



THE MERKERS AND BUCHENWALD TREASURE TROVES

By Carolsue Holland and Thomas Rothbart

Ironically, unlike the major find at Merkers (a portion of which became Shipment 1), information about Shipment 16 was not concealed by an extraordinary security classification. Therefore, when the American National Archives and Record Agency (NARA) opened the documents under the 30-year rule, information about the find hidden in the Buchenwald quarry was available to anyone with the qualifications to do archival research. Since the beginning of 1979 (31 years after the Buchenwald trials), the declassification of pertinent documents occurred according to ordinary procedure: a researcher who wished to use material deposited in the file boxes of a particular record group, brought it to the readers' room desk where an archival technician crossed out the security classification and stamped on a declassification number and date.

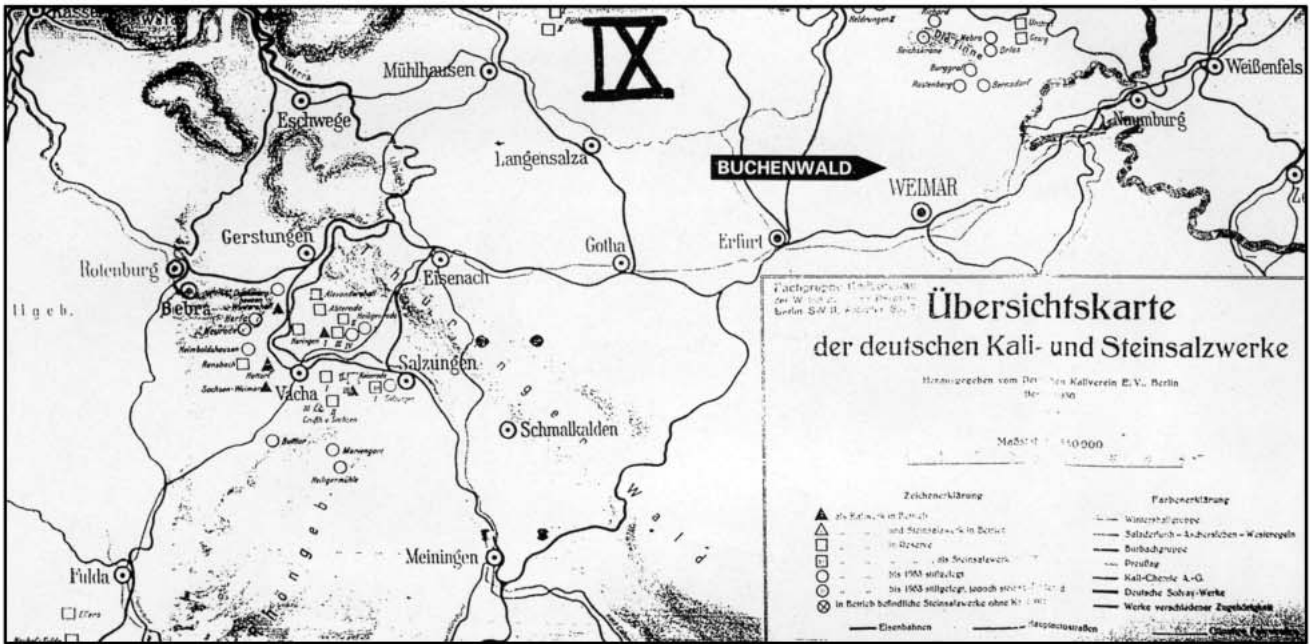
The practice of crossing-out, not deleting, the security classification has much to do with a myth that the Americans were hiding information about Shipment 16 in a 'secret archive'. On March 30, 1984, a researcher working in NARA located parts of an incomplete record about the American military and a treasure trove found in Buchenwald concentration camp's quarry. From 1984 until the unification of Germany in 1990, it appears that attributing the former US security classification to a conspiracy to withhold information generated a concerted effort on the part of local German treasure hunters. After October 1990, the quest devolved to a small group of Thuringians who, periodically, still pester State authorities and the directorate of the Buchenwald Memorial to underwrite a hunt to look for the buried assets of Shipment 16 by excavating Buchenwald quarry.

Also, one United States corporation seeking to attract investors for support, continues to pressure the Buchenwald Directorate and the Thuringian State government to dig up

the Buchenwald quarry to find assets that the entire documentary record proves were removed by US First Army before the end of World War II, more than 51 years ago.



As the Allied armies closed in on Germany in 1945, the Germans went to extensive lengths to secrete their movable state assets — bullion, cash, art and sculpture, etc — as well as hiding valuables looted from the occupied territories. Top: Salt mines, with their stable temperature and humidity were ideal: here a soldier of the US Third Army examines art treasures discovered in the Kaiseroda mine at Merkers, more than 250 kilometres north-east of Frankfurt, in April 1945. (USNA) Above: Another cache in the quarry at Buchenwald concentration camp, almost 100 kilometres to the east, was found three weeks later. (BWA)

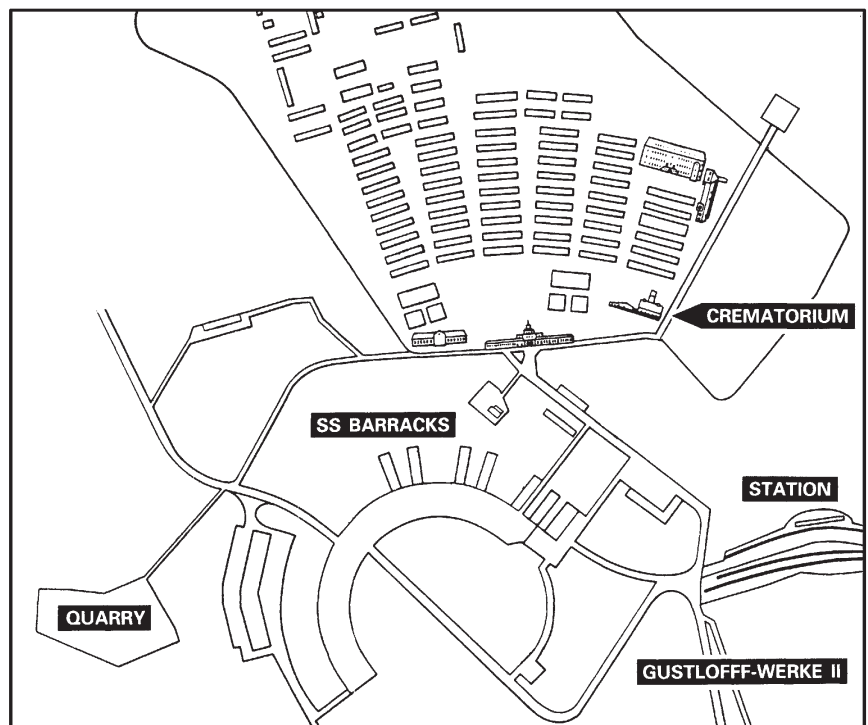


Even as late as February 1994, the US Army Center for Military History stated that they could find no reference in their records to any treasure being removed from Buchenwald and shipped to the United States by the US Army. If information remains deniable, there is nothing for which anyone, living or dead, can be held accountable. Consequently, the 'Catch 22' of any bureaucracy, military or otherwise, is operant here: if there had been a cover-up, what had been covered-up as well as the cover-up itself, would remain unknown to someone interested enough to make inquiries.

