INTERVIEWS
WITH DUTCH VETERANS
A data-set of life-stories
covering the period 1940-2011

June 2012
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Introduction

The Dutch Veterans Interview project (IPNV), an initiative of the Veterans Institute in Doorn (NL), was conducted from 2007 to 2011 and succeeded in collecting 1000 digitally recorded life-story interviews with a representative number of veterans deployed in all conflicts and military missions in which the Netherlands were involved (1940-2011).

A team of 15 interviewers spread across various regions of the Netherlands conducted semi-structured interviews of about 2.5 hours at the home of the veterans. These were recruited through adds in veteran magazines and through direct mailings based on the Veterans administration of the Veterans Institute.

Part of the collection is freely accessible online after registration and can be accessed through: http://interview.veteraneninstituut.nl/search. The other part is only accessible with special permission.

Historian dr. Stef Scagliola was the initiator, the project leader and the curator of this database. Together with several partners a number of innovative digital tools were applied, the multi-disciplinary potential of the collection was explored, and measures were taken to facilitate broad access to the data for the academic community.
The importance for academic research of documenting the relatively unknown world of Dutch military culture, specifically the informal structures and social dynamics that evolve during military missions abroad, which are hardly or not documented in written sources.

The value of retrospective personal narratives of a social group that goes through various transitions: from civilian to military, from a peaceful environment to a context of violent conflict in a foreign culture, and at the end of the career back to the status of civilian.

The increased relevance of personal documents as sources for research in the field of contemporary history.
The challenge was to develop a data management system that could combine several functions:

- monitoring the workflow of data gathering and processing;
- creating a broad meta-data structure that was accessible to the individual interviewers so that they could add their data in the system;
- anticipating the requirements of a differentiated search environment;
- anticipating the academic requirements for reuse of data by both historians and social scientists.

The data generated by the IPNV is the result of a process, of an archival effort to document a subject on the basis of a broad topic list. These sources generally do not provide clear cut answers to specific research questions. The project documents experiences that would otherwise get lost, and that can provide an essential ‘stepping stone’ in the phase of preliminary research in various realms of the humanities and the social sciences.
**Methodology 2: a broad meta-data scheme**

- Grasping the unique opportunity of combining the gathering of personal data, of data on professional career and of data on historical context, and this across generations and military hierarchy.
- Locating and preserving personal documents as cultural heritage.
- Providing extensive context information on how the data was created, which is required for the reuse of data (circumstances during interview, method of recruitment, letter of introduction, topic list, release form, background interviewers, field notes)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Veteran</strong></th>
<th><strong>Military background</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interviewer</strong></th>
<th><strong>Interview</strong></th>
<th><strong>Contextual Documents</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- Venue (connected to Google map)</td>
<td>- Personal documents (photos, diaries) can be uploaded</td>
<td>- Name of interviewer</td>
<td>- Interview ID</td>
<td>- Letters and advertising for recruitment of respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Date and place of birth</td>
<td>- Military career and education (schools + courses)</td>
<td>- Date and place of birth</td>
<td>- Date, time and location</td>
<td>- Letter of introduction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Motivation to contribute to the project / way of recruitment</td>
<td>- Military mission(s) and/or conflict(s), for each of these:</td>
<td>- Gender</td>
<td>- Status (unedited, edited, form of consent)</td>
<td>- Survey to provide background information prior to the interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Engagement in veteran activities</td>
<td>› Engagement in service (volunteer, conscript)</td>
<td>- Education and professional background</td>
<td>- Length and format</td>
<td>- Topic list, and specific topic-lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Education</td>
<td>› Branch (Army, Navy, Air Force)</td>
<td>- Marital status</td>
<td>- Remarks about the circumstances in which the interview was held</td>
<td>- Description of workflow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Marital status</td>
<td>› Unit(s)</td>
<td>- Children</td>
<td>- Summary of every 10 min. + keywords</td>
<td>- Protocol for how to deal with sensitive information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Children</td>
<td>› Rank</td>
<td>- Profession</td>
<td>- Explanation of abbreviations, military jargon, lingo, geographical locations, proper names</td>
<td>- Instructions on how to work out the summaries and attribute key-words</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Health and well being</td>
<td>› Task(s)</td>
<td>- Health and well being</td>
<td>- Possibility to upload the transcript</td>
<td>- Release form</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Asking the interviewers to conduct interview with a future listener in mind.

