

CHAPTER 11

Defining Veteran Status in Post-war Norway and Denmark 1945–1969

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The Norwegian Armed Forces (*Forsvaret*) changed the official definition of the term ‘veteran’ as recently as in 2024. It went from only applying to individuals who had served in international operations, to including individuals who had served domestically.² Such changes reflect the difficulties of defining a group of individuals who hold a unique status in societies due to the military service they provided to the country. This special status involves both social recognitions, but also legal entitlements such as pensions and compensation payments. Moreover, the idea of being a “veteran” can be central to the formation of group identity. While this status carries a different value in each country, and is even met with public ambivalence in certain cases, war veterans are typically celebrated in memorials and anniversaries. Dedicated social welfare systems are often put in place to recognise their service and compensate them and their families for any long-term health implications and death that they suffer. At an underlying level, who gets to count as a veteran, and the status they hold in society, reflects how a country tries to position itself in the world, and how a nation relates to its own past. The term is constantly renegotiated based on a

complex interaction between the individual groups claiming the status, and the willingness of wider society to potentially accept such demands.

It is therefore no surprise that the concept of the “veteran” has been subjected to a considerable amount of debate. In different national contexts, it has been contested and redefined over time, as expanding welfare states and rising expectations of compensation led various groups to seek further recognition and support. These debates varied across countries, and they were shaped by wartime experiences and post-war memory strategies.

The situation in countries that were occupied during the Second World War reveals considerable complexity, when it comes to groups such as the pre-war military, resistance fighters, and even collaborators identifying as “veterans” and competing for recognition. Precisely because neither Denmark nor Norway developed a formal veteran category after 1945, it is indeed analytically productive to explore how veteran status was conceptualised and constructed indirectly through law, welfare provisions, and public narratives of recognition. This chapter adopts a broad definition of the term “veteran”, including individuals who were engaged in military service or action during the war. This makes it possible to examine how different groups sought social and legal recognition for their wartime roles, and how they presented themselves as having fought for the “right” cause, even when such claims were not widely accepted. This chapter explores the concept of the veteran in Norway and Denmark from 1945 to 1969, focusing on the dimensions surrounding the label as described above.

In post-war Norway and Denmark, veteran status was neither fixed nor self-evident but contested. Multiple groups such as army officers, resistance fighters, and even former wartime collaborators sought recognition for their wartime roles. In Denmark, such group efforts were particularly pronounced, while the interpretations in Norway more quickly coalesced on the dichotomy between “good” and “bad” Norwegians. Nevertheless, key groups, including women and communists, remained marginalised and had to push actively for recognition. At the same time, collaborators in both countries promoted alternative narratives reframing their actions and, in some cases, even sought to claim a form of veteran identity.

These struggles over recognition were closely tied to the legal frameworks that arose in the aftermath of the war for compensation, pensions, and support. Veteran status was thus not only a symbolic label but directly linked to material entitlements, making legal categories defining wartime service more valuable and substantive. Compensation schemes could reflect social hierarchies of sacri-

fice as well as political efforts to reward or regulate groups. In this sense, post-war veteran policy reveals how welfare states responded to war while encoding distinctions between service, suffering, and legitimacy.

A further key dimension of this issue was gender. In both Norway and Denmark, the concept of the veteran remained tied to masculine ideals of service, honour, and duty, often ignoring the invaluable contribution of women. Post-war legal frameworks likewise reflected traditional gender roles, including in how provisions for survivors and dependents were determined. Examining the recognition of veterans or the lack thereof in this way sheds light not only on memory and welfare, but also on the gendered boundaries of citizenship, sacrifice, and belonging.

Through a threefold analysis, the chapter highlights different definitions of the veteran term, the groups competing for recognition, and its gendered dimensions. The chapter traces changes in the debates and legal frameworks surrounding this issue between 1945 and 1969, exploring the shifting ideas of veteran status, power dynamics, memory politics, and the development of veteran benefits in the emerging Danish and Norwegian welfare states. This endeavour is significant for three reasons: 1) it shows that the veteran concept was fluid and renegotiated in relation to memory practices; 2) it uncovers the legal and practical challenges of establishing and adapting the enacted compensation schemes, including in relation to changing understandings of long-term and psychological war injuries; 3) it demonstrates the strongly gendered nature of the concept and its impact on the differentiating recognition of men's and women's wartime roles.

Utilising Norway and Denmark as case studies, allows for a particularly fruitful comparison when it comes to investigating debates about who did and did not deserve the status of 'veteran', including compensation for the suffering caused by wartime service. The two countries share many cultural similarities and enacted many similar policies in the post-war era regarding matters such as welfare and the historical framing of the legacy of occupation. There were a range of similarities in terms of the experience of occupation too, with both countries having had both national fascist parties and active resistance movements. At the same time, there were significant differences, both in terms of the nature of the German occupation in each country, and in terms of the groups competing for influence and recognition in the post-war era. Denmark had pursued a policy of cooperation until 1943, leaving formal state structures intact and placing political elites in a more ambivalent position compared to Norway, where the government and king went into exile in 1940. Nevertheless, in both countries, questions of status

and compensation for wartime actions and suffering were contested after the war. An analysis of the veteran concept can in this way highlight differences in politicised narratives, while also showing how various wartime groups sought recognition and benefits.

For that reason, the chapter also investigates the groups who fought on the “wrong” side. This is not to equate their status with that of recognised wartime patriots, but to show that the boundaries of veteran status were produced through mechanisms of exclusion as much as inclusion. Former collaborators and SS volunteers were denied compensation, honour, and public legitimacy outright, yet some of them still articulated what they saw as legitimate claims based on service, sacrifice, comradeship, and anti-communism. Their post-war rhetoric demonstrates that the veteran identity could be claimed by groups and individuals who were firmly rejected by the state and wider society.

The history of veterans has attracted increasing attention in recent years, including studies of their role in the rise of fascism and their wartime and post-war experiences. Less attention, however, has been given to systematic analysis of the veteran concept itself and how it was contested and redefined in the post-war era.³ While some recent studies have examined the use of the veteran term for other countries, such an analysis is missing altogether for Norway and Denmark.⁴ At the same time, the link between warfare and welfare has in recent years offered new research insights into veteran benefit schemes, and combined research branches which have previously been seen as somewhat separate.⁵ This chapter contributes to this body of literature by enhancing both our understanding of the veteran concept in the post-war era, and by analysing the link between the Second World War and the expanding welfare state in Norway and Denmark.

CONFLICT AND DEBATE OVER THE SOCIAL RECOGNITION OF VETERANS

In both Denmark and Norway, the term “veteran” played a surprisingly limited role in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. Neither country developed a clear legal definition of veteran status, and the term itself was not central to the language through which wartime experiences were understood. Recognition of wartime service was instead articulated through other categories rooted in specific wartime roles and experiences. These categories were not merely descriptive entities. They provided frameworks through which individuals and groups presented themselves as legitimate participants in the national struggle and articulated claims to recognition, influence, and social support in the post-war order. Thus, even though none of these groups explicitly embraced the

label “veteran”, they nevertheless pursued recognition and status to compensate for their sacrifice and wartime service in ways typically associated with veteran communities.⁶ Following historians Crotty, Diamant, and Edele, these groups can be understood as constituting “entitlement groups,” much like regular army veterans of the two world wars. They were collective entities bound together by a shared conviction of deservingness, grounded in sacrifice and in claims to a form of martial citizenship. Whether such groups succeeded in converting this sense of entitlement into recognised social and political status, however, depended on political opportunity structures, organisational strength, and the readiness of the state to institutionalise their claims.⁷ The following sections examine how these dynamics unfolded in Denmark and Norway.

