

The Monuments Men During February 1945:  
Locating Repositories of Looted and German Cultural Property

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At the end of January, Lt. Gen. Omar N. Bradley, head of the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, wrote the G-5s of his four Armies (First, Third, Ninth, and Fifteenth) regarding the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives (MFA&A) Specialist Officers and their activities. He noted that as a measure contributing to the eventual restitution of works of art and objects of a scientific or historical importance which may have been looted from United Nations governments or nationals, the MFA&A officers would investigate all information of such nature and inspect all repositories of such works falling within the area of the command to which they were assigned or attached, and report their findings.<sup>1</sup> Of course, in late January, the Monuments Men were not, with the exception of the Aachen area, in a physical position to seek out looted cultural property, nor German cultural treasures that had been evacuated eastward for protection.

But during February 1945, as the Allied forces pushed further east, the MFA&A officers had greater opportunity to seek out information about the location of German and looted cultural treasures. By that time they already knew, based on information from MFA&A officers who entered Germany in the latter part of 1944 and the first months of 1945, that they had many challenges ahead, given the large, and increasing, number of repositories containing loot and German-owned cultural property, which were being identified. Information was being obtained from German museum personnel, from British and American sources in Paris, and from prisoner of war interrogations.<sup>2</sup>

During February [Capt. Walter J. Huchthausen](#), MFA&A officer with the Ninth U.S. Army obtained a German report, dated December 9, 1943, on a meeting of Rheinprovinz officials, October 22, 1943, the purpose of which was to discuss measures pertaining to disposition of art collections. The report provided information on thirty repositories. One was at Ehrenbreitstein Fortress on the mountain of the same name on the east bank of the Rhine opposite the town of Koblenz, where art treasures from Cologne, Dusseldorf, and Koblenz were kept in tunnels and where the building of another tunnel had been authorized for storing more art objects. Another place identified was the salt mine at Kochendorf, near Heilbronn, which purportedly held art objects from many places. In Aachen he found a group of papers that identified 10 repositories, including Kochendorf. He reported that there was much correspondence regarding Kochendorf being an ideal art repository because of its depth (150 meters) and dry conditions. From

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<sup>1</sup> Memorandum, Lt. Col. J. H. Bloss, Assistant Adjutant General HQs, 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group to Commanding Generals First U.S. Army, Third U.S. Army, Ninth U.S. Army, and Fifteenth U.S. Army (Attn: Assistant Chiefs of Staff, G-5), Subject: Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Specialist Officers, January 31, 1945, File: AMG 217, (12AGp) MFA: Correspondence: 12 Army Group, [Subject Files, 8/1943-1945 \(Entry UD-55B, NAID 612714\)](#), Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives Section, Operations Branch, G-5 Division, General Staff, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War II, Record Group 331.

<sup>2</sup> Leslie Irllyn Poste, "The Development of U.S. Protection of Libraries and Archives in Europe during World War II," (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1958), p. 192.

interrogations of Germans Huchthausen also learned about a repository at Siegen, east of Cologne, in south Westphalia.<sup>3</sup>

Based upon the information that the MFA&A officers and other Allied personnel were obtaining about repositories, SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force) on February 11 issued its first listing of German repositories holding loot and German-owned property. The list included a repository at Siegen, which was reported to contain 104 paintings and 48 pieces of sculpture from Aachen and also the Cathedral Treasure from Metz which had been sent there on August 30, 1944. The list also included a storage location somewhere in Bad Wildungen (some 35 miles northeast of Marburg) and the salt mines at Heilbronn and Kochendorf.<sup>4</sup>

While Huchthausen and other MFA&A officers attached to the Armies under the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group were trying to pinpoint the location of repositories, Capt. Marvin C. Ross, USMCR, with MFA&A, G-5 Operations Branch, SHAEF, during mid-February visited 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group and the four armies under it to discuss intelligence on repositories of works of art and to coordinate the information obtained. This information would be incorporated into the next issue of the SHAEF listing of repositories, issued on March 11.<sup>5</sup>

At the end of February, Lt. George Stout, USNR, MFA&A office at the 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group produced a listing of additional repositories and had it provided to SHAEF. In his listings, Stout noted that the Siegen mine and its vicinity were said to be used as repositories for work of art.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> MFA&A Field Record, Capt. Walter J. Huchthausen, Ninth United States Army, February 1-28, 1945, Annexure III to Memorandum, Lt. Col. Geoffrey Webb, Adviser, MFA&A, MFA&A, G-5 Internal Affairs Branch, SHAEF to Assistant Chief of Staff, G-5, Subject: Report on Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives for Month of February 1945, March 31, 1945, File: Monthly Report: Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Force March 1945, [Activity Reports, 1945-1951 \(Entry A1 496, NAID 2435804\)](#), Records of the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point, Records of the Office of Military Government (U.S.) OMGUS, Records of United States Occupation Headquarters, World War II, RG 260 ([Roll 54 of National Archives Microfilm Publication M-1947](#)). In Aachen Huchthausen established a collecting point in the Seurmond Museum for works of art that were brought in from battle areas. Walter Hancock, "Experiences of a Monuments Officer in Germany," *College Art Journal* (vol. V. No. 4, May 1946), pp. 282-283.