Addressing the elements of transition from one cultural context to another.

Asking the interviewers to cover as much topics as possible in the interview, in order to be able to compare themes across time, socio-cultural context and rank.

When needed arrange a follow up interview.

Creating a flexible sub-structure in order to facilitate the collection of data by PhD-students who research related topics. They adhere to the format of the project, add their specific questions to the topic list, and after their PhD is completed, the data becomes available to other researchers.
The interviewers have been asked to pay attention to the various dimensions in the content of the narrative, and to assess which approach yields the best results with the narrator. Special attention has been paid to the historical value of the interview. This meant the instruction to probe for details about when and where an event occurred and who were involved, in order to be able to link this information to other sources.

The leading oral history theorist Alessandro Portelli characterizes oral history as follows:

*Oral history not only can provide unknown facts or illuminate unknown aspects of known events, it also provides insight into the way common people attribute meaning to the world around them, how they live through and shape social processes.*

Another leading oral historian, Valery Yow, describes the ‘trickle over’ effect from related disciplines such as qualitative sociology, anthropology, biographical and literary studies, linguistics, communication and narrative studies and all interdisciplinary work exploring the relationship between memory, narrative and personal identity.

### Methodology 3: exploiting the multidisciplinary potential of the sources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychology</th>
<th>Anthropology</th>
<th>History</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(influence on the mind)</td>
<td>(social meaning)</td>
<td>(fact-finding, interpretations of the past)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– How did you feel?</td>
<td>– What did it mean to you?</td>
<td>– When did this happen?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– How did you cope?</td>
<td>– With whom did you share this experience?</td>
<td>– Where were you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– What is important to you?</td>
<td>– How did the others react?</td>
<td>– How did it look like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– How do you look back on it?</td>
<td>– How do you see yourself?</td>
<td>– Can you give me an example?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– Has it changed you?</td>
<td>– How do you feel about the others?</td>
<td>– Can you describe the process?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>– What was your role?</td>
<td>– Linking to other sources</td>
<td>– What is your most vivid memory?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>– What were the consequences?</td>
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</table>
Anticipating different needs by creating three search environments, each with a specific selection of searchable fields, based on the range of uses of the interview that the veteran has agreed upon and that is documented in the release form:

1. The archivist: has access to all fields, including a few classified items.
2. The academic community: has access to the restricted part of the collection only with special permission.
3. The general public: has free online access to the unrestricted part of the collection after registration.

Seizing the opportunity of involving the 15 interviewers who wrote all the summaries of the interviews, into the collective effort of creating a thematic thesaurus, to tag the 10 min. summaries in a meaningful way. The key words that were first suggested by them have been preserved, in order to link them to the agreed term that has been attributed by the editor in the final editing process.

Documenting and explaining abbreviates, military jargon, slang, lingo and geographical names. This with the intent of compiling a military dictionary and anticipating future developments in speech retrieval.

Extensive possibilities for cross linking with other digital archives, with the many websites/logs created within the veterans community, and with large scale veterans oral history projects in the US, GB, Canada and Australia.

**Efforts to optimize the retrieval success in the search environment**

* A total of 1,030 interviews are accessible to researchers.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Total interviews</th>
<th>Embargo</th>
<th>Restricted (accessible for researchers with special permission)</th>
<th>Unrestricted (freely accessible after registration)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1110</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>499</td>
<td>531</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Additional search possibilities**

* **Thematic thesaurus**

* **Military dictionary**

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Special sub-projects realized with the data

Being the first large scale digital born interview-collection in the Netherlands, the database was considered suitable for the application of a number of innovative digital tools. In addition to this it joined several initiatives set up to standardize meta-data of digital collections and to secure long term preservation.

