



You're Joking, Right?

by Robert M. Edsel



Lt. Cdr. George Stout removes Michelangelo's Bruges Madonna from the mines at Alt Aussee (National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., Gallery Archives)

On April 19th at Christie's auction house, in New York City, tens of millions of dollars will change hands. In a country that loves sports, the box score will read something like this: "Claimants, lawyers, auction house: Millions. Monuments Men: Obscurity." Who else sees something very wrong with this picture?

In fact, this upcoming sale will be another in a successive string of sales of artworks restituted to the heirs of a victim of Adolph Hitler and the Nazis. The von Saher family - heirs to Jacques Goudstikker, who fled Holland on the last boat to leave Amsterdam before the Nazi occupation - will be selling a portion of the 202 artworks recently restituted to them by the government of Holland after a lengthy and complicated legal battle. The paintings previously hung in 17 Dutch museums and government buildings. The remaining paintings from this initial restitution will be sold in London during July and in Amsterdam in November. An estimated 1,000 other

paintings stolen from this great Dutch dealer remain missing; works by Goya, Rubens, Titian, van Gogh, and Rembrandt are listed on an inventory found with Goudstikker when he died. Many will no doubt surface in the course of time.

At other such sales, the press has "followed the money" to coin a not too distant phrase. After all, "money" sells as a headline, especially sums this large. Writers at the most recognized news periodicals have written the predictable articles...*"In 1939, the Nazis looted...in 1950 Allied Forces returned the stolen works of art."* In sum, these news accounts have become so rote that the same words could be written leaving blanks to be filled with the name of the victim, the year of the theft, and the particulars of the post-restitution sale. It begs several questions: Why isn't the press writing the "untold" story of the Monuments Men? Does anyone not prefer a good story about unsung heroes as opposed to attorneys and middle-men making lots of money? We'll see...judge for yourself in the coverage that follows the sale on April 19th.

In fact, but for the actions of the Monuments Men, unsung heroes not just of this country but of CIVILIZATION, this restitution and so many like it might never have occurred. The cases of Bloch-Bauer (Altmann), Feldmann, Gutmann, Koenigs, Rosenberg and now Goudstikker, were all in their own way linked to the actions of the Monuments Men more than 60 years ago. It was the Monuments Men who rescued and preserved so many of these works of art...they catalogued and documented these masterpieces in an effort to ensure that the items were properly returned to the victims of the greatest theft in history. When millions of American soldiers were coming home after the war, they stayed in

"Mr. Edsel's book is captivating in several respects, from the graphic, garish reminders of the faces of the great plunderers, to the singular beauty of the art they sought to steal. And it is a high and overdue memorial to the "Monuments Men," who did the herculean job of tracking down and repatriating the great art."



MONUMENTS MEN NEWSLETTER

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Europe for more than six years to "do their job" as one Monuments Man recently told me.

Consider the words of Monuments Officer John Skilton, who wrote the following almost 60 years ago: *"I was ordered to go to a unit at the front to examine some paintings found in a train...when assessing this group of eight paintings, I discovered that they were originally part of the famous collection of Goudstikker, a Jewish Dutch art lover. During the invasion of the Netherlands, Reichmarschall Göring obtained the complete inventory...he took what he liked for his private collection and had the rest auctioned off...having wrapped each in a blanket, I took them*



Lt. John Skilton, center. (Les Editions Internationales)

to 7th Army HQs. The ride back was far from restful, my driver got lost and we had a very hard time finding a bridge to cross the Rhine...we held our breath when an aircraft buzzed us...We were deep in enemy territory and

the driver was not very reassured when I told him it doesn't matter what happens to us as long as we are able to bring the paintings back to a safe place."

This was but one of thousands of such scenes repeated over and over again in Germany and Austria during the final months of the war. Monuments Men were confronted with unprecedented situations involving the protection of art and artistic treasures. With no instruction, no handbook, no resources, they were left to their own ability and judgment on how

to protect many of the greatest cultural masterpieces of the western world.

