

The times they are a-changin
Veterans and veterans policy in the Netherlands

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On account of their military experiences, which are often coloured by violent or hazardous circumstances and the prolonged consequences these may have, veterans form a special group in our society. This special position is reflected in the veterans policy conducted by the various Western countries. Aftercare and social recognition form the foundations of this policy, with a number of privileges as its benefits. The Netherlands, too, has a veterans policy. In this article we will first give an overview of the historical origins of the Netherlands' veterans policy and subsequently focus on recent developments in this policy area, which are partly the result of the increased knowledge of the problems and requirements of veterans. Finally, on the basis of the current social and demographic developments, the changing composition of the Dutch veterans population and the changing desires and requirements within this group, we will define obstacles and try to define if policy needs adjustment in the near future. We will begin with a short overview of the Dutch veterans population and of the social context in which the veterans policy is structured.

Dutch veterans and the development of veterans policy in the previous century

The Dutch veteran remained a rare phenomenon well into the 20th century. Whereas in the surrounding countries millions of First World War veterans were returning home from the battlefields, our country numbered only a few thousand veterans in the period between the two world wars. They were repatriated former service personnel from the Dutch East Indies Army (KNIL), who had fought the 'indigenous enemy' in the Dutch East Indies at a time when Dutch rule was being extended over the entire Indonesian archipelago¹. From May 1940, this situation rapidly changed. Between 1940 and 1962, the Netherlands, with a population of 10 million inhabitants at the time, deployed over half a million service personnel in four different wars². These 'older' veterans fought, as service personnel, in the Second World War (1940-1945), the Indonesian decolonisation war (1945-1949), the Korean War (1950-1954) and/or in the conflict

¹ H.W. van den Doel, *Het Rijk van Insulinde. Opkomst en ondergang van een Nederlandse kolonie* (Amsterdam, 1996) p. 127-147.

² *Nieuwsbrief Kennis- en onderzoekscentrum Veteraneninstituut*, jrg.1, nr.3 (december 2001) p.4

in New Guinea (1950-1962). The war veterans did not remain the only group of veterans, however. In addition to former service personnel who have been deployed under circumstances of war, the Dutch definition of veterans also includes the group of former service personnel deployed under circumstances comparable to those of war, such as peace operations in an international context³. This, by the way, does not include military operations (humanitarian operations) not conducted under the auspices of the UN. The Netherlands, owing to the intensive participation in the peace operations of the past 25 years, now has a new and steadily increasing group of veterans.

Table 1: overview of the Dutch veterans population⁴

Number of deployed service personnel		Prognosis (estimate) number of veterans			
		2000	2002	2004	2006
1940-1962	527,600	151,800	125,600	106,800	87,900
Double counting	- 45,200	- 12,100	- 10,000	- 8,400	- 6,800
Subtotal 1	482,400	139,700	115,600	98,400	81,100
1963-2004	77,700	38,000	44,100	51,200	55,800
Double counting	- 15,800	- 6,900	- 8,600	- 10,100	- 11,400
Subtotal 2	61,900	31,100	35,500	41,100	44,400
Total (sub 1+2)	544,300	170,800	151,100	139,500	125,500

Despite the fact that there had been an extensive pool of veterans from 1950 onward, it was only in the mid-1980s that these 'older' veterans became visible to the general public. This process was primarily instigated by Dutch East Indies veterans. An increasing number of these veterans were voicing their bitterness at the utter lack of attention and recognition for their deployment in the former Dutch East Indies and the sacrifices they made in this conflict that ended so traumatically for the Netherlands in 1949. Over and above this, for several decades they were bitter at the

³ Ministerie van Defensie, *Zorg voor veteranen in samenhang. Hoofddlijnen van het veteranenbeleid* (maart 1990)

⁴ *Nieuwsbrief Kennis- en onderzoekscentrum Veteraneninstituut*, jrg.1, nr.3 (december 2001) p.4

media featuring negative reports (war crimes) and at the lack of attention and care for the ones who were still struggling to overcome the consequences of their military deployment⁵.

The lack of understanding and attention for these sacrifices and even the misjudgement and accusations by the media that went on for years and years, were mostly borne in stoic silence by the majority of these veterans. However, when the negative publicity resumed at the beginning of the 1980s, the limit to their tolerance had been reached. To the veterans, the heightened interest in and criticism of the Dutch colonial past meant that they were confronted more with their military past. A more active role for the East Indies veterans, then, was only to be expected, all the more so as a substantial number of these veterans had reached the age of retirement around 1985. This meant that they now had more time on their hands to voice their indignation at their being denied respect. Emotions that had been repressed and pent up for years now resurfaced with a vengeance. It soon emerged that a number of these veterans showed signs of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). In addition, some East Indies veterans saw with envy that the Defence organisation **was** taking seriously and **was** taking care of the -younger- UNIFIL veterans (Lebanon 1979-1985) experiencing mental problems. They also saw that groups of civilian war victims benefited from the increasing social attention for the delayed effects of war experiences. The absence of aftercare for the East Indies veterans, in contrast, became even more poignant and led to more and more veterans bringing this problem to the attention of the wider public.⁶

The year 1985 can be regarded as a watershed in this context. It witnessed, among others, the advent of the first interest group of East Indies veterans. When leafing through the newspapers and news magazines from 1985 to 1987, one soon notices that the East Indies veterans were attracting more favourable publicity. The more assertive stance adopted by the veterans helped generate professional and social attention for the physical and mental problems of many thousands of East Indies veterans. It also drove home to the public authorities the message that they had bitterly failed the East Indies veterans. The image created by the media debates of the East Indies veterans as perpetrators was gradually replaced by the image of these veterans as victims. The unenviable position of the conscript personnel in those years was a decisive factor in this context. Conscript personnel were pre-eminently projected as victims of the East Indies policy at the time and of the ensuing social impotence. Owing to the increased understanding reflected in the media and the role of the Association for East Indies Veterans, which functioned

⁵ M. Elands, "Van dader tot slachtoffer? De Indiëveteranen in samenleving, publiciteit en geschiedschrijving", in: Martin Elands (red), *Uit Indonesië. De erfenis van de soevereiniteitsoverdracht* (Den Haag, 2000) p.49-65

⁶ Ibid

as a point of contact for the authorities, the East Indies veterans, after 1985, were finally heard by the politicians.⁷

From the increased understanding among journalists and politicians we may conclude that the social debate, which had been so painful particularly for the East Indies veterans, ultimately proved to be beneficial as well. With the critical publicity, the difficult circumstances under which the personnel were required to carry out their duty were also brought to the attention of the public. This probably helped instil the realisation that one hundred thousand conscript personnel had been asked to carry out a 'mission impossible'. Partly as a result of the changing image of the East Indies veterans and the problems that were manifesting themselves among the Lebanon veterans, the Defence political leadership, from 1986, likewise 'homed in on' the forgotten group of the East Indies veterans and the delayed mental consequences of the deployment in the former Dutch East Indies. The authorities thus intimated that they were beginning to recognise their own permanent responsibility for the wellbeing of the East Indies veterans. From then on, the developments in this field happened in quick succession. In 1988 two national monuments were erected; the first to commemorate the victims of the Second World War in the former Dutch East Indies and the second in commemoration of the Dutch soldiers who fell in the period between 1945 and 1962 in the former Dutch East Indies and in New Guinea. The East Indies veterans regarded the latter monument as the first token of recognition. Given the large number of visitors, this monument soon acquired the status of a place of pilgrimage.