THE VETERAN CONCEPT IN POST-WAR DENMARK

In the immediate post-war years, Denmark had no legal or administrative status directly benefiting veterans. As documented in previous studies, recognition was organised through schemes for the victims of the occupation, with documented loss and injury as the key criteria.⁸ This is evident in the 1945 *Act on Compensation for Victims of the Occupation*.⁹ The compensation legislation did not establish a clearly defined veteran status but instead rested on invalidity and death resulting from acts of war, imprisonment, deportation, or other abuses suffered by individuals during the occupation. Military service in itself did not constitute a criterion for recognition. Deaths and injuries suffered by military personnel during the German invasion on 9 April 1940 and during the brief armed clashes connected to the dissolution of the Danish armed forces in late August 1943 were dealt with under separate legislation.¹⁰ In the *Act on the Payment of Honorary Grants to the Next of Kin of Those Killed and to Those Wounded on 9 April 1940*, the term veteran was not used at all.¹¹

This absence of a veteran category carrying legal weight was not confined to the post-Second World War period. As historian Anton Marckmann has shown, Danish soldiers from Southern Jutland who served in the German army during the First World War were likewise not recognised as veterans in any legal or administrative sense, even when they returned as invalids having sustained combat injuries.¹² Military personnel without physical combat injuries, including large parts of the Danish officer corps, similarly fell outside the scope of the compensation legislation that was enacted after the Second World War.

The concept of the veteran was nevertheless familiar in a Danish context. From the nineteenth century, “veteran” had been used about soldiers with a

long service record and about participants in earlier national wars, in particular those of 1848–1850 and 1864.¹³ In early twentieth-century administrative reference works, the term appears in biographical entries together with the rank and occupation of a given soldier.¹⁴ Meyer's Danish dictionary of foreign words (1924) similarly defined the veteran as an elderly or experienced soldier or official, with no reference to legal status, entitlements, or state recognition.¹⁵

A survey of the illegal press that flourished during the Second World War suggests that the term “veteran” was not a central rhetorical term used in the resistance discourse. In two of the most well-produced, underground newspapers, *Frit Danmark* and *De frie Danske*, the term does not appear once. In the illegalised news agency *Information*, the term occurs only sporadically, in reference to foreign soldiers or the First World War, rather than as a designation for Danish wartime actors.¹⁶ Even in post-war resistance-associated periodicals, references to veterans remained rare and unsystematic throughout the late 1940s. For instance, in *Pigtraad*, the term “veteran” appears only twice before 1950. In February 1949, the association behind the journal discussed whether it should dissolve or continue specifically as a veterans’ association.¹⁷ The discussion suggests that the meaning and usefulness of the term had not yet settled. Later that year, the term was used to describe a literary figure that had been shaped by wartime experience.¹⁸ The Danish resistance members instead referred to themselves as *freedom fighters*. This term was widely used in the illegal newspapers during the occupation and embedded within was the implicit claim that these were individuals who had fought for freedom. The totality of the loosely organised groups operating under the leadership of the self-appointed Freedom Council were correspondingly described as the “freedom movement.” At the same time, the terms *resistance fighter* and *resistance movement* were also in circulation and they were used interchangeably. In the clandestine press, the resistance fighters also referred to themselves as *patriots*. In resistance newspapers and memoirs, the term *freedom fighter* and *patriot* appears most frequently, whereas contemporary historical scholarship tends to favour the more neutral term *resistance fighter*. This preference is partly based on the view that *freedom fighter* is a more value laden expression, one that does not fully acknowledge that the aim of some communist resistance groups was not solely to liberate Denmark from the Nazis but to transition the country into a Stalinist system.¹⁹ After the war, however, the dominant language was that of the “freedom fighter” and the “resistance movement”. The term freedom fighter was widely adopted by both right- and left-wing

resistance members and became the standard designation in those circles for individuals who had opposed the German occupation during the war.

Although resistance members did not claim veteran status through the term itself, they nevertheless argued that they had fought for the nation and therefore deserved particular recognition, much like regular war veterans often did. Former resistance fighters, for example, argued for expanded social support by pointing to the physical and social hardships they endured that now embodied the consequences of their wartime sacrifices. As an example of this, one former resistance fighter who was now disabled, complained about the limited employment prospects available to men like himself and asked in an editorial letter: "Is there no commendation for having participated in the fight for Denmark's liberation?"²⁰ There were numerous such demands, expressions of grievance, and assertions of deservingness in the magazines published by organisations for former resistance fighters throughout the late 1940s, the 1950s, and the 1960s. However, their demands were not always met. Research suggests that this was due, in part, to a political reluctance to recognise resistance fighters as a particularly deserving interest group, as politicians feared that such recognition might give rise to claims for increased political influence. Furthermore, there was an ongoing struggle over who deserved the greatest benefits. In the immediate aftermath of liberation, Danish resistance fighters argued that they should be treated more favourably than groups such as Danish Jews, who were often portrayed as merely passive victims.²¹ This is just one such example.

Thus, the investigated sources indicate that "veteran" was not perceived as a natural designation for resistance fighters in the immediate post-war years. Rather than being adopted by the resistance, the term apparently continued to be associated with regular military service and seniority. This pattern must also be seen in light of post-war memory politics. As historian Nils Arne Sørensen has argued, two competing narratives of the occupation emerged after 1945. Both placed resistance at the centre of national self-understanding. The disagreement between the two concerned how broadly resistance should be defined and how the conduct of the political elites should be judged.²² This mattered in the context in which most Danish soldiers had not participated in the resistance at all and in light of how strained the relations between resistance groups and the officer corps were.

In regular Danish newspapers from 1945-1950, the term "veteran" appears frequently. The most common use was as a non-military nomenclature. "Veteran" denoted experience: football and boxing veterans, a veteran typographer, a polit-

ical veteran, and a veteran in social or educational work.²³ In a military context, it most often referred to foreign soldiers or to the First World War. American and British veterans were mentioned in reports and obituaries,²⁴ as were Danish First World War veterans, including members of several veterans' associations.²⁵ References to "guerrilla veterans" likewise concerned foreign conflicts and not the Danish context.²⁶ In contrast, the designation was only rarely applied to members of the Danish resistance. A telling example of this appears in a 1949 article on the unveiling of a monument to "fallen freedom fighters". The term "veteran" was reserved not for the resistance fighters who died, but for a speaker who had served in the First World War.²⁷ However, one early example refers to a "sabotage veteran" trained by SOE and returning from Sweden in May 1945.²⁸

According to the 1952 Dictionary of the Danish Language, "veteran" was still used at that time as a descriptive term for people with many years of experience or former soldiers, without any legal connection to rights, compensation, or state recognition.²⁹ Nonetheless, that same year, the association Frihedskampens Veteraner (Veterans of the Freedom Struggle) was established.³⁰ From the outset, it was linked to the international framework of the World Veterans Federation, which sought to unite resistance fighters and uniformed war veterans across national borders in the interest of post-war reconciliation and the prevention of future conflict.³¹ In Denmark, it also included participants from the Danish Brigade in Sweden, the exile force established under Swedish auspices in 1943–45.³² Thus, in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the word "veteran" gradually began to function as an umbrella term for different forms of wartime participation. This slow and hesitant consolidation of the terms stands in marked contrast to the much later politicisation of the veteran term, which, as Poulsen and Rasmussen have shown, only gained sustained political traction from the 1990s onwards.³³

