

Looted Art Treasures Go Back to France

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Experiences of a QM officer detailed to pack and return art looted by the Nazis in World War II.



Shortly after VJ-day I was assigned to the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Section of the Restitution Control Branch of USFET. It was a growing activity which had lately received a great deal of attention from the Chief of the G-5 Division. Its mission was to protect and repair important historical buildings and to restore looted art treasures and libraries. I had requested this assignment because my civilian background as an interior architect gave me a professional interest in the work; and, now that the shooting was over, the restitution of cultural art treasures to our allies promised to be an inspiring means of getting started on the way to reconstruction. During combat operations the work of the MFA & A had been regarded by most of the Army as either amusing or as a nuisance. But with the advent of peace, the values of normal civilized living began to assume their old importance.

Ever since the beginning of the invasion, the Military Government art experts had been going, not always quietly, but at least persistently, about their business of locating and securing temporary protection for the hoards of art treasures and valuable libraries that the Nazis had systematically stolen from the overrun countries. Now, in the fall of 1945, "the fine arts boys" found themselves on top of the largest pile of hot loot in history. Its monetary value ran into astronomical figures and the intrinsic value of many of the treasures was even more notable. For, included in the mass theft were such venerable objects as the fifteenth century Mariakirch altarpiece from the cathedral at Krakow, Poland, and stained glass windows from the cathedral at Strasbourg. Such trophies were regarded by their original owners as symbols of spiritual or patriotic reverence corresponding to our esteem for the Liberty Bell. Their prompt restitution would be a significant altruistic gesture on the part of our Government at a time when diplomatic relations among the Allies were subjected to the usual strains of readjustment. A USFET (*US Forces European Theater*) directive was therefore issued which stated that the restitution of important looted art treasures was of such diplomatic importance that their prompt return was regarded as a military necessity of highest priority. Following orders from Maj. Gen. C. L. Adeock, Chief of the G-5 Division, token restitutions of the most highly valued treasures were being made to the Belgian, French, and Dutch governments as early as August 1945. Included in these shipments were the Van Eyck altarpiece from the Cathedral at Ghent, and the Bruges Madonna and Child statue by Michaelangelo, but there still remained tons of priceless paintings, sculptures, jewels, textiles, glass, ceramics, antique furniture, and rare books, secluded in abandoned mines of Baden-Württemberg and remote castles and half-forgotten monasteries in southern Bavaria. The local security troops and Military Government detachments did everything they could to provide temporary safety for these caches, but they were burdened with a multitude of equally important tasks in their effort to keep the peace, to govern the conquered, and supervise the housing and feeding of a disorganized civilian population. Some of the repositories were damp and unheated, many were in bad repair, and the risks of theft and damage were constantly increasing. Every day that this great store of valuable foreign-owned property remained in such a state meant extended responsibility for the American occupation forces.

Restitution procedures were necessarily deliberate. Proper accountability required the establishment of unquestionable ownership. The contents of many repositories were stored in such a disorganized state that a great deal of sorting and highly technical identifying procedure beyond the facilities of the Military Government detachments was required. The Fine Arts Section of the headquarters for each of the two military districts of the American zone had set up central Collecting points in architecturally sound building at Wiesbaden and Munich. These collecting points were staffed with skilled technical personnel to classify and supervise the storage of art treasures that were being centralized for final restitution. As rapidly as the limited available transportation and qualified personnel would permit, the more valuable collections were being brought into the collecting points for final clearance. This routine was producing an average return of about a dozen truckloads a month. In time these deliveries could be accelerated. The important token restitutions had created a most favorable reaction, but unsettled conditions made it imperative that large bulk shipments should follow immediately.

A survey of the outlying repositories revealed that sorting, identifying, and packing could be made conveniently on the premises of two of the larger repositories. This meant that direct shipment from these locations to the owner nations could be made without the delay of duplicate handling through a central collecting point. General Adeock directed that these repositories be evacuated at once.

I reported for duty with the MFA & A about the time this directive was issued. The usual loose talk about square pegs in round holes certainly did not apply to this organization. It was staffed with the best selection of qualified personnel that I had seen anywhere in the ETO (*European Theater of Operations*). Its officers were former museum directors, art historians, architects, and archivists who had had routine assignments in all branches of the military service and who were now staying on to take part in the art restitution program because of a keen professional interest. Some of the key men were attached Naval officers. All were incorruptible, intellectually honest men. Some were a little on the "long hair" side, and, as one would expect, they did not always operate according to the book. In fact, their mission was so unprecedented that they did not have much of a book to follow. Rank to such men meant little. Frequently an emergency required a district headquarters to send out whatever officer was available at the time to assist a field specialist on a difficult project. The man in the field might be a junior officer who, in civilian life, was an outstanding art expert or scholar. These relationships were invariably carried on in a sensible spirit of cooperation. The man having the edge on skill or information was given the reign. This excellent spirit of cooperation was due, in a great measure, to the leadership of Major B. Lafarge, the MFA & A Chief at USFET Headquarters. He came from a family of prominent artists and writers, and was himself a successful architect. The restitution program was an innovation, and in directing the work he had to feel his way without the aid of established precedent or a long-studied table of organization and equipment.

