

#1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Monuments Men*

**ROBERT M. EDSEL**



**THE GREATEST  
TREASURE HUNT  
IN HISTORY**

**THE STORY OF THE MONUMENTS MEN**

# **THE GREATEST TREASURE HUNT IN HISTORY**

The Story of the Monuments Men

**ALSO BY ROBERT M. EDESEL**

**SAVING ITALY**

**The Race to Rescue a Nation's Treasures  
from the Nazis**

**THE MONUMENTS MEN**

**Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and  
the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History**

**RESCUING DA VINCI**

**Hitler and the Nazis Stole Europe's Great Art,  
America and Her Allies Recovered It**





Monuments Man Lieutenant James Rorimer (center) at the castle of Neuschwanstein supervising the removal of paintings stolen by the Nazis.



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**The Story of the Monuments Men**

by

**ROBERT M. EDSSEL**

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NEW YORK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Available  
ISBN 978-1-338-25119-7

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1 19 20 21 22 23

Printed in the U.S.A. 23  
First edition, January 2019

Book design by Abby Denning

*To my wife and soulmate, Anna, whose unwavering support  
guided me in writing this book, as it does all that I do;  
and to our beautiful sons, Francesco and Rodney*





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# CAST OF CHARACTERS

## WESTERN ALLIES

### *Serving in Italy*

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**CAPTAIN DEANE KELLER**

Age as of June 1944: 42.  
Born: New Haven,  
Connecticut.  
Portrait painter; professor  
of art at Yale University.



**SECOND LIEUTENANT FRED  
HARTT**

Age: 30.  
Born: Boston,  
Massachusetts.  
Art historian.

### *Serving in Northern Europe*

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**LIEUTENANT GEORGE L. STOUT**

Age: 46. Born: Winterset,  
Iowa. Art conservator at the  
Fogg Museum, Harvard  
University.



**CAPTAIN WALKER HANCOCK**

Age: 43. Born: St. Louis,  
Missouri. Award-winning  
sculptor.



**CAPTAIN ROBERT POSEY**

Age: 40. Born: Morris,  
Alabama. Architect.



**PRIVATE FIRST CLASS  
LINCOLN KIRSTEIN**

Age: 37. Born: Rochester,  
New York. Cofounder of  
the New York City Ballet  
(originally known as the  
American Ballet  
Company).



**SECOND LIEUTENANT  
JAMES J. RORIMER**

Age: 38. Born: Cleveland,  
Ohio. Curator at The  
Metropolitan Museum of  
Art and The Cloisters.



**ROSE VALLAND**

Age: 45. Born: Saint-  
Étienne-de-Saint-Geoirs,  
France. Custodian of the  
Jeu de Paume Museum  
in Paris.



**MAJOR RONALD EDMUND  
BALFOUR**

Age: 40. Born: Oxfordshire,  
England. Lecturer in  
history at Cambridge  
University.



**CAPTAIN WALTER "HUTCH"  
HUCHTHAUSEN**

Age: 39. Born: Perry,  
Oklahoma. Architect.



**PRIVATE HARRY ETLINGER**

Age: 18. Born: Karlsruhe,  
Germany. Immigrated to  
the United States when he  
was thirteen years old.



## AXIS POWERS

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### *Leader of Fascist Italy*



**BENITO MUSSOLINI**

Age: 60. Born: Dovia di Predappio, Italy. Dictator.

### *Leaders of Nazi Germany*

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**ADOLF HITLER**

Age: 55. Born: Braunau am Inn, Austria. Dictator.



**HERMANN GÖRING**

Age: 51. Born: Rosenheim, Germany. Reichsmarschall.

### *Serving in Italy*

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**GENERAL KARL WOLFF**

Age: 44. Born: Darmstadt, Germany. Supreme leader of all SS troops and police in Italy.



**ALEXANDER LANGSDORFF**

Age: 45. Born: Alsfeld, Germany. Accomplished archaeologist.

### *Serving in Northern Europe*

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**ALFRED ERNST ROSENBERG**

Age: 51. Born: Reval, Russia. Leader of the ERR, the chief Nazi looting organization.



**COLONEL KURT VON BEHR**

Age: 54. Born: Hanover, Germany. Head of the ERR in Paris, France.



**BRUNO LOHSE**

Age: 32. Born: Buer, Germany. Deputy Chief of the ERR in Paris, France.



