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*Meet the Monuments Men:  
Adaptors, Outsiders, and Visionaries in 1940s Europe*

**ABSTRACT:** *This article examines the actions of three members of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program (MFAA/Monuments Men) and the personal qualities that contributed to their success in saving and preserving artwork toward the end of World War II in Europe. On the basis of the Monuments Men's accounts, the author argues that the Monuments Men's success as a group stemmed from their shared traits, namely their adaptability in the face of changing circumstances, their ability to work as outsiders in war-torn Europe and with the U.S. Army and government, and their conviction of a singular vision. Combined, these personal qualities enabled them to undertake one of the greatest ventures in the protection of humanity's art and culture.*

**KEYWORDS:** *World War II; Europe; Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives program (MFAA); Monuments Men; Walker K. Hancock; James J. Rorimer; Thomas Carr Howe, Jr.; Nazi-looted art*

*Introduction*

There was no arbitrary drafting of personnel [to the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives program]; participation was voluntary. The resulting spontaneity and its value to the spirit of the work cannot be exaggerated.<sup>1</sup>

One month prior to the Allied invasion of Italy in July 1943, President Roosevelt created the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in Europe.<sup>2</sup> This commission founded the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) section of the Allied Armies,<sup>3</sup> known as the "Monuments Men."<sup>4</sup> A group of approximately 350 art and culture experts, the Monuments Men volunteers faced a daunting task, namely to save Europe's greatest historical treasures from annihilation and return them to their owners from before World War II.<sup>5</sup> By the time they halted the collection of looted and displaced works in 1951, the Monuments Men had recovered over 60,000 pieces of art, including such famous works as Michelangelo's "Madonna of Bruges" and

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Carr Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles: The Discovery and Restitution of Looted European Art* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1946), 294.

<sup>2</sup> Robert M. Edsel, *Saving Italy: The Race to Rescue a Nation's Treasures from the Nazis* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2013), 5.

<sup>3</sup> Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration, [Records of the American Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas \(The Roberts Commission\), 1943-1946 \(RG 239\)](#), National Archives Microfilm Publication M1944, accessed May 30, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 274.

<sup>5</sup> Robert M. Edsel, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (New York: Center Street Hachette Book Group, 2009), xiv.

the Ghent Altarpiece.<sup>6</sup> Never before had people attempted, let alone succeeded, in such an effort of conservation to protect humanity's art and culture.

To better establish the unique contributions of the Monuments Men, this article examines three firsthand accounts from American MFAA officers. The shortest of these sources, Walker Hancock's article "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany" (1946),<sup>7</sup> provides a brief, yet detailed account of his work in the one country. Two other members of the Monuments Men published longer autobiographical works, including James J. Rorimer's book *Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War* (1950).<sup>8</sup> Rorimer's *Survival* covers the longest timeframe of a Monuments Man in Europe. Rorimer arrived in Paris the very day the German Army had retreated from the city.<sup>9</sup> In contrast, Thomas Carr Howe, Jr. wrote about his experience as an MFAA member in the immediate aftermath of World War II Europe in his book *Salt Mines and Castles: The Discovery and Restitution of Looted European Art* (1946).<sup>10</sup> Both Howe's and Rorimer's works include photographs depicting the discovery of artifacts and their removal. Despite the varied nature of their accounts, these Monuments Men all describe in detail the courageous actions of their fellow officers, providing a better picture of their success as a group through the unique efforts of individuals.

Robert M. Edsel stands as the leading expert historian on the Monuments Men. His published works include several books on the topic, three of which are used here to provide context for the primary sources. Edsel also created The Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art and coproduced a documentary film about the Nazi looting of Art.<sup>11</sup> Titled *The Rape of Europa*, this documentary draws from a 1994 book of the same title by Lynn H. Nicholas.<sup>12</sup> As these remain the major works covering the Monuments Men, scholars have yet to explore the subject on a smaller, individuals-focused scale. By concentrating on the accounts of only a handful of historical figures, this article hopes to contribute to a closer analysis of the Monuments Men.