Their accomplishments and contribution to the preservation of civilization have been totally overlooked. Who can say this is anything less than a travesty? With these sales some restitution victims are finally realizing a day of justice. And that is a good thing. Others, who acted as middle-men in their saga have been rewarded beyond measure. It raises an interesting question about what is the "proper" amount of compensation for those assisting victims in the recovery of their stolen property...but I'll save that subject for a future editorial.

President John F. Kennedy once said: *"A nation reveals itself not only by the men it produces, but the men it honors, the men it remembers."* By that standard, our country has failed the Monuments Men. It was the Monuments Men, not the amorphous "Allied Forces," who rescued and returned more than 5 million cultural items after World War II. They have names, they have stories, they should be known, heard, honored. Who in good conscience would receive a gift of immeasurable value from someone and not say, "thank you"? Every time we enter one of the world's great museums without knowing the role of the Monuments Men we ignore their legacy. Had we as a nation known of their great works, perhaps the United States would have honored that legacy by responding quite differently to the looting of the National Museum of Iraq in Baghdad?

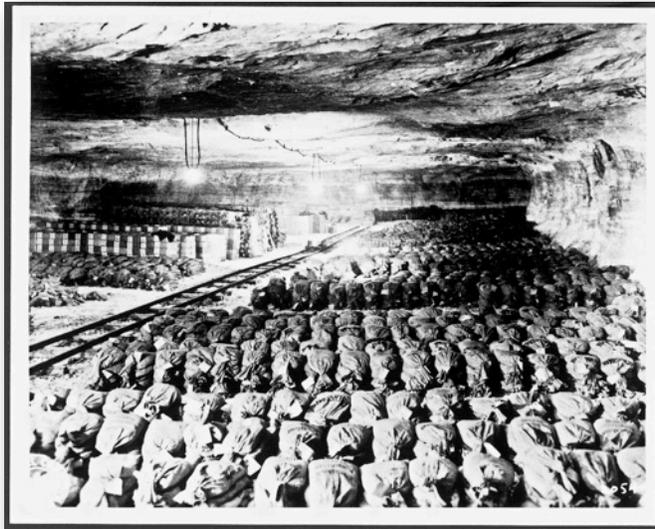
It's never too late to recognize and honor a hero. Please support our efforts to properly recognize the achievements of the Monuments Men by contacting the member of Congress in your area and asking them to support House Congressional Resolution 48. Your support is urgently needed!

"Captain (finally Major) Deane Keller, would have been very pleased with the book. Congratulations."

- William B. Keller, Son of Captain Deane Keller, MFAA officer who saved many of Italy's great art treasures



April 8th, 1945: The \$1 billion discovery in Merkers Mine



Gold reserves and currency inside the mine.

(National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD)

On April 6th, 1945, Allied Military Police questioned two women who were out past curfew in the small town of Merkers, Germany. The women divulged that the nearby Kaiseroda salt mine was full of Reichsbank gold and art treasures. Soldiers from the 90th division, U.S. 3rd Army, led by General Patton, entered the mine on April 8th. There they found 110 tons of gold bullion worth at the time more than \$100 million. In today's dollars, that sum would be equivalent to about \$1.9 billion. Foreign currency was also

found, bringing the total value of the discovery to more than \$3.3 billion! Soldiers also discovered 400 tons of art, removed from German museums in the final days of the war and placed there for safekeeping. Masterpieces from the *Nationalgalerie* and *Kaiser-Friedrich* museums in Berlin, including more than 25 paintings by Rembrandt and the Egyptian *Bust of Nefertiti*, were found along with 1.5 million books and the costume collections of the Berlin State Theater and Opera. Plans for evacuation

From the Desk of Robert M. Edsel

If the dramatic increase in the volume of emails, calls, and letters is any indication, our efforts to broaden the telling of this remarkable story are spreading. Many of the people contacting us are providing additional clues and leads of all sorts. One significant announcement will be forthcoming soon as a result.

We've made a few adjustments to this month's format under the aegis of Elizabeth Ivy, our editor, including quotes from readers we want to share with others. None touched us more than the one I received from Monuments Man S. Lane Faison, Jr. who wrote:

"Thank you for a very impressive book. You've done a great service and told clearly what often never gets told."

