



Memorials

Fact Sheet

Introduction

Since the Second World War, more than 22,000 service personnel and militarised civilians serving in the Netherlands armed services have lost their lives during wars and peacekeeping operations. The fallen are remembered in the Netherlands in a variety of ways, including through the erection of memorials where remembrance ceremonies can take place.

Memorials fulfil an important role for the relatives left behind and for survivors. A memorial is not just a tribute to fallen service personnel; it also has a clear function in the wider process of making sense of what has happened. The memorial provides a specific place where, alone or with others, a person can mourn the loss of a loved one or comrade. The great value attached to memorials by relatives left behind and comrades of fallen service personnel also explains why the vandalism of memorials, such as the theft of 50 bronze plaques from the National Dutch East Indies Memorial in December 2010, provokes so many feelings of grief and anger in them.

Number of memorials

The commemoration of military conflicts and their victims still plays a prominent role in Dutch society. For instance, over 500 new memorials have been unveiled in the Netherlands since the turn of the century. According to the National 4 and 5 May Committee's website on war memorials there are more than 3500 war memorials in the Netherlands where fallen military personnel and militarised civilians are remembered. Those memorials vary in design, ranging from the traditional war memorial and memorial stone to name plaques and window engravings. At some memorials, the visitor is provided with background information in a separate centre or through the use of signs; at other memorials, visitors can look up the story behind the memorial using an application on their iPhones (see www.4en5mei.nl).

Types of memorial

The memorials used to remember service personnel, including the fallen, can be divided into three main types.

Civil memorial:

- created at the initiative of a private individual or through non-military authorities;
- military personnel and also civilians are often remembered here;
- such memorials are in public space;
- example: the National Memorial on Dam Square.

Military memorials:

- through the military organisation;
- the memorials serve to remember fallen service personnel;
- are usually on military premises;
- example: the UNIFIL memorial in Havelte.

Combined memorials:

- the civil and military sectors play a role;
- serve to remember fallen service personnel;
- the memorials are in public space;
- example: the National Dutch East Indies Memorial in Roermond.

Some memorials are of a general nature in the sense that they are not linked to one particular conflict, but serve to keep alive the memory of fallen service personnel (and civilians) from several or all conflicts. Examples include the National Memorial on Dam Square and many municipal war memorials. Other memorials, by contrast, are strictly tailored to a specific conflict, deployment or scene of battle, or a branch of the armed forces or a military unit. This is true of nearly all military and combined memorials and of many municipal memorials used to remember the fallen from the Second World War or the decolonisation conflict.

Further examples of special categories of memorials include the memorials in military fields of honour which the Netherlands War Graves Foundation manages in the Netherlands and abroad, the series of memorials on the Bronbeek estate (Arnhem) in remembrance of the victims of the Japanese occupation in South-East Asia, and the Vrijland Veterans' Estate (Schaarsbergen) where Dutch service personnel killed during wars and peacekeeping missions are honoured.

One way of remembering fallen service personnel which differs from the traditional forms and is also more individual in nature has emerged in recent years, namely naming buildings, streets or bridges after fallen service personnel. Two examples of this, which relate to service personnel who perished in Afghanistan, are the Timo Smeehuijzenbrug in Amsterdam (2009) and Korporaal Strikpad in Amersfoort (2010).

Second World War

Most Dutch memorials serving to remember fallen service personnel and/or militarised civilians are entirely or largely linked to the Second World War. There are several hundred of them in nearly all Dutch municipalities. Among the best-known memorials are the East Indies Memorial in The Hague, the National Merchant Navy Memorial in Rotterdam and the National Army Memorial on the Grebbeberg Field of Honour. These memorials serve to remember more than 16,000 fallen members of the armed forces and merchant navy.

Dutch East Indies and New Guinea

More than 6,000 service personnel of the Netherlands armed forces and the Royal Netherlands Indies Army lost their lives during or as a result of the decolonisation conflict. The majority of those losses were incurred between 1945 and 1950. Some of the fallen, over one thousand, did not have Dutch nationality, but rather were of Indonesian origin. Until the 1990s, the number of memorials for these fallen service personnel was very small. Evidently, the time was not yet ripe for remembering the fallen from a controversial war.

Following the unveiling of the National East Indies Memorial in Roermond in 1988, the number of East Indies memorials rose sharply, mainly at local level. This was in part the result of society's reassessment of veterans of the Dutch East Indies and New Guinea and also thanks to the veterans' policy, which had been partly initiated by veterans. According to the National 4 and 5 May Committee website and a number of publications, their number can be estimated at more than 80. The majority of those memorials are dedicated exclusively to the fallen from the decolonisation conflict; some take the form of a new plaque added to an existing (municipal) war memorial.

Peacekeeping operations

Since the Second World War, military deployment during peacekeeping operations in an international context has cost 190 Dutch service personnel their lives, 125 of whom were part of the UN force in Korea (1950-1954). Those fallen are remembered not only by a few general war memorials, such as the National Memorial on Dam Square, and a few specific memorials (e.g. of regiments, weapons or services) - for instance, all the fallen from the Korean War are remembered with the Korea Memorial in Schaarsbergen, the fallen service personnel in Lebanon with the UNIFIL memorial in Havelte, and the names of some service personnel killed during peacekeeping operations are mentioned on municipal memorials. In addition, the Memorial for Peacekeeping Operations was unveiled in Roermond in 2003. It is right next to the National East Indies Memorial in the Hattem Municipal Park.

Remembrance ceremonies

Remembrance ceremonies take place at war memorials throughout the year. A substantial number are held by veterans from a particular military unit, who remember their fallen comrades during a reunion at their 'own' memorial, usually on barrack grounds. Alongside these small-scale remembrance vents there are those which have developed into large ceremonies owing to their reach or the wide interest they attract:

4 May	National Remembrance Day
15 August	Remembrance ceremony at the East Indies Memorial in The Hague
7 September	Remembrance ceremony at the National East Indies Memorial in Roermond
7 December	Remembrance ceremony at the 1 Division '7 December' Memorial in Schaarsbergen

Further information

This fact sheet provides general information. For further information about memorials and remembrance ceremonies, go to the websites www.4en5mei.nl, www.erfgoedinbeeld.nl, www.veteraneninstituut.nl, www.ogs.nl and www.mindef.nl. You may also contact the Netherlands Institute for Military History: 0703165836 or NIMH@mindef.nl if you have any questions about military memorials. The Veterans' Institute can be contacted on 088 334 00 50 or (info@veteraneninstituut.nl).

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