**HERMANN BUNJES**

Age: 32. Born: Bramsche, Germany. Göring's personal art agent in France.



# ABOUT THE MONUMENTS MEN

**T**he Monuments Men were a group of American and British men and women—accomplished museum curators, art scholars and educators, architects, archivists, and artists—who volunteered for military service during World War II combat operations to preserve works of art, monuments, and other cultural treasures from the destruction of war and theft by Adolf Hitler and the Nazis. Together, they made up the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives section, or MFAA, part of the Civil Affairs division of the Western Allied armies.

The MFAA was an extraordinary experiment. It marked the first time an army fought a war while comprehensively attempting to mitigate damage to cultural treasures. Those who served in the MFAA, known as the Monuments Men, were a new kind of soldier, charged with saving rather than destroying. Initially, they consulted with Allied air commanders to direct bombing away from cultural sites. As they entered the battered cities of Europe alongside combat troops, the Monuments Men, working without adequate transportation, supplies, or personnel, effected temporary repairs to hundreds of churches and monuments.

During the final months of the war, as the extent of Nazi looting became known, the Monuments Men served in harm's way as art detectives engaged in the greatest treasure hunt in history.



**Prior to this war, no army had thought of protecting the monuments of the country in which and with which it was at war, and there were no precedents to follow . . . All this was changed by a General Order issued by the Supreme Commander-in-Chief [General Eisenhower] just before he left Algiers, an order accompanied by a personal letter to all Commanders . . . the good name of the Army depended in great measure on the respect which it showed to the art heritage of the modern world.**

**MONUMENTS MAN LIEUTENANT COLONEL**

**SIR LEONARD WOOLLEY, 1952**



Dennis Posey, son of Monuments Man Captain Robert Posey, on the family horse.

**Dear Dennis:** Germany started this war by invading one small country after another until finally France and England had to declare war on her. We helped France and England but didn't start fighting. Then suddenly Japan attacked us and Germany declared war on us at the same time. And so we had to fight, painfully at first for we were unprepared. Now we are strong; England is strong; Russia, who was attacked by Germany is strong; Italy who fought with Germany has been defeated by us and has swung over to our side; France who was defeated by Germany but liberated by us is building a powerful army . . . And so, these are the reasons that I think we will soon defeat Germany and Japan and teach them such a lesson that when you and other little boys like you grow up you will not have to fight them all over again. And I hope no other country will start a fight to get its way for wars are bad.

MONUMENTS MAN CAPTAIN ROBERT POSEY,  
IN A LETTER TO HIS SEVEN-YEAR-OLD SON





## PRELUDE

**I**n 1907, an eighteen-year-old aspiring artist named Adolf Hitler applied for admission to the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna, Austria. He felt humiliated when a group of jurors, whom he believed were Jews, rejected his application. The memory of this experience never left him. It fanned the flames of an already burning desire to seek revenge against people who he believed had wronged him. For the remaining thirty-eight years of his life, Hitler continued to see himself as a gifted artist and architect, a creator, with an unyielding determination to prove his genius to the world.

As the leader of Nazism, Hitler used art as a weapon of propaganda to instill a sense of superiority in the German people at the expense of those he termed subhuman, particularly Jews. German



Aspiring artist Adolf Hitler.



Watercolor painted by Adolf Hitler in 1914.

art through the nineteenth century—“true art” in Hitler’s view—was easy to comprehend, often depicting scenes of everyday life. Renderings of the human form evoked youth, strength, heroism, and sacrifice, the qualities of the “master race” that Hitler wanted to project at home and abroad.

Hitler believed that modern art, with its bold colors and distorted figures, could only be the product of sick minds. The Nazis labeled these works and the artists who created them “degenerate.” In their view, such interpretive paintings and sculpture destroyed the more traditional concept of beauty and were incomprehensible to the viewer.

To avoid spoiling the minds of the nation’s citizens, Nazi leaders ordered German museum directors to remove from their walls some sixteen thousand “degenerate” works of art by greats, including Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, Edgar Degas, Paul

Gauguin, and Vincent van Gogh. Some of these artworks were traded. Almost five thousand were destroyed in a Berlin bonfire as part of a fire department training exercise. Others were sold on the international art market. As one high-ranking Nazi Party official reasoned, “In so doing we hope at least to make some money from this garbage.”