The subject matter lends itself well to a certain "bottom-up approach" method of historical analysis, as the major events and figures of World War II Europe have already received considerable documentation and review from the academic community in a conventional "top-down" method. Other spheres, such

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<sup>6</sup> Edsel, *Monuments Men*, 243-244. See also Edsel, *Monuments Men*, 116-119.

<sup>7</sup> Walker Hancock, "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," *College Art Journal* 5, no. 4 (May 1946): 271-311.

<sup>8</sup> James J. Rorimer, *Survival: The Salvage and Protection of Art in War*, in collaboration with Gilbert Rabin (New York: Abelard Press Inc., 1950); Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*.

<sup>9</sup> Rorimer, *Survival*, 46-47.

<sup>10</sup> Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*.

<sup>11</sup> Edsel, *Monuments Men*, "About the Authors;" Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*.

<sup>12</sup> *The Rape of Europa*, directed by Richard Berge, Bonni Cohen, and Nicole Newnham (2007; Menemsha Films).

as the American public, have also shown an increased interest in the subject matter over the past few decades. For example, Hollywood's attention has turned toward World War II art theft and restitution, with the MFAA coming to the forefront in the popular film *The Monuments Men* in 2014.<sup>13</sup> In all areas of professional and amateur study, many now seek out previously unexplored, first-hand accounts. This provides an often more relatable perspective, as this "bottom-up" method presents the ordinary people of history without the difficulty of historical mythos which tends to surround famous figures. Historians like Christopher R. Browning and Alex Kershaw have employed this technique in their studies to provide more complete accounts of people upon whom history had already passed judgement.<sup>14</sup> This article applies a similar method to the subject of the MFAA. By closely examining primary accounts from members of the Monuments Men and supplementing them with the necessary context from secondary sources, I hope to provide a relatable view of the Monuments Men as individuals.

This article shows that the success of the Monuments Men as a group stemmed from the shared traits of its individual members: their adaptability in the face of changing circumstances, their ability to work as outsiders within war-torn Europe and with the United States Army and government, and finally, their conviction of a singular vision. Combined, these personal qualities enabled the Monuments Men to undertake one of the greatest ventures in the protection of humanity's art and culture.

### *I. Adapting to Unusual Circumstances*

During their time in World War II and post-World War II Europe, the Monuments Men constantly adjusted their plans and methods in creative ways due to unforeseen circumstances. Among the obstacles they faced, scarcity of resources plagued the Monuments Men time and time again. James Rorimer (1905-1966) notes one instance in his book *Survival*, recounting the rocky start to his mission. When Rorimer reported for duty in Southampton, England, he felt pride in the ability of the Allied Armies to adapt to unusual circumstances, but his "bubble of confidence burst" when he discovered the ship to take him to France had already sailed.<sup>15</sup> In those days shortly after D-Day, the Allied Armies needed all available materials and resources for the war effort, and few placed

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<sup>13</sup> *The Monuments Men*, directed by George Clooney (2014; Columbia Pictures/20<sup>th</sup> Century Fox).

<sup>14</sup> Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1998; first published 1992; revised edition 2017); Alex Kershaw, *The Liberator: One World War II Soldier's 500-Day Odyssey from the Beaches of Sicily to the Gates of Dachau* (New York: Broadway Books, 2012).

<sup>15</sup> Rorimer, *Survival*, 3.

importance on the role of the Monuments Men.<sup>16</sup> Rorimer chose not to wait for the transportation officer to report back. Instead he boarded another vessel with French troops bound for Normandy. Thinking quickly, the Monuments officer solved an unexpected issue quickly and then moved on to his next task. This proved essential in the urgent pursuit of art recovery and restoration in areas devastated by World War II.

