



Dutch Veterans' Interview Collection

Fact Sheet

Introduction

Since the Second World War, the Netherlands armed forces have been deployed in conflicts and on missions in virtually all continents. Nearly 1,200 personal accounts of more than 1,000 veterans have been recorded on sound-recording media through the Veterans' Institutes' Netherlands Veterans Interview Project (IPNV).

These personal accounts provide a treasure trove of information. They give an insight into veterans' perceptions, social relationships and the day-to-day work of a military mission. Personal experiences and the revisiting of those experiences can add an extra dimension to literature and archive material and thus increase knowledge of a war or peacekeeping mission. Moreover, the interviews deal not only with the mission itself, but also the preparation for it, after-care, the transition from serviceman or servicewoman to civilian and the impact military experiences might have on service personnel later in life.

Overview of the Interview Collection

The *Vi* conducted most biographical interviews with veterans in the period between 2006 and 2011. The project has now ended. The collection comprises interviews with veterans of nearly all missions and deployments, and from all walks of life. From private to general, medic to commando, and from battles on Dutch soil in May 1940 to patrols in Afghanistan, everything is discussed in this varied collection. In addition, in 2013, with the financial backing of the *vfonds* [National Fund for Peace, Freedom and Veterans' Care], a start was made with the interviewing of a few partners of veterans, also known as the home front. This sub-project was completed in 2015.

The following table provides an idea of the interview collection composition. The interviews with partners are not included in it; it covers only interviews with veterans.

Overview of the number of interviewees by period and conflict or mission

Period	War/Peacekeeping mission	Number of interviewees^[1]
1940 - 1945	WW II	193
1945 – 1950	Dutch East Indies	238
1950 – 1954	Korea	33
1945 – 1962	NewGuinea	86
1979 – 1985	Lebanon	131
1991 – 1992	Iraq (Gulf War)	20
1992 – 1993	Cambodia	57
1991 – 2010	The Balkans	16
1992 – 2010	Former Yugoslavia	293
1998 – 2000	Kosovo	31
2002 – 2010	Afghanistan	115
2003 – 2004	Iraq (SFIR)	64
	Other conflicts/missions	214

[1] To date, 1,011 veterans have been interviewed (reference date - January 2015). Since many veterans have been on deployment several times, the total number of interviewed veterans counted per mission works out greater than the total number of interviewed veterans.

Access and use

The interviews serve as a source for academics, policy-makers and journalists, and also for veterans, family members, surviving relatives and other interested parties. At the present time, nearly 600 interviews can be listened to via the *Vi*'s website. Those interviews are accessible to the public following free registration. The other interviews are not automatically available to the public. These are mostly interviews where the interviewee has stated that restrictions apply to the use of the interview, e.g. for reasons of privacy. The interviews may be listened to only under strict conditions and with the explicit permission of the *Vi*.

The interviewed veterans relate their life stories from birth and (early) youth up to the time of the interview. The emphasis, of course, is on their military careers. On average, the interviews last two-and-a-half hours. Searches can be executed in the database using a keyword, surname, sex, mission and branch of the armed forces. The interviews are recorded in the form of audio files and contain no visual material. Each interview is accompanied by concise information about, among other things, the veteran's deployments, rank, training and role. A brief summary is also available for initial, quick orientation. Some veterans have also made personal memorabilia (including photos, diaries and newspaper cuttings) available to the *Vi*. In consultation with the donors, they were handed over to the Netherlands Institute for Military History in 2014.

OralHistory

The IPNV is a good example of what is known as an oral history project. The term oral history refers to a scientific method where the past is examined on the basis of the information gathered from talking to people about their experiences. Sources of this type give an insight into eyewitnesses' perceptions of historical events. Oral sources also give an insight into how people give meaning to their experiences and will often provide information that initiates additional research into other sources.

The specific qualities of oral history should be borne in mind when consulting the interview collection. Recollections are subjective and are not a factual description of what happened. People who experienced the same thing can remember and visualise it differently, and draw different conclusions. Also, not everything said during the interviews will be wholly accurate. People often speak about their experiences years later and are unable to remember everything exactly. This should be taken into account when using oral sources, such as the interview collection. Anyone wishing to know 'exactly' what happened will also have to consult other sources or listen to several accounts of the same event.

Interview Collection Partner

The interview collection is also accessible through the *Data Archiving and Networked Services* (DANS) site. DANS, an institute of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences (KNAW) and the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO), was set up to facilitate permanent access to digital research data. The role of DANS in this collection is to ensure that the interviews can still be listened to in the long term. Via the DANS website, search terms can be entered to search the EASY online archiving system. For more information about DANS, go to the website (www.dans.knaw.nl).

Further information

Having read this fact sheet, are you interested in further information about the IPNV or do you have any questions about the collection? If so, go to the Veterans' Institute website (www.veteraneninstituut.nl) or contact us by telephone (088-334 00 50) or by email (info@veteraneninstituut.nl).

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