During the first few days I spent in Major Lafarge's office I felt like a fish out of water. To get orientated, I reviewed directives and files, and found the highly technical procedures prescribed far beyond my comprehension. The catalogues listed materials of awe-inspiring value. The records of the far-flung distribution of hidden loot presented an overwhelming problem of centralization. There were reports of the discovery of caches turned in from all sorts of strange sources—discoveries by troops, G-2 and CIC (*Counter Intelligence Corps*) reports, and pertinent testimony from War Crimes investigations. Much of this material read like E. Phillips Oppenheim detective stories rather than routine military correspondence.

All the Nazi bigwigs carried on private looting enterprises, but most of the thievery was systematically conducted by the Einstatztab Reichleiter Rosenberg (known as ERR), a highly specialized task force organized for the single purpose of looting cultural objects for the glorification of the Nazi state. This organization was under the direct leadership of Alfred Rosenberg, Hitler's Reichleiter for Ideology and Culture. It was due to his influence that the Nazi crack-pots planned to show the world that their "master race" was its cultural as well as its military leader. Their method of achieving this goal was to establish great German art centers, which were to be furnished by the simple expedient of looting the cream of cultural material found in the countries they overran. These fanatics had a penchant for dramatizing their acts against their enemies, and the manner in which they hid their loot was no exception. Their methods of concealment were as melodramatic as they were cunning. This fact was borne out by what I found at the first repository I evacuated.

Our survey revealed that Schloss Neuschwanstein, a castle near Fussen, Bavaria, belonging to the former King Ludwig II, could be evacuated at once. Ludwig had been a great patron of the arts and an exponent of pan-German culture. After his death, Neuschwanstein became a national shrine. Hitler was greatly influenced by Ludwig's philosophy and made a special visit to the castle. It is little wonder that Rosenberg singled it out as one of his principal "art-collecting points." In it his gang stored loot they had taken from the Rothschilds, David Weil, and other outstanding private collections in Paris. When we found it a great part was in its original shipping crates and bore the original ERR identification markings. The remaining uncrated material was labeled with what appeared to be the catalogue code markings of the original owners. The ERR nearly always preserved such identification, because, by maintaining unquestionable-authenticity, the true value of the stolen art objects on the world market could be maintained. A spot verification by experts was all that was necessary to clear the contents of the repository for direct restitution to France.

There was a shortage of operating personnel throughout the MFA & A organization. The regular staff was busy keeping the routine shipments moving through the central collecting points. The extent of the Neuschwanstein evacuation was beyond the facilities of either the District or local Military Government detachments. As I was the only available officer, Major Lafarge ordered me to organize an evacuation team to accomplish this move as an independent agency. I was to set up operations at the castle, arrange whatever packing and transportation preparations were necessary, and then send all satisfactorily identified loot to Paris. The remainder of questionable items was to be sent to the Munich Central Collecting Point for further reference and final disposition.

The high priority of the project did not allow time for the organization of an evacuation team on the basis of a carefully planned T/O and E. Furthermore, little American military help or supplies could be expected, as the occupation forces were struggling with a terrific job in the face of increasing shortages brought on by the accelerated redeployment program. Improvisation and exploitation of all non-military aid were therefore requisite. Basic MFA & A directives had anticipated such a situation, and their prescribed procedures provided a good deal of aid from non-military sources. As the cost of restitution was to be borne by the German nation, civilian supplies and labor could be requested as a military necessity. The Allied Nations had agreed to supply transportation and security escorts for their respective art restitutions. The Legal Division at USFET had drawn up an excellent standard receipt form that released the American forces from responsibility for damage or theft at the earliest possible stage in a restitution project. It provided that a representative of the receiving nation would sign for and assume complete responsibility for each individual piece as it left the

repository. This was accomplished by the execution of a carefully worded preliminary agreement which was attached to an itemized schedule of the delivery. Usually one of these receipts was prepared for each separate load that left a repository.