In May 1938, Hitler made his first official state visit to Italy. The trip began in Naples, where the people welcomed him with hundred-foot-long banners bearing Nazi swastikas hung from balconies overlooking the path of his motorcade. In Rome, he and other senior Nazi leaders walked through the Colosseum, retracing the steps of Roman rulers and gladiators. But it was the beauty of Florence, jewel of the Renaissance, with its extraordinary churches, bridges, and museums, that Hitler most wanted to see.

The German leader spent two hours walking through the art-filled rooms of the Pitti Palace and Uffizi Gallery, past masterpieces of the Renaissance, enjoying the splendor and richness of the collections. Hitler saw himself as an artist among artists. During his tour, an idea took hold, one with far-reaching consequences: Hitler, the visionary, decided to build a museum in his hometown of Linz, Austria, and assemble a collection of art and cultural objects that he believed would rival some of the world’s most respected museums.

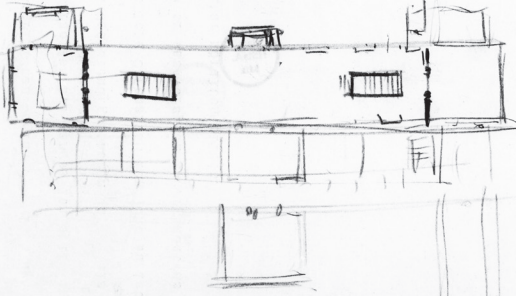
It had a formal name—Gemäldegalerie Linz—but it quickly became known as the Führermuseum. His idea had a major obstacle: Many of the masterpieces and other cultural objects that he would need for his Führermuseum were already in Europe’s most important museums and private collections. That would soon change.





Hitler and Italian dictator Benito Mussolini (to Hitler's left, wearing cap) visiting the Florence museums in May 1938.

Zeichnung des Führers, Nacht v.12./13.5.42 im Führerhaupt-  
quartier bei Rastenburg.  
Grundriss der neuen Linzer Galerie.



A Abt. I

Hitler's 1942 sketch of the Führermuseum.

Nazi Germany invaded Poland on September 1, 1939, marking the formal beginning of World War II. The invasion also sounded the starter gun for the most premeditated looting operation the world had ever seen. Thefts are normally associated with speed—get in and get out quickly. However, the Nazi looting operation continued without interruption for nearly six years.

The occupation of Poland alone provided Hitler and his museum with treasures of immense rarity and value. Cracow, one of the most picturesque cities in all of Europe, suffered irreplaceable losses. From the Czartoryski Museum, the Nazis stole the only painting by Leonardo da Vinci in Poland, one of just sixteen paintings by Leonardo known to exist in the world. From Saint Mary's Basilica, they looted the most important object in all of Poland, the Veit Stoss Altarpiece. With these priceless pieces and



riches from the private collections of Austrian Jews that had been confiscated the previous year, in particular from the Austrian branch of the Rothschild banking dynasty, Hitler and his art advisors quickly amassed a treasure that rivaled many of the world's major art museums.

Nazi Germany's invasion of the Netherlands, France, and Belgium in May 1940 pried open Western Europe's treasure chest. In contrast to their brazen looting of Eastern Europe, the Nazis wanted to pillage under a veil of legality in the West, so they simply changed the laws of conquered nations to strip Jews of their rights



Nazi Reichsmarschall Göring and Hitler admiring a painting.

to own private property. This created an avalanche of opportunities for Hitler and his agents, and also for the number two man in the Nazi Party, Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring, an art collector with an insatiable appetite.

The greatest theft in history was underway.



# JUNE 26, 1939

Letter from Hitler directing Dr. Hans Posse  
to supervise the construction of the Führermuseum in Linz.



ADOLF HITLER\*

OBERSALZBERG, den 26. Juni 1939

Ich beauftrage Herrn Galeriedirektor  
Dr. Hans Posse, Dresden, mit dem Aufbau des neuen  
Kunstmuseums für die Stadt Linz/Donau.

Alle Partei- und Staatsdienststellen  
sind verpflichtet, Herrn Dr. Posse bei Erfüllung  
seiner Aufgabe zu unterstützen.

"I commission Dr. Hans Posse, director of the Dresden Gallery, to build up  
the new art museum for Linz Donau. All Party and State services are ordered  
to assist Dr. Posse in fulfillment of his mission."

—Adolf Hitler.



# NOVEMBER 5, 1940

## Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring's order concerning distribution of Jewish art treasures.