The unveiling of the East Indies monument represented important moral support for the veterans organisations with a view to communicating their desires to the government. These mainly concerned getting general recognition and recognition of the connection between mental and physical complaints, a supplementation of their pension or other benefits and better aftercare, also for the surviving relatives.⁸ The different veterans organisations realised that in order to be able to achieve these aims, they needed to work with each other more closely. This realisation and the dissatisfaction at the ongoing one-sided reporting in the media, as they saw it, led to the founding of the Veterans Platform. On 21 September 1989, the joining of forces of twelve veterans organisations with a total membership of 50,000 veterans became a fact. The Veterans Platform soon evolved into the main representative and advocate of the veterans collectively. The platform

⁷ Ibid

⁸ *Dienstvervulling onder buitengewone en zeer moeilijke omstandigheden. De verantwoordelijkheid van de overheid voor de specifieke problematiek van oud-militairen Indiëgangsters* (Eindadvies van de Vertrouwensman Oud-Indiëgangsters drs. D.F. van der Mei (Den Haag, februari 1989) p.9-23

currently comprises nearly forty organisations and represents the interests of an estimated 100,000 veterans.

The then Defence minister, A.L. ter Beek, who had only recently taken office, set to work armed with the recommendations of his advisors and the list of requirements from the Veterans Platform. As early as March 1990 he produced the very first policy memorandum on veterans policy, entitled *Zorg voor veteranen in samenhang* (Cohesive Veterans Care). As the key policy objectives the memorandum cited the “promotion and showing of respect” and “minimising and making as bearable as possible the immaterial effects of fulfilling service under wartime conditions”. In the veterans memorandum the Defence minister announced a number of measures to be carried out in the short term. First of all, Minister Ter Beek was to appoint an Inspector of Veterans as a point of contact for the veterans. He subsequently earmarked \$ 250 000 for placing commemorative pillars at the monument in Roermond, extending the Defence facilities for reunions and for instituting an insignia for wounded veterans. The Association of Dutch Military War and Service Victims (BNMO), which had been set up as early as 1945, would moreover receive funds for gathering policy information tailored to the aftercare of ex-service personnel. The minister finally instigated the establishment of the Foundation for Veterans Services (SDV) as a central point of contact in regard to all matters related to veterans care.⁹

The policy memorandum was widely regarded as a major breakthrough. It was the first time that the late, intangible consequences of war experiences for military personnel were recognised. One of the results of this was that veterans suffering from mental problems increasingly qualified for a financial benefit. The increasing number of peace operations undoubtedly constituted a major factor in the changing perspective on veterans. Veterans were clearly not in any danger of becoming a threatened species. With the institution of the Committee for the Social Recognition of Veterans the minister made another important step forward. In its final report (1991), this committee emphasised the crucial importance of the SDV in the field of non-material support¹⁰. The foundation, which embarked on its mission in November 1991, soon became the main point of contact for individual veterans. Under the direction of former minister of Defence, dr. P.B.R. de Geus, the foundation rapidly extended its number of tasks. In addition to the role of central point of contact for veterans, the SDV shouldered a large number of other tasks including public

⁹ M. Elands, “Oudere veteranen en de roep om maatschappelijke erkenning”, in: *Militaire Spectator*, jrg.169, nr.5 (mei 2000) p.219-230.

¹⁰ *Veteranen. Een nieuwe dialoog met overheid en samenleving. Rapport van de Commissie maatschappelijke erkenning veteranen* (Den Haag, januari 1991)

information, the provision of (material) services, short-term psychosocial counselling, cooperation and coordination with specific and general aid organisations for war victims and the dissemination of knowledge of veterans issues. Finally, the SDV started the publication of the popular veterans magazine *De Opmaat*, which was later renamed *Checkpoint*. The overall goal of the SDV was to increase the social recognition of veterans. The fact that the SDV was regarded by the veterans as their own club is shown by the officially registered membership of some 80,000 veterans at the end of the 1990s, an increasing number of whom were 'young' veterans.

Thus, in the 1990s different ministers and state secretaries as well as veterans' organisations succeeded in further underpinning the Dutch veterans policy. A number of examples may be given that moreover also benefited the other groups of 'older' veterans. Former Defence minister Ter Beek announced in August 1992 that an estimated one thousand veterans of the armed forces who had served for upwards of five years in the period between 1938 and 1962 who did not receive a government pension would be eligible for a one-off pension replacement of about \$3500. The Veterans Platform subsequently set to work to try and achieve the same for the conscript personnel, volunteers and obligatory reserve personnel who had served between two and five years in the period from 1938 to 1962. This objective has since been achieved, also for the relevant category of veterans receiving a government pension and for partners of deceased veterans. With the institution of the Veterans Card, the widening of the award criteria and the establishment of the Veterans Information Desk in the Royal Netherlands Army and Arms Museum in Delft, the veterans organisations have achieved other successes in the field of social recognition. The fact that social recognition for Dutch East Indies veterans is no longer considered politically incorrect is borne out by the rapid growth of monuments and plaques at local level. The increasing attention for 'old' and 'young' veterans, both within and outside the Defence organisation in the 1990s meant that veterans were much more optimistic for the future. The public admission that the authorities had sorely failed in their duty to provide aftercare for the Dutch East Indies veterans, moreover, led to the current military personnel being far better prepared for their missions and to professional psychosocial support becoming accessible to them.¹¹

