



Cultural Property Protection as a Force Multiplier in Stability Operations

World War II Monuments Officers Lessons Learned

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PHOTO: General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, and General Omar N. Bradley, Commander, 12th Army Group, examine a suitcase of silverware, part of German loot stored in a salt mine at Merkers, 12 April 1945. (National Archives, RG 111-SC-204515)

THE MONUMENTS OFFICERS of World War II have captured the imagination of the popular press, and many professionals in the fields of archaeology, architecture, and art history revere them as legends. However, the challenges these military officers faced and their accomplishments in the face of overwhelming odds offer critical lessons to today's full-spectrum and stability operations warfighters. It is easy to forget that in situations of conflict and natural disaster the preservation of cultural property, sacred places, and objects of value rank behind only protecting human life and safety as the top priorities. Recognition of, respect for, and preservation of items and places of cultural importance in a community are extremely valuable to stabilizing and reconstructing the social fabric.¹

Few contest the long-term value of cultural property protection during full-spectrum operations. However, one might reasonably question its immediate benefits to Western military personnel facing hostile engagements in today's complex conflict situations. One immediate response refers to the media battle that is an inevitable part of all modern conflict. Just as the Italians and Germans used propaganda effectively to advance their causes during the African and Italian campaigns, the terrorists and insurgents of today are often on the scene with video cameras. The British monuments program in 1943 began in part as a response to an Italian propaganda effort centering on the ancient Roman city of Cyrenica in Libya. After the ancient site changed hands from the Italians to the British and back to the Italians, the Italian government put together a propaganda campaign with the message that the British had shown no respect for the glory of ancient Rome. The Italians faked damage to the museum, photographed statues under reconstruction and added captions accusing the British of deliberately breaking them, and offered examples of graffiti written in English.² The power of these materials was manifest. They helped convince the Italian people that the British had no respect for any element of Italian or Roman history and culture.

Similarly, during the German retreat in Italy, the Germans accused the Allies of stealing paintings and Italian artwork and sought to enrage Italian radio listeners by telling them that the Allies were offering the pick of Italian artwork to their generals for their personal collections. In this type of operational environment, it is critical that friendly forces follow strict behavioral guidelines so that the local population does not believe that military personnel are engaging in theft, damage, or disrespectful acts.

In the spirit of the axiom, "Those who fail to study the past are doomed to repeat it," I offer some lessons from the World War II cultural property protection efforts in North Africa and Italy.

Cultural Property Protection Requires Support and Direction from the Highest Levels

During World War II, in response to concern expressed by highly placed academics and professionals, President Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed the Commission for the Protection of Cultural Treasures in War Areas, now commonly known as the Roberts Commission, in honor of its chairman, Supreme Court Justice Owen Roberts. The British had a similar commission in the War Office in London. The two commissions recommended that military officer subject matter experts become cultural property advisors to combat commanders in the field. These officers became members of the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives (MFAA) Section. Political leaders and military strategists understood the public relations value of engaging and succeeding in these efforts and the propaganda value to the enemy if they did not. General Dwight D. Eisenhower personally set the tone, issuing the following order on 26 May 1944:

Shortly we will be fighting our way across the continent of Europe in battles designed to preserve our civilization. Inevitably, in the path of our advance will be found historical monuments and cultural centers which symbolize to the world all that we are fighting to preserve. It is the responsibility of every commander to protect and respect these symbols whenever possible.³

Even though the United States is a signatory to the 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, current cultural property protection initiatives within the U.S. Department of Defense (DOD) have been relegated to voluntary "additional duty" status for a group of dedicated DOD cultural resource managers, lawyers, and other professionals. Fortunately, these individuals have a viable partnership with dedicated subject matter experts, like members of the Archaeological Institute of America, who have volunteered to provide cultural training for military personnel and information for critical planning documents such as the Defense Intelligence Agency "no strike" lists.⁴ Nevertheless, DOD still needs an institutionalized program and process to engage the cultural property protection issue in a responsive, predictable, and dependable way that gets appropriate information to the right people at the right time. This initiative should come from the secretariat level.



(National Archives, RG 111-SC-204516)

GEN Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander, inspects art treasures looted by the Germans and stored away in the Merkers salt mine. Behind GEN Eisenhower are GEN Omar N. Bradley (left), commander of the 12th Army Group, and (right) LTG George S. Patton, Jr., commander of the 3rd U.S. Army, 12 April 1945.