Although Lane died on November 11th, 2006, his spirit and wit guide our ongoing efforts.

began almost immediately due to the extraordinary value of the mine's contents and the impending arrival of the Russian army. The gold and currency were removed first during the weekend of April 14th. Under the guid-

ance

"I cannot thank you enough for writing this incredible book – so true to what happened. Every time I open it, I find myself over and over in those years that shaped me and my future."



The three generals examine artworks in Merkers. (National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD)

of Monuments Men Lt. Comdr. George Stout, Capt. Robert Posey, and Lt. Col. Mason Hammond, the artworks were prepared for shipment and left the mine on April 17th. 393 uncrated pictures, 2,091 print boxes, 1,214 crates of paintings, and 140 bundles of textiles made their way to the Reichsbank in Frankfurt in a heavily guarded convoy. Before the treasures were removed however, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, CG, 12th Army Group, and

Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, Jr., CG, U.S. 3rd Army, visited the mine on April 12th, a momentous day for the Generals. Their day had begun with a visit to the first Nazi concentration camps liberated by American forces in Ohrdruf, Germany. Later that day came the shocking news of the death of President Roosevelt.



Front page of the Philadelphia Record, April 13th, 1945. (Philadelphia Record)

Bruno Lohse - Art Advisor to Hermann Göring - Dies

Bruno Lohse, art historian and agent to Hermann Göring, died in Munich on March 21st, age 95. Lohse was one of only a few of the many art agents and dealers to Hitler and the Nazis who was tried, convicted and punished after the war for his role as Deputy Chief of ERR operations in Paris (*Einsatzstab Reichsleiter Rosenberg*). Lohse became a member of the Nazi Party in 1937, and was assigned to the ERR in February, 1941. He accompanied Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring on most of his visits to the *Jeu de Paume* Museum in Paris, where the ERR gathered artworks looted from Jewish homes. In February, 1945, Lohse was ordered to the Castle of Neuschwanstein in southern Bavaria to protect the ERR inventory records which documented the systematic theft operation. This material is now in the National Archives. After serving several years in a French prison, Lohse was released. Like so many other former Nazi art dealers, he rebuilt his career and resumed dealing.



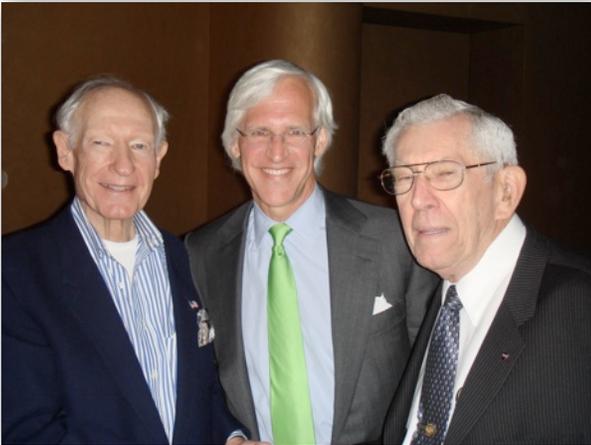
(Lynn Nicholas Collection)

"The impact of the pictures from Robert's book so vividly portrays a cultural rape of mind-boggling proportions, that I am still impacted by it."

- Peter Altmann, son of Maria Altmann, who recently had restituted five paintings by Gustav Klimt by Austria.



Our Film - *The Rape of Europa*



*Robert with his father, A. Ray Edsel, and Monuments Man Horace Apgar (right).
(Robert M. Edsel Collection)*

The Rape of Europa has been screened a number of times during the past several weeks. On March 15th, Robert Edsel, co-producer, presented the film to an audience of almost 600 paying customers at the Detroit Institute of Arts. The enthusiasm for our film and the overall *Rescuing Da Vinci* project was so fantastic that he stayed in Detroit for another screening the following evening. On March 24th, the film was shown at the magnificent Los Angeles County

Museum of Art. Monuments Man Bernard Taper and his wife Gwen were able to attend and participate in the panel discussion that took place afterwards. Also participating in the panel discussion were Bonni Cohen, executive producer of our film, and Professor Jon Petropoulos, noted scholar on the history of the Nazis and art looting. This was also the first presentation of the film in 35mm with Dolby sound.

