



UNDERSTANDING  
SACRIFICE

# Activity: Saving Art during Wartime: A Monument Man's Mission



## Guiding question:

How and why did professional artists and art historians serve in the European Theater of World War II?

### DEVELOPED BY CHERIE REDELINGS

**Grade Level(s):** 9-12

**Subject(s):** Art, Art History, Social Studies

**Cemetery Connection:** Netherlands American Cemetery

**Fallen Hero Connection:** Captain Walter J. Huchthausen



**NHD**  
NATIONAL  
HISTORY DAY

## Overview

Students will understand and evaluate the purpose of the Monuments, Fine Art, and Archives Commission (MFAA) during World War II. They will investigate the career of the only U.S. member of the MFAA killed in action, Captain Walter J. Huchthausen. Students will consider multiple viewpoints in the modern controversy over returning artworks removed from their original site during World War II.

## Historical Context

Captain Walter Huchthausen of the Ninth Army served as a member of the Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives Commission (MFAA) in World War II. The purpose of the MFAA was to protect historic art and cultural monuments from war damage and to find and return articles of cultural importance that had been removed during the war. Huchthausen was uniquely suited to this work because he spoke German fluently and taught art and architecture at the University of Minnesota.

After the Battle of Aachen in 1944, Huchthausen entered the historic city with the Ninth Army to assess damage and make repairs. Much of the city was devastated. Huchthausen moved quickly, organizing recovery and restoration efforts across the area. He found a large cache of art in Aachen's Suermondt Museum. Huchthausen used the building as a base from which to direct operations. Through his interrogation of German prisoners, Huchthausen was able to pinpoint 30 repositories of art hidden by the Nazis. Huchthausen was killed during the Battle of the Ruhr Pocket while working to salvage an altarpiece near Aachen. Men like Walter Huchthausen served a unique role in the war, preserving the historical and cultural heritage of Europe. Working on the front lines was a dangerous job, and Huchthausen gave his life protecting the art that he loved. He, along with more than 8,000 Americans, is buried in Netherlands American Cemetery.

*“The MFAA - the organization for which the Monuments Men worked - was an amazing group of individuals that came together in a completely unprecedented endeavor. Their mission, to save art from the ravages of war, is one that stirs the heart of every art teacher. I found that it stirs students' hearts, too, when they hear the stories of these unlikely warriors - professors, museum curators, and artists.”*

— Cherie Redelings

Redelings is a teacher at Francis Parker School in San Diego, California.

## Objectives

At the conclusion of this lesson, students will be able to

- Understand the motives for the creation of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Commission;
- Explain the role of MFAA officers in Europe from 1944 – 1946;
- Reflect on the value of cultural heritage during war; and
- Discuss issues involved in protecting art during war and returning displaced art after war.

## Documents Used ★ indicates an ABMC source

### Primary Sources

Photograph, Captain Walter Huchthausen

Photograph, *Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) Officer James Rorimer supervises U.S. soldiers recovering looted paintings from Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany during World War II, April-May, 1945*

National Archives and Records Administration

[i0.wp.com/prologue.blogs.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2014/01/rape-of-europa.jpg](https://i0.wp.com/prologue.blogs.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/9/2014/01/rape-of-europa.jpg)

### Secondary Sources

Documentary trailer, *The Rape of Europa*

[youtube.com/watch?v=h0iL7k\\_R0LM](https://youtube.com/watch?v=h0iL7k_R0LM)

“Monuments Men: On the Front Line to Save Europe’s Art, 1942–1946”

Archives of American Art, Smithsonian Institution

[aaa.si.edu/exhibitions/monuments-men](https://aaa.si.edu/exhibitions/monuments-men)

Netherlands American Cemetery Webpage ★

American Battle Monuments Commission

[abmc.gov/Netherlands](https://abmc.gov/Netherlands)

## Materials

- The Career of a Monuments Man
- The MFAA
- Art in Wartime: Understanding the Issues
- Restitution Summit: Student Handout for the German Team
- Restitution Summit: Student Handout for the Ukrainian Team

## Lesson Preparation

### Activity One: Researching the MFAA

- Print one copy of The Career of a Monuments Man or one copy of The MFAA (depending on the reading or grade level of the class) for each student.
- Print one copy of the Art in Wartime Activity for each student.
- Divide the class into groups of three.
- Provide computers for each student or group (optional).