You Have to Begin with a List

The *Lists of Protected Monuments* produced by the MFAA illustrate the effective potential of military-academic partnerships. During World War II, officers began with lists developed by the Roberts Commission, and the Harvard American Defense Group supplemented this information in the field using Baedeker travel guides and the 24-volume *Guida d'Italia* published by the Touring Club Italiano.⁵ Each list covered two or three regions and included military orders to protect cultural property. These lists enabled officers in the field to quickly find, identify, and document monuments, works of art, and collections of cultural property as they moved into contested areas. This efficiency accelerated the process of finding and partnering with host nation heritage professionals.

Today, under the 1954 Hague Convention and Section 402 of the *National Historic Preservation Act*, DOD planners and deployed personnel must consider cultural properties that appear on the UNESCO *World Heritage List* in addition to properties that appear on any host nation equivalent of the *National Register of Historic Places*.⁶ Section 402 has been upheld in the Ninth District Court of California (see also *Dugong vs. Gates*).⁷ The lists are important and can be offered to military professionals in the form of detailed geographic information systems maps with specific coordinates, geo-rectified features, and supporting databases with attribute information. However, the combat commander at the local level must remember that individual communities also have cultural property, cultural landscape, and sacred places that are not on anyone's list. Failure to identify and respect these features could very well be interpreted as an act of hostility and provoke violent retribution.

Rules and Processes are Essential

During operations, military personnel require clear guidelines and expectations. In the case of the MFAA, a civil affairs pamphlet offered the required guidance. GTA 41-01-002, *Civil Affairs Arts, Monuments, and Archives Guide* is the current version of this document.

In addition, Central Command has developed environmental regulations for contingency operations with a robust chapter clarifying

In genocidal and ethnic conflicts, aggression against cultural property is often used to demoralize and destroy communities.

“historical/cultural” requirements.⁹ The chapter includes a checklist in flow-chart form for ground-disturbing projects in archaeologically sensitive areas. At Forward Operating Base (FOB) Hammer, just east of Baghdad, Iraq, an observant young soldier noticed that contractors were excavating archaeological material to fill HESCO containers. He brought the new Central Command regulation to the attention of the commander. Excavation stopped, saving an ancient Mesopotamian site. Furthermore, the FOB commander became interested in local preservation issues, as did local government officials he worked with.¹⁰

Build Partnerships with Host Nation Personnel

To build cultural property protection partnerships with host nation personnel, the commander must understand what types of domestic cultural property protection systems are already in place. In Italy, experienced monuments officers prepared a summary of the Italian Ministry of Culture structure so they could identify and locate the individuals in positions of responsibility they needed to work with. The MFAA developed a special civil affairs handbook of Italian cultural institutions that explained the ministries and superintendents that were responsible for all forms of cultural property in Italy, whether archives, libraries, monuments, antiquities, works of art, or buildings.

Americans are often amazed to learn that citizens of Afghanistan risked their lives to protect the treasures of their National Museum or that Iraq has a robust Antiquities Authority with inspectors assigned to every province.¹¹ In areas where it was safe to work with Americans, these inspectors were responsive and helpful for projects that had the potential to impact archaeological sites.

During the expansion of a patrol base near Tell Arba'ah Kabiir, a U.S. State Department heritage liaison, Diane Siebrandt, arranged for an inspector to examine the proposed expansion footprint. The inspector proposed a less sensitive direction for patrol base construction and pointed out signs of recent interments of human remains. Disturbance of these remains could have stopped or delayed the project and infuriated community members living nearby.

It is critical to form trusting, amicable relationships with local partners and to avoid developing false expectations. A productive partnership of this nature includes sharing of accurate and detailed information. Lieutenant Fredrick Hartt's efforts to save cultural property post-liberation Central Italy is illustrative. In his initial meeting with Professor Filippo Rossi, director of the Galleries of Florence, he—

- Outlined the administrative structure of the MFAA.
- Introduced the officers.
- Outlined the ways that the MFAA could help the superintendents.
- Explained the limitations of how they could help.

In response to his cordial but candid approach, the Italians provided Hartt critical information concerning collections and deposits still in German hands.

