



Veterans and their missions

Fact Sheet

Definition

Under the Veterans Act, which entered into force in 2014, a veteran is “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 time 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.” Such missions could include the peacekeeping operations of the United Nations, NATO and the European Union. The Netherlands has four main groups of veterans, broken down into the World War II, the Netherlands East Indies, New Guinea and peacekeeping operations.

Second World War

More than 380,000 Dutch service personnel and militarised civilians (merchant navy) served the Netherlands between 1939 and 1945. In addition, tens of thousands of Indonesian (native) service personnel served the Royal Netherlands Indies Army (*KNIL*) and the Royal Netherlands Navy in and around the Netherlands East Indies. For more than 90% of the Dutch service personnel, the war effort was of short duration owing to the rapid defeats to Germany (1940) and Japan (1942). The other 10% continued to fight, joining forces with the Allies (including the merchant navy). Fifty-five thousand service personnel spent years in German or Japanese prisoner-of-war camps.

Approximately 16,000 service personnel and militarised civilians lost their lives serving the Kingdom, 7,500 as a result of military action and 8,500 as a result of privations suffered while being held as prisoners-of-war. There are roughly 3,500 Dutch World War II veterans still alive. More than 2,500 of them are registered with the Veterans’ Institute.

Netherlands East Indies

In the period between 1945 and 1950, the Netherlands deployed more than 170,000 (Indo-) Dutch and more than 35,000 native (Indonesian) soldiers in the fight against Indonesian nationalists who, on 17 August 1945, proclaimed the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. The objective was to enforce gradual decolonisation managed by the Dutch. Many of the nearly 130,000 soldiers sent to the Dutch East Indies were conscripts (95,000) or war volunteers (25,000) and on average served for about three years. The Dutch force comprised more than 120,000 Royal Netherlands Army service personnel, 15,000 Royal Netherlands Navy service personnel and 70,000 KNIL service personnel. About 35,000 service personnel serving with the KNIL or the navy were of Indonesian origin.

Nearly 6,000 service personnel serving the Kingdom died during or as a result of this major military conflict, which ended on 27 December 1949 when the Netherlands recognised Indonesian independence. Of the more than 150,000 service personnel to return or come (KNIL) to the Netherlands after the conflict had ended, approximately 26,500 are still alive. This means the East Indian veterans continue to represent a substantial group of Dutch veterans, more than 20,000 of whom are registered with the Veterans' Institute.

New Guinea

When, in December 1949, the Netherlands ceded sovereignty over most of the archipelago to Indonesia, West New Guinea remained in Dutch hands. Indonesia did not acquiesce in this with the result that a political conflict arose in 1950 which ultimately - as a result of Indonesian infiltrations - acquired an increasingly military character in about 1960. Until the end of 1962, when the Netherlands handed the territory over to the United Nations (which, in turn, handed it over to Indonesia in 1963), the Netherlands deployed about 30,000 service personnel. More than 100 Dutch service personnel lost their lives through illness, accidents and in combat operations. At present, about 13,000 New Guinea veterans are still alive, 11,000 of whom are registered with the Veterans' Institute.

Peacekeeping operations

Since 1945 the Dutch armed forces have taken part in about fifty international land, sea and air peacekeeping operations throughout the world (for an overview go to: www.defensie.nl). Participation in peacekeeping operations has increased rapidly, especially since the 1990s. To date, the Netherlands has deployed about 90,000 service personnel on such missions, which are highly diverse in character (varying from providing humanitarian aid and acting as observers to peace enforcement and 'warfare'). Some of them have taken part in several peacekeeping operations.

Military deployment has cost 190 Dutch service personnel their lives, 125 of whom were part of the UN force in Korea (Korean War, 1950-1953). Approximately 53,000 of the service personnel deployed as part of a peacekeeping operation have left the service. Nearly 30,000 are still in active service as veterans. At present, more than 32,000 retired veterans of peacekeeping missions are registered with the Veterans' Institute. The nearly 30,000 veterans in active service will receive their veterans' card at the end of 2014.

In figures

	Dutch service personnel (including the merchant navy)	Losses (in round figures)	Veterans in 2010	Veterans in 2014	Veterans' card holders in 2014 (classification based on 1st mission)
WW II	380,000	16,000	5,000	3,500	2,500
Dutch East Indies	170,000	6,000	35,000	26,500	20,000
New Guinea	30,000	110	15,000	13,000	11,000
Peacekeeping operations	85,000	190	56,000	82,000	32,500
Total	665,000	22,300	111,000	125,000	66,000 (with approximately 76,000 missies)

As the figures show, veterans of peacekeeping operations have formed the majority within the veterans' population since 2010. Expectations are that the total number of veterans will drop to about 100,000 people in the next few years. This is because the mortality rate among the oldest veterans is not entirely counterbalanced by the rise in the number of new veterans of peacekeeping missions. That rise will not be very substantial since all present service personnel with deployment experience have already been awarded veteran status through the Veterans Act.

Veterans' organisations

Tens of thousands of veterans have joined a veterans' organisation or a reunion association. The Veterans Institute is aware of more than 500 such organisations. The representation of East Indian veterans remains the highest. Although the majority of veterans' associations and reunion associations are aimed solely at maintaining links between members, some of the larger veterans' organisations also have representing the interests of veterans as their explicit purpose. The lead organisation in that area is the *Stichting Veteranen Platform* [Veterans' Platform Foundation], an umbrella organisation of more than forty veterans' organisations which serve as a point of contact for the government as regards lobbying and veterans' policy.

Further information

This fact sheet contains general information. For further information about veterans or completed military operations, go to the websites www.veteraneninstituut.nl and www.mindf.nl. You may also telephone the Veterans' Institute on 088-334 00 50 or send an email to info@veteraneninstituut.nl. You may also contact the Netherlands Institute of Military History (070-3165836 or NIMH@mindf.nl) if you have questions relating to military history.

This is a Veterans' Institute publication.
November 2014.