On March 25th, the film was shown at the Oklahoma City Museum of Art, an event attended by about 250 people—a truly sold out audience as we regrettably turned away about 40 people due to space limitations. Monuments Man Horace Apgar was also in attendance. On March 26th and 27th the film was screened as part of the AFI International Film Festival 2007 in Dallas. More than 188 people attended each screening—capacity crowds with many people turned away! At each screening, crowds have been astonished with the story itself; so few people have been exposed to this significant part of World War II. Given our plans for the film’s theatrical release nationwide late this spring, the reaction and enthusiastic response of audiences has been very encouraging.

Everett Parker Lesley

We believe we have identified the man on the far left of the photo on the cover of *Rescuing Da Vinci* as Monuments Man Everett Parker “Bill” Lesley. A reader and former colleague of Lesley’s at the National Gallery of Art wrote us about his suspicions, and through further research we’ve confirmed that Lesley was in fact present for the return to Poland of Leonardo’s *Lady with an Ermine*. Any information confirming our tentative identification, or identifying other people in our photographs is greatly appreciated. Please contact Elizabeth Ivy at eivy@laurelpublishingllc.com.



(National Archives and Records Administration, College Park, MD)

“Anyone with service personnel in their history or family will appreciate this extraordinary book, and anyone who appreciates our military men and women will enjoy learning about this previously untold tale of heroism.”



C-SPAN *Booknotes*

Robert Edsel's presentation for the Eisenhower Institute aired on C-SPAN four times in the last several weeks. The response has been tremendous! We received hundreds of emails from people who were moved by the story. We have dozens of leads we are pursuing; some pertain to additional information on Monuments Men, others pertain to looted art, and still others concern items in the possession of families who inherited these things from someone in their family who served in World War II. The visibility from such programs is essential to spreading this story. Many thanks to Roni Pomerantz, Richard Hall, and all of the talented people at C-SPAN for your help.

Monuments Men Update

There are currently 345 men and women on our official "Monuments Men" list. Biographies are complete for 98 men and women, and may be found on our website at www.rescuingdavinci.com/HelpSolve/list_mfaa.aspx. We have various amounts of information on another 170 people. There are 77 names for which we have no information at this time. Of the 345 men and women, there are 209 from the United States, 67 from the United Kingdom, 24 from France, 13 from the Netherlands, 7 from Belgium, 2 from Canada, 2 from Czechoslovakia, 2 from Russia, 1 from Germany, 1 from Hungary, 1 from Norway, 1 from Poland, and 16 have no known nationality at present.

H. Con. Res. 48

This month we are beginning our focused effort to enlist at least 200 Congressional supporters of H. Con. Res 48. We've added a feature to our website that makes contacting your Representative of Congress extremely easy. Just visit www.rescuingdavinci.com, click on "Honor the Monuments Men," then select our prepared "Contact your Congressman" email letter. Upon filling in your name, click on the convenient drop down menu to find your Representative and his/her email address, then press "send" to forward it to their office. Please encourage your friends and family to do the same!

UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL FILM SCREENINGS

Full Frame Documentary Film Festival, Durham, NC

April 12-15

Dayton Jewish Film Festival

April 12-29

Des Moines Art Center

April 15

Baltimore Jewish Film Festival

April 15, 3 pm presented by Lynn Nicholas

River Run Intl Film Festival, Winston-Salem, NC

April 18-23

MAY FILM SCREENINGS

Utah Museum of Art

May 2, 6 pm

National Archives, Washington, D.C.

May 2, 6 pm, presented by Robert Edsel

San Francisco Intl. Film Festival

May 7, 6:30 pm; May 8, 12:30; May 10, 7:45 pm

Minneapolis Jewish Film Festival

May 12, 7pm, presented by Robert Edsel

MAY SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

Assoc. of Major Symphony Orchestra Volunteers

May 4, Dallas, TX - Meyerson Symphony Center