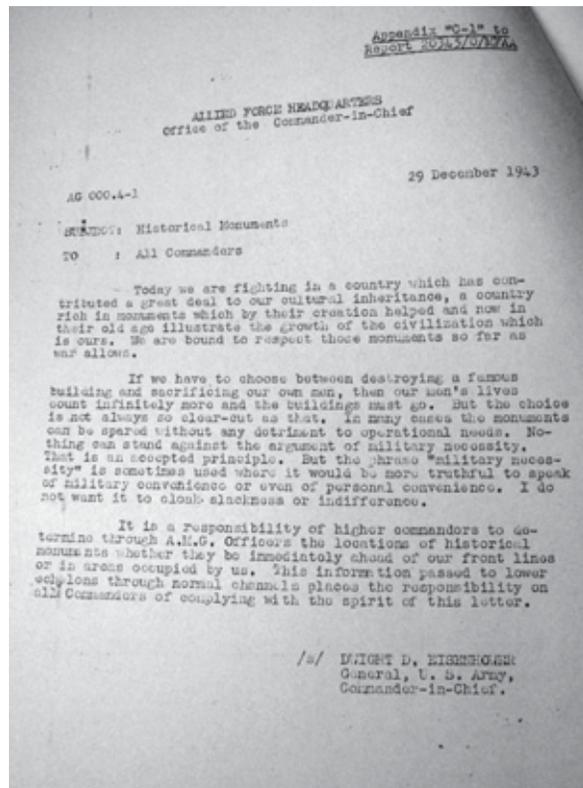
Immediate Documentation is Essential

When violations of international law take the form of deliberate damage to cultural property, it is critical to collect information and document it immediately and, if possible, use standards of forensic investigations that produce evidence admissible in court. In the case of the destruction of the bridges and the Arno waterfront in Florence by the Germans in 1944, Lieutenant Hartt requested that Professor Rossi put his first-hand account in writing. In genocidal and ethnic conflicts, aggression against cultural property is often used to demoralize and destroy communities. Evidence of these actions becomes critical when international courts bring the aggressors to justice. The importance of collecting such information was evident in the successful prosecution of General

Pavle Strugar in the International Court of Justice at The Hague for deliberately damaging the world heritage site of Dubrovnic, Croatia.¹³

In Emergencies, Established Rules and Processes are Insufficient

During times of war, damage to cultural property can range from simple theft to causing the collapse of an ancient church filled with artwork. Quite often, an immediate response can make a difference in saving property of inestimable value. Constructing an emergency roof covering, for example, could prevent further damage to frescoed walls in an exposed structure. As monuments officers responded to these kinds of critical situations all across Italy during World War II, they rarely had sufficient time to put contracts in place or to follow formal bureaucratic processes. Lieutenant Hartt found it necessary to authorize and initiate work for laborers and conservators without the proper paperwork.¹⁴ In some cases, the individuals and contractors did not receive their pay promptly, but



GEN Eisenhower's directive concerning protection of cultural property, 29 December 1943.

they did eventually. Most important, critical cultural properties were saved that would have been lost if procedures had been followed “by the book.”

Collections Also Matter

Cultural property protection also applies to museums and collections. In addition to mapping the cultural landscape, the military operation planning process must take account of institutions and collections of cultural property. In situations where buildings are damaged or collapsed, it is critical for recovery teams to know the original locations of collections to determine whether and where cultural property may be located in rubble. It is also critical that the process be set up so that engineer units with heavy equipment are responsive to cultural property officers and professionals.

According to Lieutenant Hartt, the overzealous response of British engineers who were attempting to clear debris threatened collections hidden in the rubble of the Colombaria Society in Florence. The engineers were planning to use bulldozers to

push the rubble into the Arno.¹⁵ Intervention by the MFAA resulted in the recovery of—

- More than 1,000 books.
- More than 4,000 pamphlets.
- Forty-two of 82 historical and scientific manuscripts.
- Thirty of 38 codices (hand-written books dating from late antiquity through the middle ages).
- Thirty-four of 36 incunabulae (books, single-sheet documents, or images printed, not hand written, in Europe prior to 1501).

The recovered objects were deposited in the National Library in Florence and are still available to scholars today.