All in all, the 1990s were a fruitful decade for the Dutch veterans. They were the beneficiaries of various forms of financial compensation, increasing social recognition, and positive media attention, better aftercare facilities, numerous supplementary services and structural policy attention. On the other hand, it has to be said that the 'old' veterans had had more than their

share of waiting for these positive developments. For a number of them, these developments came too late. In addition to the more general explanations that can be given for this, such as the limited financial means available to the Netherlands in the first post-war decades, the lack of insight into the delayed effects of war experiences, the veterans themselves keeping silent and/or repressing their experiences and the decolonisation trauma mentioned earlier, the absence of a military culture or even a veterans culture in the Netherlands also played a crucial role in this context. Of old, the military profession in the Netherlands has not been held in high repute. This was reinforced further by the long period - from 1830 to 1940 - in which the Netherlands had embraced a policy of strict neutrality, not wanting to be involved in large-scale international conflicts. The First World War, which had been a major influence in the process of development of a veterans culture in the surrounding countries such as the United Kingdom, France and Belgium, in a military sense, passed our country by, as it were, almost unnoticed. Due to the absence of a veterans tradition, the longstanding tradition of neutrality, the small size and limited scope for exercising power, coupled to a string of disappointing military experiences in the years between 1940 and 1950, public manifestations related to the armed forces were hardly popular and therefore hardly visible.¹²

Another explanation for the long delay in providing specific care or attention to veterans should probably also be found in the fact that the Netherlands, from the 1960s onwards, had an exceptionally high standard of social services. These services, such as medical or mental care and numerous financial arrangements, were and still are available to all civilians and consequently to all veterans. This could easily lead to the –mistaken- impression that the care for all civilians as well as for all sorts of complaints was well under control and easily accessible. The self-image of the Netherlands as a welfare state did not exactly encourage the development of specific additional facilities for special groups. Contrary to the United States, where medical treatment in the regular healthcare system is simply too expensive for a part of the veterans, the high level of social services and the excellent accessibility of the medical care system in the Netherlands with its collective and obligatory medical insurance precluded the need for instituting special hospitals or veterans clinics. Also, for the vast majority of complaints, veterans can turn to the regular health care institutes. High-grade and easily accessible care tailored to the specific needs of veterans is required only where mental complaints, whether in combination with physical

¹¹ M. Elands, “Oudere veteranen en de roep om maatschappelijke erkenning”, in: *Militaire Spectator*, jrg.169, nr.5 (mei 2000) p.219-230.

¹² Veteranen Monitor 2003. Peiling Publieke Opinie Veteraneninstituut.

complaints or not, have their origin in specific military deployment experiences. This is specifically required in the first phase of the treatment.

The realisation that this is indeed a requirement, coupled to the increasing prosperity, in combination with the growing insight into the consequences of military deployment and the broadening social basis for veterans policy formed the foundation for the developments taking place in the 1990s outlined above. Examples from other countries where veterans benefited from public recognition or countries where veterans research and the treatment of specific groups of veterans were drawing international attention (Vietnam veterans), have undoubtedly promoted this process. On the other hand, this influence should not be overrated.

A closer look at the problems and needs of veterans

At the time of publication of the veterans memorandum in 1990, the definition of ‘veteran’ covered some 270,000 people. The current figure has gone down sharply to about 150,000 veterans as a result of the mortality figure among the older group of veterans (Second World War, the former Dutch East Indies, Korea and New Guinea). The groups of ‘older’ veterans with some 110,000 constitute the lion’s share, although this number is diminishing fast. The group of young veterans of peace operations, on the other hand, is increasing rapidly. Without significant changes to the current trend, the downward tendency in the total number of veterans will continue throughout this decade. This will mean that around 2010 the number will be below 100,000. At around the same time, veterans from peace operations will make up the majority of the Dutch veterans population. Although compared to the old veterans, this group, particularly from the 1990s onwards, was better prepared for deployment and had access to professional psychosocial help, it was increasingly realised that physical and/or mental complaints were not restricted to a number of old veterans from the period of 1940 to 1962. Various scientific studies showed that, to different degrees, the same was true of veterans from peace operations. The need for aftercare and other forms of psychosocial help was felt not only by the group of old veterans, but also by the rapidly growing group of young veterans.¹³

Studies among UNIFIL veterans and experiences of and public statements by the older veterans led to the problems and requirements of veterans being mapped in main outline. To further increase the knowledge and understanding of this issue, various other studies were conducted in the 1990s, partly also within the context of the emerging veterans policy. These studies showed

that the problems manifested themselves roughly in three areas, those of health, the adjustment to a renewed civilian life and social recognition. Although most veterans, both old and young, appeared to look back at their deployment with positive feelings, a number of them had problems adjusting to civilian society. An even smaller number of veterans, at some point after the war or the deployment, still experiences short or long-term physical or mental complaints related to the experiences of that period. In some instances these complaints are exacerbated by negative reports in the media. Young veterans, too, experience large-scale and sometimes serious problems. Some twenty per cent of them have adjustment problems following their return home, while between four and five per cent display symptoms of PTSS.¹⁴ The care concept adopted by the Netherlands Ministry of Defence on the basis of studies and practical experiences and applied to personnel to be sent on and/or returning from missions is characterised by an integral approach. The care before, during and after the mission is a cohesive whole. Even during the mission a start is made on the aftercare. The care for deployed military personnel does not end on their leaving the service, however. Studies into the consequences, care and aftercare following participation in peace missions¹⁵ showed that deployed military personnel expressed a need for a single, central place where they could go to if the need arises, also after leaving the service. Of these 'young' veterans, seventy-five per cent preferred to receive help, if required, from the Defence organisation. It should be noted in this context that veterans often have a high threshold to seeking help. A study conducted by the Central Military Hospital showed that veterans, if they do so at all, often only seek help after many years. Before that, they will have spent years and years trying to solve their problems themselves. They may also have ignored or underestimated them. Although the researchers in question think that avoidance is a factor in this context, a number of veterans with long-term complaints and the doctors consulted by them have long failed to see the link with their past deployment.

Problems at the physical or mental level that are partly or entirely related to experiences gained on military missions sooner or later generate a need for specific veterans care. As was stated before, certain problems experienced by veterans cannot immediately be grouped in this category. They have experienced great difficulties in making the transition from the military organisation to civilian society. Examples of these adjustment problems are for instance problems with leading an independent life, finding (and keeping) a house or a job, or missing the intimacy and

¹³ Dr. M. Meijer, drs. G.E. Algra en drs. J.M.P. Weerts, "Andere veteranen, andere zorg? Stand van zaken, ontwikkelingen en perspectieven in de veteranenzorg.", in: *Carré*, jrg.26, nr4/5 (mei 2003) p.43-48

¹⁴ Ibid

¹⁵ Bavo Hopman, "Een gewonde militair als echtgenoot of vader. Relatie- en gezinsproblemen bij Nederlandse militairen en veteranen", in: *Carré*, jrg.26, nr4/5 (mei 2003) p.23-25

camaraderie of their military period. Especially in instances where the military experiences have had a tremendous impact, it will be difficult for them to share these experiences with people who do not have this background. Consequently, they may feel isolated or misunderstood. These veterans have a strong need to come into contact with comrades from their deployment period at reunions. In addition, a number of veterans or service personnel who are about to become veterans need support in finding a new job or a fitting education or training. An additional factor in this context may be the fact that in the military organisation most things were always neatly arranged for them, whereas civilian society confronts them with more responsibilities and demands greater independence. Some veterans do not make this transition successfully. Veterans with mental complaints have an even greater chance of failing to make this transition. Despite all the improvements made to support and assist veterans, they will not prevent the possible occurrence of further debilitating problems, some of which may even culminate in violent or criminal behaviour or even suicide. Even today, young veterans are still getting into serious problems. It is difficult to tell how large this group is. One of the greatest difficulties in this respect is the absence of a good, centralised veterans address file. A sound veterans administration would enable contact to be made with veterans in order to gather specific data and do research.