A Danish case can illustrate how veteran identity could be constructed outside of the framework of a formal legal category. The association De Alieredes Danske Våbenfæller (Allied Danish Comrades-in-Arms) brought together Danes who had fought in the two World Wars. In the mid-1950s, the association initiated the construction of a monument to the fallen combatants in "Danish and Allied war service, 1940–45", presented as a gift from "the Danish people". The inscription deliberately encompassed Danes who fell in Allied service abroad and those soldiers who were killed during the German invasion on 9 April 1940 and in the armed clashes on 29 August 1943. In contrast to the immediate post-war elevation of illegal resistance, the association's commemorative practices centred on fallen soldiers and the legitimacy of uniformed war service.³⁴

Among Danish Nazis and former Eastern Front volunteers, the term “veteran” was also absent. A systematic reading of the Danish Nazi newspaper *Fædrelandet* demonstrates that the concept was not adopted by these groups during the war. Danish SS volunteers did not describe themselves as veterans but instead referred to themselves as *frontkæmpere* (front fighters), as soldiers, and internally as comrades, and more broadly as “SS volunteers”. When *Fædrelandet* used the term “veteran”, it did so in other contexts, much like the resistance press: it referred to figures from the world of sport or to veterans of earlier conflicts, such as the war of 1864 or the First World War. In other words, “veteran” remained a designation for participants in nationally recognised wars of the past, rather than being a label appropriated by Danish SS volunteers for their own wartime service.³⁵

After the war, several former Danish SS volunteers organised themselves in *Landsforeningen af 6. maj 1945*, a revisionist association founded by convicted and ostracised wartime collaborators and nazis. The association published a membership journal titled *Revision*.³⁶ Within this publication, the former SS volunteers were consistently described as *frontkæmpere* rather than veterans. This terminology was mirrored in their organisational language. Their own post-war association was named *Frontkæmperforbundet*, and in petitions and statements, including those printed in *Revision*, they referred to themselves as “former front volunteers” or simply “front fighters”.³⁷ The same designation persisted in later revisionist literature on SS volunteers, where *frontkæmpere* remained the preferred term, alongside *Frontsvin* (“front pigs”), which implied a form of macho pride and toughness.³⁸

Although the veteran-term was not used by the Danish Eastern Front volunteers, the term *frontkæmper* remained a politically charged concept. It was employed as a source of pride, an emblem of honour among the former volunteers and a way of drawing attention to the fact that they had fought for what they believed in. It was used to describe a group that in their own opinion had entered service at the urging of the Danish government, which they interpreted as an outright permission to enlist in the Waffen SS during the war. This interpretation was rejected after the war by Danish politicians who argued instead that the policy had been introduced through German coercion: “We wish to establish the following: that we [former SS-volunteers] were a part of Denmark’s legal army, which was the consequence of Denmark’s accession to the Anti Comintern Pact and which followed the line taken by the Finnish volunteers.”³⁹

They also frequently emphasised that they had fought against the communist threat, which in 6 May circles continued to be regarded as a central and genu-

ine danger both during the war and in the years that followed. In this light, they argued that they deserved recognition for having carried out what later became NATO's task of containing communism, even before the North Atlantic Treaty had been signed:

"Today we are in the situation, like the West, that the enemy we fought in the East is the enemy that the entire Western world is compelled to fight in this day and age! ... We therefore believe that both parties in Denmark should let petty grudges rest, forget what was, and move forward together! We are, after all, when it comes to everything, in the same boat!"⁴⁰

The volunteers claimed to be misunderstood. Implicitly embedded in the term *frontkæmper* and how it was used by them after the war was in this way also a desire to be rehabilitated and recognised in the post-war period, rather than being ostracised and stigmatised, as former Danish SS volunteers.⁴¹

THE VETERAN CONCEPT IN POST-WAR NORWAY

As was the case in Denmark, Norway had no set definition of who was a veteran either during or immediately following the Second World War. In his study of Norwegian post-war veteran policies, Gullow Gjeseth applies a broad definition when discussing veterans of the Second World War (*veteraner fra annen verdenskrig*), which does not only include: "...persons who served in the Norwegian or Allied forces, but also [...] persons who served in the Norwegian or Allied forces, as well as persons who were involved in illegal activities, war sailors, and persons who were held in German or Japanese captivity."⁴²

This highlights how the term "veteran" has traditionally been applied to a wide range of groups who served Norwegian interests during the Second World War, reaching well beyond an affiliation with the military alone.

All the groups mentioned by Gjeseth were *de facto* recognized as veterans immediately following the war. This entailed official acknowledgment of their wartime actions for Norway, and it was reflected in the first war compensation schemes adopted in 1946, for which all these groups were eligible (see below). However, some groups received wider social recognition for their specific wartime injuries or suffering only much later than others, and some groups faced considerable obstacles in gaining formal access to the publicly instituted compensation schemes. In the early post-war period, the groups that received the highest levels of social recognition were those which could easily be tied to heroic narratives relating to Norway's battle against the German occupiers and their collaborators.

This applied first and foremost to the civilian and military resistance, as well as political prisoners from the pre-war mainstream parties.⁴³

The term “veteran” was not contested in its application to these groups, but it was also not central to their identity. It was simply not used extensively, either during or after the war. During the war, resistance newspapers continued to mostly use the term in relation to the veterans of the First World War or even the Dano-Prussian war, or in relation to senior figures in any type of political, social or cultural organisation. Other terms and labels carried a much more substantial and central meaning, both during and after the war. “Jøssinger”, a term which was originally used by the Nazis in a derogatory manner about resistance members, became widely used for ‘patriotic Norwegians’. This term, or simply “good Norwegians”, were among the most unifying labels used, encompassing the various groups seen as having been heroically engaged in the battle for Norway. However, these terms were used loosely and in an informal way; they were largely not part of a contested linguistic struggle in the early post-war period.

One reason for the absence of debate over the concept of the “veteran” was the broad social recognition that was granted to many groups for their wartime service, which made explicit demarcations unnecessary. At the same time, the experiences of key groups, including communists and Jews, were largely omitted from public discourse. In post-war Norway, a clear binary between “good” and “bad” Norwegians quickly took hold, centred around patriotism, a binary that did not make room for the Holocaust and the complex experiences of occupation. Although only a minority had participated in the resistance or performed military service, most Norwegians identified with and celebrated wartime heroes. This produced a strong consensus, leaving little room for linguistic conflict over the veteran term and the individuals it granted recognition. The notion of the veteran ideal was tied to having fought on the “right” side and defended Norwegian interests, reinforcing a patriotic narrative that excluded minorities and women.