### Activity Two: Restitution Summit

- Divide the class into two large groups.
- Print one copy of the Restitution Summit: Student Handout for German Team for one half of the class.
- Print one copy of the Restitution Summit: Student Handout for Ukrainian Team for the other half of the class.

## Procedure

### Activity One: Researching the MFAA (45 minutes)

- Show the trailer for the *Rape of Europa*, a documentary about looted art during World War II (02:37)
  - Explain that European art works were damaged and displaced during World War II. The Allies sent a group of artists, scholars, technicians and historians, the MFAA, to protect the works and restore them to their original owners.
- Divide class into groups of three.
- Read either *The Career of a Monuments Man* or *The MFAA* at teacher discretion.
- Distribute the *Art in Wartime: Understanding the Issues* handout and ask each group to read and discuss one of the three issues in the handout.
- Ask students to share the highlights of their *Art in Wartime* discussion with the class.

### Activity Two: Restitution Summit (45 minutes)

- Explain that hundreds of art works removed during World War II are still displaced and there is controversy concerning the return of these art works.
- Divide the class into two groups - a German viewpoint team and a Russian/Ukrainian viewpoint team.
- Distribute the appropriate Restitution Summit Handout (German Team or Ukrainian Team) that corresponds to their group's perspective to learn about the modern controversy surrounding the return of art works displaced by World War II.
- Meet in teams to plan a strategy for presenting their point of view at the restitution summit.
- Engage in a restitution summit, where each group presents their point of view and discusses solutions to the problem of displaced artwork in debate or discussion format.
  - At the end of the summit, the class can vote to decide what should be done with the art in question.

## Assessment

- Using the Restitution Summit Rubric, evaluate student contributions to the summit.
  - Did they integrate the information from the MFAA activity into their discussion?
  - Did they present one point of view clearly?
  - Did they construct reasonable arguments to support their point of view?
  - Did they assess strategy, considering the other point of view and come up with solutions?

## Methods for Extension

- Students can write out a policy statement after the Restitution Summit, outlining how to treat art works of disputed provenance.
- Students can write a letter to Huchthausen's parents, explaining the importance of his work as a Monuments Man.
- Students can research Huchthausen's career before his work as a Monuments Man, and view his artwork.
- Students can search for articles about the return of art works displaced in World War II.
- Students can listen to oral interviews of Monuments Men.
- Students can view the documentary, *The Rape of Europa*.
- Students can watch the film, *Woman in Gold*.
- Students can read an excerpt from the book, *The Rape of Europa*.
- The American Battle Monuments Commission maintains U.S. military cemeteries overseas. These cemeteries are permanent memorials to the fallen, but it is important that students know the stories of those who rest here. To learn more about the stories of Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice, visit [abmc.gov/education](http://abmc.gov/education) and [NHDSilentHeroes.org](http://NHDSilentHeroes.org).
- Teachers can enhance students' interest in World War II and art by exploring these related lesson plans:
  - [What Do You See?: Using Photographs to Learn about World War II](#)
  - [Who's Who and Why?: Examining the Sculptures at Lorraine American Cemetery](#)

## Adaptations

- For younger learners and students requiring extra support, teachers can read the Student Handout aloud to students or with students, and assist students in filling out the Student Handouts.
- For a very brief lesson, teachers can use the PowerPoint slides to give students a general idea of the MFAA's role in World War II.
- For the Restitution Summit, teachers should ensure that each group has a student or students who can organize several speakers on different aspects of the topic.

# The Career of a Monuments Man



## Before the War

Walter Huchthausen was one of five children born to German immigrant Julius Huchthausen and his wife, Ida. Julius served as a Lutheran minister in various churches in Oklahoma and Washington before settling in Minnesota during the 1920s.