Another adjustment problem that a number of veterans have faced or are facing is in the sphere of relationship problems¹⁶. A very recent study conducted by the Royal Military Academy (KMA) among 425 partners of deployed personnel showed that missing their life partner is the most important experience during the mission. For twenty-five per cent of the partners, reunification with their partner is problematic, while seven per cent state that almost one year on, the relationship is not back to the level of before the mission. The same is also true of the relationship with the children and with the parents, particularly in cases where the personnel are not living independently. Following the mission, there are the 'normal' adjustment problems in having to get used to each other again. After this period, the pressure will be mostly of a secondary nature, that is to say they will be the result of changes that the personnel have gone through.

Over and above the two categories defined above, namely the health-related problems and the adjustment problems, a number of veterans also experience a lack of social recognition. The group of older veterans felt this particularly strongly, with special emphasis on the East Indies

¹⁶ Ibid

veterans. The sense that the military deployment is insufficiently recognised by politicians and by society alike is mainly generated by the lack of positive publicity or public expressions of social appreciation and exacerbated by negative publicity and insufficient support and assistance by the authorities. Although the relationship between social recognition and health-related complaints or adjustment problems has not been scientifically demonstrated, it seems a logical conclusion that feelings of being misunderstood by society have a detrimental effect on the health and social functioning of veterans.

The American military sociologist Wilbur J. Scott has posited the thesis that the extent of social recognition is related to the question as to what extent a certain war or military action is later judged by politicians, the military personnel involved and public opinion to have been *meaningful*, *successful* and above all, *just*.¹⁷ A unanimous and unambiguous positive assessment of these points helps veterans in the process of coming to terms with their war experiences and in weighing and appreciating the sacrifices they have made. Discrepancies between the various components of this “collective memory”, according to Scott, complicate social recognition and indirectly also the process of coping with the war experiences by the veterans. Scott bases his argument on the extent of recognition of soldiers from two wars that were later judged to have been ‘wrong’ and that were more or less banned from the collective memory. They are the American military operation in Vietnam and the French military intervention in the former French Algeria.

‘Good’ wars do not automatically yield happy veterans. On the other hand, in contrast to wars that are judged to have been ‘wrong’, ‘good’ wars and consequently widely and unashamedly remembered wars do contain the ingredients that justify the war efforts and the sacrifices made in those wars and place them into perspective. This subsequently promotes the veterans’ reintegration into civilian society. After all, even during, but even more so, following this type of war the soldier sees that his military efforts are widely supported, which in itself constitutes a measure of social recognition, as does the fact that the opinion of politicians, historians and the public in general on the justness and effect of his mission matches his own (positive) assessment. In short, after a ‘good’ war, there is a better chance of the veteran feeling appreciated by society, which then improves the chance that he or she will feel at home again in that society on returning from the mission.

¹⁷ Scott, W.J., *French veterans of the war in Algeria: a description and comparison with American veterans of the Vietnam war*. (paper presented at the biennial IUS-conference, Baltimore (october 1993))

The Netherlands, too, is familiar with the phenomenon of forgotten or suppressed military actions and wars. Some would class the so-called Police Actions in the former Dutch East Indies in this category and consequently the military actions in New Guinea in the years between 1950 and 1962. Any social recognition of the efforts and sacrifices made by the service personnel involved remained conspicuously absent until the 1990s, which led to a great deal of frustration, particularly among the East Indies veterans. After all, all they had done was carry out to the best of their ability the government policy of that time, in the process of which they lost over 6,000 colleagues. Up until the 1980s, this was largely ignored by Dutch society. If and when the issue of the Dutch East Indies was raised at all, this was mostly in a negative context. The use of excessive force, for instance, was a recurrent item that received an undue amount of attention that completely overshadowed the good work that had also been done.

The discrepancies between the various components of the collective memory that Scott found in relation to Algeria and Vietnam were also manifest in the coming to terms with the events in the former Dutch East Indies. They were also at play in the immediate aftermath of the dramatic fall of the Srebrenica enclave in the summer of 1995, where a Dutch battalion was forced to stand by and watch powerlessly how the Bosnian Serbs deported the male inhabitants and subsequently murdered them out of immediate sight. Dutch veterans from peace operations that ended in a dramatic failure, such as the operations in Srebrenica and to a lesser degree Lebanon (UNIFIL) and Angola (UNAVEM), often feel insufficiently appreciated - in the same way that the Indies Veterans did years before them - because of the negative publicity. For others still, the treatment they received felt like an indictment. Nevertheless, veterans of 'wrong' or 'failed' military operations must be careful not to automatically equate critical media attention or the lack of public expressions of social recognition with a negative assessment by the general public. Surveys conducted by the Veterans Institute over the past few years repeatedly indicated that even where military operations were not judged favourably and where the role played by the Netherlands was not valued highly either, the majority of the population still appeared to have a great deal of appreciation for the role played by the individual service personnel or veterans.¹⁸

A correct conclusion would therefore be that one should not overestimate the influence of the media on Dutch public opinion. The surveys on the whole indicate that the Netherlands most emphatically does not turn a blind eye to its recent military past. The role played by the Netherlands in these surveys is valued in a rather predictable and consistent way, whereby the

¹⁸ Veteranenmonitor 2000-2003. Peiling Publieke Opinie Veteraneninstituut

decolonisation wars between 1945 and 1962 are regarded with a certain distance and distaste, particularly at the macro level. Despite the fact that the Netherlands does not look back at this episode from its recent history with pride or satisfaction, the general views on this subject have meanwhile become sufficiently differentiated to enable the Dutch people to express solidarity with and a great deal of appreciation for the individual service personnel who at the time did their best to carry out the widely supported Dutch government policy. This is a consistent attitude, by the way, because the exact same phenomenon manifested itself in relation to the events in Srebrenica in July 1995. The attitude of the Netherlands vis-à-vis its veterans thus appears to be more consistent and balanced than many people would have thought possible, including many veterans involved, for that matter.