Beyond this general conceptualisation of veterans, more specific identities centred on concrete wartime experiences that also held important meaning to individual groups. As in Denmark, a type of “veteran identity” formed among individual groups without the term “veteran” carrying central importance to them. This identity could be grounded in more concrete experiences that were shared; of joint activities in the war or the day-to-day experience of imprisonment in specific camps. The two camps in which most Norwegians were imprisoned, Grini and Sachsenhausen, became synonyms for specific wartime experiences and alliances between people having spent time there which reached well into

the post-war period.⁴⁴ Differences between groups existed, not just concerning wartime bonds and experiences, but also with regard to how their contributions to the well-being of the nation were perceived in the post-war era. Specific terms were in circulation to highlight each group's contribution. For political prisoners, the introduction of the term "prison front", complemented the term "home front" which was used by the resistance, and the term "outer front" used by people living in exile. This use of a complementary term allowed prisoners to argue that they, too, had contributed in key ways to the war-effort, promoting a narrative of unity despite everyone involved having vastly different wartime roles.⁴⁵

In tracing the use of the term "veteran" in NS circles, (Nasjonal Samling, the fascist party of Norway during the war), surprising parallels can be observed between the Norwegian exile and resistance milieus, the streamlined and heavily censored press in the occupied territories and the publications created by individuals in NS milieus. It was frequently used loosely, rather than being a term driving public debate and disputes. Among people in occupied Norway and the NS publications, both during and after the war, the term was used mostly to refer to former or serving foreign soldiers. We see occasional references to the term in NS papers, mainly to refer to senior party members ("Membership of the NS is growing day by day, and the veterans welcome the newcomers."⁴⁶ However, the term was not used in an instrumental way. It also does not appear to have featured in propaganda aimed towards SS volunteers or in the debates they had.⁴⁷ After the war, we see it mentioned in the newspapers of the former wartime collaborators, but not to a great degree. The term was therefore not central to the identity of these groups, neither during or after the war.

It was also clear that wartime collaborators, especially SS volunteers, had no claim to the veteran status not to war compensation in post-war Norway. Even if the term held any meaning for them, broader recognition would have been impossible to obtain, and they remained social outcasts with limited prospects for rehabilitation. Nevertheless, certain "veteran dynamics" were present. NS members formed interest organisations in the late 1940s to rehabilitate themselves and reinterpret their wartime actions, not by aligning with recognised veterans, but by presenting alternative narratives of having served Norwegian interests. Within NS milieus, a form of veteran spirit persisted, expressed through ideas of comradeship and shared purpose which was expressed in newspapers, networks, and post-war social circles.⁴⁸ This veteran identity was only intensified by the shared imprisonment, and the trials collaborators had to go through in the so-called *rettsoppgjør*.

The absence of debate over who counted as a veteran in post-war Norway reflects both the limited significance of the term and the perceived clarity of who deserved recognition. The dominant focus was on unity, with a key differentiating distinction between “good” and “bad” Norwegians. This produced a general understanding of veterans as men associated with the military, resistance against occupation forces, or other wartime contributions. The concept was not contested precisely because most people shared a clear idea of who had served Norwegian interests.

As in the Danish case, a closer examination reveals clear and jarring gradations in both public recognition and levels of compensation. Certain groups were overlooked, excluded, or even subjected to stigmatisation rather than recognition in post-war society, most notably Jews.⁴⁹ There was not necessarily a shared veteran identity among recognised groups; rather, identities were tied to specific wartime experiences such as resistance, seafaring, or imprisonment. Veteran organisations reflected these distinctions, as they were founded and run by individuals with shared experiences. This shows that, despite a dominant narrative dividing “good” and “bad” Norwegians, patterns of recognition were of a complex nature. Over time, the term “veteran” became more established and was adopted into the names of certain organisations, such as *Norges Veteranforbund for Internasjonale Oppdrag* (Norwegian Veterans’ Association for International Operations) (1960). At the same time, the concept remained contested, particularly in relation to UN and NATO missions, raising questions about whether different forms of service should be grouped under a single veteran identity or kept distinct.⁵⁰

For participants of the Second World War, social recognition as “veterans” and their veteran identity largely remained intact in the immediate post-war period. This was the case even though some groups were initially overlooked and wartime narratives became more complex. However, this recognition did not mean that access to pensions and other benefits was a straightforward process.

TRANSLATING WARTIME SERVICE INTO POST-WAR RECOGNITION

In comparison, the Danish and Norwegian cases suggest that the limited use of the term “veteran” did not reflect an absence of policies concerning veterans, but rather different national pathways for translating wartime service into post-war recognition. In both countries, those who had fought, suffered, or served in any capacity sought forms of distinction that resembled the veteran status without relying consistently on the term itself. Yet the two political settings differed. In

Norway, the occupation quickly generated a more unified patriotic framework, in which service to the nation could be linked to the legal continuity of the state whose leaders were in exile. In Denmark, the legacy of cooperation and the later rise of resistance created a more fragmented landscape, in which claims to honour perhaps were stronger contested and more dependent on postwar moral sorting.⁵¹ This helps explain why the Norwegian sources more readily point towards a broad but internally differentiated patriotic community, whereas Danish sources reveal a more visceral and explicit struggle over wartime contributions and the following recognition.

THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK DEFINING VETERAN STATUS

To understand how “veteranhood” takes shape after a war, it is not enough to study language, identity, and commemoration; the term is also shaped through judicial means. In many countries, the social meaning of military service is defined less by eloquent speeches or monuments than by compensation acts, pension schemes, and other tangible benefits. These frameworks determine who is recognised as having served, which sacrifices count, and which claims are legitimate. In this sense, welfare and compensation legislation function as a practical index of how a society creates a veteran hierarchy.⁵²

Denmark and Norway are instructive cases in this regard, as their post-war legal regimes created patterns of differential privilege without a distinct and legally protected “veteran” category. Recognition was instead distributed among socially defined groups such as resistance members, war widows, concentration camp prisoners, war sailors, and other “victims of the occupation,” with entitlements ranging from pensions and medical care to educational support and honorary payments. The absence of a formal veteran category is analytically productive, as it highlights how veteran-like recognition was embedded within the compensation frameworks and was constructed indirectly through eligibility criteria, evidentiary standards, exclusions, and moral language delineating worthiness.

DANISH COMPENSATION LAWS FOR WAR VICTIMS

With Denmark’s new groundbreaking social legislation in 1933, a range of laws was introduced that specified how military personnel were to be supported. For example, Section 281 of the Public Assistance Act (*Forsorgsloven*) stipulated that the relatives of conscripted soldiers were entitled to public support during wartime and in other situations in which the man had been called up for service.

The same act also defined how the honorary payments awarded to veterans of the 1864 Second Schleswig War should be regarded in relation to other potential forms of state sponsored public assistance.⁵³

As the Second World War approached, additional legislation was enacted to assist Danes who might be affected by the war. Among these was the Act on the Payment of Honorary Payments to Danish Seamen and Fishermen and Their Survivors (*Lov om Udbetaling af Hædersgaver til danske Søfolk og Fiskere og deres Efterladte*). This meant that fishermen and seamen who were injured and rendered invalid as a result of wartime events while at sea, were entitled to an annual honorary payment of 800 kroner (approximately 3,000 euros in 2026). The same amount could be granted to their widows in the event of death. Shortly after 9 April 1940, a similar act was introduced for Danish soldiers killed or wounded in connection with the German invasion, likewise granting 800 kroner in assistance annually. For civilian Danes, the state introduced war insurance schemes, including War Insurance for Movable Property (*Krigsforsikring af Løsøre*) and War Insurance for Private Household Effects (*Krigsforsikring af privat Indbo*), which insured property against war damage. In addition, the Act on War Accident Insurance (*Lov om Krigsulykkesforsikring*) covered most civilians in cases of invalidity or death caused by acts of war. However, there was no legislation specifying support or recognition for war veterans nor provisions for civilians affected by the broader social consequences of war. Such measures were only introduced after the war.⁵⁴

