



SERVICE CHECK OF THE VETERAN EFFORT – a continuous development

Preface

Since 1948, more than 50.000 veterans have been deployed to hot spots around the world. Those deployed have chosen to act upon the political decisions on the Danish contribution to world safety. Their efforts must be recognized.

The circumstances of deployment to international operations are unlike those of any other occupation. It involves a calculated risk that is embedded in the task performed. This risk cannot be eliminated. Deployment may prove to be very costly for the individual, both physically and psychically. It rests upon the Danish society to produce a veteran effort that provides the optimal support before, during and after deployment: A support that also includes the veterans' relatives.

Much effort has already been given into the assurance of veteran recognition and support. The government finds it important that this positive development is furthered with a focus on efficacy for veterans and their relatives, and the continuous development of the quality of the veteran effort.

Through this service check, the government once again focuses on the veteran effort. Veterans have been deployed on the behalf of Denmark, and we as a nation therefore share the responsibility of insuring a proper and respectful reception upon their return. Veterans who are in need of help and support must know that society will support them.

The new initiatives resulting from the service check are financed by the closure of the Iraq- and Afghanistan Commission.

Minister of Defence Peter Christensen
September 2016



Introduction

The service check of the veteran effort was started in a public meeting in September of 2015. Those attending were from within the Ministry of Defence, public authorities, unions and voluntary organisations, of which many are veterans themselves. At the meeting knowledge was exchanged and proposals for new initiatives were brought forth. The service check shows that the Danish veteran effort is strong, due to its knowledge-based nature and the systematic follow-ups from the experiences and research conducted by the Ministry of Defence. It is recognized that the veteran effort can still be improved, and many of the ideas and proposals for new initiatives will be realised as a direct result of the service check. The remaining proposals will serve as inspiration when future goals for the effort are set. The service check focuses on four areas:

1. The recognition effort.
2. The prevention effort.
3. The support and treatment effort.
4. The employment effort.

The Veteran Centre was established in 2011, and it services the veterans, relatives and those involved in the field of veterans. The Veteran Centre is responsible for the continuous development and coordination of the veteran effort across the public sector.

The following paragraphs set the frame for the effort areas, while giving examples of the existing initiatives as well as the concrete government initiatives, which will secure the continuous development of the veteran effort. More information on the existing initiatives is available on the webpage of The Ministry of Defence, www.fmn.dk.

THE FRAME FOR RECOGNITION

Veterans have been deployed to hot spots in the world to protect the lives and values we believe in. We must treasure the courage of those deployed and their will to act. Their efforts and their special competences must be recognized and respected.

As an employer, the authorities of the Ministry of Defence bear a particular responsibility for the recognition of veterans and their relatives. This responsibility exceeds current employment. Once a veteran, always a veteran.

The voluntary organisations carry a large weight in their work with our veterans. The volunteers are often veterans themselves and have personal deployment experience. These volunteers offer a special forum for veterans who are in need as a result of their deployments, and who find coordination with the established system difficult. The voluntary effort for veterans must be ensured a proper frame.

What we do today

- The effort of veterans is marked by the official flag-flying day for Denmark's deployed personnel on 5 September and by the Monument to Denmark's International Effort since 1948 at The Citadel. The agreement of 2014 on strengthening the veteran effort supports the placement of an information centre adjacent to the monument.
- The Veteran Policy of 2010 strengthened the basis for competence appraisal and employment and educational counseling. The Danish Defence produces a competence chart which documents the competences of formerly deployed soldiers.
- As a pilot project, the veteran card grants access to all physical training facilities of the Danish Defence.
- The effort of the unions and voluntary organisations is supported and coordinated by the Veterans' Secretariat within the Veteran Centre. Several of the voluntary organisations receive financial support.

New initiatives

- The information centre adjacent to the Monument to Denmark's International Effort since 1948 will aim at a broader audience.
- The solemnity of the flag-flying day is stressed to the nation's municipalities.
- An increased focus on the competences of veterans in appraisals of academic ability, and as credit for relevant training and experience in the civilian educational system, for example when applying through Quota 2.
- The organisation and operation of Veterans' Homes is better framed, for example through the establishment of a secretariat under the management of the Danish Veteran's Homes foundation.
- The Danish Defence arranges an annual reunion for veterans and their relatives.
- The Veteran Centre arranges an annual gathering of those involved in the field of veterans to discuss current themes of the veteran effort.
- The effort for veterans living in Greenland and The Faroe Islands is clarified, and the impact of the veteran effort throughout the Danish Realm is secured.