I was amazed at the casual way in which I was ordered to move millions of dollars worth of irreplaceable treasures. Major Lafarge's instructions were verbal and brief, but the way he gave them to me left no question in my mind that he was confident they would be followed, and that he would back me up in any arrangements I needed to make. In effect he said, "Eddie, we've got to move the stuff at Neuschwanstein right away. The Munich crowd have all they can do to run the regular activities of the Central Collecting Point. You go down to Fussen and get the stuff rolling. I can't spare anyone from here to help you. Maybe the Munich office can scare you up a T/3 clerk, and one of their field men can come in to help you when you get things going. Get a jeep and driver from the motor pool for as long as they will let you have them. Captain Edwin Rae, the Chief of the Munich office, is a good scrounger. He can help you chisel a little more transportation and the gas you will need from Third Army. The French have agreed to transport the loot, but you can expect plenty of snarls in their arrangements when they have to billet their men and operate a fleet of trucks so far from their home base. If necessary, we must assist them with American supplies rather than let this high-priority job bog down. Don't bother the Military Government detachments any more than you have to. They have their own problems, but they may be able to assist you in getting German labor and perhaps give you leads on locating supplies. Use German supplies and labor wherever possible. The Germans did the looting--they should bear the burden of the restitution. Although there is a large quantity of stuff to be moved, most of it has already been identified as French. It will need an accurate final check, but you won't need much other help from the art experts. This job is really a problem in logistics, and you Quartermasters are pretty good at such things. That is why I am putting you on the job.

"The USFET directives provide pretty high priorities," continued Major Lafarge. "Make whatever arrangements you think best and we will back you up, but try to work things out on the spot and get the shipments rolling. General Adcock wants action. You are now the Director of the MFA & A Evacuation Team for Upper Bavaria. Organize it to suit yourself. I shan't bother you except to check up on your shipping schedule. You can start now."

This parting blessing was all that I wanted if I was to follow the old scrounging routine. A free hand and not too many reports would be just dandy.

Two days later I reported to the MFA & A Section, Headquarters, Third Army. Captain Edwin Rae, the Chief, placed the facilities of the Munich Central Collecting Point at my disposal to help me get organized. The Neuschwanstein repository was one of his responsibilities, and I believe he was glad to have me come down and take it off his hands. His area contained more fine arts loot than any other section in the American zone, and with all his excellent staff and equipment, his entire staff was overworked. Through Captain Rae's connections with Third Army Headquarters staff I was sure of getting all the assistance I needed to procure supplies through Army channels, but the most valuable assistance was offered me by the organization at the Central Collecting Point.

The "Point" consisted of two well-constructed buildings on the Koenigsplatz--not too badly damaged by bombs--which had been efficiently repaired and staffed under the direction of Lieutenants Craige Smythe, Thomas Howe, and Hamilton Colter, all of the U. S. Navy. These officers had been key men in prominent American art galleries. The buildings originally

housed the national headquarters of the Nazi party and included the record vaults and offices of Hitler and other party leaders. Needless to say they were designed for efficient security measures. After the elaborate lighting, heating, and ventilating systems were repaired and connected to the independent power system, and the windows and roof were patched, a repository ideal for storing and handling all types of art objects and bibliotheca was created.

The Collecting Point was more than a warehouse. It was the administrative headquarters and technical operating center for all MFA & A activities of the Eastern Military District. It employed a large staff of carefully selected German art scholars who helped with classifications, maintained statistical files, and operated an art reference library. There were also well-equipped photo studios and laboratories, repair and crating shops, supply rooms, and a small transportation pool. A staff of expert packers and carpenters assisted the curators. A resident liaison officer and art expert from each Allied country was provided with an office and separate storage section in the Collecting Point. Starting with an extensive collection of confiscated German art books, Lieutenant Smythe had organized a remarkable art reference library. To this was added reference material uncovered in outlying repositories, and also a large amount of captured purchase records and files of identified code markings which had been taken from the ERR and other looting agencies. All this reference material was invaluable in assisting the experts in the difficult work of establishing the identity and ownership of questionable art objects.

All items that were sent to the Collecting Point from field repositories were checked by the regular curators, who used the reference library and record files to help them determine the ownership and identity of the item. Each item which satisfied this review was turned over to the appropriate national representative of its owner. Delivery to the rightful owner was then a routine matter and a responsibility of the receiving national representative. Quite frequently unmarked objects, or those that were suspected of being forgeries, were brought in: Such material required careful checking against all available reference material, and was then scrutinized by a committee consisting of American experts, the resident Allied art experts, and the best scholars on the German civilian staff. Disposition was then made by agreement to one of the Allied Nations, or the item was set aside in a special section for controversial material, to be considered in a final accounting. This excellent plant, with its entire staff of experts and equipment, was at the disposal of fine arts officers working on field projects throughout the Eastern Military District.

Preparing plans for French coordination took the most time of all. The French representative at the Collecting Point assigned Captain Hubert de Brye to observe the work at the repository and to sign the receipts for the French Government. He soon became an inseparable companion and one of my best friends. He was an ardent admirer of the 18th Century French painters, and every time I wanted to talk to him I had to chase back to the stacks, where I was sure to find him admiring the Fragonards. He was especially fond of a picture of a sad looking cow.