This modification of the public record might have gone unchecked except for the fact that by 1992, the treasure hunters were more cautious because even limited access to the former East German Stasi Archives demanded a more thorough-going evaluation of archival findings. We connected the story of Shipment 16 with Shipment 1 when we found corroborating evidence in other NARA record groups after we sought to authenticate some documents in the hands of one of the Thuringian treasure hunters. He claimed that what he had, had come from 'a secret American archive'. In his possession were 16 randomly selected pages from a single NARA record group arranged in such a way as to make it appear that these constituted an on-going sequence. He also tried to make it appear that the declassification date on these materials was 1989, not 1984.

Curiosity about these documents led us to others in the NARA record groups dealing with SHAEF (Supreme Headquarters Allied Expeditionary Forces) G-5 (Finance) affairs. These indicated that the designations of the respective 78 'shipment' numbers and separation of Nazi assets and plunder from SS loot had been made by the chief of SHAEF G-5 (Finance), Colonel Bernard D. Bernstein, almost one month before VE-Day. They also clarified why only a small percentage of the treasures found in the Kaiseroda mine constituted Shipment 1. What was believed to be SS loot had been assigned a shipment number; other assets and plunder had other designations. Going back over the published material on the Merkers find, as well as through the archives at NARA and at the Center for Military History, we discovered that no one, including the American official military historians, had recognised that Colonel Bernstein originally and deliberately had separated Nazi state assets and plunder from SS loot by a system of numbering each shipment according to the

To secrete their treasures, the Germans had a wide choice of hiding places. This map showing the various mines in the vicinity of Meiningen and Vacha in Thuringia, was used to plan and organise the transportation of the Reichsbank reserves and museum treasures which were secreted in February and March 1945. The original 1:350 000 Wehrkreis IX map was found by our authors, Carolsue Holland and Thomas Rothbart in Record Group 242 in the US National Archives.

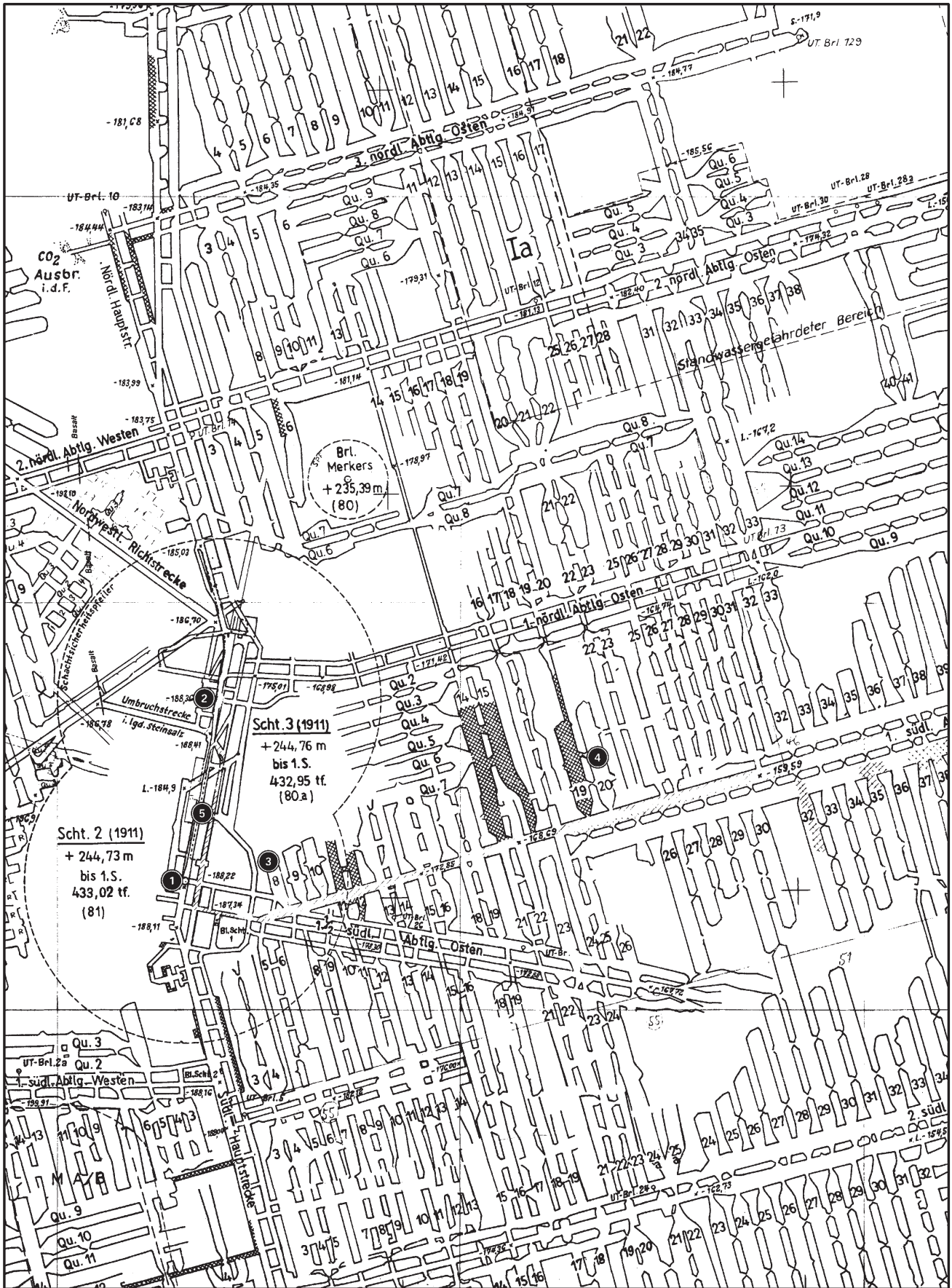


Buchenwald, just north-west of Weimar, was not marked on the Wehrkreis map but we have indicated its position. The quarry lay south-west of the camp itself and outside the main compound. Tunnels — so called 'air raid shelters' — were driven into the north-eastern wall of the quarry with brick entrances to seal the shafts. The work was carried out using forced labour from the camp, many inmates dying from the long hours of arduous work on inadequate rations. (BWA)

order in which it was received at the American Frankfurt depository. Only SS loot, not the state assets nor the plundered gold, found in Merkers was designated as Shipment 1. The entire cache secreted in the Kaiseroda mine was the first of many other 'Nazi treasures' to be delivered to the custody of the newly-organised American Exchange Depository, a hastily converted, but nevertheless secure, building that had

formerly housed the Frankfurt office of the German Reichsbank.

What led to the creation of Shipment 1 and Shipment 16, as well as what happened during and after the SS loot comprising it was in American custody, begins with the unexpected discovery on April 4, 1945, by the 90th Division's 358th Infantry Regiment of the treasure cache at the Kaiseroda mine in Merkers.