## An award-winning architect

Walter attended the University of Minnesota. He joined an academic fraternity and an honorary art fraternity. He also served as the art editor for the university's magazine, the Minnesota Techno-Log. Huchthausen won several awards for academics and art. One of the most prestigious, the Magney and Husler Prize, was from the American Institute of Architects for the student with the highest academic standing over four years.

He also created an award-winning design for the university's architectural drawing competition.

Huchthausen earned a master's degree in architecture from Harvard University. He then studied in Germany under a Harvard fellowship. His fluency in German would later be instrumental in his service in World War II. In 1939, Huchthausen returned to the University of Minnesota to teach architectural design, drawing, and painting. During the next few years, he designed buildings, including a Gothic revival church, in St. Paul. He also created designs for monuments and painted watercolors.

## Military Experience

Walter Huchthausen left the University of Minnesota in 1942, at age 37, and enlisted in the Army Air Force. He trained at Ellington Field in Texas and was deployed to Great Britain. While in London, a Luftwaffe bombing raid injured Huchthausen. After he recovered, the Monuments and Fine Arts and Archives Commission (MFAA) recruited him for frontline work in Germany.

The Allied armies housed the MFAA program in the Civil Affairs and Military Government Section. Created in 1943 in the United States, it eventually grew to include over 300 men and women from 13 countries. Many of them, like Huchthausen, had worked as artists, architects, museum curators, or educators before the war. Their role was to protect cultural treasures endangered by the war.

They also worked to collect artifacts displaced by the war. Some MFAA officers took part in battle preparations, advising military strategists of culturally important sites so pilots could target alternate sites. When warfare damaged cultural treasures, MFAA officers moved into the area with front line troops to assess damage and make repairs.

## Recovery efforts in the former seat of Charlemagne's empire

By the fall of 1944, Huchthausen was staff officer for the MFAA in the 9th Army in France. He moved with the 9th as it fought its way into western Germany. The army entered Charlemagne's 1,100 year old capital in the city of Aachen in late October. Both sides had suffered heavy losses in the Battle of Aachen. Much of the city was devastated.

Huchthausen moved quickly, organizing recovery and restoration efforts across the city. He found a key repository of the area's art in Aachen's Suermondt Museum. Huchthausen used the building as a base from which to direct operations. Another MFAA officer, George Stout, reported that he had never seen so many altarpieces in one place as he had under Huchthausen's care in the Aachen museum.

## Hidden repositories of art looted by the Nazis

During the last year of the war, the MFAA began discovering hidden repositories of art looted by the Nazis. The Nazis had evacuated some of the art from museums for "safekeeping." Some they had confiscated from Jewish families. Some enriched the estates of top Nazi commanders like Hermann Goering. Due to the swift Allied advance, the Nazis deposited many of these treasures in castles, mines, and even jail cells as they retreated. The MFAA was not yet in a position to recover this hidden art, except in the area of Aachen, where Huchthausen came across a key find.

In February 1945, Huchthausen received record of a meeting of German officials from the Rhine province. The document contained coded information on 30 repositories identified by the Germans for safeguarding looted artifacts. The location that housed the art stolen from Aachen, however, was a mystery. Through his interrogation of German prisoners, Huchthausen discovered that this site was called "Siegen." The soldier who transcribed Huchthausen's interrogation of German prisoners transposed the "ie." Because of the misspelling, it took the MFAA some time to find the repository on their maps.

While Huchthausen protected altarpieces near Aachen and assembled information about repositories further east, the Supreme Allied Command Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) was planning its advance across the Rhine into Germany. Their goal was to encircle the bulk of the German army in the west in the region directly east of Aachen.

This region, the Ruhr, was the industrial heart of Germany. It supplied coal, oil, chemicals, and power. It also manufactured tanks, aircraft, submarines, and cannons. Allied armies crossed the Rhine on March 24, 1945, in an operation known as Varsity. The 9th Army, including Huchthausen, was assigned to the northern sector. By April 1, Allied armies encircled the entire Ruhr area.