For two days de Brye and I went over all the details of arranging for French transportation and guards for the evacuation with the French liaison office at Third Army Headquarters. It was not a simple matter for the French to bring a special unit into our zone and have it operate independently from us on matters of supply. The arrangement would only work if we could keep the unit in contact with a French supply base and if we would be prepared to supplement its shortages from our own resources, if necessary. The French were delighted at the prospect of receiving such a large restitution, but there were many things that they needed to know in

order to supply the aid we required. When would the shipment be ready? How many trucks and men would we need? How long would the loading take? How would they manage their gas supply and truck service? How would they billet and feed their men in the American zone? Would the shipment be ready before the winter set in? These questions were as new to me as they were to the French and I was inclined to get a little impatient with their apparent fondness for discussion rather than action. This was my first experience in dealing with them. I suppose I did not understand the Gallic mind as well as I should. Actually, the French were most anxious to cooperate, but their Army had little in the way of resources to draw on after their country had been drained by the war. All they wanted was for us to give them a little help in getting started. Once I understood this situation and made a few simple concessions, I received the most grateful and enthusiastic cooperation in return. For example, when their men showed up in Fussen with meager rations (the standard bread and cheese fare the French soldier usually gets and accepts without complaint), I managed to provide a few cases of 10-in-1 rations for them. They were so grateful that they wore themselves out working overtime and doing every thing possible to rush the shipment.

Before leaving Munich we finally made the following arrangements for French coordination. Shipment would be made by rail over German lines, with French trucks used only for shuttling the crates from repository to railhead. This would keep the supply problem of operating a French truck organization in the American zone to a minimum. We further simplified matters by arranging to base the French truck squad at a military garrison in the French-occupied zone, which was only fourteen kilometers from Schloss Neuschwanstein. Here they could be billeted and supplied through French military channels and still commute daily to work at the repository. Captain de Brye was to sign the final receipts covering each truck as it left the repository for the railhead. American responsibility for theft or damage ended when these receipts were signed. De Brye was to command all French operations, but inasmuch as the railhead was in the American zone, I agreed to coordinate the train-loading and dispatching for him in order to expedite the paper work, which would necessarily be processed through American military channels.

Things seemed to be shaping up with a little more certainty, so de Brye and I felt justified in taking a leisurely trip to Fussen, over a Sunday, to do a little sightseeing on the side. The trip from Munich through Landsberg to Fussen offered a charming view of the Bavarian countryside in late autumn. De Brye was a rare character and an excellent traveling companion. He had been through about everything you could expect of a Frenchman during the war years-the first defeat, the German occupation, escape to serve with the Canadians during the first months of the invasion, and finally duty as a ski trooper in the Alps. He was a tall big-nosed Norman and wore an odd assortment of clothes-usually a Canadian battle-jacket over several sweaters of odd colors, an American GI overcoat, a big muffler, and huge wool mittens. His only regulation garb was a French officer's cap, which frequently got crosswise on his head. He carried all of his belongings in a faded rucksack. His German sounded exactly like French to me, and his English sounded like the actor Willie Howard's imitation of a French professor. During the trip he sat on the back seat of the jeep covered with blankets and a shelter-half. Constantly he referred to a German Baedeker and insisted on stopping at every village to visit the buildings it described. He was a well-educated man, and we had a lot of fun discussing art, politics, and sex. On the latter subject his attitude was strictly Gallic, but as far as art and politics were concerned, we had a great many ideas in common. However, he had some queer notions. He thought the United States was a fabulously wealthy land, where every soldier would receive a jeep when he was discharged. He thought the best way to start a

"conquest" (his own term) with a pretty girl was to present her with a fancy decorated card bearing a flowery poem of delete sentiment.

The little village of Fussen at the end of our trip proved to be the most beautiful sight of all. It was a resort town at the foot of the Alps just over the mountains from Garmisch and Oberammergau. In former times the Bavarian kings, and also the archbishops of Augsburg had large estates nearby. There were three castles in the immediate neighborhood. Adjoining the handsome 17th Century Rathaus was the archbishop's palace, a splendid example of Bavarian baroque architecture. But the most impressive building of all was the castle in which I was to work. About six kilometers from the village, on the top of a steep rocky cliff at the very foot of the tallest mountain, was the castle of Neuschwanstein. It was one of many of the extravagant buildings erected by the eccentric Ludwig II at the height of the 19th Century romantic revival. The castle was impressive from picturesque Bavarian plain on one side and the magnificent Alps on the other was breathtaking. Ludwig had been an admirer and patron of the composer Richard Wagner, and the castle was a monument to the man and his music. The halls and principal rooms were decorated with dramatic mural scenes from his operas. On the top floor was a great concert hall built especially for the presentation of Wagner's works.

