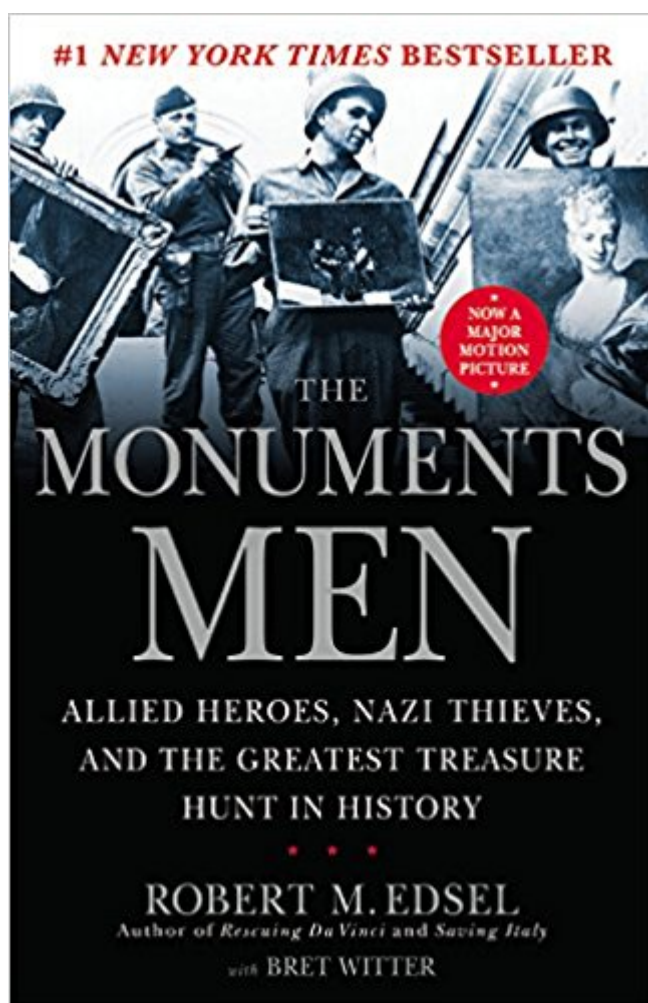


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# The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves And The Greatest Treasure Hunt In History



## Synopsis

At the same time Adolf Hitler was attempting to take over the western world, his armies were methodically seeking and hoarding the finest art treasures in Europe. The Fuehrer had begun cataloguing the art he planned to collect as well as the art he would destroy: "degenerate" works he despised. In a race against time, behind enemy lines, often unarmed, a special force of American and British museum directors, curators, art historians, and others, called the Monuments Men, risked their lives scouring Europe to prevent the destruction of thousands of years of culture. Focusing on the eleven-month period between D-Day and V-E Day, this fascinating account follows six Monuments Men and their impossible mission to save the world's great art from the Nazis.

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## Customer Reviews

WWII was the most destructive war in history and caused the greatest dislocation of cultural artifacts. Hundreds of thousands of items remain missing. The main burden fell to a few hundred men and women, curators and archivists, artists and art historians from 13 nations. Their task was to save and preserve what they could of Europe's great art, and they were called the Monuments Men. (Coincidentally or not, this book appears only briefly after Ilaria Dagnini Brey's *The Venus Fixers: The Untold Story of the Allied Soldiers Who Saved Italy's Art During World War II*, Reviews, June 1.) Edsel has presented their achievements in documentaries and photographs. He and Witter (coauthor of the bestselling *Dewey*) are no less successful here. Focusing on the organization's role in northwest Europe, they describe the Monuments Men from their initial mission to limit combat

damage to structures and artifacts to their changed focus of locating missing items. Most had been stolen by the Nazis. In southern Germany alone, over a thousand caches emerged, containing everything from church bells to insect collections. The story is both engaging and inspiring. In the midst of a total war, armies systematically sought to mitigate cultural loss. (Sept. 3) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

"After World War Two I served as a British member of the 'Monuments' section in Germany. Our task, I believe, was truly important - we were restoring to Europe evidence of its own civilization, which the War seemed virtually to have destroyed - and I was lucky to have had a chance to participate. It is excellent that Mr Edsel has now recorded this remarkable episode, and I am grateful to him for devoting so much energy to telling the stories of those involved." -- Anne Olivier Bell  
"Highly Readable ... a remarkable history" \* Washington Post \* "Engaging and inspiring" \* Publishers Weekly \* --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