After liberation in May 1945, the Danish state established the Offices for Special Affairs (*Kontorerne for særlige Anliggender*) to provide immediate relief to civilians affected by the war, with the aim of supporting them until they could return to the labour market. Individuals with eligibility were “worthy” Danish citizens, while those suspected of unpatriotic conduct during the war were excluded. Although outwardly embracing of all, the scheme primarily served members of the resistance who made up the largest group of applicants, and the offices were partly staffed by former resistance members as well. Various groups were mentioned, including Jews, bombing victims, and resistance fighters, but there was no formal definition of what resistance activity did and did not entail. In practice, guaranteed recognition required a written declaration from another resistance member.⁵⁵

While the Offices for Special Affairs operated on the basis of administrative guidelines rather than statutory law, assistance was formalised with the adoption of the Compensation Act for Victims of the Occupation (*Lov om Erstatning*

til Besættelsestidens Ofre) in October 1945. Through the Compensation Council (*Erstatningsrådet*) and the Directorate of Accident Insurance (*Direktoratet for Ulykkesforsikring*), the Danish state established clearer criteria for recognising the eligibility of individuals as “victims of the occupation.” This category included resistance fighters, communists, police officers, Jews, and others who had suffered injury as a result of German measures or reprisals. At the same time, the law introduced stricter documentation requirements and a more clearly delimited circle of beneficiaries. Although formally directed at civilian victims (resistance fighters included), research has shown that the act contained many elements typically associated with compensation legislation for veterans.⁵⁶

Recognised victims were entitled to disability pensions, compensation for loss of a breadwinner, imprisonment, and medical expenses. The scheme also included special privileges: support for establishing a business, favourable educational grants, and honorary payments (*hædersgaver*). These benefits were not available to the general population through existing ordinary welfare provisions, and this marked a clear distinction between regular citizens and the specifically defined group of occupation victims.⁵⁷ The act therefore functioned not only as a compensation scheme but also as an institutional recognition of a certain status best described in terms of moral superiority and honour.

A key weakness of the original legislation was its failure to account for the long-term effects of the persecution and injury it tried to remedy, including trauma developed from concentration camp imprisonment, also known as KZ syndrome. This was the case for both Denmark and Norway. From the late 1940s into the 1950s, this led to recognition disputes, as many former prisoners and resistance members developed detrimental health conditions that did not fit the existing categories. As a result, the boundaries of eligibility became a contested affair, with authorities having to determine which injuries qualified as war-related and which did not.⁵⁸

In addition to the Compensation Act, Danish war sailors were covered by separate legislation. This included revisions to maritime war accident insurance laws and the Act on the Establishment of the Danish Seafarers’ Memorial Fund of 1945 (*Lov om oprettelse af Danske Søfarendes Mindefond*), which provided support to war sailors and their relatives who had suffered financially or socially as a result of their service. The eligible group was loosely defined as those affected because of their “service to Denmark,” a formulation widely open to interpretation.⁵⁹

No separate veteran compensation laws were introduced for Danish soldiers who were injured or killed during regular military service. However, in 1946 an amendment to the Compensation Act expanded the range of eligibility to Danish citizens who had fought in Allied uniform or in foreign resistance movements, granting them compensation on the same terms as Danish resistance fighters. This meant that some Danes who had served in a military uniform were covered by civilian compensation legislation rather than a distinct legislative framework covering the military.⁶⁰

In practice, between 1940 and 1969, Danes who suffered as a result of the war could claim compensation, with additional privileges for those who had actively fought, served in Allied forces, been imprisoned in concentration camps, or worked as war sailors. Compensation was primarily based around physical injury or death. Educational support and business grants could be awarded to resistance members, but only if war-related disruption or injury could be demonstrated. Honorary payments were not given for service alone, but mainly to widows of resistance members and for those assessed to have lost more than fifty per cent of their ability to work due to disability, including soldiers and war sailors.⁶¹

Between 1945 and 1969 there was no protected legal definition of a resistance fighter. There were no statutory rules concerning who had been actual members of the resistance movement or specific activities that ensured any level of qualification. Instead, the Compensation Council assessed each of the approximately 9,000 individual applications submitted by resistance members and determined whether the applicant was deemed to have participated in the resistance struggle or not.⁶²

A legislative amendment in 1969 clarified this criterion for compensation. Danish citizens who had been imprisoned in concentration camps, served on Allied ships for at least six months, or participated in organised resistance work for at least one year could receive an honorary payment if their earning capacity had been reduced by at least twenty-five per cent, compared to the previous requirement of fifty per cent disability. The amendment effectively introduced a statutory definition of a resistance fighter as a person who, through membership of an “illegal” group, had carried out organised resistance activities.⁶³

From the outset, the Compensation Act contained a strict exclusion clause. Danish citizens who had collaborated improperly with the occupying forces were barred from receiving any compensation, even if they otherwise met the criteria. This applied to many groups including so-called German girls (*tyskerpiger*), meaning women who entered into relationships with German soldiers. It

also applied to war profiteers who had benefited economically from trade with the occupation authorities, and to Danes who had served in German uniform, including SS-volunteers.⁶⁴ These exclusions reflected both the moral reckoning of the liberation period and the intention to preserve the exclusive character of the compensation scheme as a privilege that was reserved for worthy Danish citizens, with additional honours granted to those considered especially deserving.

NORWEGIAN COMPENSATION- AND VETERAN LEGISLATION

Before the Second World War, Norway had no comprehensive compensation schemes for veterans. Some ad hoc legislation existed for civilians, such as a 1916 act introduced for seafarers. This was an act which was applicable only to individuals with a connection to the First World War, however, and a permanent scheme for seafarers injured in military conflict was only adopted in 1937, when the work accident scheme came to include permanent war compensation for seafarers.⁶⁵

Beyond the scheme for seafarers, no legislation existed concerning war injuries or death incurred in military conflicts. However, as early as autumn 1939, the Norwegian government began to consider a compensation scheme for ordinary military personnel and appointed a committee to work on the matter. In the first instance, it was about exploring possible schemes granting assistance for “permanent injury”, while the mandate of the committee was only later expanded to include compensation options for invalidity and death, including pensions for survivors.⁶⁶ On 31 May 1940, the Norwegian government adopted a first set of provisional decrees concerning pensions for those injured in connection with their service during the war, or their survivors in case of death. In addition, a committee appointed by the interim Administration Council in the occupied territories worked on a pension scheme for both military and civilian participants of the war, which led to two decrees being adopted on 9 December 1941, covering military and civilian victims respectively.⁶⁷ Upon the liberation of Norway, these war schemes were temporarily continued by provisional decrees on the 4 and 8 May and expanded to include “any injury to a person caused as a result of patriotic work or attitude”.⁶⁸ However, on 13 July 1945 the post-war unity government appointed a new committee, the so-called War Damages Committee (*Krigsskadekomiteen*), to work on a new comprehensive scheme which would be fit for purpose and grant assistance coverage to a wide range of groups affected by the war.

