

MILITARY HERITAGE

The archeological discovery of two World War II military helmets near 'Stratumseind' (city centre Eindhoven).



EINDHOVEN

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Commemoration and Celebration: the archeology of the Second World War

We, here in Eindhoven, like to look to the future but we don't lose sight of our past. That is the reason for archeological research. There are archeological remains to be found from various periods of the history of our town. Some of these form our military heritage and much of that is from World War II (1940-1945). Military heritage sources play an important role in providing information about the lives of local inhabitants and military personnel and how they survived the war years. By combining information from the written word, pictorial sources and archeological finds, a more complete and varied picture emerges of this dark period in our recent past.



Overview of the groundwork near Stratumseind (photo: BAAC B.V.)

Eindhoven in the Second World War

Eindhoven was of strategic military importance during the war years. The small local civilian airport, Welschap, was transformed by the German occupation forces into a large military airfield, Fliegerhorst Eindhoven. Their aim was to counter Allied bombing raids, which targeted German industrial areas and towns. The airfield itself became a target along with the industrial sectors of Eindhoven and were heavily bombarded by the Allies. There were many casualties and extensive bomb damage. Research into wartime records shows there were some 6,000 bomb craters. The Eindhoven area had a central role during the liberation offensive by the Allied Forces in 1944, known as Market Garden. The town was liberated on 18th September, a date which is annually commemorated and celebrated.

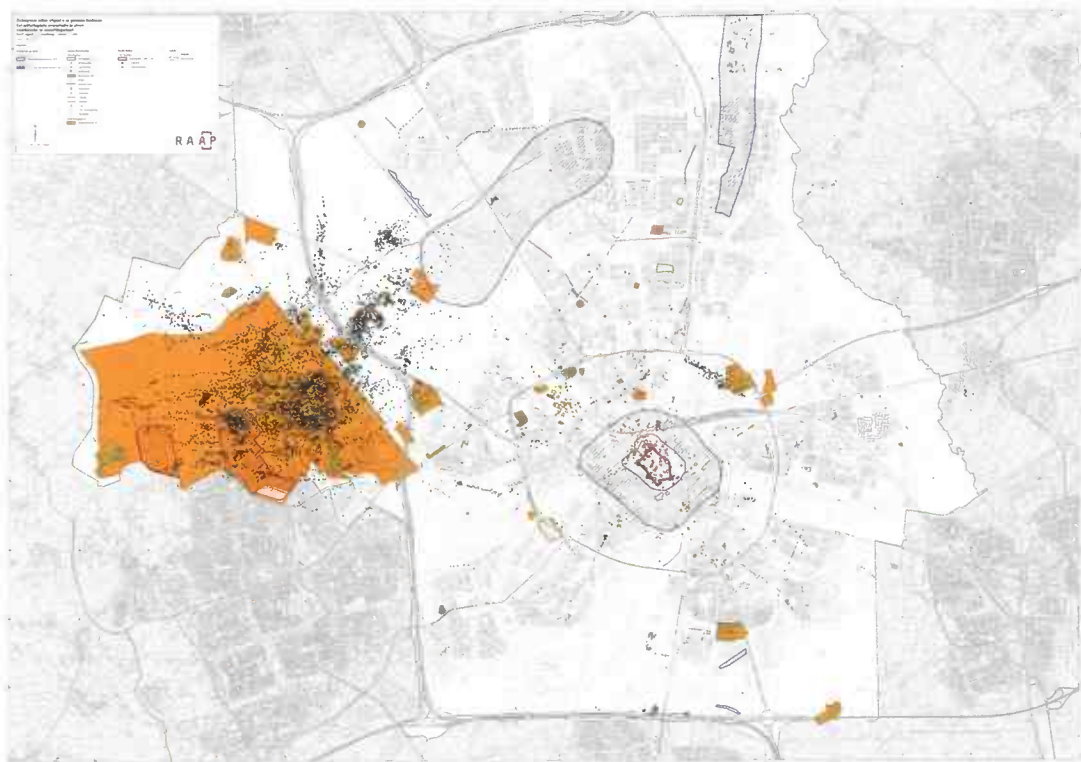
Excavations near Stratumseind

Research into heritage buried in the ground is a continuing process. There is someone digging in the ground somewhere almost every day, for

example for new utility services. The local council then requires archeological research to be done. This is to prevent the disappearance of old objects and archeological traces. Archeologists carrying out a dig work closely with explosives disposal personnel.