Our preliminary survey of the castle took nearly an entire day. The cache turned out to be about 6,000 items of fine paintings, sculpture, silver, archeological relics, antique tapestries, furniture, oriental carpets, and a large collection of rare books. Half of it was in its original crates. The rest was stored in orderly racks or bins in locked rooms. All principal rooms and hallways of the first three floors of the castle were literally stuffed with loot. The lowest storage level was connected by a winding stairway to the only usable loading entrance, twenty-five feet below.

The Rosenberg staff had set up a special atelier and art-reference library in one of the wings. Connected with these was a photo laboratory and also a small room full of interesting inventory records. One of my first moves was to ship Rosenberg's library and records to the Munich Collecting Point for Lieutenant Smythe to add to his central reference file. We converted the atelier into an office and supply rooms. It was a perfect setup. There were plenty of desks, chairs, lamps, typewriters, heating stoves, and quantities of office supplies. All we had to do was throw out Rosenberg's trash, hook up the lights, and set up the stoves. The signal sergeant of the local security regiment installed a captured German field telephone in the office and connected it to the civilian and military networks. In Fussen I employed two good German carpenters as handy-men. In a short time they installed stoves, extra lights, and improvised work-benches in the main kitchen and photo lab to provide packing shops. Fortunately we found quite a few carpenter tools and were able to purchase locally the rest that we needed. We also discovered a room full of most modern-type fire-fighting equipment. It even contained gas masks and asbestos suits.

A windfall in the form of an abandoned jeep gave us an additional car for errands. Our handy-man repaired it and made a fancy plywood body for it. My GI driver came back from a scrounging expedition with a fire siren, which we installed in place of its missing horn. We now had three vehicles of our own and the use of an old German charcoal-burner truck, so we set up our own gas dump and began to operate a regular shuttle service to Munich. This was necessary to bring in gas, mail, and special supplies. We also made continuous deliveries of questionable art objects to the Collecting Point, and brought transient MFA & A experts to and from Munich.

I took over the direction of the American Army guards and civilian caretakers staff at the castle and set up special procedures for security and fire prevention during the evacuation. It now looked as though we could begin evacuating the crated items at once, so I phoned Captain Rae to send down a couple of his best "professors" to go over all the material for a final identification check. At the same time, de Brye went off to the neighboring French zone to get his truck and security guards organized.

During the intervening time I gathered together a civilian office staff and labor crew. This presented a problem because I needed especially qualified assistants. For the sake of simplifying procedures we decided to keep all working records in French—that is, inventories, crate markings and shipping lists, and final receipts. Nearly all MFA & A personnel knew French, so a great deal of time could be saved by the elimination of bilingual recording. The Fussen Military Government detachment provided me with an excellent translator-secretary who could take my dictation in English and also speak and write French.

My second key employee was a little harder to find. I wanted a business man who knew his way among the neighboring merchants and manufacturers to help me requisition supplies. I also wanted this man to hire and manage the German labor crew. Through the Military Government detachment I hired Erwin, a former local hotel proprietor. He had been carefully checked and was honest and extremely resourceful. He became my most valuable employee, general manager, straw boss, man Friday, and ski instructor on Sundays.

With the aid of Erwin I started to organize a labor crew of about twenty men. The going was slow until we discovered a boys' school near the castle. It was a former Naval Cadet Camp for German boys from fourteen to eighteen years old. After the war the cadets whose families had become disorganized lived at the camp for want of a better place to go. A few instructors remained to conduct classes and keep order. To make a living, everyone at the school was obliged to work at whatever odd jobs they could find in the neighborhood. We hired the whole school, teachers and all. It was an excellent arrangement. The boys were glad to get the work. They were well disciplined and worked with military precision under their teachers as squad leaders.

The railway carloading required expert supervision because of the fragile material we were handling. There were a great many fine 14th and 15th Century paintings to be shipped. The old paint on their surfaces flaked off easily. It was not only necessary to pack them carefully but also to place them in the cars in a manner that would reduce jolting to a minimum. We needed an expert carloader to supervise this work at the railhead. Erwin brought in the owner of a large furniture-moving concern, who turned out to be a very capable man. (I heard later that the ERR had employed him to unload freight cars when they brought the loot to Fussen.) I assigned one teacher and eight cadets to him to make up the railhead squad.

During the next few days I spent a great deal of time negotiating with the R.T.O. (*Rail Transportation Officer*) at Kempten. I invited him to the castle and got him so interested in the job that he gave me deluxe service in spotting freight cars and dispatching the trains. By the time the experts finished checking the contents of the repository and de Brye brought in his trucks, we had twenty freight wagons on the siding at Fussen and were ready to roll the first shipment.

The 7-kilometer route to the railhead led down a steep, winding, unpaved road. I arranged with the military Government detachment to order the Kriese Strassmeister to see that the

road was plowed and sanded immediately after every snowfall. In spite of a very severe winter, the road was never out of use during our operation. The French supplied good trucks and an excellent crew of drivers. The best phasing we could work out was a shuttle of four trucks operating on the route at one time.

