

## Congress to honor WWII heroes Veterans saved enemies' artwork

Author: Eric Pfeiffer  
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Bernard Taper says he is not a hero. Walking along the Pacific theater section of Washington's World War II memorial, the 89-year-old veteran who helped recover and protect priceless artwork and cultural artifacts during the fall of Nazi Germany reflects on his contributions.

"There's a cause that is greater than patriotism and a higher cause than victory," he said with a smile. "Our allegiance was to art, truth and justice."

Mr. Taper is in the District with three other Monuments Men to be honored by members of Congress on the 63rd anniversary of D-Day for their services to the country and the world at large. Only 11 Monuments Men - including one woman - are alive today.

"I'm very moved by it," Mr. Taper said. "I never expected all this attention."

Today, the Senate is expected to pass a bipartisan resolution honoring the 350 men and women who served with the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives section.

The story of the Monuments Men is being brought to attention largely because of the efforts of author Robert Edsel and three San Francisco filmmakers who produced a documentary about their accomplishments. Mr. Edsel helped bring the Monuments Men to the District and led the tour across the National World War II Memorial.

"They reflect the ideals of what so many of us are wanting to get back to," he said. "They are the greatest generation within the arts arena." Mr. Edsel wrote "Rescuing Da Vinci," which chronicles many of their heroic acts.

Estimates place the recovered works' value, many of which were retrieved from German salt mines, in the billions of dollars.

The visiting Monuments Men are full of wit, opinions on current affairs and detailed stories of their experiences.

Asked whether he was looking forward to the ceremony today, Horace Apgar joked, "It depends on who's doing it." Mr. Apgar spent a year and a half in France and Germany during the war.

The willingness of the Americans and the Allies to risk their lives to protect the treasures of defeated enemies was unprecedented. To the Monuments Men, it just made sense. "You made a bond between all of the folks you lived with. All of them sacrificed, especially those who died," said Harry Ettlinger, 81.

Like his colleagues, Mr. Ettlinger is moved and surprised to be recognized for his actions.

"It's a great honor," he said, "far beyond what I ever dreamed I'd be privileged to experience."

After completing their war service, many of the Monuments Men continued to work in arts. They included curators and directors of the National Gallery of Art, the New York City Ballet, the American Association of Museums and the National Endowment for the Arts.

Caption:

Harry Ettlinger, one of the Monuments Men, showed a copy of a Rembrandt painting he saved during World War II. He said a congressional resolution planned for today was a "great honor." [Photo by Katie Hayes/The Washington Times]

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