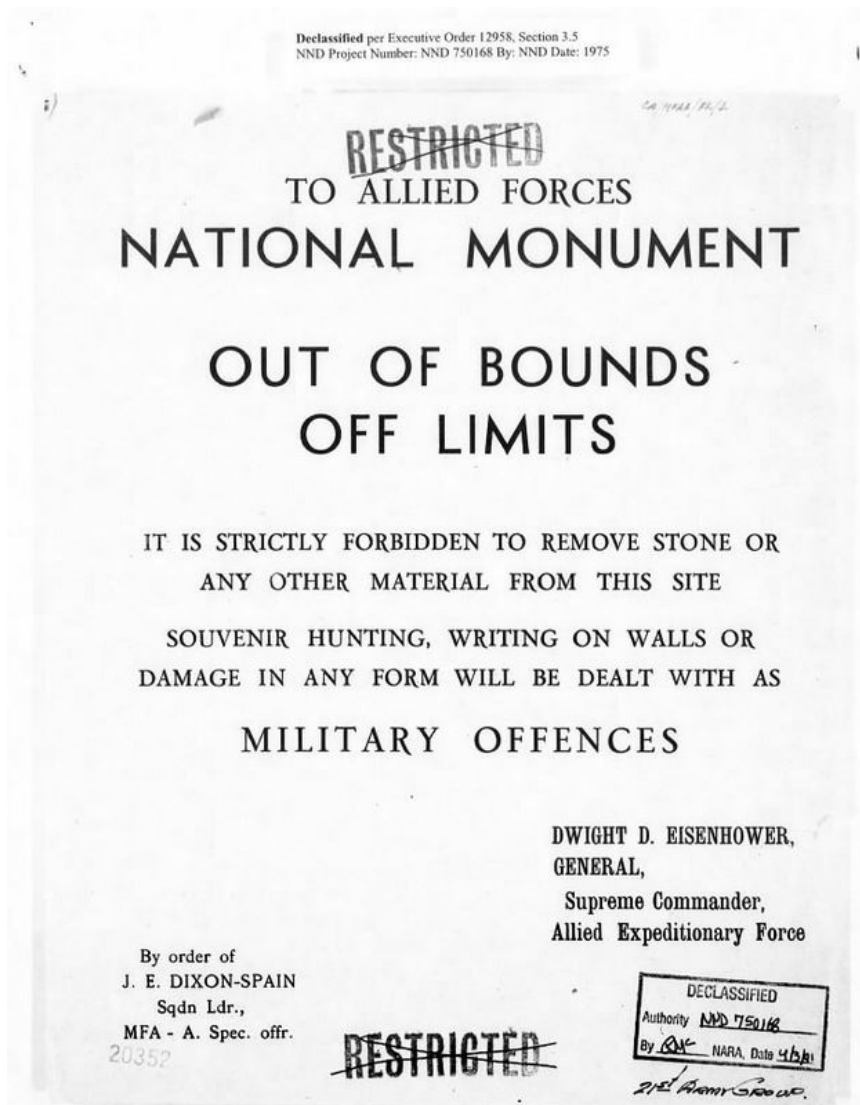


Figure 1: "To Allied Forces, National Monument, Out of Bounds, Off Limits," poster (1944), Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration, Civilian Agency Records RG 239, National Archives Microfilm Publication M1944, Roll 69, AMG-95 ("5 Posters Used in Protection of Historic Monuments"), photo no. 1537270.

<sup>16</sup> Mason Hammond, "The War and Art Treasures in Germany," *College Art Journal* 5, no. 3 (March 1946): 205-218, here, 215.

Even on the rare occasions when resources abounded, the Monuments Men faced the bureaucracy of both the Allied Armies and local governments. Thomas Carr Howe, Jr. (1904-1994) found himself confronted with red tape put in place by the Military Government as he sought to save a cache of artifacts kept in a Cistercian monastery in Hohenfurth (now Vyšší Brod, Czech Republic). To help load the trucks with artwork, Howe enlisted the help of two packers. Since the packers came from Germany, they needed permits from the U.S. Military Government to leave the area where they were living. Unfortunately, neither Howe nor anyone else in his group thought to ask the packers if they had been issued the requisite permits until the morning they planned to depart for the monastery.<sup>17</sup> Howe faced a choice. Such a task would prove impossible without the packers, but there was no telling how long it would take to acquire the permits. Howe decided to take his chances. The group and the packers left without the permits. Howe made similar decisions throughout his time as a MFAA officer. As going through proper channels often inhibited his work, Howe sometimes skirted the authority of the Allied Armies, choosing smaller risks for a mission of greater importance.