However, but for German prisoners revealing the whereabouts of the secreted treasure, searching all the mines would have been like looking for the proverbial needle. This plan shows *just a small part* of the mine complex at Merkers, begun in the 1870s but which extended to some 500 kilometres of tunnels and chambers by 1945. More correctly, it was referred to as the

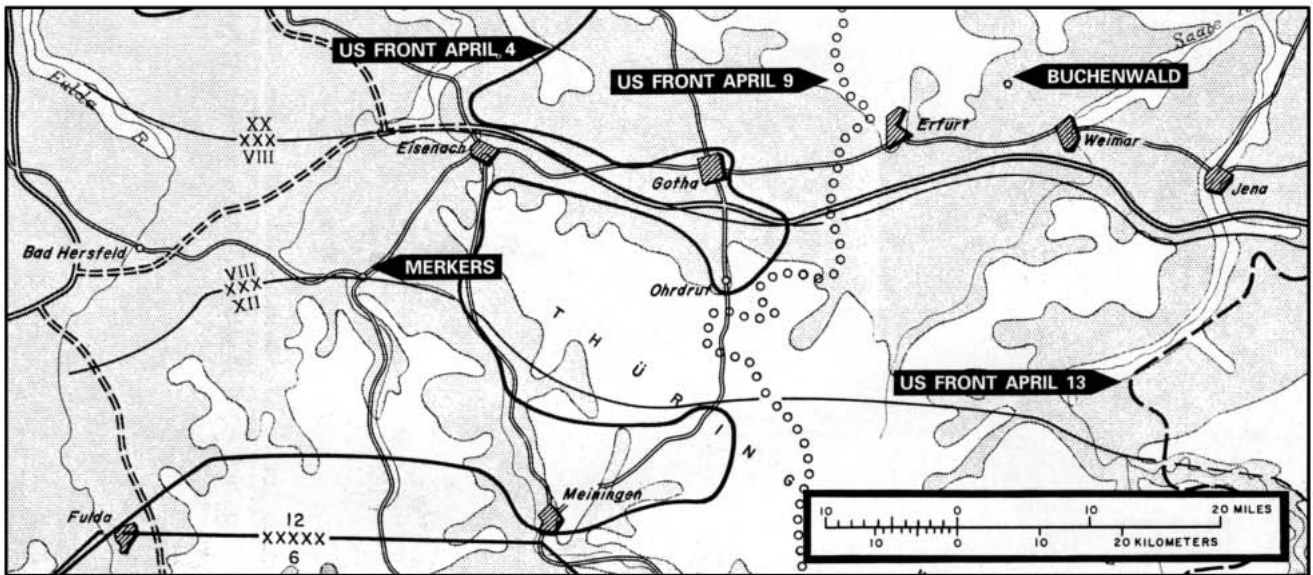
Kaiseroda II/III mine, the Second World War storage area being situated in the '1. südliche Abteilung Osten' (1st Southern Section East). Relevant to our story are: [1] Shaft No. 2. [2] Shaft No. 3. [3] Room No. 8 (gold storage). [4] Room No. 20 (paintings, objets d'art). [5] Location where photo of GIs holding Manet painting (on page 14) was taken. (Courtesy Merkers mine)

FROM MERKERS: SHIPMENT 1

During the morning of Wednesday, April 4, Lieutenant General George Patton's US Third Army forces were advancing through the village of Merkers proceeding south-east toward the Thuringian town of Meiningen.

Just beyond Merkers town centre, behind the fencing abutting the road, Berlin Reichsbank officials Albert Thoms, Dr Otto Reimer and Dr Werner Veick, with the help of some of the staff, were frantically racing up and down a shaft at the Kaiseroda mine to secrete sacks full of German currency in a specially constructed vault located almost 1,600 feet underground before the Americans could discover what was going on. Together with cases and crates of bullion, the Third Reich's gold reserves, and other monetary and artistic treasures, these banknotes had been sent from Berlin in two shipments (the first leaving on February 11) to be hidden in vaults inside the Kaiseroda mine.

Advancing through Merkers — June 1996. Here 51 years previously, spearheads of Patton's Third Army thundered eastwards in their drive to the Elbe.



According to Thoms who, later, was interrogated by Colonel Bernstein on April 19, the February shipment, comprising 22 rail wagons, took German personnel and foreign labourers four days to unload and secrete in a section of the mine that had been prepared by Wintershall A.G., owners of the Kaiseroda mine, for the storage of the Reichsbank's holdings. The second and smaller shipment, arriving in the middle of March, required less than 48 hours to unload.

Interrupted by an Easter weekend railway shutdown from Friday, March 30 to Tuesday, April 3, Thoms and his people had been trying to send currency back to Berlin in order to replenish the supply in circulation after Allied bombing had stopped the printing of new banknotes.

Now, shortly before noon on April 4, the Germans carrying money bags back into the shaft housing continued to work, as streams of American soldiers passed by on the road fronting the mine entrance. During that Wednesday, several foreign workers in conversation with soldiers from the 3rd Battalion of the 358th Infantry Regiment mentioned the Reichsbank treasure hidden in the Merkers mine. Yet it was not until 11 a.m. the next day that Staff Sergeant Wall, Military Intelligence Team 404-G attached to the 358th Infantry, interviewed some French displaced persons who had worked in the mine. They stated that they had heard that gold



Just the other side of town lay the entrance to the Kaiseroda mine with the tell-tale winding gear of Shaft No. 3 towering above. US troops passed from right to left along the road in the foreground, unaware at this stage that a King's ransom lay buried deep beneath their feet.



Thuringia was one of the eight German Länder (or states) which had been assigned to the Soviet Union as part of their zone of occupation already agreed by the Allies in September 1944. Thus, American forces were already advancing across country which would have to be surrendered to the Soviets. For the next 45 years, Merkers was to remain inaccessible behind the Iron Curtain — the largest salt mine in Germany, if not the world — employing a workforce of 5,000. It was first opened to visitors on August 6, 1991 following unification but, at the same time, the mine workings were shut down. Now, some 250 miners are retained to safely close the tunnels and backfill — a job which will take at least ten years.

had been stored there. Sergeant Wall reported this information to Captain Dengler, the S-2 (intelligence officer) of the 358th. The commander of the 90th Division, Major General Herbert L. Earnest, without examining the mine, notified General Patton's headquarters that his command had been told by a worker who had been in the mine and reported from personal knowledge that 'Merkers mine . . . contains marks, gold, silver, paintings, jewels. There are approximately 500 kilometers of passages underground.'

On Friday, April 6, PFC Harmon and PFC Kline of the XII Corps Provost Marshal's Office challenged and stopped two women walking along the road between Kieselbach and Merkers for curfew violation. One of the women was pregnant. She stated that she was being accompanied by the other to find medical help. Taking the women as passengers in their Jeep, Harmon and Kline drove them to the XII Corps Provost Marshal's Office where they were questioned. Later in the morning they were driven back to the village of Merkers by Private Mootz. Entering Merkers, Mootz saw the Kaiserroda mine-shaft winding gear and asked the women what sort of mine it was. They explained that it was where the German gold reserve and valuable property of the national art museums in Berlin had been deposited. They knew this, they said, because they were personally acquainted with some of the civilian German workers from the Merkers mine who had worked for four days in February unloading a 22-car treasure train carrying gold, sacks of currency from the Reichsbank and numerous, precious statuary and paintings from art museums in Berlin.