The War Damages Committee presented its findings to the Department of Social Affairs on 30 November 1945. In its recommendations, the committee drew heavily on the existing wartime provisions, since most of those initiatives were considered to be well-functioning.⁶⁹ The work of the committee led to the adoption of the Act on War Pensions for Military Personnel (*lov om krigspensjonering for militærpersonell*) and Act on War Pensions for Home Forces Personnel and Civilians (*lov om krigspensjonering for hjemmestyrkepersonell og sivilpersoner*), both of which were adopted on 13 December 1946. The names of the acts reflect both their scope and the difficulty of categorising veterans and victims. The creation of two laws followed the earlier distinctions that were highlighted between military and civilian compensation schemes. However, legislators were concerned that members of the military resistance (the Home Forces) were not included by the act for military personnel, but placed within the civilian category due to the technical definitions used.⁷⁰ The Social Affairs Committee, following the recommendation of the War Damages Committee, had advocated the use of this categorisation mainly for ‘practical’ reasons: it argued that it could be difficult to draw a distinction between resistance members and ‘other patriotic activity’, which would be covered by the civilian act.⁷¹ This meant that resistance members would be subject to different rules of causation in relation to their claims for assistance. Under military law, any injury or death during service qualified an individual for a pension, whereas civilians had to prove a direct link to specific wartime actions in order to be eligible. The Social Affairs Committee justified this by noting that many resistance members also pursued civilian work during the war. At the same time, the Committee stressed that this distinction did not imply a hierarchy of recognition and that members of the military resistance “are to be regarded as military personnel.”⁷² To reflect this, the Committee proposed to change the title of the act from “Act on War Pensions for Civilians”, to “Act on War Pensions for Home Forces Personnel and Civilians”.⁷³

The two acts were based on similar principles: military personnel received pensions for injuries incurred during service, while civilians were entitled to benefits for injuries resulting directly from patriotic activity or when they were classified as eligible victims of war-related injuries. Pensions aimed to ensure an adequate material living standard based on pre-war income and reflecting the expected post-war status of the individual. This approach caused unease among some parliamentarians, who argued that all forms of service should be honoured equally. Despite their concerns, the principle was adopted with reference to the fact that the pensions who were under consideration could never receive an

adequate amount of monetary reward for their actual war contribution (*krig-sinnsatsen*), but at the very least the state should ensure fairness and an adequate living standard for those who had incurred injuries because of the war.⁷⁴

Civilian legislation covered three subgroups, systematically ranked by their level of service or exposure. Group one included those who had served in the home forces, participated in resistance work, served in Norwegian or Allied forces, been forcibly conscripted, or worked in civil defence or assisted a certain set of voluntary aid organisations and were particularly exposed to the dangers of war. Group two included seamen, pilots, fishermen, and other civilians in occupations deemed especially vulnerable to war-related accidents. Finally, group three applied to: "...other civilians, and persons belonging to the aforementioned groups when the accident is unrelated to the aforementioned service or employment conditions."⁷⁵ In this way the law ensured coverage for a wide range of groups. Legislators generally understood the first two groups as having faced an active risk of injury, whether through military service, resistance work, imprisonment, or labour as group one included prisoners of war. The War Damages Committee had recommended including merchant sailors sailing under the Norwegian flag in this group, but the Social Affairs Committee rejected this "for practical reasons," while still emphasising their importance to the war effort. Groups one and two were nevertheless seen as comparable, and contemporary parliamentary debates made clear that both were regarded as comparable categories of wartime veterans.⁷⁶

Unsurprisingly, the schemes applied only to those who were seen as having fought on the right side. The wartime schemes had previously excluded Norwegians serving allied interests as military and merchant seafarers. These individuals were now included and could apply for assistance. In the 1946 legislation, those who had been sentenced for committing treason (*landssvik*) were expressly excluded. This reveals some of the symbolic intention behind the act: while these revolved around providing compensation benefits, and not veteran pensions, they were still only to be paid to those who fought for the nation against the occupying forces. In other instances, however, the legislative process revealed the difficulties of drawing a clear distinction between those who were worthy and those who were unworthy of receiving pensions: When it came to the so-called 'German workers' (*tyskerarbeiderne*), the War Damages Committee had proposed to exclude such individuals outright from eligibility when those "persons who had worked on German sites and in German companies" incurred an injury. However, the Department acknowledged that most labour performed in the industries

under consideration had been: "...for the benefit of both Norwegian and German interests".⁷⁷ This highlights that it was hard to define who were deemed to be deserving of pensions because of the practical ambivalences of working life during the occupation.

While the principles of compensation, and the adequate grouping of individuals were debated, it was not the veteran status as such which was contested in the context of the legislation. The Act corresponded with the ideals of patriotic duty and sacrifice commonly held at the time. There was a general understanding that in addition to the individuals who were covered by the act for military personnel, individuals in group one and two of the civilian acts had in fact made a contribution to the war effort comparable to that of actual military personnel. This was emphasised by the War Damages Committee, by the spokeswoman of the Social Affairs Committee, and by several members of Parliament. In principle, the 1946 laws covered a broad group of individuals and represented an extensive and comprehensive scheme when counted together.⁷⁸ The laws were met with general satisfaction in 1946 from the different groups of individuals who were injured during the war. While some of the guiding principles behind the benefit calculations were debated, there was strong support for the solutions that were ultimately adopted. Norway had also taken reasonable precautions when deciding upon the scope of law by looking at corresponding legislation from abroad. The main inspirational source for the laws came first and foremost from Denmark. As the chairman of the Social Affairs Committee highlighted during a parliamentary debate: "In this regard, it has been significant for the committee that the Danish law on victims of the occupation, which is based on similar principles, has now been in force in Denmark for over a year and, according to the information provided to the committee, has functioned satisfactorily without any difficulties or causing any controversy."⁷⁹

Shortly after taking effect, the shortcomings of the legislation became apparent. Pensions failed to keep pace with inflation and the compensation from other schemes, and it was often difficult for claimants to prove that their injuries were war-related or even covered by the 1946 provisions. This led to minor adjustments of the laws in the 1950s. However, the laws continued to be strict in regard to proof of causation, something which caused challenges for some individuals. This caused dissatisfaction, because many veterans believed that their pensions were a reward for their service, rather than compensation for sustained injuries. Such practical challenges led to the establishment of the *Krigsinvalidforbundet* in 1954 with the purpose of improving the access to war pensions.⁸⁰ However,

further reforms were needed in order to handle other challenges. This was the case in particular because the early post-war acts in both Denmark and Norway did not cover a range of long-term physical and psychological damage such as the so-called concentration camp syndrome, which only revealed themselves over the years and were not legally recognised immediately.

THE CONCENTRATION CAMP SYNDROME IN NORWAY AND DENMARK

Shortly after the Second World War, Danish doctors began systematically researching the physical and psychological effects of concentration camp imprisonment. Doctors and former prisoners Paul Thygesen and Jørgen Kieler conducted early studies in 1947–48, documenting starvation-related illnesses, chronic conditions, and severe psychological effects such as anxiety, depression, and reduced work capacity with only one third of afflicted individuals being able to work full-time after the war. Mortality was also significantly elevated among the afflicted, especially in the first five post-war years. In 1954, Thygesen and Knud Hermann defined the “KZ syndrome,” highlighting the accompanying trauma and social decline among survivors and their families. These findings aligned with international research, and conferences on the subject from 1954 onwards facilitated the further exchange of medical research in this field. Overall, the studies showed that former prisoners suffered more severe and longer lasting harm than initially assumed. The Norwegian physician Leo Eitinger, himself a former prisoner, demonstrated that similar symptoms affected merchant sailors exposed to prolonged danger at sea. Despite this, war pension laws in both countries required clear medical proof directly linking acts of service to the claims of illness—a burden that proved extremely difficult to meet for many.⁸¹

Despite growing medical recognition, authorities were slow to acknowledge psychological injuries in compensation cases in both Denmark and Norway. Only in 1968, following sustained pressure from veterans’ organisations and mounting media attention, the Norwegian legislation was finally amended through the *Tilleggsloven til krigspensjonslovene av 1968* (Supplementary Act to the War Pension Acts).