<sup>4</sup> Memorandum, Capt. Marvin C. Ross, USMCR, Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives, G-5 Operations Branch, SHAEF to MFA&A Officers in the Field, Subject: Information on Repositories of Works in Germany, February 11, 1945, File: Repositories: Works of Art and Archives in Germany, [Records Relating to Status of Monuments, Museums, and Archives, 1945-1950 \(Entry A1 497, NAID 2435815\)](#), Records of the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point, Records of the Office of Military Government (U.S.) OMGUS, Records of United States Occupation Headquarters, World War II, RG 260 ([Roll 63 of National Archives Microfilm Publication M-1947](#)).

<sup>5</sup> Memorandum, Lt. Col. Geoffrey Webb, Adviser, MFA&A, G-5 Operations Branch, SHAEF to Chief, Operations Branch, Subject: War Diary, MFA&A, February 21, 1945, File: AMG 208, (ADM)/3 MFA&A Administration: War Diary, [Subject Files, 8/1943-1945 \(Entry UD-55B, NAID 612714\)](#), Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives Section, Operations Branch, G-5 Division, General Staff, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War II, RG 331; Capt. Marvin C. Ross, USMCR, Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives, G-5 Internal Affairs Branch, SHAEF, Repositories of Works of Art in Germany, Second Edition, March 11, 1945, File: Public Archives: Seebach Depot, [Records Relating to Status of Monuments, Museums, and Archives, 1945-1950 \(Entry A1 497, NAID 2435815\)](#), Records of the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point, Records of the Office of Military Government (U.S.) OMGUS, Records of United States Occupation Headquarters, World War II, RG 260 ([Roll 62 of National Archives Microfilm Publication M-1947](#)).

<sup>6</sup> Report, Lt. George L. Stout, USNR, MFA&A Officer, HQs, 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, Additional Repositories of Art Collections and Archives in Germany-As Reported, February 28, 1945, Inclosure 1 to Memorandum, Lt. Col.

The Siegen copper mine, some 60 miles southeast of Cologne, had first come to the attention of the MFA&A officers in late 1944. Capt. Robert K. Posey, with the Third U. S. Army, had issued a report, dated December 29, 1944, indicating that the Metz Cathedral treasures were at Seigen [Siegen] in Germany. Upon reading this Ross wrote Stout at 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group that he could not find any trace of a Seigen [Siegen] in his Gazetteer and asked him to check with Posey about his information. Two days later Ross again wrote Stout, indicating that Lt. Col. Geoffrey Webb, Adviser, MFA&A, G-5 Operations Branch, SHAEF, had straightened him out about the place where the repository was—Siegen—Posey had the letters transposed.<sup>7</sup> It is interesting to note that the Office of Strategic Services reported on January 1 that it was probable that part of the Treasury of Aachen Cathedral had been taken to “Singen in Westphalia, a town not otherwise known.”<sup>8</sup>

It would not be until spring that the MFA&A officers would finally get to Siegen and discover what art works and other cultural property it contained. In the meantime, during February and March, they would continue gathering information about the location of repositories and their contents. Of course, they would continue with their mission of protecting cultural property. As will be noted in future blog postings, two of them would be killed in action trying to save German cultural treasures.

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Walter Sczudlo, Assistant Adjutant General, HQs, 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group to SHAEF, Attn: Assistant Chief of Staff, G-5, Subject: Monthly Report, March 10, 1945, File: AMG 292, 12 Army GP, [Subject Files, 8/1943-1945 \(Entry UD-55B, NAID 612714\)](#), Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives Section, Operations Branch, G-5 Division, General Staff, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War II, RG 331.

<sup>7</sup> Letter, Marvin Ross, MFA&A, G-5 Operations Branch, SHAEF to Lt. George L. Stout, USNR, 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, January 13, 1945, File: AMG 217, (12AGp) MFA: Correspondence: 12 Army Group, [Subject Files, 8/1943-1945 \(Entry UD-55B, NAID 612714\)](#), Monuments, Fine Arts & Archives Section, Operations Branch, G-5 Division, General Staff, Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces (SHAEF), Allied Operational and Occupation Headquarters, World War II, RG 331; Letter, Marvin Rose, MFA&A, G-5 Operations Branch, SHAEF to Lt. George L. Stout, USNR, 12<sup>th</sup> Army Group, G-5 Section, January 15, 1945, *ibid*.

<sup>8</sup> Capt. Marvin C. Ross, USMCR, Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives, G-5 Internal Affairs Branch, SHAEF, Repositories of Works of Art in Germany, Second Edition, March 11, 1945, File: Public Archives: Seebach Depot, [Records Relating to Status of Monuments, Museums, and Archives, 1945-1950 \(Entry AI 497, NAID 2435815\)](#), Records of the Wiesbaden Central Collecting Point, Records of the Office of Military Government (U.S.) OMGUS, Records of United States Occupation Headquarters, World War II, RG 260 ([Roll 62 of National Archives Microfilm Publication M-1947](#)).

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