



Public appreciation

Fact Sheet

Introduction

More than twenty years ago the realisation dawned that the government had failed in showing its appreciation for veterans. The sometimes critical reporting on veterans in the media and also the psychological symptoms related to deployment experienced by veterans reinforced the need for recognition. The legitimacy of that need was recognised with the publication of the 'Coherent Care for Veterans' policy document in 1990. Since then, promoting and increasing public appreciation has been a principal objective of the Netherlands veterans' policy. The *Stichting Nederlandse Veteranendag (NLVD)*, [the Netherlands Veterans' Day Foundation], the *Veteraneninstituut (VI)* [Veterans' Institute], in consultation with the Ministry of Defence play a key role here.

In short, public appreciation for veterans includes:

- the level of awareness within society at large of veterans' previous military deployment;
- the level of appreciation within society at large for veterans' previous military deployment and the sacrifices they made as a result;
- the various ways in which society at large expresses its appreciation.

Importance

In the context of public appreciation, politicians, the media, fellow veterans, the defence organisation and their own social circles are the most important representatives of society for veterans. Open appreciation from those groups gives veterans the feeling that the efforts they made as service personnel in time of war or in comparable circumstances and the sacrifices they made have broad support. Expressions of appreciation can also support veterans in the process of making sense of and coping with their deployment experiences. This way, public appreciation can also benefit the mental health and well-being of veterans.

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Expressions of appreciation

Society has been expressing its appreciation for veterans in a variety of ways since 1990. Those expressions of appreciation and the publicity surrounding them can contribute to increasing further awareness of deployment experiences, and their consequences, and appreciation for veterans. Important forms of public appreciation include:

- its inclusion in policy, general intangible and material care and services;
- decorations, the Veterans' Commemorative Badge and the veterans' card;
- memorials and remembrance ceremonies;
- veterans' days and reunion facilities;
- attention in the media and education, publications, including scientific publications;
- the Netherlands Veterans' Day (last Saturday in June).

The majority of the examples of public appreciation mentioned were taken into account in the Ministry of Defence's veterans' policy, sometimes on the insistence of the veterans themselves. They were also reflected at regional and local level.

Appreciation in figures

The abovementioned expressions of public appreciation are - it is hoped - a consequence of prevailing public views of veterans. The extent to which the policy is in line with those views is apparent - with some room for manoeuvre - from a fairly recent *Vi* survey into public opinion on veterans. It produced, among others, the following results:

Dutch public opinion figures for 2013

	Aware of deployment	Great and very great appreciation for the role played by the Netherlands	Great and very great appreciation for veterans
World War II 1940-1945	95%	82%	90%
Dutch East Indies/Indonesia 1945-1950	91%	32%	56%
Netherlands New Guinea 1950-1962	56%	33%	53%
Korea 1950-1955	41%	38%	58%
Lebanon 1979-1985	64%	45%	57%
Gulf War 1990-1991	48%	42%	57%
Cambodia 1992-1993	20%	44%	63%
Bosnia 1992 to date	86%	40%	60%
Srebrenica 1994-1995	86%	30%	56%
Kosovo 1999-2000	78%	39%	58%
Iraq 2003-2005	66%	41%	58%
Uruzgan 2006-2010	82%	47%	61%
East Africa's coastal waters 2010 to date	66%	65%	70%

There are visible differences in awareness of participation in operations and in appreciation for service personnel or veterans. This is to be expected. For instance, it is logical for the Second World War to have a more prominent position in the collective Dutch memory than a fairly small mission far away from the Netherlands.

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This has an impact on how society remembers and appreciates the service personnel involved. Added to that is the fact that societies tend to prefer to forget or ignore military actions that have failed, or failed in part, or controversial military actions. Despite this, it is apparent that a majority of the Dutch population is aware of the previous deployment of veterans and appreciates it. It is also noteworthy that the appreciation for an individual veteran or serviceman or servicewoman is markedly greater than that shown for the role of the Netherlands as a whole.

The future

Perception of appreciation is in part subjective and generation-related. With a view to bringing about public appreciation for young veterans, it is important to know how best to meet the need for appreciation for veterans. Initial surveys in this area suggest this need will not be met by traditional and existing forms of appreciation, such as medals, memorials and financial compensation. Intangible forms of appreciation, such as arranging the Netherlands Veterans' Day and regional or local veterans' days, considering veterans in education, as well as the interest shown by the Ministry of Defence and the branch of the armed forces as former employer appear to be more important.

Some young veterans also expect, for instance, the Ministry of Defence to take their part in relation to reports on deployments or veterans in the media which they consider to be incorrect, one-sided or unfair. In the context of a policy concentrated on the target group it is very important to know the extent to which young veterans actually feel valued and what exactly they expect as far as appreciation is concerned. The *Vi* is also conducting ongoing research in this area.

Further information

This fact sheet provides general information. For further information about the veterans' policy and appreciation for veterans, go to the websites: www.veteraneninstituut.nl, www.veteranendag.nl and www.mindef.nl. You may also contact us by telephone (088-334 00 50) or by email (info@veteraneninstituut.nl).

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