In carrying out the measures taken to date for the safeguarding of Jewish art property by the Chief of Military Administration in Paris and the Einsatzstab Rosenberg (Chef OKW. 2 f 28.14. W. Z. Nr 3812/ 40 g), the categories of art objects moved to the Louvre will be established as follows:

1. Those art objects for the further disposition of which the Führer has reserved for himself the right of decision;
2. Those art objects which will serve to complete the collection of the Reichsmarschall;
3. Those art objects and library material which appear useful for building up the Hohe Schule and for the task of Reichsleiter Rosenberg;



4. Those art objects that are appropriate for turning over to German museums . . . will immediately be inventoried, packed and transported to Germany by the Einsatzstab with all due care and with the assistance of the Luftwaffe.
  
5. Those art objects which are appropriate for transfer to French museums and to the French and German art trade will be sold at auction at a date yet to be fixed; and the proceeds will be assigned to the French State for benefit of the French dependents of war casualties.
  
6. Further seizure of Jewish art property in France will be effected in the heretofore efficient manner by the Einsatzstab Rosenberg, in co-operation with the Chief of the Military Administration Paris.



Paris, 5 November 1940

I shall submit this suggestion to the Führer,  
pending whose approval this procedure will remain  
effective.

Signed: GÖRING



# SECTION I



Hitler sketching preliminary concepts for the Führermuseum in Linz.



# MAJOR BATTLE LINES AND ART REPOSITORIES IN ITALY





## CHAPTER 1

# LETTERS HOME

**Palestrina, Italy: June 1944**

The army jeep crept along the hillside road leading to Palestrina, a small Italian town about twenty miles east of Rome. Captain Deane Keller—artist, professor, husband, father, and newly assigned Monuments Man for U.S. Fifth Army—knew the path from his student days, when his painting and drawing talents had earned him the opportunity to study at the American Academy in Rome. No one was shooting at him then, but that was eighteen years ago. Recent reports detailing how German troops were using elevation and blind turns as part of their ambush-and-retreat tactics caused great concern. Determined to serve his country and return home to his wife, Kathy, and their three-year-old son, Dino, Keller and Giuseppe de Gregorio, an officer of the Carabinieri and also his driver, continued advancing up the hill, cautiously.

After rounding a bend in the road, Keller grabbed Giuseppe's arm and told him to stop. He was out of the jeep before it came to a halt. About one hundred feet ahead, lying facedown in the road, was the body of an American soldier. As Keller approached, he thought of a phrase he had once heard used to describe a corpse: "sweetish smell." There was nothing sweet in the air on this hot



Deane Keller and his son, Dino.



June day. Despite the overpowering and nauseating stench, he continued walking.

Those one hundred feet felt like a mile. With each step Keller thought about “the boys,” as he referred to them in his letters to Kathy. They had been fighting their way up the Italian peninsula since landing at Salerno in September 1943, taking one hill after another. Some were the age of his art students at Yale University. He wasn’t sure why he felt such paternal feelings of pride for them. Maybe it was a consequence of being forty-two years old. Maybe it was being five thousand miles away from his own son, unable to be the father that he had envisioned. Seeing the young men in uniform—“the boys” driving the tanks, the infantry soldiers crouching behind them, and this brave warrior lying in the road—reminded him of Dino.

As he knelt beside the young man’s body, Keller noticed something in the overturned helmet. Wedged inside the helmet liner was an airmail envelope addressed to the soldier’s mother. Keller wiggled the envelope out of the webbing. As best he could tell, the letter had been hurriedly written, perhaps before or even during battle. All he could do at this point was make sure it was posted.

Keller, like all the soldiers he’d met, relished receiving mail from home. Letters were the sole connective tissue—a lifeline of hope—for soldiers separated by time and distance from family and close friends. Even those containing the most dreaded news were preferred to the heartache and gnawing pain of no news at all.

Keller recalled a letter he’d received from his mother before beginning his assignment as a Monuments Man that filled him with pride and emboldened him for the difficult days he knew were ahead. Standing next to the body of this American soldier,

caressing a letter to a mother that contained the last earthly thoughts of her son, was just such a day.

Military service “is a big sacrifice for you,” he remembered his mother writing, “but I am thankful you can see beyond that to realize the great need for good men to help. I believe you will never regret it for your own sake and the sake of Dino. He says proudly now—‘My Daddy’s a sojer.’ I don’t know who told him that—but I suppose he saw you in that first uniform.”