FRAME FOR PREVENTION

Deployment to international operations means service in an unknown and sometimes dangerous environment. The danger and the risks of experiencing traumatic events cannot be eliminated, but the weight of their burden on a veteran can be reduced through prevention.

Prevention includes the time before, during and immediately after deployment. Prevention minimizes the risk of both physical and psychic damage. It is crucial that those deployed on Denmark's behalf are robust and optimally prepared.

As an employer, the authorities of the Ministry of Defence are responsible for equipping their employees for deployment. Health examinations with a focus on mental preparedness will ensure that only the best suited employees are deployed. Those who are to be deployed must be optimally prepared for the many different challenges that may be expected. They will also be trained to handle the stressful situations that may arise.

Veterans' relatives are offered briefings with information on the burden that deployment may be and what possibilities for counseling and support they have. Relatives who are in need and who request support must be cared for. This will lighten the burden for the deployed as well.

What we do today

- As part of the soldier selection process, obligatory health examinations are conducted with a focus on readiness.
- Mission preparations include training in self-management. Training in buddy support and stress management is conducted.
- Leaders are assisted in identifying mentally unfit soldiers who are not prepared for deployment, and units that face deployment are provided with psychologists. Commanders and officers are trained by psychologists of the Veteran Centre in the prevention and management of stressful situations.
- Units that have served in stressful missions conduct courses in acclimatization and reintegration.
- In order to identify the need for psychological or social/specialist support, veterans are encouraged to fill out a questionnaire about their experiences and reactions six months after their return. Veterans are contacted again after two, five and eight years.
- Meetings for relatives are held before, during and after deployment. Here, information is provided on counseling and support, psychic factors, et cetera. A contact officer is presented, who will function as a connecting link between the employer and the relatives.
- The Veteran Centre conducts active follow-ups for veterans who no longer serve within the Ministry of Defence. This effort spans from the traditional method of correspondence to physical outreach.

New initiatives

- The development of an evidence-based robustness training program. The initiative is a stepping stone towards the implementation of obligatory robustness and mental training.
- The Danish Defence provides increased focus on the relatives, this including the relatives of employees that are individually deployed.
- Research shows that good leadership and continuous work planning in an inclusive and prejudice-free work space reduces the stress that comes with deployment. The Danish Defence will prioritise the development of the work space environment and unit preparation.

FRAME FOR SUPPORT AND TREATMENT

For many veterans, deployment is a stressful but also enriching experience. Most have the experience of having made a difference while deployed, gaining new competences and gaining a better understanding of self.

Deployment may inflict permanent wounds on a smaller group of veterans, who may see their lives, and the lives of their relatives, changed radically. Deployment leaves its mark not only on the veteran. Relatives, notably children of wounded veterans, may be burdened, and they must be supported in their hardship.

The foundation of the veteran's stabile and meaningful existence will be supported by efforts to assist and support him or her. As an example, engagements in various clubs and outdoor life projects may strengthen the veteran in partaking in existing social groups as well as exploring the new.

The difficulties that see a veteran requiring professional help and treatment are often complex and influence several aspects of the veteran's life. In consequence, several specialists from region, municipality and the Veteran Centre will participate and coordinate their efforts in the treatment program. The program must be coordinated, integrated and focus on the competences and resources of the individual.

The Veteran Centre is the primary coordinating function for dialogue between veterans and public authorities. The support ranges from assisting veterans filling out applications for work space injury cases, coordinating with the regional psychiatric unit or as assessor when the veteran consults the general practitioner. With regards to municipality level, the Veteran Centre supports veterans in employment, health and social matters. If a veteran in need has a very complex case involving the coordination between several authorities, the Veteran Centre ensures the veteran is in focus by providing one single point of contact.

What we do today

- The Danish Defence conducts individual psychic screenings of veterans upon their return. Veterans and their relatives have lifetime access to psychologists and social/specialist counseling. The Veteran Centre hot line is always available.
- A special law ensures lessened documentation demands in the work space injury cases of psychically wounded veterans.
- Highly specialised psychiatric treatment for veterans has been made available at Rigshospitalet, Odense Universitetshospital and Aarhus Universitetshospital.
- The Danish Defence offers courses in improved communication and problem-solving for couples (PREP).
- Talking groups have been established for children and adolescents. The groups are a resting place for the children and young, who, through child's play and exercises, are able to share their knowledge and experience of living in families with burdened veterans. In line with this project, three books have been published. These are aimed at children and adolescents who live in families with heavily burdened veterans.
- Veterans are a part of the target group for The National Knowledge and Special Counseling Organisation.
- The Veteran Centre assists the municipalities with regards to the implementation of veteran policies, the training of municipal officials and counseling on the specific requirement of the individual veteran.