Standing Historic Structures are Good Anchor Points for Reconstruction

If there is hope of rebuilding a historic structure or neighborhood, it is critical to shore up standing ruins to use as anchors and landmarks for rebuilding. It sometimes takes less engineering effort to shore



(National Archives, RG 111-SC-204899)

Troops of the U.S. Third Army view German loot stored in a church at Ellingen, Germany, 24 April 1945.

up a structure than to clean up the wreckage after demolishing the standing section or allowing it to fall. Consequently, it is critical to structure the response chain-of-command so that overly enthusiastic engineers have to heed civil authorities who wish to incorporate standing structures into reconstruction efforts. At the Via Guicciardini, military engineers actually found it difficult to bring down a standing tower that the Florentines wanted to save.¹⁶ In fact, when they did bring it down, it destroyed a neighboring structurally sound façade that they could have used as an additional anchor point for reconstruction. The needless destruction resulting from the engineers' well-meaning efforts created massive amounts of additional rubble that required removal. Had they simply left the structure standing and reinforced it, clean up and reconstruction would have been far more efficient. More important, the gesture of respect would have improved relations with the host nation community.

Cultural Property is Not Just Bricks and Mortar

Deployed personnel in unfamiliar environments must realize that members of local communities are the ones who should assign value to cultural properties in their landscape. After the Germans destroyed bridges crossing the Po River during their retreat, the British required wood for bridge reconstruction in time for the 1944 spring offensive. Claiming military necessity, the British 2nd Forestry Group began to cut down the dense virgin forest of Camaldoli.¹⁷ Protection for this forest dated back to at least the 11th century, the time of Saint Romauld, who established an order where monks could live as hermits in solitary huts in the forest.¹⁸ In 1944, after protests from members of the local community brought the issue to the attention of monuments officers, a critical portion of the woods near the Sacred Hermitage was saved by the successful request of the MFAA for the demining of

...cultural property like a virgin forest takes decades, if not centuries, to recover.

roads leading to alternative forest resources at La Lima and Campigna. In this case, it is also critical to remember that cultural property like a virgin forest takes decades, if not centuries, to recover.

During full spectrum operations, especially in semiarid environments, Western forces should apply this lesson learned to agricultural assets like date palm plantations, olive groves, vineyards, and orchards. These entities are often critical food resources and may reflect the political and social organization at the local level. In addition, these resources are the legacy that families leave for future generations.

There are potentially similar lessons to learn from Iraq and Afghanistan where destroying vineyards, palms, or orchards can be extremely tempting when hostile personnel take cover there, but the destruction of agricultural properties can infuriate entire extended families and their communities. It is also important to note that the Koran and Islamic codes of the laws of war forbid destruction of agricultural assets during the course of battle.

Appreciate Mission Requirements and Find Common Ground

Villa Reale Poggio a Caiano was five kilometers northwest of Signa, Tuscany, where Renaissance artwork had been stored for protection. The villa itself was also historic and the Allies placed it off limits. The Germans stole 58 cases of artwork from the villa as they retreated, but many valuable works remained in storage there. However, there was no other building in the vicinity large enough to handle immediate battlefield casualties, so the 54th South African Field Dressing Station requisitioned the villa. Fortunately, the commanding officer understood his responsibility in terms of the value of the villa and its contents. One hundred ninety-nine severely wounded casualties were treated there, with no losses of or damage to cultural artifacts.

It is useful to remember that there are methods for protecting architectural and artistic elements of historic structures when they must be requisitioned as field hospitals, headquarters, or billets. First, and most critical, the occupying personnel must recognize that structures in occupied countries do not belong to the occupying personnel, no matter what their history. International law and

military regulation require DOD representatives to document the condition of historic properties when U.S. forces take responsibility for them. Without documentation, angry host nation personnel will accuse U.S. personnel of causing damage to a structure or an archaeological site, even if the damage dates back over decades or centuries. The Department of Defense has developed readily available guidelines for environmental baseline statements and condition reports to help in the documentation process when time is of the essence.¹⁹ In addition to documentation, all freestanding or hanging artwork in a structure should be removed and stored in a locked place to prevent looting. Frescoed or painted walls, decorative windows, and finished floors should be protected if possible. Architectural elements should be left in place.

Currently, a military museum in the U.S. has a decorative architectural feature removed from one of Saddam's palaces on display. The international laws of war forbid the removal of such an architectural element, and its current display as a war trophy illustrates the need for improved education on this issue. In addition, we do not know how the Iraqi people perceive U.S. treatment of Saddam's palaces. They may have witnessed disrespectful behaviors, though these palaces were built using resources essentially stolen from them.