On the long dust-filled drive back to headquarters, with the dead soldier’s letter inside his shirt pocket pressed against his chest, Keller closed his eyes for what seemed like just a few minutes, lost in thought about all that had happened since leaving his teaching position at Yale to get into the fight.

### **New Haven, Connecticut: May 1943**

In May 1943, as the end of the semester approached, Keller finally received a reply from the Marine Corps. “Rejected: poor eyesight,” or so they said. Admittedly, at 5 feet 7 and 170 pounds, with a grayish tint to his hair and the stereotypical wire-rimmed glasses of a professor, he was hardly the strapping figure of youth that so frequently passed through the recruiting office. Then a well-timed letter from a colleague, Tubby Sizer, the former director of the Yale University Art Gallery, mentioned a newly created art protection unit that would comprise soldiers charged with saving rather than destroying. In Keller’s mind, that sounded just right. At the end of his letter, Tubby tried to preempt Keller’s natural tendency. “Don’t be so damned MODEST,” he wrote. “Put it on thick.” Keller did, and it worked.

By the time Keller reported to Fort Myer, Virginia, for active duty in late September 1943, circumstances in Italy had changed dramatically. Operation Husky, the successful invasion of Sicily by U.S., British, and Canadian forces that began on July 10, resulted in the removal from office of Benito Mussolini, known as “Il Duce,” the leader of Fascist Italy and Adolf Hitler’s most important ally.

The battlefield then shifted to the Italian mainland, and within days, Italy signed an armistice agreement with the Allies. Hitler was enraged that his former ally had surrendered. He immediately transferred one million German soldiers to Italy to build a series of defensive lines that stretched across the Italian peninsula between Rome and Naples, intended to slow the Allied advance and make it as costly and bloody as possible. The war was now going to be fought in a country that contained millions of works of art, monuments, and churches, placing some of the greatest masterpieces of Western civilization at risk of being destroyed. It was a recipe for disaster.

Following a month of orientation and training at Fort Myer, Captain Deane Keller boarded a Liberty ship bound for North Africa. Like his 550 shipmates, including many young soldiers headed into combat, he felt proud, excited, and scared. On December 2, 1943, after more than three weeks at sea, he reached his temporary home, an army Civil Affairs training school in the remote hillside town of Tizi Ouzou, Algeria.

The kaleidoscope of fall color of the Virginia countryside was just a memory now. Standing in this desolate Algerian town, all Keller could see were colorless clusters of half-finished buildings and an abundance of braying donkeys and bleating goats. The sound of a familiar voice over his shoulder caught him by surprise.

He turned around, shaking his head in disbelief, and smiled: Standing before him was Major Tubby Sizer, the man who had encouraged him to join the new art protection unit and become a Monuments Man.

Sizer had been among the first selected to serve as a Monuments Man. The army had created the Civil Affairs school, where Keller now found himself, to educate American and British officers about military government and how to run a town once combat troops moved on. With their training now complete, Sizer, fellow American Captain Norman Newton, and British Monuments Man Captain Teddy Croft-Murray were on their way to Naples, Italy.

Despite the obvious good intentions of leaders in Washington and the Monuments Men at Tizi Ouzou, everyone questioned whether the mission could succeed. Would Allied commanders listen to the recommendations of middle-aged art history professors or architects to direct artillery fire *away from* a church or monument when being fired upon? Would Allied troops respect signs the Monuments Men posted making churches and historical buildings off-limits, even if it meant sleeping outside in the rain? And how could just eight Monuments Men, in an army of more than two hundred thousand soldiers, protect even a portion of the works of art and monuments in culturally rich Italy? After eight weeks of training, Keller was on his way to Naples to find out.

Keller's initial duties involved inspections of nearby towns and villages. These experiences left him feeling sad, not because of the extent of destruction, but out of sympathy for what the Italian people had endured. As an artist, he had always admired the country's beauty and boundless creative achievements, but it was the



Italian people who had won his heart so many years earlier. “*Buona gente, buonissima gente, ma bisogna saperla prendere.*’ Good people, very good people,” he always told his students and the soldiers he met, “but you have to know how to take them.”

