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Can Psychological Selection be the Same for All Dutch Officers?

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Since a couple of years there is in the Netherlands one national Defense Selection center. With the exception of pilots all Dutch officers are selected there. In this Selection Center there is a tendency to equalize as far as possible the procedures for the different officer corps, and to differentiate only when there are different requirements in practice. In this reading on the officer selection in the Netherlands the different procedures for four Armed Forces is discussed and the tendency to make them more uniform.

First I will give an survey of the officer selection and some background information about the Dutch military forces. Then I will speak about the different phases of the selection process. At first the administrative pre-selection, where the first screening takes place, in which there is decided if the applicant is admitted to the official selection. Next the psychological examination, existing of capability tests, personality questionnaires, and the interview; the medical examination with connecting physical tests; assessment tests for the Corps Marines and for pilots, and finally the Selection Admission Boards.

In each phase of the selection procedure I will indicate the differences between the Forces, and explain on which grounds these differences are made.

1. SURVEY OF THE NATIONAL SELECTION SYSTEM

The Netherlands are a relatively small country. The surface is 41.000 km². The distance from the capital Amsterdam to nearly each place is 200 km at most. The country counts 15 million citizens. The Netherlands form the Kingdom of the Netherlands with six small islands in the Caribbean. These six small isles have their own government, but the Netherlands are responsible for their defense. In the Netherlands there is an extensive school

system. It is easy to go to school. Until the age of 16 everyone is obliged to go to school and this education is free. From the age of 16 education is voluntary. Secondary school costs then about US \$ 800 a year, university US \$ 1300. Thanks to all kinds of scholarships most of the young people continue their formal education.

The Dutch Armed Forces consist of the Royal Navy, the Royal Army, the Royal Airforce and the Royal Military Police. Together the Armed Forces employ 56.000 military personnel and 18.000 civilians.

In 1996 conscription is abolished. There are now only volunteers. Most of NCO's have a contract for limited time; at the moment 60% of the officers have an engagement for life, in the future this will be 40%.

Besides the defense of the borders of the country and the assistance on calamities an important task of the Dutch defense is nowadays to assist in peace keeping and peace enforcing all over the world. There are at the moment more than 3.000 military men on duties abroad.

The Netherlands have two military academies for officer studies: the Royal Institute for the Navy and the Royal Military Academy for the Army and the Airforce. The Royal Military Police recruits its officers out of the officers of the other Forces. The military academies are no universities, they are institutes for higher professional schooling. The officer studies take three years.

Each year about 250 students are needed for both academies. For this there should be about 1.000 applicants. Besides these there are needed each year about 60 pilots for the three Forces. In the selection for pilots for the Airforce only 2% of the applicants turn out to be suited.

On grounds of financial reduction the government in 1995 decided that the selection of Dutch military personnel had to be centralized in one organization, the Dutch Defense organization for

Recruitment and Selection. This organization is responsible for the total recruitment and selection of all military men. The only exception is the selection of the pilots for the Airforce, which takes place elsewhere. Since 1996 the selection procedure for officers is the same for all the three forces. It takes place now in Amsterdam.

The Dutch organization for Recruitment and Selection is itself responsible for the instruments of selection and tests. The forces decide which instruments must be used and which scores are acceptable.

The Dutch organization for Recruitment and Selection aim at making the test procedures and acceptable scores the same for comparable functions of the different forces, and to accept only differences that are based on the different demands in practice.

2. THE ADMINISTRATIVE PRE-SELECTION

The administrative pre-selection is the same for the four Forces.

The minimal requirements are:

- Dutch nationality
- length: men 1.65 m, women 1.60 m.
- relevant school diplomas with at least Dutch, English and mathematics and for some functions physics.

About 4% of the applicants does not fulfill these requirements.

3. THE PSYCHOLOGICAL EXAMINATION

This takes two days.

On the first day the applicants make all the capability tests and fill in the personality questionnaires, on the second day the interview takes place and materials are prepared for the Admission Board.

3.1. CAPABILITY TESTS

All applicants for officer studies do a number of intelligence tests and for some functions also specific capability tests. Although intelligence tests have in psychological literature a high predicting value, they play a role of minor

importance in the selection of officers in the Netherlands. Research has shown that the marks in the last grade of the secondary school (VWO) have a better predicting value than IQ-tests. Only when applicants have another secondary school education, the tests have predicting value. Tests used are:

General capability tests:

- verbal reasoning
- non-verbal reasoning
- logical arithmetic test
- test for technical insight

Specific capability tests:

- selected listening test
- air controllers test

The specific capability tests are used for a number of Airforce functions. For pilots there are simulation tests.

3.2. PERSONALITY QUESTIONNAIRES

The applicants have to fill in three questionnaires that deal with:

- social functioning
- neuroticism
- extravert / introvert
- flexibility
- leadership capabilities
- acceptance / tolerance
- self esteem
- impulsiveness
- achievement orientated

The Forces acknowledge different values to the different scores of these questionnaires.

3.3. THE INTERVIEW

All applicants have an interview of 75 to 90 minutes. In this interview the next factors are evaluated:

- social functioning
- discipline
- psychological stability
- will to achieve
- sportsmanship
- suitability for missions all over the world

- leadership capabilities
- motivation for the specific force and the function
- knowledge of the desired function

After the interview the interviewer values each factor on a four or five-point scale. The Forces use the results of the interview in a different way. They have however in common that they demand a minimal score for almost every factor.

4. MEDICAL EXAMINATION

This examination takes one day and consists of a medical examination and some sport-tests.

The medical examination:

- visual and auditory examination
- laboratory examination (urine)
- if necessary X-ray photographs
- physical examination by a doctor
- interview by a doctor

The physical fitness tests:

- measurement of the jumping abilities
- measurement of the muscular strength
- bicycle-test

The Royal Navy does not apply the physical fitness tests.

5. ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES FOR CORPS MARINES AND PILOTS

Applicants for the Royal Corps Marines will have, after the basic psychological and medical selection procedure, an assessment trial, which takes two days.

It consists of:

- climbing into a rope and a tower
- carrying another person
- fitness tests
- delivering a lecture
- cross country
- solving a group problem
- obstacle race
- leadership tests

The applicants are judged on:

- physical capabilities

- communicative abilities
- perseverance
- leadership capabilities

The results of this assessment trial play a role in the admission procedure. Some candidates withdraw their application during or after the trial.

Applicant-pilots for Airforce and Navy undergo after the medical examination two more sets of tests, computer simulation tests for pilots and flying tests in practice. The computer simulation test for pilots consists of six flying exercises, which the applicants have to learn in four days. Judged are the obtained results and the speed of learning.

The flying tests in practice: under the supervision of an experienced instructor an applicant gets flying lessons for five days. Judged are the obtained results. Also contra-indications such as air sickness, flying fear and G-tolerance are measured.

6. SELECTION ADMISSION BOARDS

All Forces have their own Selection Admission Board. These will all see the applicants personally and establish the following order for admission. The Boards prefer to get 1.5 times the number of applicants as they need for the contracts.

7. FINAL REMARK

For a relatively small country like the Netherlands it is good to have a joint selection center for all officers. In this way it is most guaranteed that the four Forces get the right number of applicants of the required quality at the right time. A consequence of the joining is that the differences in requirements become more visible. These differences are being discussed with the Forces. But the starting point is correct. The Forces decide on their own psychological selection-criteria.