

## Art team's work in WWII recognized

By **ROB HOTAKAINEN**  
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WASHINGTON -- Stationed in Germany after World War II, James Reeds was the chief clerk for a little office with a big mission: to rescue art that the Nazis had looted.

On Wednesday, the 85-year-old Kansas City man squinted into the bright television lights on Capitol Hill, clutching an American flag with both hands. He walked with a cane and spoke slowly.

"I think we did a good thing in that war," Reeds said. "We conquered the Nazis and their friends, and we did very good things to protect people from the sins of the Nazis. ... I'm glad to be an American."

On the 63rd anniversary of D-Day, Congress paused to honor Reeds and three other members of the so-called "Monuments Men." They were a small band of art experts that tracked down tens of thousands of pieces of stolen art and cultural artifacts by masters such as Michelangelo, Rembrandt, Picasso and da Vinci.

"This is long overdue," said Sen. Kay Bailey Hutchison, R-Texas, who presented flags to the four men: Reeds; Horace Apgar of Oklahoma City; Harry Ettlinger of Rockaway, N.J.; and Bernard Taper of Berkeley, Calif.

Rep. Kay Granger, R-Fort Worth, who was among four sponsors of the resolution honoring the Monuments Men, called it "a remarkable story of heroism and also true love." She said she wanted to recognize the Monuments Men because so few Americans know of their work.

"That's why they call it the greatest generation," Granger said. "Because they did heroic things like that, and they didn't talk about it a lot."

One of the Monuments Men had a Fort Worth connection. Harry Grier was a trustee of Fort Worth's Amon Carter Museum. He also served as director of the Frick Collection in New York and as director of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

### The history

Dallas author Robert Edsel, who has written a book on the Monuments Men, organized the congressional salute, saying it was an attempt "to celebrate and honor an overlooked group of heroes."

The book, *Rescuing Da Vinci: Hitler and the Nazis Stole Europe's Great Art -- America and her Allies Recovered It*, identifies 12 living members of the 350-member team in charge of saving art during the war.

Edsel said the Monuments Men, who received their nickname from American GIs during the war, collected art that had been stored in salt mines, caves and castles. Much of the confiscated artwork was for Adolf Hitler, who wanted to build a personal museum near his birthplace. Edsel called it a "premeditated theft of unparalleled proportion" and said he'll create a foundation to make sure that the Monuments Men's work is remembered.

"It was the greatest treasure hunt in history," he said.

The Monuments Men formed in 1943 as a result of lobbying by U.S. art experts and organizations for a national effort to preserve art in the European theater. The group won the support of President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

He established a commission, headed by Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts, which led to the creation of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives branch within the Civil Affairs and Military Government Sections of the Allied armies.

The men were primarily young professors and museum curators chosen for their vast knowledge of art history. Their first mission during the war was to identify historical and cultural monuments and other sites in Axis-occupied European nations to prevent Allied forces from bombing and destroying them.

### **Reeds' reaction**

After listening to the speeches, Reeds said it was an emotional day.

"I'm impressed," he said. "I don't want to say it's not well-directed, but what should I say? It's bewildering."

Reeds worked in the War Department's Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives section.

One of the group's original members, he was stationed in Wiesbaden and Frankfurt, Germany, and responded to incoming messages regarding artworks and monuments that soldiers had discovered.

"The telephone would be ringing from way off in the American occupation zone about something that someone had found, and they didn't know for sure what it was, but it was a big picture and it looked like a good picture," Reeds said. "We're talking about riflemen who had never had that experience.

"I sat at the telephone or the typewriter, whatever chief clerks are supposed to do; I don't know," Reeds said. "I just got shoved into the job. My previous military experience was as a laboratory assistant in the medical department. When I was armed, it would have been a syringe. That's as high as I got as far as weapons are concerned."

Reeds said he always knew he was doing important work.

"I knew that people outside this dinky little office we had would be talking about it," he said.

This report includes material from the Star-Telegram archives.