



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

(May 5, 2015) Washington, DC - Today at a State Department press conference, Victoria Nuland, Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs; Ambassador Peter Wittig, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany to the United States; and Robert M. Edsel, Founder and Chairman of the *Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art*, and No. 1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Monuments Men*, announced two separate discoveries of important paintings missing since World War II. The Monuments Men Foundation turned over custody of all five paintings to the Federal Republic of Germany for return to their rightful owners. These paintings are part of the hundreds of thousands of cultural items, missing since the end of the war, which the Monuments Men Foundation hopes to help recover in the coming years through leads received through its toll free tip line.

In early 2014, in conjunction with the release of the George Clooney film based on Mr. Edsel's book, the Monuments Men Foundation established a toll free tip line, 1-866-WWII-ART, in order to receive leads about lost and missing artworks and other cultural treasures. Following Mr. Edsel's mention of the tip line number during an interview on the the Glenn Beck Radio Show, the Foundation received dozens of phone calls including one concerning two paintings in the possession of heirs to Ms. Margaret Reeb. Numerous conversations with her heirs followed leading to detailed information about the paintings, including photos, and Ms. Reeb's purchase of them. Ms. Reeb bought the paintings in late 1945 while serving in Germany as part of the United States Special Services as a librarian.

In this instance, research into determining the rightful owners proved simple. Both paintings had been at Castle Friedrichshof (today known as the Schlosshotel Kronberg, just north of Frankfurt), which in April 1945 was confiscated by American forces and converted into an officer's club. These paintings have enormous importance for reasons besides their artistic value: they once belonged to the eldest daughter of Queen Victoria, Princess Victoria (Empress Friedrich), who built the castle. Her royal seal appears on the reverse of one of the paintings. The other painting is actually a portrait of Princess Victoria as a child being held by Her Majesty, Queen Victoria. These paintings would have been among the many personal belongings that accompanied the Princess to Germany for her marriage to Frederick III.

Earlier this year, Mr. Edsel met with Donatus Landgraf von Hessen in Kronberg to discuss details of this discovery. The Landgraf had with him the actual inventory books of the family belongings, which make specific mention of both paintings. About the return of the two paintings, *Madonna and Child* (Queen Victoria and her oldest daughter), and *Charles I in Three Positions*, the Landgraf stated: "We are very excited for the paintings to return to the collection. We want to express our gratitude to the Monuments Men Foundation for their work reuniting these and other items with their rightful owners".

Margaret Reeb's nephew, Mike Holland, commented: "My aunt was from a generation that grew up making sacrifices and putting others before themselves". "I believe that working with the Monuments Men Foundation honors her legacy and is a testament to her personal character and patriotism. We are excited to know that these paintings will now be returned to their rightful owners," said Mr. Holland.

In August 2014 the Foundation received a call from James Hetherington who stated that he had several

paintings that had been in Europe during the war. Mr. Hetherington had recently learned of the Monuments Men Foundation after seeing information provided at the end of *The Monuments Men* film. Hetherington's step-father, Major William Oftebro, a World War II officer who died many years ago, mailed the paintings home to his wife, James' mother, after the war. Major Oftebro served in the 750th Tank Battalion and received the Bronze Star on April 28, 1945. He informed his family that he had won the paintings in a poker game. After several interviews Mr. Hetherington brought the paintings to the office of the Foundation for examination. As in the case of the Friedrichshof paintings, determining the rightful owner proved straightforward: all three paintings contained museum labels and identifying marks of the Joachim-Ernst-Stiftung, a German Foundation whose art collections had been placed on loan to museums and historic houses in and around the city of Dessau. That collection is now part of the Anhaltische Gemäldegalerie Dessau collection.

In a recent letter to the Monuments Men Foundation, Dessau Museum officials stated that "These three paintings you mentioned from the collection of the Anhalt Art Gallery Dessau (inventory numbers 57, 205 and 273) were stored since 30 August 1943 together with other artistic treasures from the Gemäldegalerie in a potassium mine called Solvayhall near Bernburg (Anhalt). They were in crate no. 31 in which a total of 16 paintings were packed. All 16 paintings from this crate are part of our war losses." Dr. Norbert Michels, Director of the Anhaltische Gemäldegalerie Schloss Georgium in Dessau commented about the return of the paintings by Frans Francken III, Christian Wilhelm Ernst Dietrich and Franz de Paula Ferg: "It is with great joy that we welcome these paintings back to our collection and we are very thankful to the Monuments Men Foundation for their important work".

Upon receiving the news that these paintings would return to his town, Peter Kuras, the Mayor of Dessau stated: "Thanks to such fortunate circumstances, three important paintings can be returned to the Anhaltische Gemäldegalerie Dessau. It is not just a question of luck however. All art-loving citizens of the city of Dessau extend their gratitude to the Monuments Men Foundation whose persistence and diligence has led to the rightful return of artworks misplaced during times of conflict and war. Presumably also, George Clooney's film *The Monuments Men*, filmed in Saxony-Anhalt, the federal state of where Dessau is located, brought the issue to public attention. It is always a pleasure when film and real life events come together in an enlightening way."

Assistant Secretary Nuland commented on the occasion: "We're lucky to have private organizations and individuals in the United States, like the Monuments Men Foundation and Robert Edsel, to work with us, to bring missing cultural property to light, and to return it to its rightful owners. We're equally fortunate to have families like the Hollands and the Hetheringtons who cared for these works of art for 70 years and decided to reach out to the Monuments Men Foundation. Today's ceremony is only possible because of your generosity and your deep sense of justice."

The added visibility of the work of the Monuments Men Foundation has greatly increased the number of calls and emails received from veterans and their heirs who don't know the importance of items they may have picked up during their service (or may have inherited from those who did serve), or that anyone is looking for the items. Mr. Edsel stated, "these paintings are just the tip of the iceberg of the hundreds of thousands of paintings and other cultural items still missing since WWII, some of which will be located in the coming years. In fact, the Foundation will be making additional announcements later this year. The families of Major William Oftebro and Margaret Reeb have set a great example, just as the Monuments

Men set the standard for the protection of artistic and cultural treasures during armed conflict and their post-war return. We at the Monuments Men Foundation honor that legacy by completing their mission; we hope that through our toll free tip line we can illuminate the path home for many more missing items and family treasures.”

About the Monuments Men Foundation

The Monuments Men Foundation for the Preservation of Art is a recipient of the National Humanities Medal, the highest honor given in the United States for excellence in the Humanities field. The Foundation was created to raise public awareness of the 350 men and women from thirteen nations, many of whom were museum directors, curators, and educators, who protected monuments and other cultural treasures from the destruction of World War II. By 1945, these heroes of civilization had tracked, located and later returned more than 5 million artistic and cultural items stolen by Hitler and the Nazis. For more information about the Monuments Men Foundation, please visit www.monumentsmenfoundation.org.

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