During one inspection, Keller visited a hospital where he saw a man without a nose. In its place were two holes. Before the war, had he seen someone in such sad condition, he would have looked away. But sights such as this were all too common during war. Now, each wounded child, destroyed home, and damaged town made him realize how sheltered and privileged his life had been.

The severity of fighting at the town of Cassino, about seventy miles northwest of their headquarters in Naples, had Allied forces pinned down and the Monuments Men waiting until the battle was over. The only practical route into central Italy, and the big prize, Rome, required passage through the Liri Valley. That meant contending with an impregnable mountain bastion overlooking the entire valley, the Abbey of Monte Cassino—and the Germans knew it.

Every effort had been made to avoid damage to the abbey, but General Dwight D. Eisenhower’s December 29, 1943, order concerning the protection of cultural treasures made it clear: “If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men’s lives count infinitely more and the buildings must go.” On the morning of February 15, waves of Allied bombers severely damaged the abbey, but the fighting continued for three more bloody months.

Norman Newton was the first Monuments Man to reach the heavily mined and booby-trapped abbey, still under fire from enemy mortars, just hours after the remaining Germans had been

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By: M. NARA Date: 8/17/05

C O P Y  
~~CONFIDENTIAL~~

ALLIED FORCE HEADQUARTERS

Office of The Commander-in-Chief

AG 000.4-1

29 December 1943

SUBJECT: Historical Monuments

TO : All Commanders

Today we are fighting in a country which has contributed a great deal to our cultural inheritance, a country rich in monuments which by their creation helped and now in their old age illustrate the growth of the civilization which is ours. We are bound to respect those monuments so far as war allows.

If we have to choose between destroying a famous building and sacrificing our own men, then our men's lives count infinitely more and the buildings must go. But the choice is not always so clear-cut as that. In many cases the monuments can be spared without any detriment to operational needs. Nothing can stand against the argument of military necessity. That is an accepted principle. But the phrase "military necessity" is sometimes used where it would be more truthful to speak of military convenience or even of personal convenience. I do not want it to cloak slackness or indifference.

It is a responsibility of higher commanders to determine through A.M.G. Officers the locations of historical monuments whether they be immediately ahead of our front lines or in areas occupied by us. This information passed to lower echelons through normal channels places the responsibility on all Commanders of complying with the spirit of this letter.

/s/ Dwight D. Eisenhower

DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER,  
General, U. S. Army,  
Commander-in-Chief.

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driven out. His damage assessment report painted a grim picture: “Reconstruction of entire Abbey is possible although much is now only heap of pulverized rubble and dust.”

The far greater tragedy was the body count. Four months of fighting in grueling weather conditions had exacted a toll so great it hardly seemed believable: fifty-five thousand Allied soldiers dead, wounded, or missing; twenty thousand dead or wounded



Monuments Men approach the remains of the Abbey of Monte Cassino.

Print the complete address in plain letters in the panel below, and your return address in the space provided on the right. Use typewriter, dark ink, or dark pencil. Paint or small writing is not suitable for photography.

Deane Keller

(CENSOR'S STAMP)

TO DEANE KELLER  
28 WALKLEY RD.  
VI. HARTFORD  
CONN.