The parliamentary debates on the supplementary act in Norway were marked by expressions of regret. Politicians acknowledged that the legal framework had been insufficient to help those it was meant to protect. Although knowledge of the KZ syndrome had existed since the early 1950s, compensation procedures had not been significantly updated. Most significantly, the 1968 amendment reversed the burden of proof. Instead of requiring veterans to demonstrate a causal link

between service and injury, this connection was now automatically presumed for those who had served more than six months in the military, the resistance, on Norwegian or Allied ships, or for individuals who had been imprisoned.⁸² In her study of Norway's merchant sailors, Guri Hjeltnes characterised this shift as a "social policy sensation".⁸³ One consequence of this was that the number of individuals receiving war pensions increased fivefold.⁸⁴ More indirectly, it led to a renegotiation of the veteran term, which could now also include individuals suffering from psychological conditions.

The same tendencies were evident in Denmark. Although Denmark had pioneered compensation legislation and early research on the KZ syndrome, Norway had overtaken Denmark in the 1960s in both trauma research and compensation reform. Norwegian changes directly inspired the Danish amendment of 1969. The political process was similar: a public debate questioned whether the state could abandon aging resistance veterans who had sacrificed their health for the good of the country. Driven largely by a media campaign from veterans' organisations, the reform was ultimately passed with an overwhelming parliamentary majority.⁸⁵

The Danish and Norwegian cases show that medical knowledge alone was insufficient to secure recognition and compensation. Although the long-term psychological effects of war had been documented since the late 1940s, legal frameworks continued to individualise responsibility and require proof from the injured veteran. Only when sustained political mobilisation reframed the issue as a collective moral obligation, did the burden of proof shift from the individual to the state. In the words of the American historian Jay Winter, these former resistance fighters may be understood as a form of moral witnesses. Winter emphasises how veterans and survivors position themselves either within dominant national narratives of heroism and sacrifice or against them.⁸⁶ In the Scandinavian context, resistance veterans, former prisoners, and merchant sailors increasingly challenged the post-war consensus of unity and heroism. Instead, they emphasised the lasting effects of their physical war injuries, psychological injury, social marginalisation, and long-term physiological effects. In doing so, they questioned the moral economy of the post-war state and demanded that the recognition of their suffering should be a collective responsibility. The reforms of 1968–69 in this way not only marked a technical change in pension law, but a broader renegotiation of what counted as a war injury and who qualified as a veteran in the welfare state.

GENDERED DIMENSIONS OF THE VETERAN CONCEPT

The concept of the “veteran” is closely associated with military service and armed combat and therefore carries a strong gendered imprint that is male aligned. Military service and combat have traditionally been understood as “male,” a perception rooted in nationalist norms that define a binary gender order. Within this framework, women are assigned responsibility for reproduction, childcare, and care work, while men are expected to defend the nation. Military skill and combat thus form central elements of the nationalist ideal of masculinity, making it appear “natural” that men fight while women care for the home.⁸⁷ As a result, military heroism has been closely linked to ideals of masculine sacrifice and national service. The soldier’s willingness to die for the nation was framed as the ultimate expression of masculine duty.⁸⁸ The figure of the veteran was therefore closely associated with notions of martial honour, courage and combat experience.

This binary gender order, rooted in the nineteenth century, retained strong authority into the twentieth century, including during the Second World War. However, in occupied Denmark and Norway, fighting was largely conducted by exile forces and the resistance movements and in neither society did mass mobilization occur. As a result, the traditional divide between a male war front and a female domestic sphere applied only to a limited extent.

Especially in Denmark, the military played an exceedingly limited role in the war. The swift defeat in April 1940 and disarmament in August 1943 left many officers unable to demonstrate traditional martial masculinity, contributing to the post-war tensions with resistance groups. While resistance offered visible proof of and claims to sacrifice, regular military service provided fewer means of asserting wartime merit. More broadly, war and occupation did contribute to a loosening and blurring of the traditional gender order, particularly in Norway.⁸⁹ Following the onset of the German invasion, most men and women initially continued their everyday work and responsibilities. However, both became involved in organised resistance, and in Norway, women were also incorporated into the armed forces. At the same time, wartime collaboration involved both genders and, in some cases, opened up new opportunities for women to take on roles that were otherwise less accessible.⁹⁰

Nevertheless, binary nationalist gender roles retained a strong normative force. As soon as occupation and war came to an end, social and political efforts were directed towards re-establishing traditional societal structures rather than altering the gender order. This effort once again defined everything associated

with the military as distinctly masculine and eroded the traces of female actions in this sphere during the war.

This particularly affected those militarily connoted roles that women had assumed during the war in the resistance, in the intelligence services, and for Norway in the armed forces, and on the basis of which they might have claimed political participation, social influence and entitlement to social benefits according to the legislation described above after the war.

One context, in which this development became painfully obvious, is memory politics. In the aftermath of the war, narratives concerning both the merits and the misconduct of men and women during the occupation were gendered. The resistance struggle was framed as a “male” phenomenon – despite the many women who had taken an active part in it. Although female resistance fighters were discussed and praised in the media in the immediate post-war months, the importance of their deeds and their contribution to the success of the resistance was soon downplayed.⁹¹

Female tasks were depicted as subordinate to men’s or as mere support for the “real” resistance. Women who acted as messengers, spies, or served in the armed forces did not fit the traditional gender order. As Karen Steller Bjerregaard, Helle Bjerg and Claudia Lenz have shown, women in Norway and Denmark often reproduced these interpretations themselves. Even when engaged directly in resistance, they remained in the background in terms of recognition and political influence, and their contributions were often neglected in the big picture.⁹²

Instead, another form of “female resistance” was promoted: the housewife and mother who sustained the home front under the yoke of occupation. In Norway, women who managed to feed their families despite shortages or mend clothing when shops were empty were seen as the true heroines. A similar pattern appeared in Denmark. As Anette Warring has shown, women’s resistance was often framed within the domestic sphere. Activities such as hiding fugitives or distributing illegal newspapers were thus interpreted as extensions of household duties rather than as political or military action.⁹³ Both the Norwegian and the Danish narrative represented another variation of the nationalist ideal of the female role as a caring mother.⁹⁴

The extent to which this myth was socially pervasive in Norway, even within circles associated with the women’s movement, is illustrated by the following example: After the war, the women’s magazine *Alle kvinners blad* sought to duly recognise the numerous contributions made by women to the resistance. The magazine also announced that its honorary prize for 1945 would be awarded to

a “brave woman” who had rendered outstanding services to the resistance. The prize, however, was not awarded to a woman who had been part of the military resistance or assumed other “male” roles during the war, but to the director of a tuberculosis sanatorium in Finnmark, Helga Mårdalen.⁹⁵

When German troops devastated northern Norway towards the end of the war, Mårdalen persuaded them not to burn down the hospital. After the surrounding area had been destroyed, she took in numerous people who had been rendered homeless. During the occupation, she had also assisted refugees by organising transport, clothing and provisions and by hiding them.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, it was above all her service as a nurse (“sister”) and the traditionally “female” qualities associated with these actions – care, nurturing attentiveness and self-sacrifice – that were foregrounded. In the justification for the prize, *Alle kvinnens blad* stated: “Sister Helga [...] is very representative of the Norwegian women’s front. She is a housekeeper for a large institution. She is a social worker and has made an outstanding humanitarian contribution.”⁹⁷ The *Rjukan Arbeiderblad* described her as: “... a mother to all those in need in Eastern Finnmark.”⁹⁸ Mårdalen thus primarily embodied the “resistant Norwegian housewife” and thereby the traditional gender role ascribed to women.

