



Veteran Status

Fact Sheet

Introduction

Since the publication of the 'Coherent Care for Veterans' policy document in 1990, the Netherlands has been pursuing an active veterans' policy. The following definition of a veteran was used in that policy until early 2012:

"All former military personnel with Dutch nationality who have served the Kingdom of the Netherlands in times of war or similar situations, including international peacekeeping missions."

Using that definition meant that only retired service personnel could be given veteran status. Service personnel in active service with deployment experience were not a target group of the veterans' policy because that category already appeared to be guaranteed sufficient care and appreciation (recognition) within the armed forces. However, over the years, the distinction between veterans and service personnel in active service became a matter of public and political debate.

Those who regarded service personnel in active service also as veterans and observed the need to provide a statutory basis safeguarding the entitlement of deployed service personnel to after-care, wanted to meet the need for a sense of 'shared experience that counts' and hoped, in so doing, actively to involve service personnel with deployment experience in veterans' events (e.g. reunions and the Netherlands' Veterans' Day).

New definition of a veteran

In 2010, the MPs Pechtold, Eijsink and others tabled a motion for veteran status also to be accorded to service personnel with deployment experience in active service. The Lower House unanimously carried the motion, leading to the following, more comprehensive definition of a veteran being included in the Veterans Act (*Bulletin of Acts and Decrees*, 30 March 2012):

"The serviceman or servicewoman, former serviceman or servicewoman, or former conscript of the Netherlands Armed Forces, or the Royal Netherlands Indies Army, as well as any former conscripted members of the Merchant Navy who served the Kingdom of the Netherlands in times of war or who took part in a mission to maintain or promote the international rule of law insofar as that mission was designated by order of Our Minister."

Since 2012, the Veterans' Act has been developed into an order in council, known as the Veterans' Decree, which entered into force in the middle of 2014.

This means that, since 2012, the Dutch veteran population included nearly 30,000 veterans in active service, something which is unparalleled in the Western world where veteran status continues to be reserved for retired service personnel. Incidentally, in countries such as the United States and Great Britain, you do not need to have been deployed during wars or peacekeeping missions to become a veteran when you leave service. Any retired serviceman or servicewoman is a veteran in those countries.

Deployment circumstances

The old definition of a veteran still referred to “times of war or similar situations, including international peacekeeping missions” as far as the deployment criterion is concerned. This criterion offered room for interpretation. The “times of war” specification was unambiguous, but the “similar situations” specification was accompanied by a partial description only. Although it included all international peacekeeping missions, there were, of course, other deployment circumstances at home and abroad which could conceivably be regarded as a ‘similar situation’.

One example of this was the humanitarian mission in Rwanda and Zaire (Goma) in 1994. Although it was not an international peacekeeping mission, the ultimate conclusion was that it was a situation similar to war and retired service personnel who took part in that mission were accorded veteran status. Military actions which in any case were not classified as ‘similar situations’ were strictly humanitarian operations, such as the deployment of naval personnel in the earthquake-stricken city of Agadir in Morocco (1960). Nor were deployment circumstances during the Cold War regarded as ‘similar to times of war’.

With the definition of a veteran, the Minister of Defence has the option of nevertheless according veteran status to participants in missions which, strictly speaking, are not regarded as wars or peacekeeping missions. Consider, for example, service personnel or retired service personnel who were involved in carrying out strictly humanitarian operations in extremely hazardous circumstances or combating operations, including terrorist operations threatening the national or international rule of law, such as the hijacking and hostage-taking at De Punt and Bovensmilde in 1977. In the 2011-2012 Veterans’ Document, the minister stated with regard to combating terrorism that this must involve “lengthy and extensive operations at the higher end of the spectrum of force, on Dutch territory and also beyond it”.

People given equivalent status

Since 1990, five small groups in the Netherlands have been accorded ‘equivalent status’ to veterans. Although those groups are not named separately in the Veterans Act of 2012, their equivalent status remains in force. The groups concerned are as follows:

- Dutch Red Cross nurses who were deployed to the Dutch East Indies between 1945 and 1949 and were used (for years) to provide the Dutch forces with medical care.
- Employees Special Services (civilian informers) of the Marine Brigade’s Security Service (1945-1949).
- Dutch interpreters of the Interpreters Corps which assisted the Allied Forces in the final phase of the Second World War.
- Former Allied troops who helped to liberate the Netherlands and settled here and became Dutch citizens after the war.

- Former service personnel of the Royal Netherlands Army and the Royal Netherlands Navy who, until 31 December 1947, were attached to units originating directly from explosive ordnance disposal services formed during the Second World War and themselves actively disposed of unexploded explosive ordnance. Service personnel attached to the Royal Netherlands Navy's mine-clearance units are considered to have been deployed until 7 December 1953 inclusive.

Further information

This fact sheet provides general information. For further information about the veterans' policy, go to the websites www.mindef.nl and www.veteraneninstituut.nl, or contact us by telephone (088-3340050) or by email (info@veteraneninstituut.nl).

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