Along with sidestepping the bureaucracy of local governments and military authority, the Monuments Men contended with constantly changing political geography. As the Allied Armies pushed further into Axis-occupied territory, MFAA officers followed closely behind.<sup>18</sup> The essential task of finding, assessing, and then protecting the art of Europe fell upon a group of only 250 personnel. Thus, a Monuments Man originally assigned to one area suddenly found himself in charge of a different region or even country. As World War II drew to a close, the Allies began establishing their temporary sectors in France and Germany. These territories did not always align with the current locations of the respective Allied country's army, resulting in jurisdiction shifts even after the end of the war. In this manner, the Monuments Men kept moving and receiving new assignments throughout and even after World War II.

James Rorimer presents an example of the changing geography of his assignment as the American Army took control of western Germany. In April 1945, the announcement came that the Seventh Army had extended its command to cover an area of about 280 by 80 miles, stretching over the lower half of Germany and into Austria.<sup>19</sup> Rorimer knew that the Seventh Army had no Monuments officer, so the next news put him in the hopes of a reassignment. The Army had made a remarkable discovery. In the Merkers Salt Mine in Thuringia, 2,100 feet underground, they located a room filled with an estimated eighty-four

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<sup>17</sup> Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*, 80-81.

<sup>18</sup> Richard J. Evans, "Art in the Time of War," *The National Interest* 113 (May/June 2011): 16-26, here 25.

<sup>19</sup> Rorimer, *Survival*, 133-134.

million dollars (U.S. 1950 dollars) worth of gold bullion.<sup>20</sup> Of more interest to Rorimer, the salt mine also contained countless works of art, yet unidentified by the Seventh Army. Several days later, Rorimer received orders to leave his post in Paris and proceed to the Seventh Army's headquarters. His focus now shifted from the metropolitan landscape of France's capital to the underground art repositories in Germany, a change which Rorimer handled seamlessly. Despite the circumstances that differed greatly from his career as director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,<sup>21</sup> Rorimer and his fellow MFAA officers adapted to whatever task was set before them.

## II. Functioning as Outsiders to Conflict

As regular civilians and members of a global curatorial community, most of the Monuments Men brought unique perspectives and solutions to otherwise insurmountable goals. In his article "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," MFAA officer Walker Hancock (1901-1998) describes how he and fellow Monuments Man Steve Kovalyak reacted when in need of staff. In the early afternoon on a weekend, Hancock and Kovalyak arrived with a convoy in Cologne. The trucks contained, among other relics, the robe of the Blessed Virgin, the shroud of Saint John the Baptist, and the beaten-metal bust of Charlemagne, containing part of the emperor's skull.<sup>22</sup> Even though the men parked the convoy directly in front of the Cathedral, officers of the U.S. Military Government refused their request for help unloading the trucks. Help would not come until Monday. Until then, the trucks bearing priceless artifacts would stay in their current position, regardless of weather and without a guard.

Neither of the Monuments Men found this acceptable. While Hancock stayed with the convoy and its treasures, Kovalyak walked into the ruins of Cologne, reemerging with a large group of men and boys. Despite warnings from the American Army forbidding the use of civilian labor on weekends, the MFAA officers recruited locals. Hancock justified this, stating, "Cologne was their city – what was left of it."<sup>23</sup> With the aid of these men, the two Monuments Men managed to unload everything into the Cathedral by nightfall. The odds of this mission succeeding without the creative thinking of Hancock and Kovalyak were little to none. Because they functioned as outsiders to the military, the Monuments Men did not possess that stringent adherence to protocol typical of the American Army. When working with the Allied Armies failed, the Monuments Men showed little hesitation to go against military protocol to

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<sup>20</sup> Gladys E. Hamlin, "European Art Collections and the War," *College Art Journal* 4, no. 3 (March 1945): 155-163, here 163.