Exploit the potential of digital data:

› Applying new technology
› Providing broad access and securing long term preservation
› Other special projects
Applying New Technology

1. The Veteran Tapes, DANS, Kwalon
   - Example of reuse of qualitative data.
   - 25 transcribed interviews are the basis for a series of publications each from a different discipline.
   - Examples: discourse analysis, metaphors of violence in language of the veterans.

2. The Veteran Tapes, Enhanced Publication, DANS, Surf Foundation, Radboud University of Nijmegen
   - Development of the fragment cutter in order to enrich the digital publications with audio-clips and meta-data.
   - www.watveteranenvertellen.nl

3. Living Oral History Workbench, Ministry of Health and Welfare funding: program for heritage of the War, DANS, Radboud University of Nijmegen
   - A subset of 250 interviews about WWII and the Dutch/Indonesian decolonization wars (Indonesia, New Guinea) has been automatically indexed through speech retrieval and can be searched on the basis of spoken content. Researchers can add annotations to the retrieved fragments and share them with peers.
   - http://wwwlands2.let.kun.nl/spex/annotationtool/ (for researchers)
   - http://wwwlands2.let.kun.nl/spex/annotationtool/demo (demo)

Providing Broad Access, Securing Long Term Preservation

4. Clarin – INTER-VIEW, DANS, Radboud University of Nijmegen
   - The entire collection is being processed to meet the European CLARIN Standards. The standards pertain to:
     - Data formats
     - Metadata categories, components and formats
     - Persistent Identifiers

5. Data Archiving Networked Services (DANS) / VI
   - The entire collection is integrated into the Electronic Archival System of a central digital archive for long term preservation of research data and broad access for academic research.

Other special project

6. Friendly Fire Interviews, TNO Defence and Safety
   - Narrators located on the basis of a search in the database with the keywords ‘friendly fire’, were approached for a follow up interview specifically focused on this subject. These interviews yielded rich material and formed the basis for a historical typology of friendly fire incidents for a European Research Project on safety during military operations.
The collection is valuable for different academic disciplines: history, media-studies, memory studies, social psychology, linguistics, sociology, anthropology, ICT-research, archival and information studies.

Researchers can profit from the digital structures that have been developed: open data, sharing data, reuse of data, depositing related data, searching with a digital tool, enriching a digital publication.

The general audience can learn about military cultures. The collection contributes to bridging the civil-military gap that has increased since the end of conscription in 1996 and the involvement of the Netherlands in multinational peace-keeping missions.

The Armed Forces can profit from the retrospective reflections of its former employees with regard to policy on social, psychological and institutional issues.
Creators and Partners

The data-set of the interview project Dutch Veterans was realized thanks to the effort, support and advice of many people.

Creators

Project-manager and curator: Stef Scagliola
Assistant-manager: Gerrie Koops
Secretary and administrator: Janny Bakker-de Sain
Head of Centre for Knowledge and Expertise of Veterans Institute: Jos Weerts
Interviewers of the VI: Martin Elands, Gielt Algra, Patricia Huls-Van Zijl, Jos Groen, Jos Weerts, Natasja Rietveld
Free-lance Interviewers: Ageeth van der Veen, Florien Linek, Inge van Zoelen, Klazien van Brandwijk, Arie-Jan van Hees, Theo Boiten, Bart Wagenaar, Bart Hetebrj, Edith van Loo, Paul Troost, Casper van Bruggen, Rein Bijkerk, Tineke van Gulik, Karolien Bais, Annemiek Bal, Alfred Staarman, Manon Westenbroek, David Gaillard, Marleen Wegman, Martijn van Dijk, Bert van Elk
Interviewers of the Netherlands Defence Academy: Adrea van Dijk, Jolanda Bosch