This small exhibition has been put together following the discovery of two wartime helmets at the bottom of the back-filled town moat. The street above the old moat in the town centre is now called 'Oude Gracht'. They came to light while digging down to install new sewers as part of a refurbishment of Stratumseind. The moat used to be open with an arched brick bridge until the 1950's when it was back-filled. Traces of this bridge were also discovered.

All the top finds from across the ages are housed and displayed in our Heritage Centre, 'Erfgoedhuis' Gasfabriek 2 on the former NRE site. (www.eindhoven.nl/erfgoedhuis).



An overview of military heritage in the ground: the largest area in orange shows the site of Fliegerhorst Eindhoven and black crosses show the bomb craters. From: RAAP report 5557.



The liberation of Eindhoven



An American paratrooper of the 101st Airborne Division taking a break on Stratumseind, 18 September 1944 (photo: Eindhoven in Beeld foundation).

The airborne landings (Market)

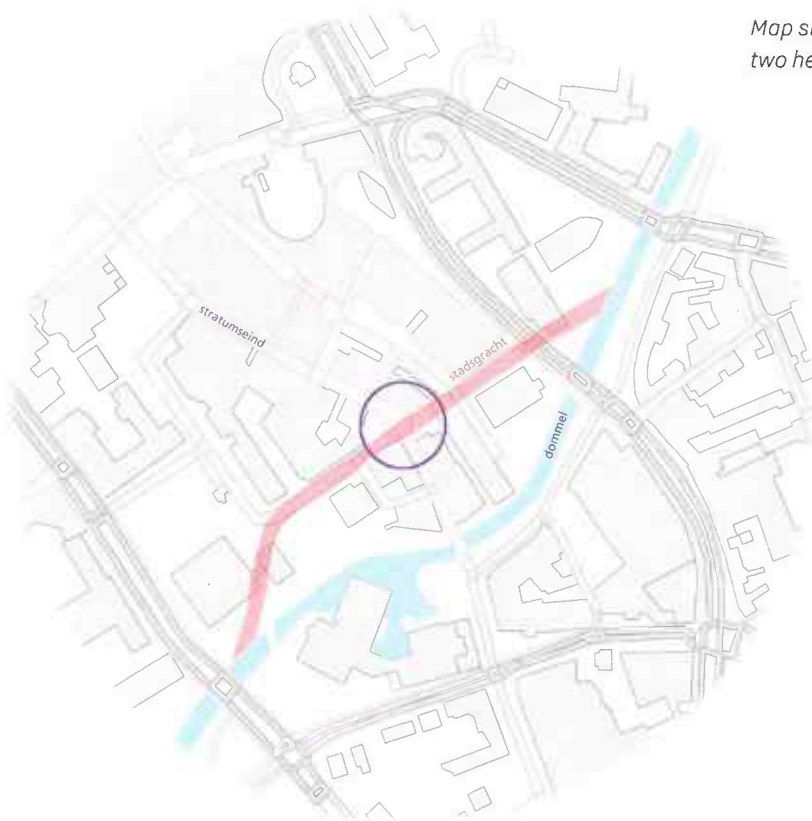
Operation Market Garden began on 17th September 1944. The intention of this military campaign was to create a corridor up from Eindhoven, Nijmegen and Arnhem towards Germany and so outflank the Siegfried Line. Thousands of American paratroopers of the 101st Airborne Division landed just to the north in Son on the same day. Some of them moved southwards towards Eindhoven to get control of the bridges and meet up with the British ground forces who were to come up through Valkenswaard.

The ground forces (Garden)

The British XXX Corps came up across the Belgian border by Lommel to secure the road to Arnhem called the Club Route. After fierce fighting near Valkenswaard, the first ground troops reached the Americans in Eindhoven on 18th September. They were warmly welcomed by the population of Eindhoven as their liberators.

