

## 30 Musis Sacrum

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### Wehrmachtsheim

Only a few months after the German occupation began in 1940, the 19th century Arnhem concert hall Musis Sacrum was declared a Wehrmachtsheim. It was primarily a recreation centre for German soldiers where films were shown and various performances, plays and such like were organized. It was difficult for civilians to gain access.

The building was also used for other purposes, such as meetings. For example, on Saturday evening 31 January 1942 a concert was given in aid of the Winterhulpactie (the Winter Aid Action). [1] This collection was intended to provide 'needy Dutch folk' with financial support. With this gesture the German occupiers wished to show that their intentions were of the best, and that the concert was not a national socialist initiative. However, many Dutch people were quick to see through this: there were many NSBers (Dutch collaborators) on the national honour committee. Collections and benefit concerts for the Winterhulp were hardly contributed to or attended, so they made very little. The Winterhulp posters were either defaced or torn down as a means of protest. [2] The meagre return was used for war purposes, not for poor Dutch people.

The building also served as a meeting hall for the Nationaal Socialistische Beweging (NSB National Socialist Movement). The local branch of this pro-German party met regularly in Musis Sacrum and was delighted with the presence of the Rijkscommissaris in Nederland (State Commissioner in the Netherlands), Dr. Arthur Seyss-Inquart, at the third "Jahrestag des Arbeitsbereiches der NSDAP in den Niederlanden" in Arnhem on 31 October 1943. The Sudeten-German Seyss-Inquart, who, on 19 May 1940, was appointed by Hitler as the highest civil authority in the Netherlands, gave a speech in the concert hall. [3] As "Rijksduitser" he originated from the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, which the Germans had already 'added' to the Third Reich by 1938.

### Muis Sacrum during the Battle of Arnhem

At the preparation stage of Operation Market Garden in September 1944, Musis Sacrum was chosen as the future headquarters for the 1st Parachute Brigade of the 1st British Airborne Division. But the British advance from the landing zones at Heelsum to the Arnhem road bridge on 17 September did not go as quickly or smoothly as planned. Only brigade HQ, a few RE detachments, the greater part of the 2nd Parachute Battalion and some smaller units managed to reach the Rhine Bridge that evening and night.

In anticipation of the rest of the brigade's arrival it was decided to use the Rijkswaterstaat building in Eusebiusbinnensingel as a temporary command post. However, the expected reinforcements didn't arrive and the German counter-attacks increased. Every man at brigade headquarters was then needed to defend the small perimeter around the northern end of the Rhine Bridge. Therefore, the plan to use Musis Sacrum as command post had to be abandoned.

In an interview after the war, German Obersturmbannführer Walter Harzer, commander of 9. SS-Panzer-Division 'Hohenstaufen' claimed that German soldiers in Musis Sacrum had been taken prisoner for a short period on 17 September 1944:

"When the first British parachutists arrived in Arnhem great confusion reigned. Initially they encountered very little opposition. About 80 German soldiers were in the recreation centre drinking coffee and playing cards. A handful of British parachutists came in and ordered the Germans to raise their hands. They then drank a cup of coffee and went on their way." [4]

This story can't really be confirmed, but it is possible that a few soldiers from 'C' Company, 3rd Parachute Battalion, which was heading from Arnhem station to the bridge, might have entered Muis Sacrum to see if brigade HQ had already arrived.

It was on Tuesday afternoon 19 September that the Germans first used their Wehrmachtheim as an improvised prison. British parachutists who had been captured that morning in the vicinity of Roermondsplein and Boterdijk were taken to Muis Sacrum to be interrogated.

Two days later, in the afternoon of 21 September, all the British officers who had been taken prisoner around the Rhine Bridge were marched from St. Eusebiuskerk to Muis Sacrum. Next morning they were sent on to the Bene Sita villa in Velp where, only then, did the Germans begin registering their prisoners-of-war.

## Monument to the Resistance

It was a great wish of one of the British parachutists who managed to reach the centre of Arnhem, veteran Bob Peatling (1924-2007), that a monument should be raised to the Arnhem Resistance people. He escaped falling into German hands with the assistance of the Penseel family, who took him into hiding at number 7 Velperplein. The Geen Brug te Ver - Herinnering Verzet Arnhem (No Bridge too Far - Remembering the Arnhem Resistance) foundation came into being early in 2004 and nominated three ideas, any one of which could be voted for by the Arnhem inhabitants.

The foundation had received hundreds of reactions by the summer of 2004. The winning design, a monument of 128 tiles depicting an imposing cloudscape and a striking text at the rear of Muis Sacrum, was the work of the Arnhem artist Jouke Hoogland and the retired lecturer in Dutch Jos Pauw, also from Arnhem. The tiles were Hoogland's idea and Pauw composed the text "De meeste mensen zwijgen, een enkeling stelt een daad" ('Most people remain silent, an individual takes action'). [5] The outcome of the voting was made known to burgomaster Paulien Krikke on Friday 17 September 2004, exactly sixty years to the day that Operation Market Garden, and therefore the Battle of Arnhem, began. Hundreds of thousand of euros were received in gifts from private parties and businesses and this was made available for the realization of the winning design.

Precisely a year later, on Saturday 17 September 2005, the monument was unveiled by burgomaster Krikke in the presence of the two artists, Bob Peatling and a large group of interested people. They named the monument "Een boodschap voor ieder, voor alle tijden". ('A message for everyone, for all time'). [6] The British 'Arnhem 1944 Veteran's Club' Newsletter gave full coverage to the monument.

[1] 'Winterhulp. Winterhulpconcert op zaterdag 31 januari om 7.15 uur 's avonds in de concertzaal van Muis Sacrum. Programma' (Arnhem 1941/1942). Gelders Archive, Documentation collection Second World War, inventory number 814.

[2] 'Winterhulp', <http://www.geheugenvannederland.nl/?/nl/zoekresultaten/pagina/1/winterhulp/%28winterhulp%29/&colcount=0&wst=winterhulp> Visited on 15-01-2016.

[3] Gelders Archive, Photo collection Second World War, inventory number 315.

[4] 'Interview with Lieutenant Colonel Walter Harzer - November 11, 1967', page 6. This interview comes from the Cornelius Ryan Collection, Vernon R. Aldan Library, Ohio. The copy of this document used here can be found in file 30; from the L.P.J. Vroemen Collection (Gelders Archive, 2867).

[5] E. Louwes, 'Arnhem moet verleden meer herdenken', De Gelderlander, 25 August 2004.

[6] A. Oost, 'Een boodschap voor ieder, voor alle tijden', De Gelderlander, 19 September 2004.