<sup>21</sup> Edsel, *Monuments Men*, xvii.

<sup>22</sup> Greg Bradsher, "The Monuments Men in April 1945: Siegen, Finally" (blog), *National Archives: The Text Message*, August 25, 2015.

<sup>23</sup> Hancock, "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," 305.

complete their mission. They recognized the significance of Cologne's artifacts as well as their importance to Cologne's residents, something which proved far greater than a foreign government's policy.



Figure 2: "Capt. Walker Hancock, Capt. Asa M. Thornton, and Lt. Cdr. George Stout" (from left to right), photograph (1944), Gift of Walker Hancock Family, The Monuments Men Foundation Collection, The National World War II Museum, New Orleans, LA.

Another attribute that set the Monuments Men apart from other Allied forces in Europe was their willingness to collaborate with partners regardless of their nationality. In *Salt Mines and Castles*, Howe remembers some of the unorthodox characters he worked with in pursuit of protecting art. When recovering artwork at the enormous underground cache at Altaussee in Austria, Howe and fellow Monuments Man Lamont Moore worked closely with a German art restorer named Karl Sieber.<sup>24</sup> Sieber had been a member of the Nazi Party during World War II. However, according to Howe, Monuments Man George Stout sized up Sieber as "a man ninety-eight per cent preoccupied with his profession and possibly two per cent concerned with politics."<sup>25</sup> Many Germans, like Sieber, had joined the Nazi Party due to better business prospects or peer pressure.

The actual values of Germany's only political party during the war mattered little to people like Sieber, who committed themselves to their work. One evening, the Monuments Men learned from Sieber just how deep his loyalty to the art ran. In March 1945, mere months before the Allies discovered the cache in

<sup>24</sup> "The Monuments Men: Lamont Moore (1909-1988)" (article), *Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art*, accessed May 31, 2019.

<sup>25</sup> Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*, 154.

the Altaussee mine, Hitler had issued what became known as the “Nero Decree.”<sup>26</sup> The document called for the immediate destruction of all remaining resources as German forces retreated, ceding more and more territory to the Allied Armies. The Nazi Gauleiter (district leader) August Eingeruber took Hitler’s purposefully vague instructions to include the annihilation of cultural artifacts, as well as infrastructure. Deceptively ordering crates labeled “Marmor—Nicht stürzen” (“Marble—Don’t drop”)—actually containing bombs—into the mines, Eingeruber planned to demolish the caverns and everything they contained.<sup>27</sup> Members of the Austrian Resistance heard of Eingeruber’s plan, and they told Sieber who set off small charges of dynamite instead. His cunning ploy left the artwork unharmed, but provided enough rubble to convince Eingeruber that his plan had been followed. Unfortunately, Eingeruber learned of Sieber’s deception and planned to have him and the miners shot, but the Allies overtook Altaussee quickly enough to prevent this.<sup>28</sup> Yet, despite all of Sieber’s valiant efforts in the name of art and culture, many British and American soldiers and officials refused to work with Germans like him. The nation Sieber came from had waged an atrocious war, and for most of the Allies that fact said enough. In contrast, Howe and other Monuments Men recognized those dedicated to the protection of art and those people’s potential to help their cause. In this manner, the MFAA officers prioritized their goals over national prejudices as only outsiders to the fighting could.

