

CASE REPORT: DNA IDENTIFICATION OF A WORLD WAR II VICTIM

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In the Netherlands about 600 individuals are still recorded missing since World War II. For many of them their fate is known but the exact burial locations of their remains are unknown. Nowadays the Netherlands Forensic Institute deploys several forensic techniques to aid the identification: anthropological analysis and combinations of autosomal, Y chromosomal and mitochondrial DNA profiling.

In 1943, the 23 year old Pieter Hoppen was killed by members of the Dutch resistance movement because they thought he was collaborating with the German occupying forces. His body was buried in a shallow grave near the town of Staphorst.

In 2008, a documentary film maker discovered that Pieter Hoppen was in fact not a collaborator. One of the members of the Dutch resistance movement decided to reconcile to his conscience and revealed the burial place. Indeed, in 2009 personnel from the Dutch military recovered skeletal remains from a young male person at the designated site.

To confirm that the remains belonged to the missing Pieter Hoppen, a search was started for DNA reference material. In a case file, the Red Cross recovered an envelope and letter, written in 1947 by the father or the brother of Pieter Hoppen to request for help in finding their relative. A niece of Pieter Hoppen provided her DNA and a tie of her father, Pieter Hoppen's brother, to aid the investigation.

A Y chromosomal DNA profile from the envelope matched the Y chromosomal DNA profile from the skeletal remains, giving strong support for the hypothesis that the skeletal remains belonged to the missing Pieter Hoppen. The remains of Pieter Hoppen were reburied at the Field of honor in Loenen. ☘