

35 Gele Rijdersplein

The Battle of Arnhem in September 1944 had an enormous influence on the infrastructure of Arnhem. A number of imposing buildings in Willemsplein were badly damaged in the battle and in many cases never rebuilt.

Gele Rijdersplein was constructed in the nineteen-fifties on the site where the Willemskazerne (barracks) had stood until the end of the war. The barracks were bombed by the allies at the very start of the Battle of Arnhem. Due to the construction of the Gele Rijdersplein the size of Willemsplein was drastically reduced. This story describes the air raids on 17 September 1944 which preceded the airborne landings and the ensuing ground actions. Also described is the stately artwork in the Gele Rijdersplein which was made by the Arnhem sculptor Gijs Jacobs van den Hof, and unveiled in 1963.



[The bombing of the Willemskazerne Gele Rijdersplein](#)

The bombing of the Willemskazerne



The Willemskazerne in Willemsplein before 1940. (Gelders Archive collection)



The Willemskazerne and surroundings as seen from the air before the Second World War. (KLM Aerocarto collection)

An allied air raid on Sunday morning 17 September 1944 signalled the beginning of a changed townscape for the capital of Gelderland. However, this was not the first time that Arnhem had been bombed during the Second World War. On 22 February 1944 the American 446th Bomb Group bombed the gasworks and Van Ommeren's paint and glass Company in error, causing extensive damage. Seventeen houses were also destroyed, 21 others were badly damaged and 57 people lost their lives.

The British bombers which arrived over the city on that first morning of Market Garden were not there by accident. In the preparations for the operation - the dropping of three allied airborne divisions and an independent parachute brigade, spread over three days - it was established by aerial observation that, between 1 and 11 September, the number of German anti-aircraft artillery sites had been increased from 21 to 112. [1] This artillery and three barracks in the area would have to be bombed in the hope that this would give the 1st British Airborne Division virtually unopposed landings at Heelsum and Wolfheze.

Around 10.45 hours the first British Mitchell bombers appeared over the city, escorted by small, manoeuvrable dive-bombers. Various places, such as the telegraph office and the Ack-Ack guns at the Rhine Bridge, were bombed. [2] The 19th century Willemskazerne also paid the price. The main building was designed in 1836 by architect Anthony Aytink van Falkenstein, and was home to the famous Gele Rijders - the Horse Artillery Corps - until May 1940.

Reports from the Arnhem OD (Order Police) and LKP (National Commando Teams) resistance groups told the British Intelligence Service that the barracks at Willemsplein were being used by the Germans as a training centre for junior officers of the Schutz Staffel (SS). The SS Unterführerschule Arnhem was housed there and was commanded by SS-Standartenführer Hans Michael Lippert. Shortly after the war he recalled.

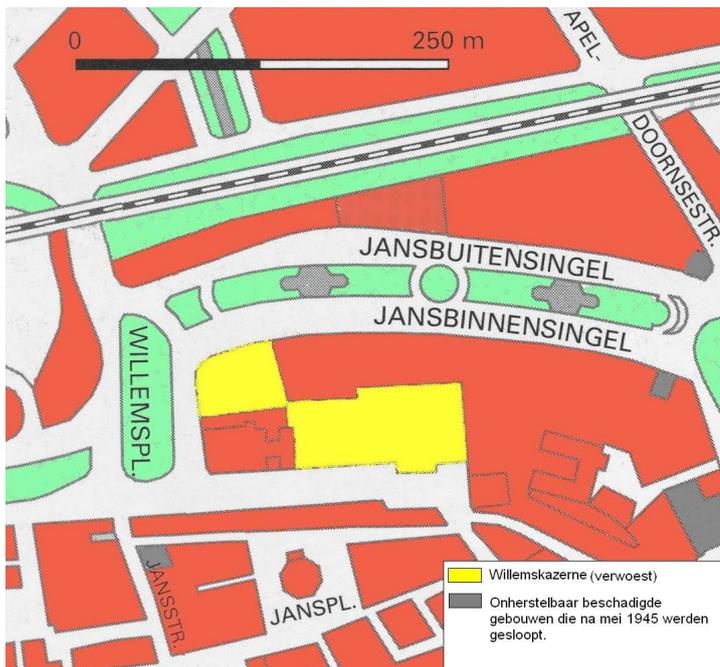
“On 17 September 1944, when the allied landings at Arnhem took place, I was stationed in a sector on the Waal between Gorinchem and Zaltbommel with the SS Unterführerschule, which at that time was located in Arnhem. This Unterführerschule (School for Junior Officers) consisted of two companies, all young men of about 24 years of age. I had the job of intercepting troops withdrawing from Belgium as well as facing the enemy there.” [3]

Soon after the bombing, Lippert and his unit were moved to Rhenen. Here they were reinforced by every German sailor and soldier who could be assembled in the west of the Netherlands. They would remain in action to the west of Oosterbeek until the end of the Battle of Arnhem, so the bombing of the Willemskazerne had little point seeing that there were few troops present. Obviously the British high command thought otherwise.