If I had written this review when I was only 25% of the way through this book, I would have given it 2 stars. The beginning of the book can only be described as plodding and in my opinion was not very well constructed. However, I hung in there and the payoff came in the remainder of the book. The book describes an overlooked group of men and women who served during WWII to save priceless buildings and works of arts in Europe. It also describes the internal conflicts of these folks who wondered, for example, if the German people deserved the return of their Nazi-stolen art. The efforts of these dedicated service-men and -women were, naturally enough, largely overshadowed by the inarguably more important discoveries at the end of WWII, such as the truths revealed by the liberation of the concentration camps. This book is thus a wonderful contribution to an overlooked history of the time. The end of the book describes the discovery of hidden German repositories of art; the volume and quality of art found in these hiding places is absolutely staggering. I had the pleasure of seeing Michelangelo's flawless Madonna when I was in Bruges and was riveted by her WWII story, which was not described in any detail in the materials given out by the museums there. In summary: stick with it. The book had some problems with flow, especially in the beginning, but the payoff of the middle and ending was worth it.

A few years ago, on a trip to St. Louis, Missouri and I toured their well-known art museum. I noted a number of paintings on loan by a Jewish family that stated the paintings were returned to the family

by the Monument Men. I said to myself I need to read the book. Finally, I just did. From 1939 to the end of World War II, the Nazis Army seized priceless paintings, sculptures, tapestries and other artworks from museum, palaces, cathedrals and private homes. The Nazi plundered everything and carted it off to Germany. The Allied Forces created a group called the MFAA (Monuments, Fine Art and Archives) Division. This group consisted of men and women who were curators, archivists, art historians and artist. Their job was to find and return the art to its owners. The book is well written and researched. Edsel examined family letters and records, museum and church archives and even the Nazi archives. The book got off to a slow start but the ending was much more interesting. Sometimes it read like a detective story. I found the repetitiveness very annoying. I found the story interesting but the way the book was written just did not grab me as I felt it should. It is a hard thing to explain. I am only going to give this book a three rating instead of a four because the author never managed to obtain that something to make the book great. The book was 468 pages. I read the e-book on my Kindle app for my iPad.

One of the most enjoyable aspects to the study of history is always finding new stories. Even when you think you know a lot about a field you find something new and enjoyable. That one of the many reasons that I enjoyed *Monuments Men* so much. Robert Edsel has provided us with a look at an area of World War II studies that has gone virtually unnoticed for nearly 70 years. The men and women of the MFAA (Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives) Division served an almost unknown, but incredibly valuable part in the war against the destructive evil of Nazism. When Hitler's forces overran Europe they set about looting the national artistic treasures in a methodical manner. Priceless treasures were pillaged from the museums and galleries of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, and other European nations. All property belonging to Jews were taken. Hitler's dream was to create an enormous museum that would be the envy of the entire world. Instead he launched the most destructive war in history. The allies were aware of the cultural heritage in the areas that they would be fighting. This is why the MFAA was created. The original MFAA officers were tasked with traveling into the war zones and identifying historic sites that needed to be preserved. The stories of what these men accomplished is truly amazing. Time after time they were able to save important buildings from being destroyed. As the book progresses we see another dimension of their work. They began to investigate the Nazi looting. Their job shifted from simply protecting buildings from destruction to locating stolen works of art. At times the book resembles an action thriller story. The theft of priceless works of art. The heroic civilians who work undercover to spy on the Nazis. The small band of men rushing from place to place to save these

priceless objects. I really enjoyed this book. I enjoyed the subject, I enjoyed the writing, I enjoyed everything about it. Robert Edsel has done an excellent job of sharing this important story with us. Perhaps there is no greater evidence of the statement that those who do not study history are bound to repeat it. We never studied the important work of the Monuments Men. As a result the allies were not prepared when Iraq was invaded in 2003. The looting of those priceless antiquities could have been avoided by simply employing a group like the MFAA. Perhaps this book will help to raise awareness so that tragedies like the Iraq museum will not happen again.

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