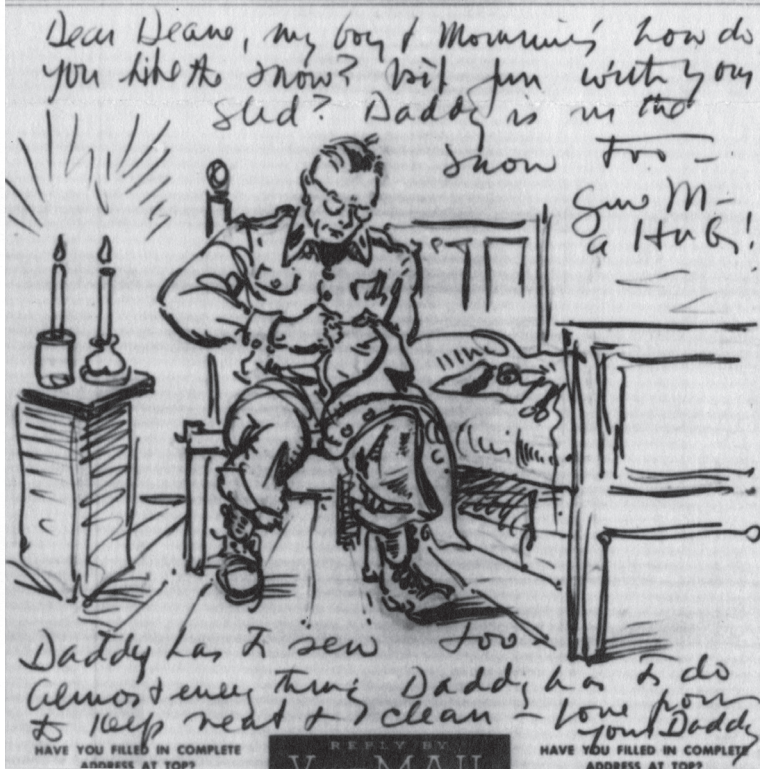
SEE INSTRUCTION NO. 2

FROM

Capt. Deane Keller  
Co. G, 2675 REGT. A. C. C.  
A.P.O. 394 c/o P. M. NEW YORK

1 Feb. 1945

(Sender's complete address above)



Monuments Man Deane Keller's drawing of himself sewing a Fifth Army patch onto his jacket.

Germans; and one historic but largely destroyed fourteenth-century Benedictine abbey.

With the stalemate at Cassino ended, Allied forces and the Monuments Men began their advance toward Rome. Several



received new assignments. Keller's exceeded all expectations: He would be the first Monuments Officer attached to Fifth Army and its fighting force of eighty thousand soldiers.

On his last night in Naples, Keller held up the sleeve of his uniform to the small, dim lamp near his bunk. Needle and thread in hand, he began sewing onto his uniform the shoulder patch for Fifth Army, which he had purchased earlier in the day from a street vendor. "I haven't worn my ribbon or shoulder patch yet. Don't know when I will," he had written Kathy. "I feel the boys at [the] front are the ones to wear the stuff. Maybe some day I'll feel I earned it." That day had finally come.

About one week into his new assignment, things were going well for Monuments Man Captain Deane Keller. He had the job he wanted—a position of enormous responsibility—and a jeep, a rarity for the Monuments Men. He swelled with pride serving his country and helping the Italian people, but it came at a high cost. The bloodbath at the Battle of Monte Cassino served as a painful reminder to Keller and his family that he might not see them again, ever. Most of all, he missed being the dad that he had promised to be when Dino was born.

For now, he resigned himself to writing letters, lots of letters. Each letter to Kathy had a message for Dino, right up until the time he realized that his three-year-old boy couldn't yet read. A few weeks later, or perhaps months—war was like that, the blurring of time—he realized that the solution to communicating with his son wasn't through words but images. Every boy liked looking at cartoons, and after all, Keller was an artist and an art teacher.

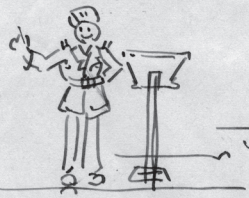
Dear Deane: This is Daddy's History to now:



1 GOING OVER



2 AFRICA



3 GOING TO ITALY



3 TALKS AT WOOLY

4  
Love to you +  
Mommie from  
Your Daddy.

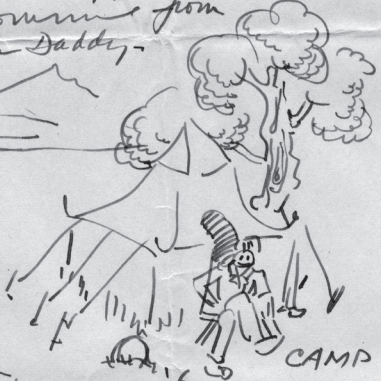
HELLO  
MOMMIE  
+  
DEANELL



I IN ITALY  
a CITY

HELLO!

WORK (to keep is happy)



CAMP

when to sun goes down + gets sleepy.

LOOK AT PICS OF  
& YOU +  
MOMMIE

One of Monuments Man Deane Keller's early drawings to Dino summarizing his experiences as a soldier.

One of Keller's earliest drawings summarized his journey, step by step, from his trip to North Africa and training at Tizi Ouzou—"Toozy Woozy," as he jokingly referred to it—to his work in Italy.

With Keller's assignment as a Monuments Man now underway, Dino would be receiving many more drawings.