Private Mootz promptly reported the story

to Sergeant Matthews, Headquarters Company, 90th Division, who passed the information on to Colonel Whitcomb, Chief-of-Staff, and Lieutenant Colonel Russell, the Military Government Officer for the 90th Division. By midday, Colonel Russell had arrived at the Kaiserroda mine to interview displaced persons found in the area. One of this group was Sergeant Walter Farager of the British Army, a German prisoner since June 26, 1940 who, employed in the mine as a machinist's assistant for the past year, had helped hide the gold. These interrogations also produced the information that Professor Dr Paul Ortwin Rave, curator and assistant director of the National-Galerie in Berlin was living in the Merkers area to care for the paintings secreted in the mine.

With this evidence, Russell ordered the 712th Tank Battalion under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Vladimir Kedrovsky to guard the entrances to Kaiserroda. All the mine officials were placed under house arrest and confined to their homes for the night. Personnel checked the generators so that power would be available for the elevators and electric lights when the mine was inspected early on Saturday, April 7.



Capture of the mine is credited to Company I of the 3rd Battalion of the 358th Infantry Regiment, 90th Division (part of XII Corps) on April 4, 1945. This picture was taken just outside the main entrance.



Fifty-one years later, Karel Margry and Martijn Bakker met the mine manager, Hartmut Ruck, to take the photographs for this feature. (The underground workings are open to visitors from 9.15 a.m. to 1.15 p.m. except Mondays.) They found that the machine gun emplacement outside the entrance had been demolished.



However, on Friday evening, Colonel Russell discovered that there were five accessible mine shafts, three more than the two at the main site. He decided that one tank battalion would not be sufficient to guard these entrances in view of their proximity to the front lines, and requested additional reinforcements. Shortly before 10 p.m., the 357th Infantry Regiment, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel John H. Mason, arrived in the Merkers area to relieve the 90th Division Military Police and reinforce the 712th Tank Battalion.

At 10 a.m. the following day, Lieutenant Colonel Russell, accompanied by mine officials, Dr Rave, Colonel Joseph J. Tully, Assistant Division Commander, Major

Information about the mine's contents sparked an immediate XII Corps reaction after two women walking along this stretch of the Kieselbach road overlooking Merkers were taken into custody by a XII Corps military police patrol. The winding gear to the two shafts in the town can be seen — No. 3 on the left with No. 2 to its right.

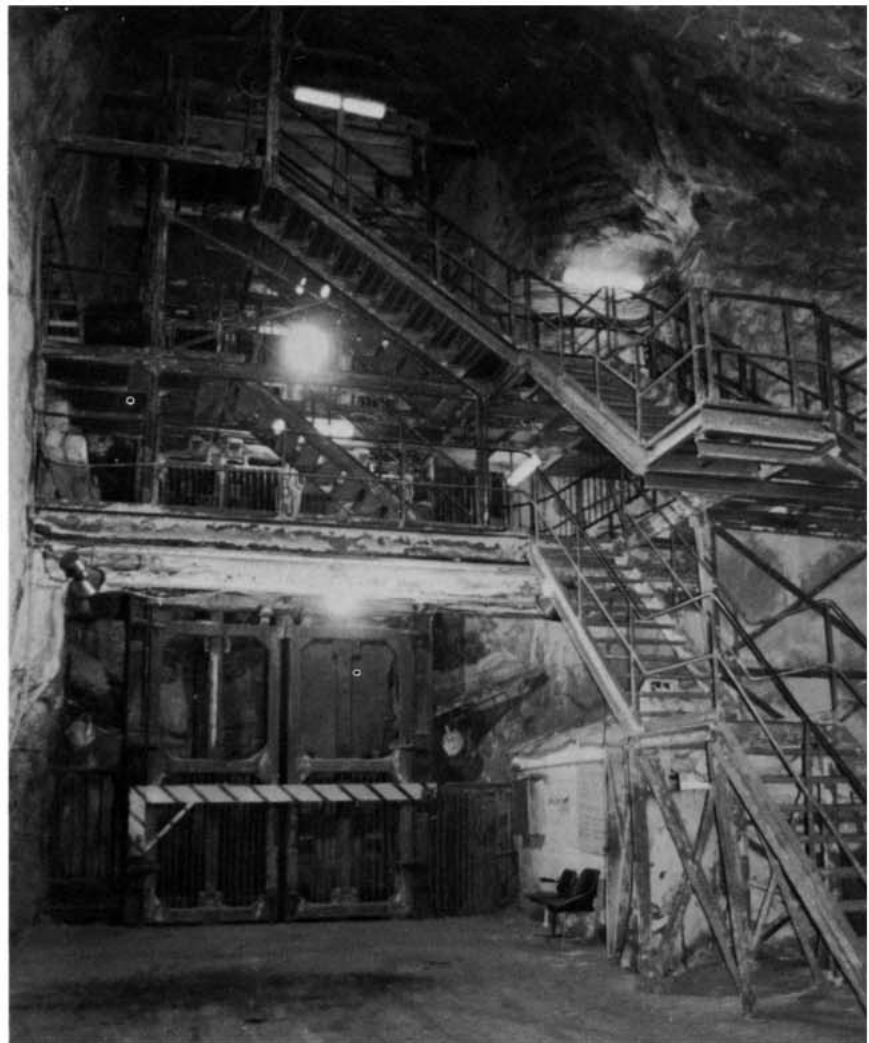
Joseph Brick, Judge Advocate General, and Captain James C. McNamara, the 90th Division's public relations officer, descended into the mine shaft. According to a footnote in George B. Dyer's official history, *XII Corps — Spearhead of Patton's Third Army*, they were guided to Room No. 8 by British PoWs from 'a camp near Merkers, who had been used as labor to get the treasure in place'. Using the jocular tone of the *Time* magazine story published during the week of April 16, Dyer's account mentions that 'rumor at least

had it that the original tip off was given our troops not by the Krauts but by some British PW's in a camp near Merkers . . . but Colonel Albert C. Lieber [deputy commander of XII Corps] . . . remembers that a woman was said to have given the tip off. . . .' The British PoW, Walter Farager, mentioned in connection to Russell's initial visit to Merkers mine, was, however, not mentioned in Lieutenant Colonel Carl L. Morris's detailed report to his superior, Major General Robert W. Crawford, the SHAEF G-4 (Logistics).

The main lift shaft used by the Americans to examine the mine on the morning of Saturday, April 7, was No. 3 — the one just inside the main gate. Below: The elevator is constructed in three tiers so that three 24-man teams of miners can be transported below ground in one go.



Right: Since 1945, the shaft has been extended to service a new lower level, the old sealed wartime lift stop being now passed in complete darkness. It takes about a minute to descend the 1,600 feet — our authors, Carolsue Holland, Professor of International Relations at Troy State University, and Thomas Rothbart, political journalist for the Thüringer Allgemeine, taking this picture at the bottom in 1995.





Above: Today, one has to drive in a 4x4 up an inclined connecting tunnel to reach the old level. 'It's all quite exhilarating', explains Karel, 'but with hundreds of kilometres of tunnels, with countless "Y" and "T" junctions, you would not want to go down without a guide. The main tunnels are 10-15 metres wide with a ceiling of 3-4 metres. It feels like driving on a motorway with no lights on a very, very dark night — with you the only one on it!'