On April 2, Huchthausen and Lieutenant Sheldon Keck, a fellow MFAA officer, traveled north of the Ruhr Pocket by jeep to recover an important cultural artifact. As they were driving, German machine gun fire hit their jeep. A shot to the head killed Huchthausen immediately. His body fell onto Keck, protecting him from injury. American troops found Keck alive in a foxhole later that day.

## Commemoration

On April 2, the same day that Huchthausen died, soldiers found six wooden crates in a damp iron pit in a town called Siegen ("see-gen"). The crates included a silver bust of Charlemagne and paintings by Dutch masters. They also contained the original manuscript of Beethoven's Sixth Symphony and other priceless artifacts. Because of Huchthausen's tireless efforts to find, recover, and preserve cultural treasures, the MFAA was able to return hundreds of artifacts to their original homes.

### **"A signal contribution to the cultural preservation of Europe"**

David Finlay, a member of the Roberts Commission that created the MFAA, wrote to Huchthausen's parents: "Captain Huchthausen was, in the opinion of this Commission, one of the outstanding Monuments Officers in the field, and his work in the Valley of the Loire and at Aachen will remain as a signal contribution to the cultural preservation of Europe."

The work of the MFAA remained largely unknown for the next half century. In 2007, however, both houses of Congress passed a resolution honoring the soldiers who served in the MFAA. In the course of his statement of support, Senator Jim Inhofe singled out Huchthausen for praise.

For heroic service against the enemy, Huchthausen received the Bronze Star. He also received the Purple Heart. Huchthausen is buried in the Netherlands American Cemetery at Margraten.



## The MFAA (Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives)



In 1942, American cultural groups, including university and museum directors, became increasingly concerned about the welfare of art in war-torn Europe. On behalf of these groups, Chief Justice of the Supreme Court Harlan F. Stone asked President Franklin Roosevelt to form an organization for the “the protection and conservation of works of art and of artistic and historic monuments and records in Europe.”

In April 1943, the president created the Commission for the Protection and Salvage of Artistic and Historic Monuments in War Areas, the “Roberts Commission.” This commission, in turn, created the MFAA, a group of art historians, architects, artists, and conservation experts who worked with Allied military units to identify, preserve, and protect cultural property endangered by the war.

In all, over 300 servicemen and civilians from 13 countries served in the MFAA. Some MFAA officers took part in battle preparations, advising military strategists of culturally important sites so troops could avoid these areas. When Allied troops secured an area, MFAA personnel moved in to find known art works and to stabilize cultural property damaged by war. As Allied troops advanced, the MFAA found thousands of displaced works of art in mines, jail cells, and abandoned buildings.



### A Monuments Man's Contribution

Walter Huchthausen was the MFAA staff officer for the 9th Army in France. He moved with the 9th as it fought its way into western Germany. The army entered Charlemagne's 1,100 year old capital in the city of Aachen in late October. Both sides had suffered heavy losses in the Battle of Aachen. Much of the city was devastated.

Huchthausen moved quickly, organizing recovery and restoration efforts across the city. Although he found a key repository of the area's art in Aachen's Suermond Museum, many of the most valuable pieces had been moved, some to Dresden, others to an undetermined location. Huchthausen used the museum as a base from which to direct operations. Another MFAA officer, George Stout, reported that he had never seen so many altarpieces in one place as he had under Huchthausen's care in the Suermond museum.

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## Restitution

During the Yalta conference, in February 1945, Stalin demanded that Germany pay \$20 million in reparations at the end of the war. He proposed that this sum be split, with half going to the Soviet Union and the other half to Britain and the United States. The Big Three discussed the use of art and cultural property as reparations, eventually deciding that they would establish a Reparations Committee to decide how and where to bestow displaced art.

Some officials in the United States favored "the use of works of art as a basis for reparations." However, the Roberts Commission declared that "we are sufficiently civilized not to engage in looting ourselves." The U.S. never confiscated art for reparations.