As outsiders, the Monuments Men also possessed an in-depth knowledge and appreciation of art rarely displayed by the Allied Armies. Their careers prior to the war as museum curators, as well as art and culture experts, gave the MFAA officers unique insight into the art world. Not only did they have a remarkable perspective, they were also members of a global community of curators and conservationists. When working in the decimated cities of France and Germany, having contacts from the local art scene proved crucial. James Rorimer noted this about his time in Paris. His social visit to a friend from the Direction of Fine Arts led to Rorimer’s access to a network of French civilian colleagues in charge of Paris’s art during and after the German occupation.<sup>29</sup> In the subsequent months, this network proved invaluable in organizing the Monument’s Men’s recovery and restoration efforts. Eventually, Rorimer gained the trust of Rose Valland, a member of the French Resistance and assistant at the

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<sup>26</sup> “Hitler’s ‘Scorched Earth’ Decree (Nero Decree) (March 19, 1945) and Albert Speer’s Response (March 29, 1945),” German History in Documents and Images (GHDI), accessed May 31, 2019.

<sup>27</sup> Jim Morrison, “The True Story of the Monuments Men” (article), *Smithsonian.com*, February 7, 2014, accessed May 31, 2019.

<sup>28</sup> Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*, 155.

<sup>29</sup> Rorimer, *Survival*, 52-53.



Jeu de Paume gallery.<sup>30</sup> During the occupation of Paris, Germany officials like Hermann Göring had used the gallery as a central collection point for stolen French art.<sup>31</sup> Valland's meticulous notes sped up the rediscovery and identification of numerous artifacts the Nazis had taken to German repositories. One can only guess the difficulty of completing the Monuments Men's mission without her aid.



Figure 3: "American GIs hand-carry paintings down the steps of Neuschwanstein Castle in Bavaria (Germany) under the supervision of Capt. James Rorimer," photograph, *Monuments Men Foundation website*, Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration, Civilian Agency Records RG 239, photo no. 239-RC-14-5.

Despite the advantage of contacts in the art world, the Monuments Men rarely shared the same understanding and camaraderie with the Allied Armies. Rorimer encountered this divide when he came upon bulldozers approaching a chapel. According to Major Lord Methuen, a British officer who worked with the

<sup>30</sup> "The Monuments Men: Rose Valland (1898-1980)" (article), *Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art*, accessed May 31, 2019; Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*, 308-309.

<sup>31</sup> Joseph Wulf, *Die bildenden Künste im Dritten Reich: Eine Dokumentation* (Gütersloh: Sigbert Mohn Verlag, 1963), 394-398.

Monuments Men,<sup>32</sup> the château of the Comte de Germigny at Fontenay-sur-Mer in Normandy, France, was a significant, if lesser-known, monument of northern France.<sup>33</sup> Apparently this did not occur to the American officer intent on knocking down its walls. A major concern of the Allied Armies included resource scarcity. The American Army often tore down damaged walls for raw materials.<sup>34</sup> In this case, officers hoped to use the stones from the château for road construction at a neighboring air field. Even though he had no proper authority, Rorimer immediately stopped the driver of the bulldozer, hoping to save the remaining wall, which contained two eighteenth-century statues. Despite Rorimer's insistence on the historic value of the château and its status as a protected monument, the American officer in charge refused to halt the operation. Only when Rorimer lied about having photographed the building for his official report did the officer relent, grumbling, "But this is a helluva way to fight a war."<sup>35</sup> Rorimer's quick assessment of the statues as significant saved them from destruction. Even though he technically had no authority to order their preservation, Rorimer placed the preservation of artifacts at the forefront and convinced others of their importance through any means necessary.

### III. Adhering to a Common Conviction

Perhaps the most powerful and yet least tangible quality of the Monuments Men was their unwavering resolve in the face of their decidedly daunting mission. For instance, the common problem of unexpected deadlines features prominently in the three Monuments Men's accounts. In *Salt Mines and Castles*, Howe relates how his deadline to evacuate the treasures at Hohenfurth suddenly loomed closer. Checking in with American Army officials in Linz, Austria, Howe inquired about rumors of the pending closure of an eastern road. A colonel had warned Howe not to return that way but refused to expound on the matter. By way of response, an official in Linz referred to a bridge along the route. He noted that people and carts had been traversing the bridge to get to the western side of the Danube for the past two days and that "it could only mean one thing—that the Russians aren't far behind."<sup>36</sup> This presented a two-fold problem: MFAA officers could only work in British, French, and American-occupied territory, and