### **Near Palestrina, Italy: June 1944**

Somewhere on the road back to headquarters, Keller awakened and quickly checked the pocket of his shirt. The letter from the dead American soldier was still there. It prompted him to write to Kathy as soon as he reached his tent. He began his June 25 letter by recounting some of the experiences of his first few weeks as a Monuments Man. With the death of the young soldier fresh on his mind, the tone of his letter changed. He wanted to share with Kathy something he'd been thinking about. "The life of one American boy is worth infinitely more to me than any monument I know." Keller thought of it as a personal manifesto of sorts, one that would guide him in his work as a Monuments Man.

### **Rome, Italy: June 1944**

Monuments Men Lieutenant Perry Cott, British Captain Humphrey Brooke, and Lieutenant Fred Hartt, who had joined the operation in late April, couldn't believe they were in Rome, not under these conditions. Like Keller, Cott and Hartt had each visited the city during their time as students, but those experiences couldn't compare with the exhilaration of accompanying Fifth Army troops into the Eternal City.



It had taken the Western Allies six months to blast through Monte Cassino before sprinting north to Rome. The first units fought their way into the city on the morning of June 4, liberating it by late afternoon. The sound of the deliriously happy throngs of people cheering as the tank column of a modern army motored past the almost nineteen-hundred-year-old Colosseum left Hartt, Cott, and Brooke speechless. But the appearance of the Arch of Constantine and Trajan's Column, and many of the city's other landmarks, wrapped in protective casing made of brick, sandbags, and scaffolding brought them back to the reality of the war—and their mission.

While Brooke and Hartt set out to conduct damage assessments, Cott began gathering information on the status of works of art. The Vatican and its collection, one of the most comprehensive and important holdings of art in the world, were safe. So, too, were the treasures of the Brera Picture Gallery in Milan, the Accademia in Venice, the Borghese Gallery in Rome, and those from many of the nation's most important churches, which Pope Pius XII had allowed to be stored for safekeeping within the Vatican's walls. Cott, a seasoned museum curator and art scholar, was astonished at the thought that, with these combined holdings, the Vatican was the richest museum in the world, at least for the moment.

Monuments Man Lieutenant Colonel Ernest DeWald, director of the MFAA in Italy, reached Rome several days later. After presenting his credentials to the Holy Father and explaining the purpose of the Monuments operation, he and Cott gained access to the Vatican storage areas. On June 26, they began their investigation into works of art belonging to museums in Naples that the



Hermann Göring Tank Division had delivered to Rome for safekeeping. Suspicions abounded.

The media spectacle surrounding the Hermann Göring Tank Division's arrival was Nazi propaganda at its best—they seldom missed a chance to promote a good deed done. But when two trucks of this elite fighting unit mysteriously disappeared on the way to Rome with the artwork, it greatly concerned Italian art officials, especially since it involved a division named after Hermann Göring, the Nazi Party's second-most powerful man and the most prolific art collector in the world.

After a quick look at the crates that the Hermann Göring Division had delivered to Rome in January, DeWald and Cott began inventorying the contents, starting with crate number 1. A few minutes passed before DeWald looked at Cott, puzzled. Crate number 1, which according to their inventory schedule had been packed with three paintings, was completely missing. That hardly



Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Blind Leading the Blind*, 1568.

seemed an accident. Later they opened crate number 29, relieved to find one of the paintings that belonged in the missing crate number 1. A second of the missing paintings appeared in crate number 58. But they never found the third and most important painting: the world-famous masterpiece by Pieter Bruegel the Elder, *The Blind Leading the Blind*.

“There can be no doubt that the paintings were stolen by persons who knew just what they wanted,” DeWald told Cott in disbelief. The thieves clearly had a shopping list. What else could explain that in several instances they had left behind paintings of far greater importance? Hiding the works that they didn’t want in crates with extra space was a cover-up attempt as clumsy as the theft itself.

DeWald and Cott were gobsmacked by the audacity of the theft. In all, seventeen works of art from Naples and the ancient site of Pompeii were missing, a few of which were among the most recognizable works of art in the world. The Hermann Göring Division soldiers might as well have driven to Naples, backed up their trucks to the doors of the Museo Nazionale in broad daylight, and lifted the masterpieces off the wall. Both DeWald and Cott believed that the works of art were in Nazi Germany, probably recent additions to the ever-growing collection of Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring.

Reports of Nazi looting throughout Europe were hardly new, but the Vatican inventory provided the Monuments Men with their first hard evidence that the Nazis had looted art treasures in Italy. With German troops now retreating north toward Florence, the Monuments Men feared that this was just the beginning.

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