As the war in Europe waned, General Eisenhower directed the MFAA to collect property displaced by the war in order to restore it to the rightful owners. Two primary collecting points were set up in Munich and Wiesbaden, Germany, in which thousands of objects awaited restitution. Soviet troops also collected art as they advanced westward, with a view to using the objects as reparations. Many of these art works were restored to Germany after the war, but a significant number remain in Russia and former Soviet areas today.

The MFAA was disbanded in 1946 when the State Department took over the task of restoring art works to their owners.

## Art in Wartime: Understanding the Issues

At the age of 37, Walter Huchthausen left his job as a professor at the University of Minnesota and a designer and architect of public buildings to join the war effort. Several other artists, architects, and museum personnel did the same.

In December 1942, the director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, Francis Taylor, heard about the possibility of serving on a team of specialists to protect monuments in war zones. He wrote :

*"I do not know yet how the Federal Government will decide to organize this, but one thing is crystal clear; that we will be called upon for professional service, either in civilian or military capacity. I personally have offered my services, and am ready for either."*

Do you think it was a good use of U.S. resources to protect art? What kinds of arguments could be advanced for and against the creation of the MFAA?

Arguments for the creation of the MFAA:

Arguments against the creation of the MFAA:

Walter Huchthausen lost his life trying to salvage an altarpiece in the Ruhr Valley, Germany. What do you think about the value of protecting art and architecture in comparison to the value of protecting a human life?

Arguments for use of human lives to protect art during war:

Arguments against the use of human lives to protect art during war:



Germany had purchased some of the panels of the famous Ghent altarpiece (above) before World War I, then removed other panels during its occupation of Belgium in World War I. Under the terms of the Treaty of Versailles in 1918, Germany was forced to surrender all the panels to Belgium as reparations for German aggression. In July 1942, after invading Belgium, Hitler ordered Dr. Ernst Buchner, head of the Bavarian Museums, to bring the Ghent Altarpiece to Berlin. When World War II ended, all of the panels were returned to Belgium. Allied nations discussed whether art and cultural items should form part of the reparations that Germany owed after World War II.

Arguments in favor of using art and cultural objects as reparations in war:

Arguments against using art and cultural objects as reparations in war:

# Restitution Summit: Handout for German Team

## Ukraine Museum Refuses to Return Looted German Paintings

The management of a Ukrainian art museum on Saturday, Nov. 8, 2008 refused to return to Germany dozens of paintings brought to the Soviet Union as a result of World War II.



### **As the Red Army swept across Germany to Berlin, artworks went missing on the way**

Officials from the Simferopol Art Museum in south Ukraine told Germany's Foreign Ministry the museum "had no plans to give up" the 87 paintings thought originally to have belonged to the Suermondt-Ludwig Art Museum in the German city of Aachen, a Foreign Ministry spokeswoman said.

A pair of Bavarian tourists photographed the paintings during a 2007 visit to Ukraine's Crimea province and sent copies of the shots to the

Aachen museum after finding the paintings listed as "whereabouts unknown" on the Aachen museum Web site.

The art works, mostly by Western European artists, had been transferred from Aachen to the German city of Meissen for safekeeping in 1942 and had been thought to have been lost or destroyed during the later Allied invasion of Germany.

According to the tourist, one painting featured an image of the inner court of Nuremberg's St. Lorenz Church and a still-legible German inscription on the frame identifying the work as part of the Aachen collection.

Meissen was in the Soviet zone of control during Allied occupation of Germany.

"It is explicit, here (in the Simferopol museum) are on display 87 paintings from Aachen's Suermondt-Ludwig Museum," said Philip Becker, curator of the museum's current "Schattengalerie" exhibition.

### **Disputed paintings at center of ownership row**

Text descriptions accompanying the exhibition in Ukraine gave the impression that the current ownership of the paintings had been resolved on the government level.

Becker said he was surprised to find out about the location of the art works a year after the Ukrainian exhibit began.

"The most important thing is to know where the paintings are, that they exist and that they are in good condition," Becker said.

Simferopol's spokeswoman told reporters the museum had no intention of returning the paintings.