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<sup>32</sup> Major Lord Methuen, given name Paul Ayshford Methuen (1886-1974), worked as an MFAA officer in conjunction with the American Monuments Men during and after World War II. He focused mainly on the preservation of châteaux in Normandy. "[The Monuments Men: Lord Methuen \(1886-1974\)](#)" (article), *Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art*, accessed May 31, 2019. See Paul Ayshford Methuen, *Normandy Diary: Being a Record of Survivals and Losses of Historical Monuments in North-Western France, Together with Those in the Island of Walcheren and in that Part of Belgium Traversed by 21st Army Group in 1944-45* (London: Robert Hale Limited, 1952).

<sup>33</sup> Rorimer, *Survival*, 13.

<sup>34</sup> Edsel, *Monuments Men*, 80.

<sup>35</sup> Rorimer, *Survival*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*, 112.

the Russian Army brought with it a nasty reputation for looting. In April 1945, it came to light that Russia would not wait for reparations from Germany. Its armies had already begun taking everything of value, cultural or otherwise, from the territory it had occupied.<sup>37</sup> If the Russians took control of the repository at Hohenfurth before Howe could finish its evacuation, it is unlikely the world would have seen this artwork again for years.<sup>38</sup> With the clock ticking, Howe managed to remove the art to the American sector in a matter of days, instead of weeks. He braved the new conditions as they came, putting forth even more effort to protect the art.



Figure 4: "Thomas Carr Howe, Jr., ca. 1945," photograph, Washington, D.C., National Gallery of Art, Gallery Archives, Charles Parkhurst Papers. Used by permission.

At times, the Monuments Men required something beyond greater speed to complete their tasks. Working so near to the dangers of the western front required courage as well. While recovering a Breughel painting, Hancock walked

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<sup>37</sup> Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*, 369-370. It was later discovered that the Soviet armies included "Trophy Brigades" whose art and finance officials seized enemy assets, including valuable artwork. They disregarded the provenance of such works, viewing them simply as the spoils of war. Edsel, *Monuments Men*, 297-298; Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*, 362.

<sup>38</sup> The Soviet Union returned most of the artwork from the Dresden and Berlin collections in the late 1950s. Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*, 442.

into a building that just half an hour earlier had been hit by a German shell.<sup>39</sup> Shells continued to drop nearby, shaking the structure where an American combat commander had taken the precious painting before calling Hancock. Without the proper equipment to transport such an item, Hancock returned the following day with fellow MFAA officer George Stout. The sound of exploding shells ringing in their ears, the two Monuments Men set about examining the painting. As the ceiling beams shook above their heads and loose plaster dust rained down, Hancock and Stout calmly took meticulous notes. Before they finished detailing every aspect of the Breughel, night gathered around the Monuments Men and the battle outside came to a halt.<sup>40</sup> The painting survived to return with Hancock and Stout to the safety of the American-occupied zone.<sup>41</sup> Frequently working in active war zones, the Monuments Men willingly risked their lives to save artwork.



Figure 5: "Monuments Man Lt. Frank P. Albright, Polish Liaison Officer Maj. Karol Estreicher, Monuments Man Capt. Everett Parker Lesley, and PFC Joe D. Espinosa, Guard with the 34th Field Artillery Battalion, return Leonardo da Vinci's 'Lady with an Ermine' to Cracow ( Poland) in April 1946," photograph, [Monuments Men Foundation website](#), Washington, D.C., National Archives and Records Administration.

<sup>39</sup> Hancock, "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," 277.

<sup>40</sup> Edsel, *Monuments Men*, 149-152.

<sup>41</sup> Hancock, "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," 279.

Even after World War II had officially ended, the Monuments Men had to contend with various hurdles that tested their conviction. Toward the end of his *Salt Mines and Castles*, Howe describes a moral dilemma he and his colleagues encountered. In October 1945, Howe worked in conjunction with other Monuments Men to complete acts of “token restitution” as a show of good faith to countries like Poland and Hungary.<sup>42</sup> This involved transporting artifacts from central collection points in the American and British zones and back to their museums from before the war.<sup>43</sup> While the Monuments Men continued their task of restitution, the United States government made other plans.