Conclusion

"E tutto quello che ci rimane." (It is all we have left.)²⁰

Preservation of cultural property can be critical for social restoration in a devastated community. During World War II, the Germans systematically blew up every single structure in the small town of Pieve Santo Stefano, Italy. Incredibly, they failed to destroy the Andrea della Robbia altarpiece relief, *Assumption of the Virgin*, in the local church. The MFAA wanted to remove the piece for its own protection, but the prospect of its relocation was unthinkable to the citizens of the community. Instead, the MFAA worked with them to save the altarpiece as part of the town's restoration. Cultural property that survives war, sometimes miraculously, offers hope when all else seems lost.

Another example includes the recovery of stones and sculptures from the Arno River to



One of Saddam Hussein's palaces serves as the Anbar Operations Center for Iraqi politicians inside Camp Blue Diamond, Iraq, 16 January 2009. Camp Blue Diamond is now protected by the Iraqi Army.

rebuild the Ponte Santa Trinita, one of the bridges destroyed by the Germans in 1944.²¹ After the accidental bombing of the Campo Santo in Pisa, red earth drawings by Benozzo Gozzoli were found perfectly preserved underneath the lost frescoes. Not only did the drawings enable reconstruction of the art, they gave "a new insight into the process of Renaissance composition."²² U.S. monuments officer Captain Deane Keller played such a critical role in the recovery of the Campo Santo that upon his death he was buried there, honored by the United States, Italy, and the Vatican.

Even the destruction of the Bamyán Buddhas in Afghanistan offers a glimmer of hope. Within the empty niches formerly occupied by the giant statues, ancient oil paintings were discovered that the sculptures had hidden. No one suspected the existence of these extraordinary works of art, especially the Taliban.

As we consider the present and look to the future, we can begin to assemble contemporary lessons learned concerning cultural property protection.

Some members of the current generation of U.S. military personnel, operating without a formal program comparable to the MFAA, have intuitively responded to cultural property challenges and discovered the force-multiplication effects of doing so. Examples include Major Cori Wegener, the only serving U.S. cultural property officer since World War II. Inspired by the MFAA, she joined U.S. Army Civil Affairs as a reservist with the hope of using her expertise as an art historian and curator. She was assigned to assist the staff at the Iraq National Museum in Baghdad with recovery efforts after rampant looting. She is now the founding president of the U.S. Committee for the Blue Shield, an organization committed to supporting proper U.S. implementation of the 1954

Hague Convention. Lieutenant Benjamin Roberts encouraged the use of Commander Emergency Response Funds to rebuild tourist amenities at Agar Quf, Iraq.²³ And of course there is Sergeant James Carlson, the soldier at FOB Hammer who saved some of Iraq's archaeological heritage from filling HESCO containers. In all three cases, these efforts resulted not only in preservation but also in improved relations with host nation personnel and progress toward improved stability. There is no question that DOD is capable of institutionalizing efforts of this nature and reaping the benefits of cultural property protection as a force multiplier. The key is recognizing the challenge and obtaining corresponding support from the secretariat level. And so, we are back at lesson one. **MR**

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NOTES

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 10. Laurie Rush, personal communication with members of the FOB Hammer command group.

11. Fredrik Hiebert and Pierre Cambon eds., *Afghanistan: Hidden Treasures from the National Museum, Kabul* (Washington, DC: The National Geographic Society, 2007).
 12. Hartt, 37-38.
 13. Communications Service, *Case Information Sheet "Dubrovnic" (IT-01-42) Pavle Strugar*, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia.
 14. *Ibid.*, 50.
 15. *Ibid.*, 52-53.
 16. *Ibid.*, 54.
 17. *Ibid.*, 93-94.
 18. It is interesting to note, however, that there is documentation that sacred forests in Italy date back to at least the third century BC. The Lex Spoletina, a Roman inscription on a stone marker, clearly indicates that the Monteluco Forest, south of Camadolli, is protected, and that any individual harvesting wood from within this sacred forest was required to sacrifice an ox to Jupiter.
 19. Access to recommended EBS formats is available at <http://www.cemml.colostate.edu/cultural/09476/pdf/CENTCOM_ITTR_CCR_200-2-1.pdf>
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 21. *Ibid.*, 56-57.
 22. *Ibid.*, 85.
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