I had to be at the railhead a great deal of the time, and the rest of my working day was required to make arrangements for the purchase of a large quantity of crating lumber and other packing supplies which we needed immediately after we cleared out the packed cases. Captain Rae persuaded Lieutenant John Skilton to drop some important fine-arts work he was supervising at Würzburg to come over and take charge of the operations at the castle. While the trainloading was going on we brought in a crew of ten expert art packers from the Munich Collecting Point and started the preparation of the remaining uncrated material for a second shipment.

The trainloading for the first shipment required about five days. To provide security for the loaded cars during this period, we brought in the French gendarme escort. We billeted these guards in two pack wagons (caboose), which we equipped with stoves, bunks, lights, and fire extinguishers. These two guard vehicles were then placed at strategic positions in the freightyard.

The value of a single freight car loaded with art treasures was enormous. We were shipping many pictures by famous painters such as Rembrandt and Rubens. Many of them were scarcely over a foot square and were valued at-say-\$30,000 for the lesser ones. The number of such paintings that can be put in a single freight car will give some idea of the value of the payload for a single car. Once such high-value material left the castle it was of utmost importance to get it out of the transportation pipeline as soon as possible. The train would have to be dispatched as soon as the cars were loaded, and would have to proceed to Paris without interruption. This would require a high priority routing, and every precaution would have to be taken to keep the cars from getting lost en route. This latter hazard was quite common over the disorganized rail system through Germany and France. To keep the shipment together, the payload cars were placed between the two pack wagons; each of which carried half the security escort. The cars were then numbered in sequence and marked with the letters MFA. These symbols were about 18 inches high and marked in white paint on both sides of each car. I insisted, against the protests of the transportation people, that the train would have to be dispatched clear through to Paris as a single train, and that at no time should it be broken up or become attached to other freight trains.

Two weeks after we started operations at Neuschwanstein, we completed the trainloading, gave the guards an ample supply of 10-in-1 rations to supplement their bread, cheese, and wine, and sent the 22-car train off to Paris with our blessing and a prayer. It arrived at its destination in less than two days without mishap. The shipment totaled 634 crates of high-value loot.

Now the real work began, for there remained about 3,000 uncrated items to be prepared for shipment. The winter weather had set in earnest by this time, and we would have to work as fast as possible and then wait for a break of clear weather to get another sizable shipment down the mountain and off to Paris. At that time we were not sure whether we could finish the rest of the job during the winter. Lieutenant Skilton was called home, and I was left to carry on the work with only the two corporals to help me supervise the large German labor crew.

The cadets remained to help the ten expert packers from the Collecting Point. Some of the best were skillful enough to use tools. The others carried materials and treasures to the packing shops and assembled finished crates near the exits. We were able to salvage a great deal of lumber by knocking down the elaborate racks and bins after we cleared them. However, we used two carloads of lumber, two tons of wrapping paper, and twenty-five bales of excelsior before we finished.

The crating was fairly routine. All small objects were wrapped, padded, and packed in tight standard style-2 boxes. Furniture was double-wrapped, padded, and suspended in corner-braced crates. Carpets and textiles were sprinkled with moth flakes, rolled around padded poles, and wrapped with heavy paper. The only exceptional packing problems were an extra large painting and two very heavy ancient Roman carved stone sarcophagi.

The large painting was the famous "Three Graces" by Rubens. It was too large to fit in the standard closed freight car, so we made a special tight plywood box, lined with waterproof paper, insulated it against frost with excelsior padding, and shipped it on an open flat-car. When completed, the crate measured :275 centimeters square by 30 centimeters thick. A scaffold of heavy planks was constructed on the flatcar and the crate was set upright on edge and lashed securely to this framework. Even then we had to slope the scaffold 300 in order to clear tunnels. After the crate was in place it was covered by two heavy tarpaulins.

The sarcophagi were elaborately carved and had to be boxed in heavy padded cases. When crated, they weighed about a ton and a half each. Their excessive weight and the difficult stairs to the loading level were too much for the cadet labor squad: I was quite certain that someone in the town of Fussen had helped the Rosenberg gang drag these pieces into the castle, so I sent Erwin to find him. He came back with a building contractor, who was well equipped with winches, rollers, and block-and-tackle equipment. With his aid, the entire cadet school, and half the town of Fussen, we got the sarcophagi out of the castle and onto the train. I never stopped wondering at the fact that the same men who helped the looters move the treasure into the castle gave me such capable assistance in getting it out. In all such cases I received the same Unimaginative, methodical cooperation, and never had the slightest trouble with attempts at theft or deliberate damage. The older skilled workers in particular seemed solemnly happy as long as they were working at their special skills. It seemed not to matter that they were working for Americans now. Strange people, these Germans!