Talk about removing German-owned works of art to the U.S. circulated at USFET (U.S. Forces, European Theater) headquarters.<sup>44</sup> Attempting to gently persuade the American Army officials against such a move, Howe helped to write a report, together with the officer sent to assess the viability of the plan.<sup>45</sup> He kept his assessment factual and stated only the physical difficulties of transporting the art to the United States. Despite Howe’s appeal to reason, orders arrived in early November to prepare 202 paintings, among them those by Caravaggio, Rembrandt, and Van Eyck, for immediate shipment.<sup>46</sup> Howe and other Monuments Men were furious. They immediately drafted a document that became known as the “Wiesbaden Manifesto,”<sup>47</sup> as the twenty-four MFAA officers who signed it had gathered at the Central Collection Point in Wiesbaden, Germany, to do so.<sup>48</sup> In the document, the Monuments Men expressed their disapproval, stating that, even though they owed allegiance to the United States, “there are yet further obligations to common justice, decency, and the establishment of the power of right, not might, among civilized nations.”<sup>49</sup> Despite the possible repercussions from the United States Army and

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<sup>42</sup> Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*, 271-272.

<sup>43</sup> The Monuments Men sent looted artwork to the Munich Central Collection Point. In 1951, they entrusted the remaining artifacts to a West German agency. Evans, “Art in the Time of War,” 16-26.

<sup>44</sup> Nicholas, *Rape of Europa*, 392-394.

<sup>45</sup> Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*, 272-273.

<sup>46</sup> “The Monuments Men: Walter Ings Farmer (1911-1997)” (article), *Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art*, accessed May 29, 2019.

<sup>47</sup> Some debate exists as to which MFAA officer first drafted the document, with some crediting Walter Ings Farmer and others Everett Parker Lesley. Howe credits the group as a whole in *Salt Mines and Castles*. Greg Bradsher, “Everett Parker Lesley, Jr.: The Monuments Man Who Drafted the Wiesbaden Manifesto” (blog), *National Archives: The Text Message Blog*, October 7, 2014.

<sup>48</sup> Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*, 274-275.

<sup>49</sup> Charles L. Kuhn, “German Paintings in the National Gallery: A Protest,” *College Art Journal* 5, no. 2 (January 1946): 78-82, here 82.

government, the Monuments Men stood by their ideals.<sup>50</sup> They believed in the restitution of all art after World War II, even when the country of the art's origin was Germany.

### *Conclusion*

When compared as individuals, the Monuments Men possessed certain characteristics that account for their success in saving and returning much of Europe's art during and immediately following World War II. These traits included their adaptability to changing circumstances, their frequent role as outsiders to other organizations, and their unwavering commitment to their mission. In the future, scholars might want to add to this topic with an exploration of accounts by MFAA women. Although Hollywood portrays the group as exclusively male, a number of women did work for the MFAA as organizers and conservationists. The list of female art preservationists grows when considering those who worked in French and German museums and with Resistance groups. The pursuit of art preservation, recovery, and restitution involved not just the Monuments Men, but countless other individuals. The fact that such diverse people came together for the sake of humanity's shared past gives hope for our shared future. To quote Monuments Man Walker Hancock, "[Is] there, perhaps, in this mutual confidence and common interest, the germ of something that might be made to work for world peace?"<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> The twenty-four MFAA officers who signed the "Wiesbaden Manifesto" submitted the document to Major La Farge, Chief of the MFAA Section, on November 7, 1945. It is unknown if the document was passed on to any higher authority, but the U.S. State Department did receive letters of protest from other individuals, including museum curators in the United States. Regardless, two-hundred paintings were sent to the National Gallery in Washington, D.C., where they were put into storage under "protective custody." Howe, Jr., *Salt Mines and Castles*, 312.

<sup>51</sup> Hancock, "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," 311.