New initiatives

- A new regional function is established in order for veterans diagnosed with PTSD have access to individual treatment in all regions. The initiative ensures treatment availability locally for the veteran.
- Strengthening the knowledge of general practitioners on vulnerable veterans.
- Physical training suited for the mentally wounded veterans is promoted. Based on the positive learning from The NOC and Sports Confederation of Denmark's (DIF) Project for Soldiers for physically wounded veterans, the effort is expanded to include mentally wounded veterans as well. The project is a collaboration between The NOC and Sports Confederation of Denmark, The Danish Sports Organisation for the Disabled, The Danish Defence Health Department and The Department of Military Psychology.
- The app "PTSD family coach" is implemented in 2016 and developed with psychoeducation, for example reactions and symptoms stemming from experience, and proposals for coping strategies and follow-ups.
- Volunteers in the veteran field will be offered training. This initiative aims at providing the latest knowledge and necessary tools for the volunteers, for example crisis management training.

FRAME FOR THE EMPLOYMENT EFFORT

We find value for ourselves and others through an active work life. We enter social groups and establish new social connections. While jobs require competence and effort, they grant us freedom and quality of life in return.

By far the most veterans are enriched upon their return, having acquired new competences. The amount of discharged veterans who are either employed or taking an education is high.

A smaller group of veterans face challenges after they return. These veterans may find it difficult to settle in the work force. The rehabilitation of veterans who still serve within the Ministry of Defence is integral to the veteran effort. The rehabilitation effort includes supporting veterans' training with the purpose of reentry into the work force. For veterans who face particular challenges, this effort may initially aim at improving the circumstances of the veteran's life.

Supporting veterans that find themselves at the periphery of the work force back into an active work life is key. A certain degree of flexibility and understanding on the employer's behalf, alongside an active employment effort from the Veteran Centre and municipal job centers, contribute to the possibility of a resumed active work life for veterans with challenges.

What we do today

- Veterans employed within the Ministry of Defence, who have accepted claims of work-related injuries sustained while deployed in international operations, are offered a rehabilitation course. It is an interdisciplinary effort aimed at employment, with the purpose of assisting the veteran in reentering the work force, either within the Ministry of Defence or elsewhere.
- Mentors and employment counselors are positioned within the Veteran Centre to individually assist formerly employed veterans who are in need of special support, in collaborating with municipalities or other forms of support, e.g. financial counseling. The Veteran Centre cooperates with municipal officials on veterans within this target group.
- Government funds are allocated for projects, whose focus is the increased employment readiness for veterans with challenges, and who thereby better the possibilities of employment.

New initiatives

- Firms who – by agreement with the Veteran Centre – employ a veteran with challenges for six months is rewarded a cash bonus for use in mentoring, competence development or otherwise. This initiative aims at creating new possibilities for veterans who find reentry into the work force difficult.
- The Ministry of Defence increases its focus on wounded veterans when recruiting for civilian positions within The Ministry of Defence, namely flexjobs and wage-subsidy jobs.
- The Danish Government encourages further collaborated effort between the Danish Defence and the municipalities, and it encourages the proliferation of municipal veteran coordinators.
- Municipal veteran coordinators are offered skill upgrades. Through these upgrades, the newest knowledge with daily relevance will be transferred. Furthermore, a frame for professional collaboration between veteran coordinators of different municipalities is desired.

The existing effort and the new initiatives will continuously be subjected to evaluation and adaptation to ensure an optimal veteran effort.

Financing

The Ministry of Defence spent circa 180 mil. DKK on the veteran effort in 2015. Moreover, circa 340 mil. DKK were paid out as compensation in accordance with "Law on damages and compensation of the formerly deployed and other public employees with late diagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder" of 2 April 2014 (Lov om erstatning og godtgørelse til tidligere udsendte og andre statsansatte med sent diagnosticeret post-traumatisk belastningsreaktion, lov 336 af 2/4-2014).

The collective cost of the new initiatives for the improvement of the veteran effort as described in this brochure is 20 mil. DKK. The cost is financed by additional funds granted to the Ministry of Defence due to the closure of the Iraq- and Afghanistan Commission.

For the latest reports, evaluations and other useful information on the veteran effort, go to the webpage of The Ministry of Defence, fmn.dk.

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Photo: Ministry of Defence

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