



Veterans & the Media

Fact Sheet

Introduction

Appreciation and perception are closely linked terms. Some veterans feel unappreciated or under-appreciated and also make reference to the media which, they say, sometimes treats them 'unfairly'. When they say this, veterans are alluding to articles containing half-truths or which describe their former military deployment in an accusatory or critical tone. It is clear from research into the perception of veterans that such 'veteran-hostile' articles are not representative of the media's view of veterans.

Research

Since 2004, the Veterans' Institute's Knowledge and Research Centre has been researching how veterans are perceived in the media, initially in collaboration with Erasmus University Rotterdam. The research covers the print media only. An initial analysis of all daily and weekly newspapers in the Netherlands between 2000 and 2005 inclusive produced a collection of more than one thousand articles. Those articles provided a good idea of how the print media portrays veterans.

In 2009, this research was supplemented by research into how the print media of 2008 perceives veterans. The number of articles on veterans amounted to 175 that year. Angelique van Tilburg has carried out more recent research, using a different methodology, into the reporting on veterans in the five biggest national and five biggest regional newspapers (2012/2013) on behalf of the Veterans' Institute.

Tone and stereotyping

All the articles are weighted according to tone. They are subdivided into the categories positive, negative and neutral. Other aspects are also evaluated, such as whether veterans were the main topic or a sub-topic of the article, or touched on only. Finally, a distinction is made into the image (archetype or stereotype) created in the article: hero, culprit or guilty party, victim or neutral (no stereotyping). Nearly 50% of the articles adopted a (slightly) positive tone as regards veterans. Just 10% of articles adopt a (slightly) negative tone. It should be noted here that the number of articles adopting a neutral tone increases as the years go by. The research produces the following picture as far as 'stereotypes' are concerned for articles in the years 200-2005, 2008 and 2012-2013:

Stereotyping of Dutch veterans in the Dutch daily press

Articles containing stereotyping	2000-2002 (N=376)	2003-2005 (N=514)	2008 (N=91)	2012-2103 (N=383)
Hero	32%	36%	37%	38%
Culprit or guilty party	16%	19%	27%	16%
Victim	52%	44%	35%	45%
No stereotyping	N=135	N=32	N=84	N=557

In the reports which turned out to contain stereotyping, the image of the veteran as 'hero' gradually gained ground, whereas the image of the veteran as 'victim' (health problems or lack of recognition) is less dominant than at the turn of the century. There appears to be more nuanced reporting on veterans in recent years. Despite various negative reports in 2013 on military action in the former Dutch East Indies (Rawagede, South Sulawesi) the image as culprit was not as prevalent in 2012-2013.

The ground gained by the image of the veteran as 'hero' identified in the research appears to be long-lasting and is also in line with the increased appreciation openly expressed by Dutch society for veterans, such as during and at around the time of the Netherlands Veterans' Day. The Netherlands Veterans' Day generates mainly positive reports on veterans in which the topics 'recognition and appreciation' feature large and great importance, comparatively speaking, is attached to the 'hero' stereotype.

In an overview of the topics covered in reports on veterans (who also appeared in reports containing no stereotypes) we recognise some of the developments identified in the perception of veterans.

Subject-matter in reports

	2003-2005	2008
Blaming/crime	17%	15%
Health	12%	24%
Lack of recognition	12%	6%
Recognition/appreciation	10%	30%

The research on reporting in 2012-2013 classifies topics differently. The top three in those years are as follows:

1. Remembrance 27%
2. Health 13%
3. Veterans' day or days 12%

Other conclusions we can draw from the various research work are that the image of the veteran as 'hero' continues to a significant extent to be linked to older war veterans (primarily from the Second World War), whereas younger veterans, comparatively speaking, are more frequently characterised as health victims. The image of the veteran as culprit remains to a large extent linked to the partially failed and, partly for that reason, controversial military action in the Dutch East Indies (decolonisation) and Srebrenica.

Groups of veterans

The attention afforded veterans can be subdivided into the attention afforded various groups of veterans. The following table shows the number of reports in a few years for each group:

	2000/2001	2004/2005	2008	2013
WW II	58	42	32	118
Dutch East Indies	36	30	38	40
New Guinea	09	01	20	06
Korea	04	02	17	10
Peacekeeping operations	187	194	126	70
Severel/general	53	167	78	210

This table shows that the attention afforded veterans of the Second World War and veterans of peacekeeping missions is the greatest. Within the latter category, the attention afforded Lebanon, the former Yugoslavia and Afghanistan is again considerable, comparatively speaking. The attention afforded veterans of the Second World War is at its greatest around 4 May and 5 May and 15 August (Japan's capitulation), with much attention afforded primarily in the regional newspapers (which were researched in 2012-2013 only). The attention afforded veterans of the Dutch East Indies, who dominated the image of veterans portrayed in the media in the 1980s and 1990s, is comparatively small.

National versus regional (2012-2013)

The following table clearly shows that regional newspapers pay markedly more attention to veterans than national newspapers, with *De Gelderlander* being the proud frontrunner. The regional newspapers' share in 2012-2013 was as much as 70%. It is also noteworthy that nearly half of all articles on veterans appear in the months April to July inclusive, the period between 4 May and 5 May and the Netherlands Veterans' Day.

Newspaper	Number of articles in 2012-2013
<i>De Gelderlander</i>	233
<i>Brabants Dagblad</i>	138
<i>Noordhollands Dagblad</i>	137
<i>De Telegraaf</i>	99
<i>Dagblad van het Noorden</i>	94
<i>AD/Algemeen Dagblad</i>	53
<i>Limburgs Dagblad</i>	53
<i>NRC Handelsblad</i>	48
<i>Trouw</i>	48
<i>De Volkskrant</i>	37

Further information

This fact sheet provides general information. For further information about Veterans & the Media, go to the websites www.veteraneninstituut.nl and www.mindef.nl, or contact us by telephone (088-334 00 50) or by email (info@veteraneninstituut.nl).

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