In Denmark, particular attention was given to the widows of resistance fighters, who were praised for their husbands’ sacrifices. In speeches, commemorations, and compensation practices, they were celebrated for this “ultimate sacrifice” and were by far the most generously accommodated group in the compensation legislation.⁹⁹ The Danish Freedom Fund, a private initiative with broad popular support, also provided extensive assistance to both widows and children, while also organising special events for the widows and even producing dedicated gifts intended to symbolise their sacrifice.¹⁰⁰ It was simply good politics to support resistance widows, and part of the fund’s advertising strategy in connection with fundraising was to emphasise that they provided special support to widows—one of the many advertisements they placed in the daily press, for example, read: “The Freedom Fund is thinking of the widows.”¹⁰¹ In this way, the Danish resistance widow resembled the typical war widow in terms of the elevation and emphasis placed on the ultimate sacrifice made by the husband. Likewise, the practice of tying the support granted to soldiers’ wives and war widows to their husbands’ service and earnings was characteristic of military widows more generally.¹⁰²

In a broader societal perspective, this was also characteristic of contemporary views on women in Denmark as well as in Norway. Women, especially married

women and mothers, were primarily regarded as economically and socially dependent on men, and both prevailing norms and social legislation were therefore based on the assumption that they neither could, nor should, manage on their own.¹⁰³

Gendered narratives of the war and occupation also shaped the handling of collaborators in the Norwegian treason trials. During the war, the “typical collaborator” was assumed to be male, except in cases of sexual collaboration, which was primarily observed as a “female” phenomenon. When the trials began in 1945, authorities were surprised by the high number of accused women—who made up one third of all suspects and convicts.¹⁰⁴ Over the course of the treason trials, gender stereotypes and gender roles consistently shaped the treatment of wartime collaborators by the police and courts. Female defendants who were perceived as independent, strong, influential or even violent—attributes coded traditionally as “male”—were depicted as deviant, often in a sexualised manner, and prosecuted more harshly.¹⁰⁵ By contrast, female defendants who presented themselves in gender-stereotypical ways—as caring mothers or impoverished widows—often fared better in the *Rettsoppgjør*. Courts frequently downplayed even serious offences perpetrated by women by neglecting female agency, while at the same time rewarding behaviour that conformed to ideals of women as caring housewives and mothers. In this way, police and judicial authorities framed domestic roles as the proper model of a “good” Norwegian woman.¹⁰⁶

The re-traditionalization of society was not only a retrospective effort but it was also oriented towards the future. This is evident in the debate about women’s position in the Norwegian military after 1945. During the Second World War, around 700 women served in the armed forces. From April to June 1940, following the German invasion, women volunteered mainly in medical, domestic, and administrative roles. In 1942, the Norwegian authorities in exile introduced conscription for women aged 18–40 living abroad, who received military training in Great Britain to form a female medical corps and an armed women’s corps with separate hierarchies and ranks.¹⁰⁷

After the war, these women initially remained in the armed forces as regular officers, and additional female volunteers were recruited and trained. The Ministry of Defence worked to establish a voluntary peacetime service option for women in non-combat roles, but it was concluded that Parliament would have to decide whether or not women should be integrated into the armed forces as a matter of principle. At the same time, a heated public debate arose over the planned “militarisation” of women, which many, including the bourgeois-con-

servative opposition, saw as a threat to traditional gender roles. In December 1946, Parliament rejected further integration projects and terminated the female recruitment and training programme. Consequently, by the end of 1947 all-female support units and new recruits were discharged, and by 1955 the last thirteen female officers had been dismissed. Thus, "... military defence continued to be identified thoroughly with a male world."¹⁰⁸

In Denmark, women did not serve in the armed forces during the Second World War, but many participated in the resistance movement. As in Norway, their contributions were soon marginalised after the war. A notable example is the "Red Widows," whose husbands were Danish communists that were interned during the occupation and later deported to Nazi camps. From informal meetings in 1941, they developed into an organised network that secured financial support for affected families, petitioned local authorities, and organised relief efforts. Over time, they became both a welfare advocacy group and a political pressure movement. After the war, however, they were pushed aside. As their husbands returned, the women's networks and experience lost influence, and they were expected to resume traditional roles. Their wartime efforts were largely forgotten until rediscovered in the 1980s.¹⁰⁹

Most striking is the limited political influence granted to women after 1945. In Denmark, no resistance women were appointed to prominent positions in the liberation government or post-war councils. In Norway, despite strong efforts, Kirsten Hansteen was only appointed as a consultative minister without her own department in Einar Gerhardsen's first post-war cabinet. Female representation in parliament and government remained low in the following decades.¹¹⁰ In both countries, political arenas were largely male dominated. Regardless of how effectively women had operated within the resistance during the occupation, they were granted little influence after liberation and they were typically not understood as military- or resistance veterans.

This shows that gendered narratives of war and post-war policy had far-reaching consequences. Women were not only excluded from "male" spheres such as the military and resistance but also denied claims to political participation and influence in post-war society. Instead, they were relegated back into traditional roles as mothers and housewives.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this chapter, we have demonstrated that veteran status in post-war Norway and Denmark was not a fixed term, but that it emerged through social,

legal, and political negotiations after 1945. Rather than being a demarcated and protected legal category, recognition of wartime service took multiple forms, reflecting different types of sacrifice and experience. Resistance fighters, war sailors, camp prisoners, soldiers, and others all sought recognition, even if they did not identify or qualify as veterans.

In both countries, the concept of the veteran remained closely tied to material entitlements. Compensation laws, pensions, and welfare provisions became key arenas for defining and contesting wartime service. Although neither Denmark nor Norway created a clearly defined veteran category, their systems effectively established hierarchies of recognised service, thereby functioning as indirect forms of veteran assistance policy.

Another key finding is that recognition of veterans evolved over time. Early post-war legislation in both countries focused on visible, physical injuries and clear wartime damage. Long-term psychological harm and delayed effects were only gradually acknowledged. Reforms in the late 1960s marked a turning point in this regard, as new medical knowledge and political mobilisation broadened both the understanding of what constituted war-related injury and opened up access to compensation.

Finally, we have demonstrated that the concept of the veteran was strongly gendered. In Norway and Denmark, recognition of wartime service was closely tied to masculine ideals of combat and sacrifice, while women's contributions were framed as extensions of domestic or humanitarian roles. Post-war compensation and commemorative practices reinforced this by recognising women mainly as widows or dependents, limiting their opportunities for political influence compared to the men who gained political influence through their ties to the resistance movement.