The veterans policy from the year 2000: results and obstacles

The veterans policy in the Netherlands as it now stands may be regarded as a compromise wrested from the political leadership. In that respect it is the product of the political pressure exerted by the group of veterans that was sent to the Dutch East Indies to fight in the decolonisation conflict. It was also formed to a large extent by the increasing social and political attention for the delayed consequences of experiences with violence and the heightened awareness of the fact that participation in peace operations in the near future would also lead to the feelings of future veterans being hurt. Against the backdrop of the absence of a strong military tradition or a veterans tradition in the Netherlands, the veterans policy developed and carried out by the Dutch Ministry of Defence is aimed at improving the aftercare and recognition of veterans in a reticent and understated manner. The intention of this policy is not so much to place veterans on a pedestal as it is to recognise the special role that veterans have played in representing the Netherlands and to compensate or mitigate the adverse effects that a number of veterans were left with as a result of their military past.

The way in which the veterans policy is structured and carried out is in line with the typical Dutch tradition of cooperation between the various social partners. As early as the late 1980s, the Ministry of Defence took up and maintained contact with the veterans interest groups, sought advice of independent advisors and cooperated closely with private care institutes, such as the Association of Dutch Military War and Service Victims (BNMO) to help carry out the veterans policy. Shortly after that, the Defence ministry delegated the implementation of the major elements of the veterans policy to a new and independent foundation. This targeted distribution

of tasks and responsibilities and the attempts to get into contact with other relevant parties involved in the fields of veteran care and veterans policy were continued in the year 2000. That year saw the establishment of the Veterans Institute at the instigation of the Ministry of Defence. The Veterans Institute (VI) is an alliance between the Ministry of Defence, the BNMO, the BNMO Centre, the Veterans Platform and the Foundation for Veterans Services (SDV). The VI has two aims, the promotion of social recognition and care for veterans and their families.¹⁹ In addition to medical and legal advice, the VI also offers help and assistance by social workers and various forms of aftercare programmes for different groups. These programmes are best described as supervised contact between people finding themselves in the same situation based on the principles and procedures of rehabilitation. To put it briefly, the latter is concerned with the regaining of independence and an autonomous existence for veterans. The Veterans Institute is also responsible for the administration involved in the Veterans Card. In addition to offering accommodation for reunions and memorial services, the VI also offers numerous other services and provides general information in the broadest sense. The institute publishes a (free) magazine for the holders of the Veterans Card, entitled 'Checkpoint'. The Ministry of Defence is represented in the board of the institute, provides funding and personnel for the VI and facilitates consultations and cooperation with numerous military health and care institutes.

After registering at the Veterans Institute the veterans are issued a veterans identity card (the Veterans Card). They can exert influence on the veterans policy through their veterans associations and avail themselves of the available individual services. They are also kept informed of the latest developments, reunions and commemoration days via the magazine, which they receive at their home address. In so doing, the VI streamlines the care and recognition for veterans that particularly the old veterans have had to do without for a long time. With the establishment of the VI two new facilities were created at the same time: the Central Point of Contact (CAP) and the Centre for Knowledge and Research (KOC). The CAP is the general point of contact to which veterans and their families can turn with any questions they may have. This generally concerns questions on allowances or provisions, psychosocial problems and other questions in the personal life sphere, be it that of the veteran concerned or his or her family. Social workers are available for this purpose five days a week. The Defence organisation participates in this by making available one officer-social worker for this work. The CAP analyses the situation in consultation with the veteran and draws up a plan on how best to deal with the question. If necessary, the veteran is referred to the Defence Social Service, the Psychotherapy

¹⁹ Dr. M. Meijer, drs. G.E. Algra en drs. J.M.P. Weerts, "Andere veteranen, andere zorg? Stand van zaken,

Division, the Central Military Hospital or a care institute in the civilian sector. The CAP also takes care of case management, which means the coordination and assistance of all activities in support of the individual enlisting help. The KOC is tasked with gathering, processing and disseminating scientific information and knowledge and promoting scientific research. One of the elements of the latter task is monitoring relevant developments in the Netherlands and abroad and formulating advisory reports in the field of scientific research.

As mentioned before, in addition to and in conjunction with the Veterans Institute a large number of divisions and organisational elements of the Defence organisation each make their own contribution to the provision of aftercare to veterans²⁰. These include the Defence Social Service, the Psychotherapy Division of the Royal Netherlands Army and the mental healthcare divisions of the other Services, the Military Medical Services Agency and the medical services and the behavioural sciences divisions. Another valuable contribution is made by numerous civilian care institutes. In the past years, particularly from the mid-1990s, attention has increasingly been paid to the mental and social problems of veterans. Military assistance, both primary and secondary provisions, during and after missions has also been strongly improved over the last few years and it has been made more accessible to veterans with a view to fine-tuning the care for active service personnel and post-active personnel. The only restriction this imposes is the one-sided focus on the individual soldier. This is therefore still open to improvement. Both veterans and their 'home front' indicate that aftercare should be tailored more to the 'home front', while it should become more proactive and be offered more frequently than is currently the case. It should also emanate more frank interest and commitment than is now often the case. Sending questionnaires to service personnel and not following this up with further feedback to the personnel involved does not suffice. Veterans also indicate a need for various accessible forms of assistance, support and aftercare. Veterans and service personnel do not easily turn to civilian institutes because the vocabulary and reference framework do not sufficiently link up with theirs.

It almost goes without saying that an organisation such as the Veterans Institute with its employees and members of the board who either still are or were employed by the Defence organisation and still maintain close contact with the Defence ministry or the Services, is characterised by a form of self-censorship that stems from loyalty to the 'mother' organisation. In practice, this gives rise to frequent debates between the Veterans Institute and the Defence ministry on the issues to be researched or divulged. A procedure has therefore been developed

where it is agreed that all topics can be discussed while keeping each other informed of what issues are to be divulged in order not to spring any surprises on each other. This does not mean, however, that disagreements between the parties do not occur now and then.

In addition to the aftercare, the forms of recognition and the services offered by the Ministry of Defence through and in conjunction with the Veterans Institute, the veterans policy in the Netherlands has a number of other ingredients. With a view to promoting social recognition and increasing social support for veterans policy, the years 2003 and 2004 will mark the setting up of a National Monument for Peace Operations and the organisation of the annual Netherlands Veterans Day on 26 June. The Netherlands also has an extensive system of awards, insignia and commemorative medals, while numerous commemorative publications and other military history books are published with Defence funding support. The Inspector of Veterans, who promotes the interests of veterans within the Netherlands armed forces, is the one veterans can turn to with any problems they may have.