The only serious bottleneck in the work at the castle was a connecting hallway leading to the exit. For some unknown reason it was lined with shelves containing several hundred rare books on erotic subjects. Until we got this particular material packed, we had trouble with the entire staff stopping to and from work to look at the fascinating illustrations.

About halfway through the work, Captain Rae sent me another officer to take Skilton's place. This time it was a Naval officer, Lieutenant Charles Parkhurst. In civilian life he had been one of the curators at the National Gallery in Washington. In addition to being an outstanding art expert, he was a practical, levelheaded person, and was of great assistance in supervising routine mechanical work. He was also an expert skier, and between him and Erwin, I managed to learn to ski well enough to keep from falling down too often. After his arrival, we spent every Sunday on the superb ski-runs nearby.

After packing continuously for three weeks we had accumulated a sizable shipment; and a break came in the weather. Following the same procedures we used initially, we sent a second

train of thirteen cars and two pack wagons to Paris. It took another ten days to clear up the rest of the loot, which made up a final shipment of four cars.

The evacuation of the Neuschwanstein repository took from the 25th of October to the 2nd of December. The restitution totaled 6,000 items, which were packed in 1,200 crates. The three trains dispatched to Paris totaled a payload of thirty-five freight cars.

Upon completion of the Neuschwanstein job, I was ordered to start immediate preparations to evacuate the Buxheim repository near Memmingen, about 70 kilometers west of Fussen. While I was in Memmingen getting the Buxheim repository opened, Lieutenant Parkhurst remained in Fussen to close Neuschwanstein. We had accumulated a quantity of tools, miscellaneous equipment, packing supplies, and several skilled laborers, which we wished to use for the new job. Eventually Parkhurst brought over to Buxheim a truck-load of lumber, nine bales of excelsior, five 200-pound rolls of paper, fifty balls of wrapping twine, four kegs of nails, ten fire extinguishers, two heating stoves, a chest full of miscellaneous light bulbs and fixtures, an assortment of carpenters' tools, a typewriter, and about a year's supply of stationery. Captain de Brye had arranged with the MFA & A people in Paris to salvage the crating from the Neuschwanstein shipments, which resulted in twelve carloads of usable crates and excelsior being returned to Buxheim for use on the new job. Erwin and the two Fussen carpenters came over to the monastery with me, and we soon had an office and two packing rooms, completely equipped with heat, lights, telephone, and work benches.

The need to evacuate the Buxheim repository was most urgent for a number of reasons. The loot was stored, none too securely, in an unoccupied monastery. The buildings were old, damp, unheated, and in bad repair. None of the material was packed. A great many of the treasures were perishable small objects stored in open racks in rooms that could not be securely locked. The numerous ground level entrances to the monastery could not be watched continuously by the inadequate military guard who were assigned for that purpose. The monastery was a labyrinth of connected buildings, which included three churches, a school, dormitories, a dozen cottages for former monks, extensive farm buildings, and a large greenhouse. The entire inclosure covered about four city blocks, and it was crowded right into the middle of a little village. In spite of the "eintritt verboten" signs, the entire community used the various entrances as connecting thoroughfares for shortcuts from one side of the village to the other. The central files had listed the monastery as uninhabited, but during our two-and-a-half-months' stay in Buxheim, we were continually discovering new inhabitants holed up in the remote corners of the scattered buildings. They were mostly displaced Germans, camping out because of the housing shortage. Some of them turned out to be former employees of the ERR who had worked in the atelier of the repository. Fortunately, the loot was stored in one wing. I had all entrances except one barricaded, and then persuaded the commander of the local security regiment to increase the guard detail. After that we managed to keep everyone except the evacuation team out of the repository wing.

The Buxheim monastery had evidently been used by the Nazis as a collecting point for damaged and miscellaneous unidentified items. They had set up elaborately equipped ateliers and carpenter shops. There were a 159 living quarters for the former staff. Apparently there had been a colony of art experts and restorers for the ERR living a sort of Bohemian existence in these ancient holy buildings. This accounted for the extremely disorderly condition of the repository.

In the atelier we found numerous damaged paintings in the process of being restored. The shops were filled with broken antique wood carvings, chinaware, silver, and glassware. Eighty per cent of the material stored here was made up of fragile damaged small objects. On the floor of a small chapel we found a collection of fine oriental carpets and Aubusson and Gobelin tapestries. There were about 350 items in this particular lot. We also discovered about 200 paintings belonging to the Russian government, and a large room filled with portfolios, rare prints, drawings and etchings from the Royal Bavarian Arts Collection, which had been moved from the Residence Museum in Munich before the bombing.