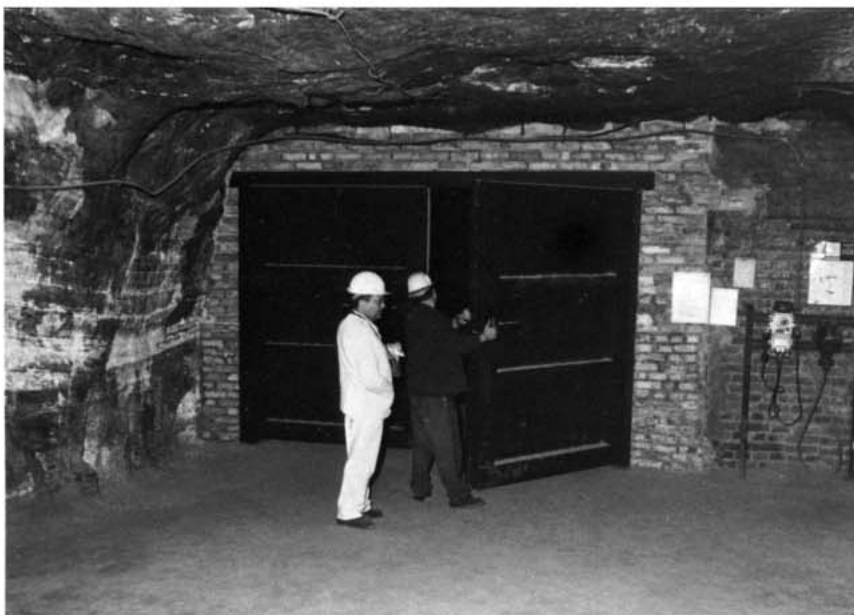
At the base of the elevator, Signal Corps photographers immediately took pictures of the bags of currency abandoned in the main haulage way after the futile attempt to resupply Berlin with Reichsmarks was interrupted by the arrival of the Americans on April 4. Russell's group continued along the passageway almost 1,600 feet underground to a steel door barring the way into a vault. Just outside this door, they found 140 additional sacks of currency. Failing in their efforts to open the vault, Russell and McNamara returned to the surface to find and interrogate Dr Veick, one of the Reichsbank officials who had come to Merkers to escort the currency back to Berlin. Veick stated that the Merkers mine contained all of the gold that was in the Reichsbank and that these reserves were hidden in the sealed



vault. Arrangements were made to blast an entrance into the vault wall during the following morning.

Meanwhile, General Earnest directed that Kaiseroda be guarded by a reinforced rifle company of the 1st Battalion of the 357th Infantry supplemented by tank destroyers of the 773rd TD Battalion, tanks, and Jeeps mounted with .50 calibre machine guns. At 5 p.m., Major General Manton S. Eddy, US XII Corps commander, countermanded General Earnest's order, and retained the entire 357th Infantry in the area of Kaiseroda for security purposes. The other 357th Infantry battalions relieved the 358th Infantry and became the force guarding the

Karel took the picture of 'his' 4x4 to match this shot (below) of a Jeep of the 357th Infantry in the same tunnel between Room No. 8 and Shaft No. 3 (see plan page 3). The Americans took several Jeeps down to transport the valuables — note the vehicle is on a return trip from the shaft with empty trailer. The Browning has been set up to cover the length of the tunnel. (USNA)



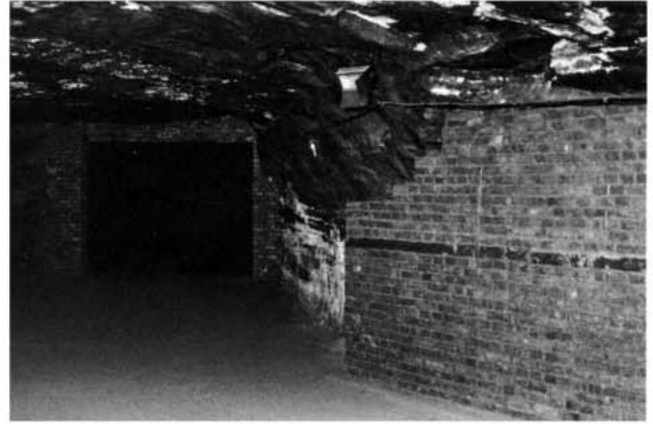
areas and entrances above the 500-odd kilometres of passages and vaults which comprised Wintershall's Kaiseroda mine.

At 8 a.m. on Sunday morning, April 8, with General Earnest in attendance, Russell and McNamara escorted photographers, journalists, and elements of the XII Corps engineers into the mine. When the engineers ascertained that a hole could not be dug through the vault wall, they blasted an entrance approximately 4ft x 8ft through the masonry.

On Saturday morning, April 7, Lieutenant Colonel Russell, the Military Government Officer with the 90th Division, led the first party down the mine, guided by mine officials and Professor Dr Paul Rave, the assistant director of the Berlin National-Galerie. They were taken to Room No. 8, sealed by a steel door. This impressive replacement (left) has been only recently installed for the benefit of present-day visitors. From the plan, it would appear that the original was much smaller, the new one taking up the complete width of the old door and opening which was blasted through by US engineers on Sunday morning.



Left: Reproduced from the 1947 XII Corps unit history: *XII Corps — Spearhead of Patton's Third Army* by Lieutenant Colonel George B. Dyer, this rather poor shot was taken from inside



Room No. 8 looking back to the entrance with the hole just discernable on the right. Right: Today, the brickwork has been extended with the installation of the 'bank-safe'-type of door.