Information architecture and technology

PSid – Paolo Sancis
Become-IT – Leo Kodde
TICA-solutions – Ishan Sital and Georgi Khomericki
Contribution to dataset validation

* **The Veteran Tapes** – www.watveteranenvertellen.nl
  Data Archiving Networked Services (DANS)
  drs. Paula Witkamp and dr. Rene van Horik
  Faculty of communication studies – Radboud University of Nijmegen
  prof. Fred Wester, dr. Ellen Hijmans
  Faculty of Social Sciences – Vrije University Amsterdam
  dr. Harry van den Berg and drs. Susan Woelders
  Faculty of Social Sciences – Radboud University of Nijmegen
  dr. Hans Marks and drs. Inge Melchior
  Faculty of Human Science – University of Ottawa
  dr. Karlijn Demasure
  Faculty of Social Sciences – Radboud University of Nijmegen
  dr. Hennie Boeije and drs. Sarah Drost
  Netherlands Defence Academy – Faculty of Social Science
  dr. Rene Moelker and dr. Rudy Richardson
  Veterans Institute
  dr. Stef Scagliola

* **Friendly Fire Typology**
  TNO Defence and Safety
  prof. Jan Maarten Schraagen

* **Netherlands Defence Academy**
  PhD candidate Netherlands Defence Academy
  drs. Andrea van Dijk
  drs. Yolanda Bosch

* **Legermuseum Delft**
  The collection was used for a pilot exhibit meant to visualize experiences of veterans.
  Head of exhibition department: drs. van der Pols

* **Mariniersmuseum Rotterdam**
  Six video-life story interviews were held with leading senior ex-marines for the exhibit in the museum. The museum could profit from the skills of the interview-pool, the meta-data-structure, the digital search environment and the long term preservation policy.
  Assistant-director: drs. Annelies Visser

Development of digital tools

* **The Veteran Tapes Enhanced Publication**
  The Oral History Annotation Tool
  Data Archiving Networked Services (DANS)
  drs. Paula Witkamp and dr. Rene van Horik
  Centre for Language and Speech Technology – Radboud University of Nijmegen
  dr. Henk van den Heuvel, drs. Eric Sanders
  Veterans Institute
  dr. Stef Scagliola and ms. Gerrie Koops
Support to the IPNV with expertise and advise

Netherlands Institute for War, Holocaust and Genocide studies (NIOD)
prof. Peter Romijn, drs. Annemieke van Bockxmeer

Royal Institute of Caribbean and Asian Studies (KITLV)
dr. Fridus Steijlen

Dr. Christ Klep, independent military historian/consultant

Netherlands Defence Academy (NLDA)
prof. Jan van der Meulen
dr. mr. Peter van der Kruit

Institute for Dutch Military History (NIMH)
prof. Jan Hoffenaar
drs. Dirk Barth, former secretary general of Ministry of Defence

Meertens Instituut
Kees Grijpink

Faculty of Human Media Interaction – University of Twente
Prof. Franciska de Jong, dr. Roeland Ordelman, dr. Arjan van Hessen

SURF foundation
mr. Wilma Mossink

Vormingscentrum van de Dienst Geestelijke Verzorging van de Krijgsmacht
Huize Beukbergen

Support for facilitating broad access to the collection

Data Archiving Networked Services (DANS)
drs. Paula Witkamp, dr. Rene van Horik (integrating collection into EASY)

Centre for Language and Speech Technology – Radboud University of Nijmegen
dr. Henk van den Heuvel, drs. Erik Sanders

DANS - dr. Marjan Grootveld
(integrating collection in CLARIN infrastructure (INTER-VIEWS)

Funding for the IPNV

* Ministry of Defence
  Department of Veterans Affairs/

* Veterans Institute/director ktza Frank Marcus

* Ministry of Health and Welfare
  Program Heritage of World War II

* V-fonds voor Vrijheid en Veteranen

* Surf Foundation

* CLARIN – Common Language Resources and Technology Infrastructure