The first survey of this hodgepodge of fragile, unpacked, and unidentified material got me to wondering if we could possibly evacuate the repository before summer. Everything would have to be carefully checked to establish ownership. If we sent any of the material to Munich for checking, it would all have to be as carefully packed as if it were to be sent directly to an owner nation. Some of the records we found at Neuschwanstein led us to believe that most of the material at Buxheim was French-owned. If that could be proved, we could make another quick restitution direct to France. So we called for the art experts from the Collecting Point, and with their aid Lieutenant Parkhurst went over every item in the place. It was painstaking work, but in one week's time we had every piece segregated that could be sent to France. The remainder of the loot (about ten truckloads of questionable material) was sent to the Munich Collecting Point for further disposition.

From then on it was a simple matter of shipping and packing according to the procedures adopted for the Neuschwanstein evacuation. Parkhurst's aid as an art expert, as well as a practical general assistant, had been invaluable to me, but he was needed for important work at Munich, so I agreed to carry on the operation from then on by myself.

We brought down the same crew of expert packers from Munich that had been loaned to us for the Neuschwanstein evacuation. To their number we added several skilled carpenters whom we, had picked up in Fussen, and began to settle down to the long, slow process of preparing some 5,000-odd items of extremely fragile art objects for shipment. Nearly every piece presented an individual problem in packing. Two of the special crates we developed are particularly interesting. To prevent improper freight handling of small statues and ceramic figures we packed them in a special "right-side-up box". This box could be stowed in a vehicle conveniently only if it were set on its broad base. The top of this type box was made in the form of a peak so that it would be impossible to place other heavy cases on top of it. Another special crate was constructed for a particularly fragile but heavy and bulky archeological item-an ancient Chinese fresco on plaster, which had been cut from a temple wall. It was a chunk of crumbling plaster 3 feet by 8 feet by 6 inches thick, held together by a light wood frame. Its preciously decorated surface was badly cracked, and the entire piece was in danger of falling apart. Shipping this item by truck or train was a great risk, but it certainly could not be left behind. The French representatives agreed to take the chance and let us try to pack it and include it in the shipment. From experience with other shipments we had learned that the most severe shocks of a moving truck are those caused by sudden stops or starts, so our crate would have to be especially built to minimize jolting of this type. We first made a tight plywood case that covered the undecorated sides and back of the fresco. Over the decorated surface we taped soft pad of tissue paper, then heavy wrapping paper and finally an inch of fine excelsior. We then placed this package, face up, in an oversized box on top of a deep cushion of excelsior, which was about three feet deep. This would give sufficient insulation for the comparatively less severe vertical shocks. The outside box provided a space of four inches around the side and ends of the smaller package. The sides were stuffed with

excelsior, but each of the ends was wedged tight by three compressed coil upholstery springs that were nailed to the frame of the fresco and to the ends of the outer box. This provided a secure but resilient fastening. The box was then placed lengthwise in the freight car, so that the springs took up the impact of the horizontal shocks of the moving train. No packing material other than the light pad was allowed to rest on the delicate surface of the fresco. In order to call attention to the extremely fragile contents, the crate was left open and plainly labeled. This was the toughest packing job I had ever supervised. The fresco arrived safely at its destination.

The railhead at Buxheim was only five hundred meters from the repository. We decided to pack every thing and then wait for a break in the weather to rush the trainloading in a single operation. The weather was very bad and we had to get the Kreise road crew to gravel part of the soft muddy road to the railroad siding. Since the shuttle from repository to railhead was so short we figured that the train-loading time would be negligible. The 14th Regiment at Memmingen was most cooperative and had supplied many of our needs at Buxheim. They were willing to furnish trucks and drivers for our work for short periods of time, so we used their transportation for the final train loading rather than make the more difficult arrangements of bringing in a French truck crew.

Captain de Brye called in a train escort of twelve men and an officer to guard the siding and help with the loading. We evacuated the entire repository in five days, in spite of a severe snow-storm that continued throughout the loading period. The train consisted of a payload of twenty-two freight cars. Nine hundred and fifty crates were required; the total number of items shipped came to an even 5,000.

Buxheim was the last of the large outlying Bavarian repositories to be evacuated. The smaller ones were being systematically evacuated to the Munich Central Collecting Point by the local Military Government detachments. In the months we had worked at Neuschwanstein and Buxheim the collecting point had been able to catch up on its backlog. It was now shipping about a dozen carloads monthly to each of the Allied nations. The log-jam of art restitution was definitely broken. The MFA & A men in Paris were asking us to slow up so they could find room for the tons of loot that was pouring in.

Shortly after we closed Buxheim I was ordered home for separation. On the way to the port of embarkation I stopped off at Paris to visit our collecting point in the Musée de Jeu de Paume. They were preparing a special public exhibition of the restituted French art treasures. It was a great satisfaction to recognize among the display so many pieces that my evacuation team had had a hand in returning.