helsing was *de facto* deprived of his command. The mutinous soldiers then proposed to leave the camp to return to their quarters in Finland.⁶⁷

In his letter from 1581, Erik Helsing testified that Sven Nilsson had not taken part in this mutiny. Rather, Sven came upon the renegade soldiers when they were heading back to Sweden via Finland. As soon as Sven found out what had happened, he returned to his commander and stayed there to protect him against further trouble. Sven Nilsson then remained under Erik's command for the next two years. Erik stated in his letter that Sven had always proved himself as the best and most trustworthy of all his soldiers, demonstrating his loyalty while never failing to risk his life for his king and ruler. In short, Sven Nilsson was a capable man and no one could ever accuse him for having failed to fulfil his duty.⁶⁸

Sven Nilsson's experience demonstrates the fact that masculine, military identity was a crucial asset also for demobilized soldiers. The wars of the sixteenth century opened up possibilities for violent men to better their circumstances by performing in the royal army. Soldiers that proved themselves worthy could be transferred to cavalry regiments, promoted to officer duty or even military command. Military career opened up a career path for commoners that had previously been the exclusive privilege of noble warriors. Military men who chose to return to peasant society could rely on a mixture of masculine bravado and military honour to further their status. Tax exemptions and perhaps a small allowance of ready cash were other features to single them out from the other peasants.

The royal propaganda linked the aggressive discourse of empire to the honour and manliness of the individual soldier. The great wars had an egalitarian component: the king, his noble officers and the common foot soldiers were all part of a collective purpose: to fulfil a historic mission to conquer and civilize the east. For the common soldiers, the hardship and dangers suffered during long campaigns further strengthened the military ethos with a sense of corporate spirit. However, in the local context military masculinity might constitute a problem as the ex-soldiers were often regarded as troublemakers by the resident

⁶⁷ Testimony for Sven Nilsson of Malingstorp, date Söderköping 19/2 1581, Krigshistoriska handlingar M 1277, RA.

⁶⁸ Testimony for Sven Nilsson, Krigshistoriska handlingar M 1277, RA.

peasant freeholders. By the end of the sixteenth century, the sources provide evidence of a widening rift between the propertied peasantry and the conscripted soldiers. This social conflict would become even more marked during the massive wars of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Conclusion

Was there a hegemonic masculine ideal among army soldiers in sixteenth-century Sweden? Inspired by Ben Griffin's article I have tried to test this by analysing sources from three different communication communities: the royal propaganda constructing the national community of the Swedish realm, the collective grievances from army units away on military campaign and the written experiences of individual foot soldiers returning and trying to re-adjust to a normal life in peasant society. The evidence points in different directions, but the main implications will be discussed here.

The royal propaganda attributed a violent masculinity to all Swedish men participating in the wars of the late sixteenth century. Both Erik XIV and Johan III addressed the peasant freeholders and common foot soldiers in a similar way than they addressed the noble warriors and experienced mercenaries. To make the wars of conquest appear legitimate, the rulers promoted the discursive status of the peasants by constructing them as political subjects, capable of understanding the state of the realm. True manhood meant engaging in violent combat as one of the king's men. The war propaganda had an egalitarian dimension that acknowledged the crucial role of the peasantry. The belligerent discourse of the Vasa kings weaved together notions of manliness and community with a history of conquest and dynastic claims for new territory. These ideals were transmitted to the common foot soldiers through their oath of allegiance, where they expressed their willingness to risk life and neck for king and country. In the community of the realm, a masculine hegemony appears to be prominent, promoting loyalty, prowess and physical strength.

The evidence of soldiers' grievances produces a more mixed picture of the masculine ideals within the army ranks. Group cohesion and military sociability probably strengthened the violent military ethos of the peasant foot soldiers, assuming the role of champions of (protestant) Christianity, the king and the realm. However, the letters from army commanders and common foot soldiers also display a different masculine ideal: the responsible head of the peasant household. Providing for wives and families was an integral part of the identity of the peasant soldiers. As long as the military campaigns remained restricted in time and space, the civic –and martial– ideals of peas-

ant society probably served to support the masculinity promoted in the army corps. As military operations dragged on for years, and the state of war became a permanent fixture, these two facets of masculine identity became increasingly incompatible. The case of common soldiers offering to give up their military career and return to a life as petty-farmers is an illustration of this point.

Although most of the foot soldiers in the Swedish army stemmed from rural backgrounds, returning home from war inevitably caused a clash of ideals. The soldiers had nurtured a violent masculinity in their years of military service, and they soon found themselves at odds with the leaders of established peasant society. Some of the soldiers had their small farmsteads, but many of them faced marginalization when discharged from the army. The social distance between the major peasant householders and the men recruited for military service was widening, to become even wider in the following centuries. In Connell's vocabulary, the violent masculinity that seemed to permeate every layer of peasant society in the sixteenth century gradually transformed into a weapon of the weak: a marginalized masculinity in permanent opposition to the ruling strata.

This article supports Berkovich's thesis that military service strengthened a unique military identity among the foot soldiers, even in the sixteenth century. This eventually served to make integration to the norms of local society more difficult when the army units demobilized and the peasant soldiers had to support themselves on home turf. The only way for the ruling elite to minimize the havoc of plundering bands of ex-soldiers was to cooperate with the leaders of peasant communities. The male heads of households assumed the position of controlling and correcting the young men dwelling in the margins of peasant society. The conscripted soldiers continued to nurture an opposing, violent masculinity but as time went on and warfare shifted to foreign arenas they became more thoroughly detached from the resident peasant householders. To paraphrase B. Ann Tlusty, peasant masculinity gradually became more civic and less martial, as peasant leaders came to support the monarchs in hunting out vagrants, day-labourers and farmhands to reinforce the Swedish army. Paradoxically, the great wars paved the way for a pacification of peasant society. The peasant householders no longer sided with angry young men to rebel against the crown. While aggressive masculinity continued to flourish among the conscripted soldiers, there were no peasant risings in the Swedish realm after 1600. The combined authority of the state and the landed peasant freeholders helped seeing to that.