Despite the increasing attention for young veterans, Dutch veterans policy remains comparatively speaking strongly oriented towards the group of old veterans. The latter still form the majority within the veterans population and they are well organised. Eighty-five per cent of all the veterans who have applied for a Veterans Card with the Veterans Institute belong to the group of 'older' veterans. In the fields of commemorative events, reunions, applications for insignia and in terms of the frequency of enlisting the services of the Veterans Institute, they are still outstripping their younger colleagues. They are active, well organised, easily accessible and they know what they want. A number of them, moreover, feel that they command greater authority than veterans from peace operations on account of having seen action in actual wars. A large share of the available budget for veterans policy is, moreover, still being used for facilities and services that are highly valued by the older veterans, whereas they are not appreciated so much by most young veterans. The magazine Checkpoint is still mainly oriented towards the older veterans, while the application of free train tickets to attend commemorative events and reunions equally remains largely the domain of older veterans. In consultations on veterans policy and within the Veterans Institute itself, moreover, it is the group of the older veterans that predominantly manifests itself as discussion partner.

Young veterans on the other hand are badly organised, refrain from registering as veterans and are therefore highly elusive as a group. Given the fact that part of the group of young veterans also needs aftercare or experiences other types of problems without asking for help, the Ministry of Defence and the Veterans Institute decided to adopt a more proactive approach vis-à-vis the young veterans. Within the foreseeable future, they will be forming the majority of the veterans population, while care should be taken not to lose sight of this group, as this might lead to those among them experiencing problems not getting the help or support that they need and deserve. This would be a reiteration of the same problem experienced by the East Indies veterans. To improve contact with the younger veterans, their behaviour, wishes and requirements must be mapped in order to be able to tailor the provision of services and facilities to their needs.

Achieving this change in culture from 'old' to 'young' and making and maintaining contact with the young veterans constitutes an important challenge facing the current veterans policy. Another challenge lies in identifying the causes of the (health) problems experienced by veterans. While in the 1990s the problems were identified, the absence of longitudinal and prospective research meant that the causes of particularly mental problems and the main risk factors are insufficiently known. A third challenge, and one with a large bearing on social recognition for veterans, is the further promotion of a social basis for veterans policy. Although the familiarity with and appreciation for military actions in wars or peace operations are considerable, there is every risk in economically less felicitous times with major spending cuts that attention and funding for veterans policy fall by the board. This is even more true of groups with deployment experience that are not covered by the official definition of veterans, such as service personnel who participated in humanitarian operations (Rwanda, Zaire) or the increasing group of non-military personnel who participated in UN missions together with military units. In the context of deciding about eligibility for allowances and facilities, definitions of veterans are applied more strictly in periods of cutbacks than in more prosperous times.

New veterans

As has been stressed a number of times in this article, the composition of the Dutch veterans population is undergoing a thorough and rapid change in this decade. The number of older war veterans from the period between 1940 and 1962 is decreasing rapidly, while the influx of veterans from peace operations is rising sharply. From 1979, for the first time in approximately twenty years, the Netherlands participated once more in large-scale deployments involving large

groups of military personnel. In the context of the UNIFIL UN peace operation, troops of battalion size were sent to Lebanon. These battalions, which were mainly manned by conscript personnel, formed the vanguard of a new group of veterans which has been dubbed 'young' veterans. These groups of conscript personnel who volunteered appeared to be younger and less highly educated than the average conscript personnel of that time²¹. In all, over 8,000 military personnel served in Lebanon in the context of UNIFIL.

After the Dutch contribution to UNIFIL in 1985, it was to be a number of years before the armed forces were again involved in peace operations on such a large scale. In the early 1990s, the Dutch political leadership instigated a gradual transition from the conscript model to armed forces filled by volunteer personnel. The reasons for this transformation were the end of the Cold War, but more so the practical impossibility of deploying conscript personnel in the context of peace missions. The Dutch political ambition to make a sizeable contribution to the UN missions was insufficiently supported by the conscript personnel. As a result, the Defence minister was not able to offer anything but ad-hoc units for the purposes of the UN peace missions²². The first Dutch contributions to UNPROFOR (Bosnia) were small teams of signal troops who were responsible for the communications traffic between the various UN battalions. At a later stage a transport battalion was formed with the Belgians, but armoured infantry units were required if the intended more robust approach was to be realised. Even the fall-back option, the formation of a special battalion filled with volunteer conscript personnel, could frustrate the pledged contribution to the UN at the eleventh hour as the personnel were entitled to change their minds, as it were minutes before boarding their flight. Any escalation of the conflict would probably have immediate consequences for the possibilities of relieving the deployed troops. It was anticipated that the number of volunteers for the relief battalions would fall sharply in such an event.

This heralded the next change that influenced the composition and backgrounds of the young veterans in the Netherlands. The composition of the Dutch armed forces of nothing but volunteers meant that the recruitment effort and the concomitant preferences of the Defence organisation in this context became the deciding factor in determining the backgrounds of the new generation of veterans. The initial successes in recruiting volunteers for the armed forces in

²¹ Gielt Algra, *Managementsamenvatting sociaal demografisch profiel jonge veteranen* (KOC, Veteranen Instituut, 2002) p.2

²² Christ Klep, Richard van Gils, *Van Korea tot Kosovo, De Nederlandse militaire deelname aan vredesoperaties sinds 1945* (Den Haag 2000) p. 106-114

the first phase of the transition of the Dutch armed forces from regular and conscript armed forces to all-volunteer armed forces, were followed by a period of very meagre and disappointing recruitment results. In the first period of the transformation, the armed forces benefited from a large number of personnel re-enlisting after fulfilling their national service. The obligation to enlist, after all, remained in force until the end of 1997, in parallel with the new model that was being set up at the same time. This also led many people to decide for the financially more attractive volunteer option, which could be chosen instead of the compulsory national service. The economic prospects in the first years of this decade, moreover, were not such that it was pouring jobs. It is from this period that we have veterans who were first deployed as conscript personnel, after which they renewed their contract and were deployed as volunteers.

From the second half of the 1990s, the Dutch economy and in its tracks, employment began to pick up vigorously. This soon led to a shortage of volunteers and a landslide of vacancies in the armed forces. As this went hand in hand with a strong increase in the number of missions in which the Netherlands participated, the pressure on the available operational units was much higher. The Ministry of Defence was forced to step up its recruitment effort. These measures had an immediate impact on the composition of the group of veterans. One of the measures taken was to focus on that group of youngsters in society that, as research had pointed out, was interested the most in a potential contract with the armed forces. This turned out to be young people taking VMBO (pre-vocational secondary education) training²³. The downside of focusing on this group was that the most VMBO students generally conclude their training at the age of 16, whereas the minimum age for a contract with the armed forces is 18 years of age. The Defence organisation consequently lost a large number of potential personnel to civilian sectors, which did accept sixteen-year-olds. As a counter measure, the Defence organisation developed training programmes that can be characterised as introductory courses to the armed forces. An increasingly large number of the total of military personnel currently join the armed forces at seventeen (27% in 2003), so that they are ready for deployment when they turn eighteen. The length of the contract period, however, in contrast to what was intended, has not been extended. In combination with the fact that the average age of military personnel has gone down, this means that there are now more veterans who are in their early twenties.