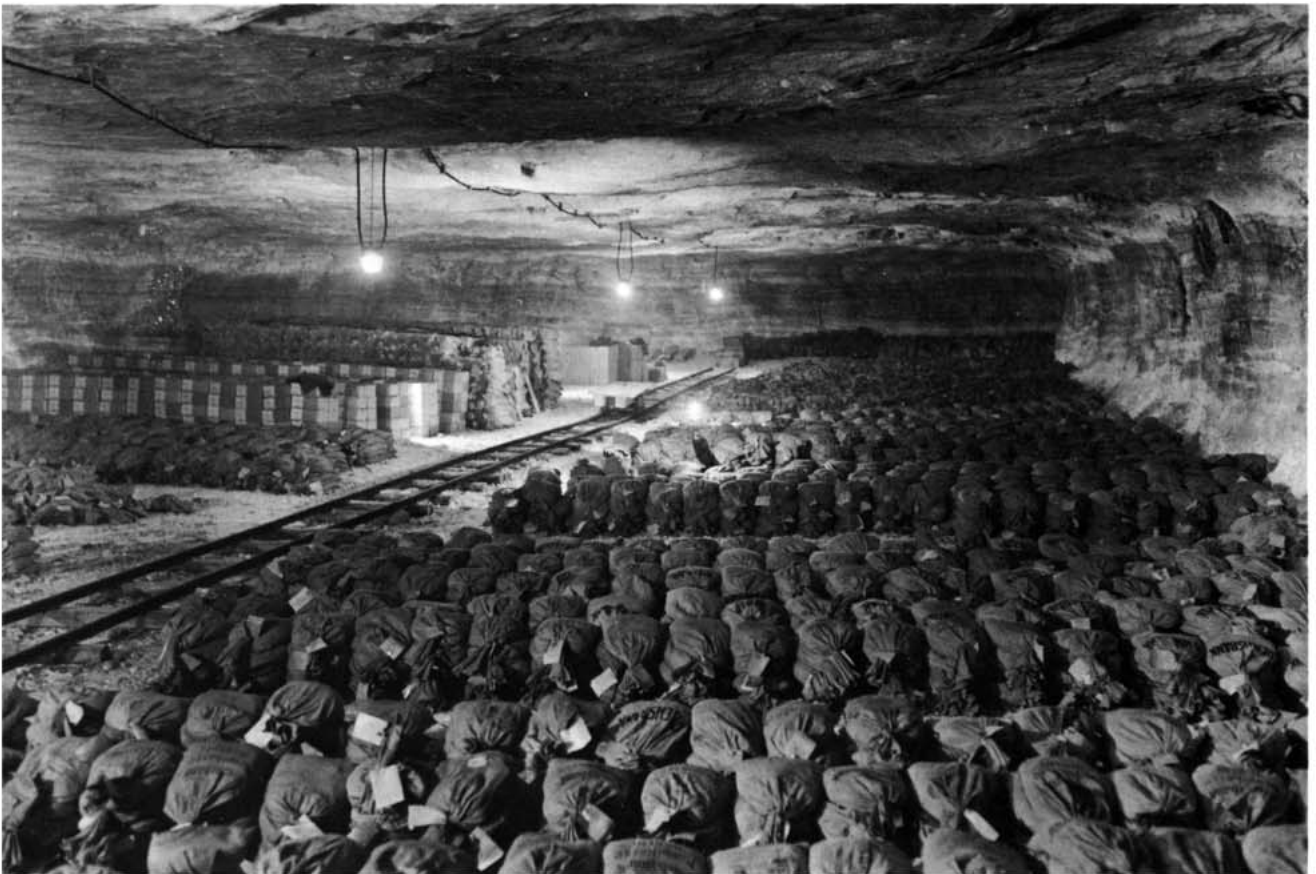
Once inside, Earnest, Russell and McNamara opened the seals on some of the bags to begin a partial inventory but they were interrupted by the arrival of General Eddy, his deputy, Colonel Lieber, and his G-5 (Civil Affairs), Lieutenant Colonel Asa W. K. Billings, who had come to inspect the mine.

By early in the afternoon, Brigadier General Frank McSherry, the G-5 (Civil Affairs) of SHAEF in Reims, was notified about the discovery of the Kaiseroda treasure. He transmitted orders to Colonel Bernard D. Bernstein, the chief of SHAEF's G-5 (Finance), to oversee US monetary and fiscal matters under the auspices of the American Secretary of Treasury, Henry Morgenthau. Colonel Bernstein was to go forward to Merkers as soon as possible to examine the treasures and take over their control in the name of the Commanding General ETOUSA (European Theater,

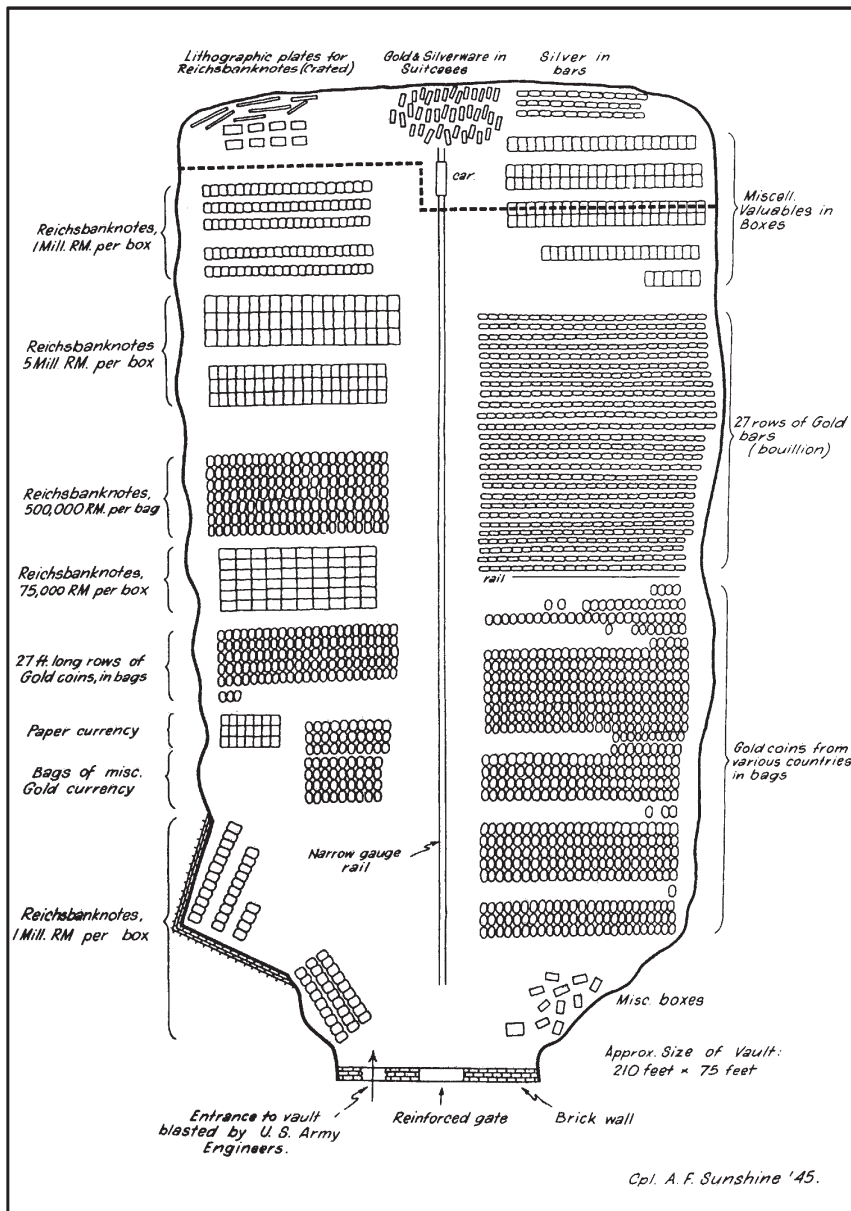
United States Army). Later when Colonel Bernstein arrived at SHAEF Headquarters, General McSherry informed him that he, Eisenhower as Commanding General ETOUSA, and Major General Robert W. Crawford, the SHAEF G-4 (Logistics) had decided that the entire contents of Kaiseroda be removed to a more secure area in order to relieve XII Corps combat units for tactical missions.

Meanwhile, the journalists were busy filing their stories. The Monday morning (April 9) edition of the US forces daily newspaper, *Stars & Stripes*, reported the story, stating that 'officials in Washington consider the gold in question to be the property of the United States'. Likewise, news of the discovery of the treasure in Kaiseroda mine appeared in the Paris edition of the *Herald Tribune* and in the issue of *Time* magazine published during the week of April 16.