At 13.30 hours 34 British Mosquito aircraft came over the Gelderse capital to bomb the Willemskazerne again, as well as the Menno van Coehoorn and the Saksen Weimar barracks. Two aircraft were shot down by German gunners. The fire service restricted itself to fighting the fires in premises close to the barracks. The Arnhem barracks themselves were not tackled because of the fear of exploding ammunition stocks. The exception was the neighbourhood of the Willemskazerne where, despite German warnings of the danger of explosions, the fire service prevented the fire from spreading to Jansbinnensingel and the nearby HBS (Dutch High School). Sadly, the air raids also claimed a number of civilian lives. [4]

The Willemskazerne continued to burn throughout the Sunday afternoon and night. After the war the ruins of the complex were demolished. The HBS close by could be saved, but not so the chique 'Royal' café-restaurant which was designed by architect Willem Diehl. The building suffered severe fire damage and was further damaged during the eventual liberation of Arnhem. A much-published photo was taken of British gunners from the 49th 'Polar Bears' Infantry Division manning a 17-pounder anti-tank gun in this building in April 1945.

Gele Rijdersplein



The situation around Willemsplein in 1945. (Copyright Cartografisch Bureau MAP / Bert Stamkot)

As mentioned above, Willemsplein was greatly reduced in size after the war by the construction of the Gele Rijdersplein. In the fifties the site where the Willemskazerne's stables once stood was re-christened Gele Rijdersplein to commemorate the unit's presence in the city. [5] The Horse Artillery Corps was disbanded in the war but was re-established in January 1963 after pressure from former Gele Rijders. To mark the occasion the 11th Field Artillery Regiment was renamed the 11th Horse Artillery Regiment. It was housed in the Saksen Weimarkazerne until 1999, when it was transferred to the Tonnetkazerne in 't Harde. [6]

In the late fifties, prior to the discussion about the reinstatement of the Gele Rijders, the council approached the Arnhem sculptor Gijs Jacobs van den Hof (1899-1965) about producing a fitting statue of a Gele Ridder on horseback for the Gele Rijdersplein. Jacobs van den Hof himself found the end product not beautiful, and the council was also not entirely satisfied: they found it out and out boring and it created a wooden impression. The sculptor had already received a down payment however, so he decided to have the statue cast in bronze anyway.

The statue was enlarged by the Bousquet studio in Parijs and cast in a bronze foundry in Soest. In December 1963 it was unveiled by Prince Bernhard in the presence of Jacobs van den Hof and burgomaster Matser. [7]

The artwork is a permanent reminder of the former Willemskazerne and the Horse Artillery Corps.

[1] A. Korthals-Altes, Luchtgevaar : luchtaanvallen op Nederland 1940-1945 (Amsterdam, 1984), 225.

[2] Hen Bollen, Corridor naar de Rijn (Zutphen, 1988), 27.

[3] Tjeerd Holwerda, Proces-Verbaal, houdende verklaringen van de Commandant van het v.m. SS Wachbataljon en diens adjudant (P.A. Helle en A.P.H.G. Naumann), de SS Standartenführer H.M. Lip-pert en de SS Obersturmführer H.W. Fernau, betreffende de slag om Arnhem van 17 tot en met 25 September 1944, met bijlagen (Police Utrecht, Bureau for Tracing War Atrocities, Sub-commission Utrecht. Dossier 586/25, 17 March 1948), 17-18. L.P.J. Vroemen Collection (Gelders Archive, 2867), inventory number 26 (previously D.1.11).

[4] Korthals-Altes, Luchtgevaar, 228-229.

[5] A.B.C. Schulte en A.G. Schulte, De verdwenen stad. Arnhem voor de verwoesting van 1944-1945 (Utrecht, 2004), 74.

[6] [Geschiedenis 11 AfdRA](#) (Consulted on 28-01-2016).

[7] De Gele Rijder <http://www.jacobsvandenhof.com/306.htm> (Consulted on 11 June 2007).