Action at the front

The town did not entirely escape further warfare. The town suffered bombing raids from the German air force, the Luftwaffe. The aim of the bombardment was to try to make this important strategic cross roads impassable. 227 people lost their lives during this bombing raid and parts of Eindhoven were irreparably damaged. Eindhoven remained an important staging post for Allied Troops for the next few months.



Map showing the find spot of the two helmets – circle.

Two helmets and a shell shrapnel in the disused town moat (Stadsgracht)

IDDS, a company specializing in research into explosives in archeological contexts, discovered the two helmets and the shell shrapnel while investigating the disused moat and an archeological advisory company BAAC handled the further research. One of the helmets turned

out to be British and the other one German. The piece of shrapnel was from a shell from a 25 pounder gun. These finds ended up in the old moat near to the bridge at the end of a road leading out of town, Stratumseind. The moat was back filled in 1953 so these objects must have gone into the moat between 1944 and 1953.



Left: the German helmet. On the right: the British helmet, after conservation (photo: BAAC B.V.).

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A helmet from the Princess Irene Brigade?



British dispatch riders are welcomed by the inhabitants of Eindhoven. They are all wearing a Dispatch Rider Helmet. (Photo: Eindhoven in Beeld Foundation)



The British helmet, after conservation (Photo: BAAC B.V.)

The Dispatch Rider helmet

One of the most remarkable finds from the excavations along the street 'Stratumseind' is a British Dispatch rider's helmet. This was typically worn by military dispatch motor cycle riders. Their job was to deliver dispatches to and from the various units and the commanders. Radio messages were unsafe because they could be listened into or were not possible. This model Mark I Dispatch Rider Helmet was manufactured between 1942 and 1945. It is very similar to the helmet worn by the Paratroopers but has a different liner.

Remarkable painting

Some remarkable painting and numbers or letters appeared on the helmet after it was cleaned. One side has the Dutch tricolour and at the front is a large black patch. The numbers 111 seem to be written on it. They may stand for the headquarters of the 2nd Battle Group of the Dutch Princess Irene Brigade, which was involved in Market Garden. This could explain the use of the Dutch flag. Or it is possible that it was decorated by a liberated local during the celebrations.

Lost or dumped?

It remains a mystery how the helmet came to be in the moat. The Princess Irene Brigade came through Eindhoven several times from September 1944. However there may have been soldiers from the Princess Irene Brigade already in Eindhoven during the bombing raid of 19 September. In the ensuing chaos perhaps its owner lost it. It could simply have got lost along the way during the push into town. Maybe a local simply threw it away in the moat at some point. There was a lot of rubbish to be cleared away by the end of the war.



The unlucky German helmet



Additional text: German soldiers wearing model 35 steel helmets taking a break in a field sometime in May 1940. (photo: private collection)



The German helmet, after conservation. The impact hole can be seen at the bottom. (photo: BAAC B.V.)

The 'Stahlhelm 35'

This helmet was found near the bridge over the old town moat (Stadsgracht) at the end of the street, Stratumseind. It is a German military steel helmet, type 35. This an updated model of the helmet first introduced during WWI. It was pressed out of sheet steel and the inside liner made out of aluminium and leather. The at the back was to protect the neck from shrapnel and any other projectiles in the air. This typical design became an icon both during and after the war. The helmet from Eindhoven is a type 35 which was originally apple green but later was painted over in a darker, mat shade. Therefore it must have been reissued during the war.

Hit by shrapnel

One noticeable characteristic of this helmet is the hole on the left which was probably caused by a hit from a piece of shrapnel. This then penetrated and caused a dent on the other side of the helmet. It is not possible to say whether anyone was wearing the helmet when it was hit but if so they would not have survived. Although these helmets were designed as protection against shrapnel, a direct hit from close range would be lethal.

A casualty of artillery gunfire

The battle around Eindhoven in 1944 was really quite intense. The soldier wearing the helmet was perhaps involved in this battle and thereby lost his helmet near the bridge over the moat. The centre of Eindhoven was within range of gunfire from both light and medium heavy artillery from 17th of September 1944. It is not clear whether there was an exchange of fire on Stratumseind but most probable that the town was fired on from this direction. Then it is possible that this fatal casualty was due to this artillery fire.



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