This group of students with a pre-vocational training includes a large number of non-native Dutch people. Research has shown that particularly young people of Turkish origin show an

interest in a job in the armed forces²⁴. The armed forces welcome the influx of these ethnic minorities and women and target their recruitment policy to these potential personnel categories. These groups naturally have a different background to that shared by the traditional group of veterans, which used to be composed of mainly Dutch nationals, except of course for the more traditional groups of ethnic origin from the former colonies. These are trends, however, that lead to the veterans population forming a more true reflection of Dutch society.

Over the past few years there also seems to be a trend for an increasing number of veterans coming from the more rural parts of the Netherlands. This is partly the result of the decision by the Defence organisation to recruit personnel in the regions where the armed forces bases are located. Research conducted by the Royal Netherlands Army showed that these days young people attach a great deal of importance to friendships, relationships and spare time. The home-work travel time then becomes a factor in choosing a job. Not having to move and losing little time travelling to and from work on a daily basis become strong arguments in deciding on a job. Other ingredients of the successful regional approach have meanwhile been adopted successfully in the recruitment effort. The bases, however, are unevenly distributed over the Netherlands. They are located for the main part on the country's periphery. One of the logical consequences is that there are far fewer veterans from the urbanised western part of the Netherlands, also known as the Randstad.²⁵

It now looks as though there are more factors at play here than merely the regional orientation of the recruitment effort. Thus, the relatively small number of personnel from the Randstad was also identified by a random survey among a detachment of UNIFIL service personnel in 1980. These were mainly conscript personnel, which means that their composition should have been representative of the whole of the Netherlands. An even distribution was cancelled out by the fact that volunteers were invited to join the armed forces. Follow-up surveys of the origins of personnel of later UN operations showed the same pattern²⁶. Factors such as family traditions, conservative backgrounds and greater familiarity with the military profession owing to the presence of barracks in the immediate living surroundings may play the same role here as witnessed abroad. Another factor of influence, as mentioned earlier, may be the fact that the

²³ *Wat Wil De BBT'er, wervingsonderzoek bij Nederlandse jongeren*, Afdeling Gedragwetenschappen, Centrale Dienst Personeel en Organisatie, Koninklijke Landmacht (Den Haag, 1998) p.13-14

²⁴ Sico van der Meer (Beter vrijwillige dienstplicht dan reclamespotjes, *Werving onder Turkse en Marrokaanse jongeren*) in *Civiel/Militair, Magazine voor Maatschappij en Krijgsmacht*, jaargang 1 (2001), no 1, p.10-12

²⁵ Gielt Algra, *managementsamenvatting sociaal demografisch profiel jonge veteranen*, (KOC, Veteraneninstituut 2002) p.7

recruitment effort was targeted to a group of people with a lower education. Compared to the Randstad, the number of people with a lower education in various parts of the periphery can be as much higher as between 1.5 and 1.8²⁷.

Even in his choice of a career after leaving the service, the youngest veteran in the Netherlands does not show many similarities with the average Dutch person. Research shows that when choosing training programmes to prepare them for their return to civilian society, a vast majority of military personnel prefer those preparing them for the masculine uniformed jobs²⁸. The fire brigade, the police, the customs authorities, the prison authorities and private security services are all hot favourites of service personnel looking for opportunities in the civilian job market. It is also the result of both push and pull factors in the labour market. On the one hand, these sectors in society are characterised by a structural personnel shortage, while the Defence organisation, from a recruitment-motivated perspective, wants to give its former personnel who are leaving the service a job guarantee. Other groups of ex-military personnel mainly opt for a career that is directly related to the tasks they fulfilled in the armed forces. Drivers, for instance, are mainly interested in a job in road transport, while medics will aim for a job in nursing.

Owing to the increase in the number of missions and the transition to an all-volunteer army, the distinction that is made in the Netherlands between veterans and ex-service personnel is disappearing. Virtually all service personnel leaving the service after three years (short-term contract) have or will have mission experience in the future (2,500 to 3,000 per year). The same is true for regular personnel with a contract for an indefinite period, who, at some point in their military career, decide to make the transition to civilian society (1,100 to 1,200 per year). It is even true of an increasing number of regular personnel who, at the end of their military career, decide to leave the service (some 1,000 per year). Although the reorganisations and spending cuts that have been announced recently may have a temporary influence on these statistics, it is expected that the Netherlands will have an annual 3,000 new veterans. Their ages will range widely. Experience shows that many young regular personnel with a contract for a definite period do not renew their contract and leave the service as soon as they start forming a stable relationship. The main body of veterans will therefore begin their lives as veterans when they are aged around 25

²⁶ Ibid

²⁷ Centraal Bureau voor Statistiek, 2002

²⁸ Gielt Algra, *managementsamenvatting sociaal demografisch profiel jonge veteranen* (KOC, Veteraneninstituut 2002) p. 6-7

years. The oldest group of veterans will have vanished within ten to fifteen years from now, due to natural mortality.

New requirements

The composition of the veterans population will be a more faithful reflection of Dutch society in the near future, as groups are now represented in it that were not traditionally represented, such as ethnic minorities and women. Particularly the youngest veterans, however, form a specific group in society on account of their ethnic origin, their career choice after leaving the service and the lower level of education. The most recent groups of veterans do not register as veterans in large numbers. They do have the same image of the veteran that has formed in society in general, an image of old and conservative men who fought for 'queen and country'. Many young veterans are not attracted by this image and therefore do not consider themselves to be veterans. As a result they hardly organise themselves in veterans organisations, or show much interest in medals, monuments and commemorative events. Also, rather than attributing the lack of recognition to general negligence by society, they feel that it is the Ministry of Defence that is to blame by not taking enough action to influence media reporting in their favour²⁹.

The requests for help submitted by this group of veterans to the Veterans Institute involve psychosocial issues rather than the financial applications that are still frequently being made by the group of older veterans³⁰. As for the issue of recognition, the younger group is much more practically oriented, in the sense that they expect the Defence organisation to help them find a job in civilian society. Where press coverage of controversial issues involving UN missions is concerned, they expect an official reaction from the Defence organisation or the Veterans Institute in their defence. This might be a sign of our times. For years, the older generation confronted the Defence organisation with numerous financial claims. This generation has enough people in its ranks, professors and members of parliament among others, who are capable of mobilising and influencing the media themselves. The structure and organisation of the current veterans policy appears to link up with this tendency very well.