The Ukrainian museum's management reportedly justified its intention not to give up the paintings, citing a Ukrainian law giving people or organizations having suffered property damage during the German invasion of the Soviet Union during WWII legal title to German property captured by Red Army troops in later stages of the war.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Ukraine Museum Refuses to Return Looted Art Works." *Deutsche Welle*, 8 November, 2008. DW. Web. 25 August 2015.

Since the article above was written, officials from Germany and from the Ukraine have tried to work out their differences regarding the Suermondt Museum's art works. You and your team, museum officials from Aachen, Germany, have been selected to represent Germany in the dispute over art taken from Germany by Russian troops during World War II.

Read the article above. Prepare the following with your team:

- A policy statement about the return of looted art.
  - When is it right to return art?
  - Should all art taken from another country be returned?
  - Why should German art taken by the Soviets be returned?
- A pragmatic statement about the return of looted art.
  - When should the art be returned?
  - How much art should be returned?
  - Should there be any compensation for the art - should Ukraine, Russia, or Germany pay for the art?

Additional resources available on the web:

<http://www.dw.com/en/art-and-compromise-in-the-crimea-crisis/a-17546700>  
[http://www.suermondt-ludwig-museum.de/projekte/verluste/verlustgemaelde\\_en1/index.html](http://www.suermondt-ludwig-museum.de/projekte/verluste/verlustgemaelde_en1/index.html)

Decide with your team who will present each aspect of your argument and proposal.

My comments: \_\_\_\_\_

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Take notes on the proposal of the Ukrainian team, so you can respond to them: \_\_\_\_\_

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After the discussion, a tribunal will decide the fate of the art works. Record the decision and your reaction to the decision:

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Since the article above was written, officials from Germany and from the Ukraine have tried to work out their differences regarding the Suermondt Museum's art works. You and your team, museum officials from the Simferopol Museum, in Ukraine, have been selected to represent Russia in the dispute over art taken from Germany by Soviet Russia during World War II.

Read the article above. Prepare the following with your team:

- A policy statement about the return of looted art.
  - When is it right to return art?
  - Should all art taken from another country be returned?
  - Why should Russia keep art works taken from Germany in World War II?
- A pragmatic statement about the ownership of the Aachen art works.
  - How should the problem be resolved?
  - Should some art should be returned?
  - Should there be any compensation for the art - should Ukraine, Russia, or Germany pay for the art?

Additional resources available on the web:

<http://www.dw.com/en/art-and-compromise-in-the-crimea-crisis/a-17546700>  
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# Restitution Summit Rubric

## Group Evaluation

Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Emerging
Information presented in the debate was clear, accurate, detailed and thorough.	Most information presented in the debate was clear, accurate, detailed and thorough.	Some information presented in the debate was clear and accurate, but lacked complexity and detail.	Information contained major inaccuracies or was unusually unclear and unfocused.
Counter-arguments offered were relevant, and strong.	Most counter-arguments offered were relevant, and strong.	Counter-arguments were offered, but some were weak or irrelevant.	No counter-arguments were offered.
Responses indicated students listened carefully to their own arguments and those of the other team. They responded accurately and respectfully to the other point of view.	Responses indicated students listened somewhat to their own arguments and those of the other team. They responded to the other point of view with some degree of accuracy.	Responses indicated students occasionally listened to their own or the other team's arguments. Some responses were off target or sarcastic.	Responses indicated that students failed to listen to key arguments of both teams. Several responses were irrelevant or inappropriate.
Students consistently used vocal inflection, eye contact, enthusiasm, and gestures.	Students often used vocal inflection, eye contact, enthusiasm, and gestures.	Students occasionally used vocal inflection, eye contact, enthusiasm, and gestures.	Students seldom used vocal inflection, eye contact, enthusiasm, and gestures.

## Photograph, Captain Walter Huchthausen



# ***Photograph, Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) Officer James Rorimer supervises U.S. soldiers recovering looted paintings from Neuschwanstein Castle in Germany during World War II, April-May, 1945***

National Archives and Records Administration