Major General Crawford met with Lieutenant General Lucius D. Clay, Eisenhower's Deputy Military Governor; General McSherry; and Colonel Bernstein early Monday morning before the latter flew out to take control of the Merkers treasure. The chain of command established at that meeting became the basis for custodial responsibilities as well as for command and control of any other Nazi treasure troves located by American military authorities. These decisions fundamentally affected claims made later by belligerent and occupied countries whose gold had been sequestered by the Nazis. Colonel Bernstein was given discretionary power to determine a suitable new location for the contents of the Kaiseroda discovery, to coordinate the actual movement 'including taking treasure from the mine . . . arranging for trucks, security guards on the road and the permanent



Aladdin's Cave. This was the incredible scene which greeted Colonel Russell's party when they entered the chamber. (USNA)

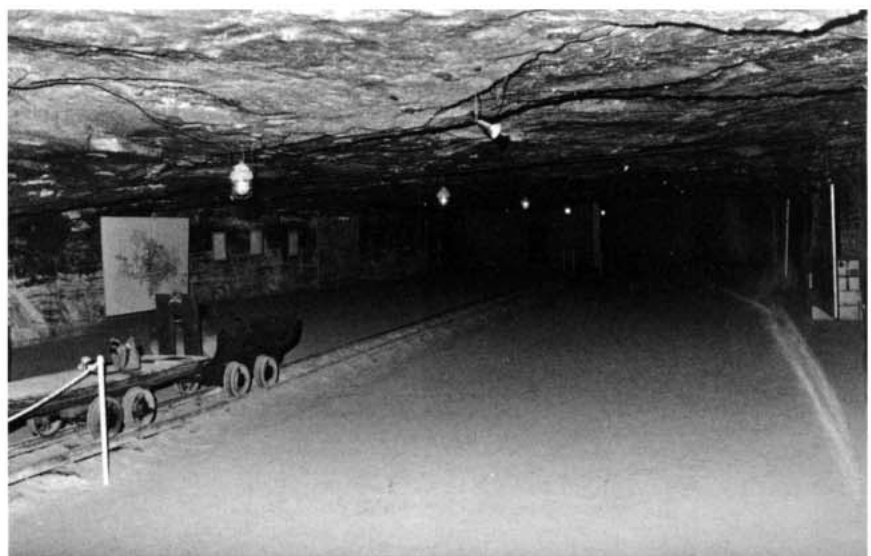


As well as making a photographic record, a plan was produced detailing the contents before they were disturbed. Today, a false wall has been built across the end of the chamber for the back projection of a huge enlargement of the photo opposite. We have added its position (dotted line). We were allowed access to the area behind to match the pictures of the silverware in the suitcases reproduced on pages 11 and 13.

guards at the new location'. Accompanied by Lieutenant Colonel Carl Morris, the SHAEF G-4 aide, Bernstein then left for Frankfurt in General Crawford's plane to look over the fortress at Ehrenbreitstein, rising high above the junction of the Moselle and Rhine rivers opposite Koblenz, for the storage of the treasure.

Arriving in Frankfurt before noon on April 9, Bernstein and Morris conferred with Third Army staff officers including Colonel Roy L. Dalferes, G-5, the Chief-of-Staff, Major General Hobart R. Gay, and his deputy, Colonel Paul D. Harkins, to formulate plans for the movement and administration of the Kaiseroda treasure. During the discussion General Patton joined the meeting and agreed that the treasure should be moved. He urged that it be done as soon as

The projection screen can be seen in the background, other blow-ups of the Signal Corps photos being spotlight around the walls. The floor was levelled after the war and the narrow-gauge railway line is a recent reconstruction.



possible in order to release the 357th Infantry and the 712th Tank Battalion for combat. General Gay prepared a letter to General Eddy delineating Bernstein's authority for the purposes of administration, movement, and appraisal of the Merkers mine discovery as direct to Third Army. Defining the responsibility given to Bernstein, Gay's arrangements included a plan for detaching empty cargo trucks returning from forward hauls back to supply points in the Frankfurt area to convey the shipment to a secure depository.

By 2.30 p.m., Bernstein, Lieutenant Colonel Tupper Barrett, G-5, 12th Army Group, and Major Ferrara and Lieutenant J. S. Feary of XII Corps G-5, made a preliminary inspection of the Reichsbank building which was the property of Philip Holzmann A.G., located on Adolf-Hitler-Allee (today Taunusanlage) in Frankfurt. They then drove to Koblenz.

Finding the fort at Ehrenbreitstein inadequate because the great number of entrances to the storage vaults would require at least a full regiment to insure adequate security, Bernstein determined that the castle, already filled with archives and art taken from museums and public buildings by American units when they had deployed across the Rhine and Moselle river valleys, was an unsuitable location in which to store the volume of material discovered at Merkers.

By the authority of SHAEF and the town mayor, the Reichsbank building was requisitioned in the name of the Commanding General (Eisenhower). Although it was already too late to stifle publicity about the Kaiseroda mine treasure, the 'Third Army Censor was instructed by General Gay that no information of any kind would be allowed to emanate [sic] through private or press channels concerning the movement of this treasure', but stated that official pictures could be taken during the movement for possible release later.

Reporting to General McSherry by telephone early on April 10, Bernstein urged the assignment of both Property Control and Currency Section personnel of the SHAEF G-5 Financial Branch to the mission. McSherry verbally approved the requisition of the services of the 1306th Engineer Regiment through the Engineer Officer, Third Army, to rehabilitate it. Lieutenant Feary was left in Frankfurt to coordinate the work with Colonel William C. Hall, the commander of the 1306th Engineers, because the tentative plan was to move the treasure to Frankfurt from Merkers by Saturday, April 14.



Once the full extent of the discovery became known, the entire 357th Infantry Regiment was drafted in to guard the mine,



reinforced by the armour of the 773rd Tank Destroyer Battalion. M-10s of Company A seen here guarding Shaft No. 3.

Before Bernstein and Lieutenant Colonel Barrett, the 12th Army Group G-5, drove to Merkers to establish an advance headquarters, they discussed security arrangements with General Patton and General Gay. Patton 'suggested the use of a cavalry squadron while the convoy was on the road, and Gay stated that a regiment would be required in the Frankfurt area to constitute a mobile reserve in the event of a major attack'. Lieutenant Colonel Morris's report to Major General Crawford hints that the command feared 'a major attack' less from the German military than from a rogue armed force out to enrich itself by stealing the Merkers treasure.

Once at Merkers, Bernstein and Barrett inspected the Kaiseroda mine in company with the commander of the 357th Infantry, Lieutenant Colonel Mason. Before they drove to XII Corps headquarters at Meiningen, Colonel Bernstein interrogated Dr

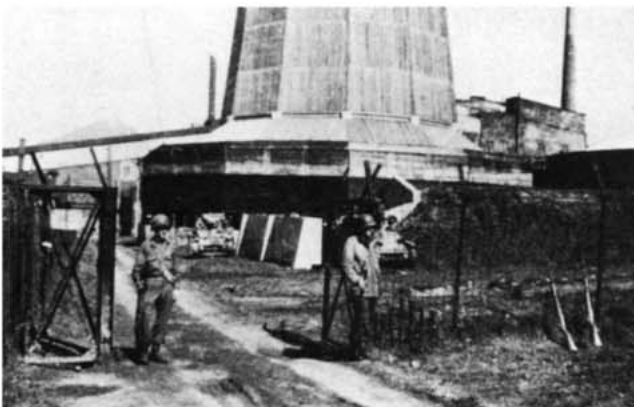
Veick and Dr Reimer, the two Reichsbank officials who were caught in Merkers when they were unable to finish moving the banknotes back to Berlin.