²⁹ Joanne Mouthaan, *Wat Willen Jonge Veteranen? Onderzoek naar wensen en behoeften van jonge veteranen* (KOC, Veteraneninstituut, 2002) p. 10-17

³⁰ Patrick Wokke, *Het Centraal Aanmeldingspunt, onderzoek naar het cap van het veteraneninstituut*, (Koninklijke Instituut van de Marine, Den Helder, 2002) p. 38

If the younger veterans join any veteran-related association, this is motivated primarily by the wish to avail themselves of the available services. This is even more the case for veterans with a lower level of education. The original design of the veterans organisations to organise veterans per mission, is increasingly less relevant for many new veterans as they have often participated in several missions. The group of young veterans is not easily organised per mission and appears to be unhappy with the distinction between serving military personnel with mission experience and veterans, as they feel that this distinction is an arbitrary one.³¹ In contrast to a number of the older and sometimes embittered veterans from the period from 1940 to 1962, younger veterans usually do not feel an antipathy for the Ministry of Defence. Young veterans, also when enlisting the help of an independent organisation such as the Veterans Institute, appreciate being helped by someone in uniform. A uniformed social worker gives young veterans the impression that he or she is on the same wavelength with them. They also see this as a sign of recognition by the Defence organisation vis-à-vis its former personnel.

Naturally there are many veterans who do not experience any problems in the fields of health, the transition to civilian society or that of social recognition. Many veterans say that their mission experience has helped them mature. Others indicate that they are less inclined to give up and more able to persevere. They also view the relative prosperity around them with different eyes and with a greater sense of perspective. Employers in certain sectors are highly interested in veterans on account of their discipline, physical prowess and their proven ability to work as a (uniformed) team. But even this large group of veterans who are doing well for themselves and who have found their way in civilian society see their mission experience as military personnel as an important episode in their lives which they would like to relive now and then with their former colleagues. This need is felt by all age categories and former trades. This is not expected to change in the future. Having contact with their former mission fellows constitutes a form of recognition for veterans. The fact that they share and exchange experiences, memories and feelings in itself testifies to the importance of their experiences and efforts. Appreciation through recognition, in other words.

The fact that these terms have shared meaning elements is emblematic of what it is for veterans to be 'recognised'. There are many things, both small things and big gestures that can give them the feeling of being recognised. It also ranges from being given material bonuses to developing a certain 'feeling'. The Veterans Card is a tangible sign of recognition. The same is true of the

³¹ Joanne Mouthaan, *Wat Willen Jonge Veteranen, Onderzoek naar wensen en behoeften van jonge veteranen*

medal they receive after participation in a peace mission. Recognition is also generated by the sense that they are backed by the Defence organisation and helped, not thwarted. Veterans want to be sure that the Defence organisation sticks up for them when they feel that the media are presenting a wrong or negative image of 'their' mission, their efforts or of other missions.

According to the young veterans, the Defence organisation has the moral duty to speak up for the individual soldier and/or veteran instead of keeping silent. In the absence of such support, veterans will interpret this as a lack of appreciation for their efforts on the part of their former employer³².

A more proactive attitude of their former employer, as stated before, is also very important with a view to offering aftercare to young veterans. Where opinions differ with regard to receiving care during and immediately after the mission, they agree in appreciating longer-term aftercare following the mission. As a general rule, veterans will have had an interview with a care provider on conclusion of the mission, but these are isolated occasions and not overly relevant in their experience. It was felt, moreover, that these interviews took place too soon after the mission, whereas it is only later that problems and difficulties arise. According to a large number of young veterans, help should therefore be offered actively and at repeated intervals. The same is true for other forms of service. In view of the foreseen developments in respect of the composition of the group of young veterans, an active role by the authorities is becoming an increasingly important item. All the more so given the fact that the average age and level of education of the group of personnel with a contract for a definite period are decreasing. In the past, people have pointed to the possible vulnerability of this group on account of these characteristics for problems arising after the mission³³. Because of these characteristics, it is to be expected that this vulnerable group will have difficulty finding their way to an organisation that can help them. An active approach during and even more so after the period of service in terms of the provision of information, reception and in offering help may prevent a great deal of unnecessary problems.

Towards a new veterans policy?

The veterans policy in the Netherlands has been developed at a relatively late stage. The high level of the Dutch social services, including health care, the absence of a veterans tradition or

(KOC, Veteraneninstituut, 2002) p. 10-17

³² Ibid

³³ Mickey Schok, Joanne Mouthaan *Posttraumatische stressklachten en symptomen bij Nederlandse militairen en veteranen* (KOC, Veteraneninstituut, 2003, Submitted) p.10-12

military culture in the Netherlands, repression by the veterans themselves and the insight into the phenomenon of delayed traumas of experiencing violence that was only acquired several decades later have all played a part in this. Until recently, the policy developed under the responsibility of the Ministry of Defence and implemented in cooperation with numerous social partners was mainly targeted to the older veterans from the years between 1940 and 1962. The pillars upon which this policy was founded were and still are the improvement of aftercare and the promotion of social recognition for veterans. Given the fact that the composition of the veterans population is changing rapidly and younger veterans of peace operations are forming the majority, aftercare and the expressions of social recognition should be tailored more to their situation and needs. In view of the heterogeneous character of the new group of veterans, their low degree of organisation and low education level, as well as the busy phase of life they are in (relationships, work), a more active attitude on the part of both the Ministry of Defence and the Veterans Institute is demanded. Many veterans are soon lost sight of, which means that at a later age they too might experience the same problems that the Indies veterans did before them.

For the Defence organisation and the Veterans Institute this transition requires a major transformation of the traditional way of thinking. It also requires another, more modern form of communicating and the use of other means to let the veterans know that society appreciates their efforts and to convince them of the importance of seeking help when confronted with problems. Over the past fifteen years, our knowledge of the problems and needs among veterans has increased vastly, thanks to numerous studies, the initiatives taken by the older veterans and the practical experience gained in the context of veterans policy. We know that the majority of veterans look back at their missions with a positive feeling and make the transition to civilian society with success. We also know, however, that between ten and twenty per cent of them experience adverse effects as a result of their deployment or will do so at a later stage. It is particularly with a view to this vulnerable group that the authorities cannot afford to offer help and other services in a half-hearted way. Although it is true that the veterans themselves carry responsibility for their own situation and welfare, as well as for availing themselves of the aftercare and other opportunities offered them, experience has shown that a push in the right direction may prevent a lot of future problems. In addition to improving aftercare and promoting social recognition, the active and indefatigable approaching of young veterans should become the third pillar of the Dutch veterans policy.