



COURTESY OF THE MINT MUSEUM (CHARLOTTE, NC)
MUSEUM BOOK CLUB GUIDE

The Monuments Men

ROBERT EDSSEL

The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History—“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.” Page numbers refer to the 2010, Center Street paperback edition.

1. Robert Edsel calls the Monuments Men, “The Heroes of Civilization.” What does he mean? What common traits or aspects did these men possess? What kept them going during incredibly difficult and often miserable times?
2. Discuss the Monuments Men. Which ones were you more drawn to? Why? What in their personal stories drew you in? Which Monuments Men sacrificed the most?
3. Would museum employees, librarians, and artists do today what the Monuments Men did during and after WWII?
4. Are there similar atrocities taking place today? Examples? What’s different?
5. Discuss Hitler’s fascination with art and its power. What about societies’ fascination with art? Is it strictly monetary fascination or is there more to it?
6. On page 393, Monuments Man Harry Ettlinger states, “My knowledge of the Holocaust started really with the realization that it was not only the taking of lives—that I learned much later in my experience—but the taking of all their belongings ...” Discuss the difference in stealing personal belongings and stealing national treasures. Is there a difference? What effect does this have on a nations’ collective mental health?
7. Robert Edsel has said, “Rose Valland is my candidate for the greatest heroine of WWII.” Do you agree? What about Rose made her so special? Discuss her relationship with James Rorimer and Jacques Jaujard.
8. Discuss George Stout. How did his knowledge and passion for art conservation come into play? Discuss his creativity in the field. What was his relationship with the other Monuments Men?
9. Why do you think this is a relatively unknown story? Is it not interesting? Exciting?
10. Where do you think the thousands of still missing works of art are located? Once found, should they be returned to their original owners?
11. Discuss what you found the most fascinating about Monuments Men. The brazen theft of the Bruges Madonna with the Allies mere days away? The discovery of the Altarpiece in the Altaussee mine? Which story touched you the most? Or shocked you?

Further Resource: www.monumentsmen.com