Amidst very detailed explanations of his rôle in the arrangements for the Reichsbank notes and monetary bullion, Veick's affidavit claimed: 'my [first] wife and two sons live in the United States. I say all I know'. What he told Colonel Bernstein was the basis for delineation between German monetary and gold reserves on the one hand and SS loot, some of which had been found in Room No. 8 in the Kaiseroda mine, on the other.

This early point in Bernstein's investigations marked the beginning of the idea to separate the captured Reichsbank assets from what was clearly SS booty. However, when the press was told about the transfer of the treasure from Merkers to Frankfurt a few days later, most of the journalists failed to make that distinction. Consequently, even

the official histories tend to lump German monetary instruments, gold bullion, reserves, and currency together with SS treasure. These early accounts were the inception of myths about great treasure troves of buried Nazi gold.

Determining the ownership of the more than 1,000 paintings and objets d'art that were found in the Kaiseroda mine was less sensational. Official inventories of the holdings of public galleries and museums were available from which to determine whether a particular item had been the property of the German state or of a sub-division thereof. Under international law these could be seized by the armed forces finding them and held until post-war restitution and reparations were arranged. Prima facie evidence that the Nazis in addition hid in Kaiseroda works of art taken from Jews and from countries occupied by the Nazis could be assured when experts of the Monuments, Fine Arts



Left: The troops were deployed to guard the various entrances and shafts, these men being stationed at the rear gate. Right: Because the mine is no longer in production, all the surface buildings, save some administrative buildings, are being demolished and the cooling tower went just prior to our visit.



Even though the Kaiseroda mine had 50,000 visitors in 1995, it cannot be self-supporting because of the limited number of visitors who can be carried by the lift each day. State support is currently available as part of schemes to foster employment in former East Germany.

and Archives (MFA&A) group, a joint Anglo-American mission headed by the Cambridge University Slade Professor of Fine Art, Geoffrey Webb, and Colonel Mason Hammond of the United States, authenticated all the property to determine that which had been stolen. Assuming scrupulous monitoring by Colonel Bernstein's mission, as long as the entire holding found in the Merkers mine remained intact until it was examined and appraised in the secure vaults of the Frankfurt depository, it would be possible to separate out SS loot.

Establishing a command post at the Kaiseroda mine on Wednesday, April 11, Colonel Bernstein and his staff assigned personnel and made preparations for the movement of the treasure to Frankfurt scheduled to begin on Saturday, April 14. The division of G-5 personnel between Frankfurt and Merkers insured continuing administrative oversight so that future contention about the categories of various items comprising the treasures could be avoided.

Bernstein had requested as staff at Merkers Lieutenant Colonel Omer V. Claiborne, of the SHAEF Mission to France and Chief, Currency Section for France; Lieutenant Colonel William S. Moore, Commanding Officer, and Lieutenant Benjamin S. Schilling of the European Civil Affairs (ECA) Currency Section for Germany, both detached from XII Corps; Lieutenant Commander US Coast Guard Joel A. Fisher, Chief Freezing, Foreign Exchange and Property Control Section of SHAEF G-5 (Finance); Lieutenant USNR George L. Stout, G-5 (MFA&A); 1st Lieutenant William A. Dunn, Financial Branch, US Group Control Council; and an American civilian, Maurice St Germain, a gold expert who was an officer in the Paris branch of Guaranty Trust Co. of New York. Enlisted personnel from the ECA Currency Section for Germany were detached from XII Corps and assigned to the working group moving the treasure. Awaiting the arrival of the convoy in Frankfurt were Lieutenant Colonel Henry D. Cragon of the ECA Currency Section for Luxembourg and Belgium; Captain John A. Love, Property Control Officer attached to SHAEF G-5 (Finance); Lieu-

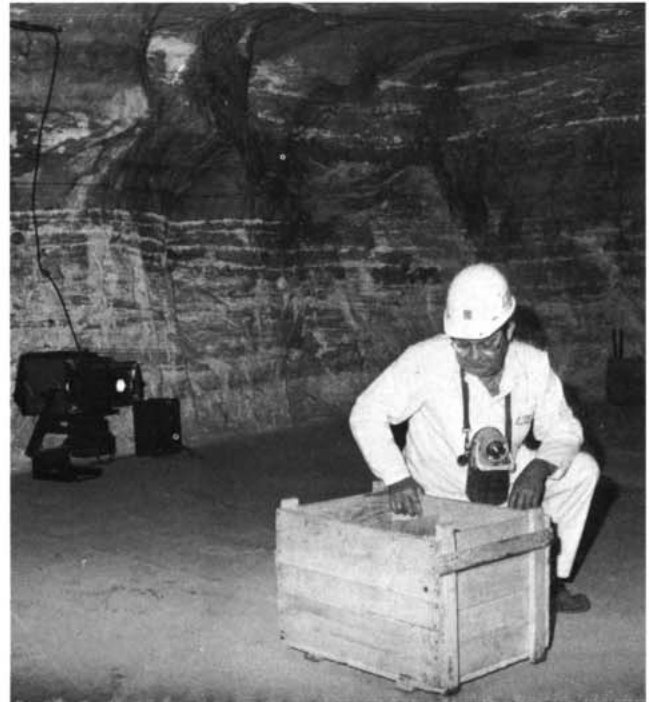


Colonel Bernard D. Bernstein, the chief of SHAEF's G-5 (Finance) branch, was detailed to take charge of the contents of the mine and to speedily remove everything to safe custody to enable the 357th Infantry to be released for combat. He arrived at Merkers on Tuesday, April 10, and began to organise the operation to carry out a complete inventory and have everything moved to Frankfurt by the weekend. Here Colonel Bernstein (left) is pictured with an aide examining sacks containing gold bars and gold coins. In all, there were more than 7,000 numbered bags, each weighing between 55lbs and 81lbs laid out in more than 20 rows. (USNA)

tenant Robert Kelso of the ECA Currency Section for Germany detached from XII Corps; Lieutenant J. S. Feary, XII Corps G-5 Finance Branch; and enlisted personnel.

The British were represented by Major Francis W. A. Fairfax-Cholmeley, British Army Headquarters Branch at the SHAEF Currency Section for Germany, and Professor Geoffrey Webb, the (civilian) British chief officer of the MFA&A, who had come to Merkers with Lieutenant Stout. Permis-

sion to inspect the mine was given to Stout through the custodial authority granted to Bernstein from General Patton, but Webb as a British civilian was excluded from the interrogation of Professor Dr Rave who provided to Stout information that initiated an inspection of an additional 45 cases of paintings and objets d'art from the Kaiser-Friedrich-Museum in Berlin that were hidden in a Wintershall mine nearby at Ransbach.



Left: This was the shot taken at the far end of Room No. 8 which Karel had to match behind the projection screen. (USNA) Above: Herr Ruck stands in for the Colonel.



Colonel Charles R. Codman (Patton's aide), April 13, 1945: 'Yesterday was a full day, and a gruelling one. General Eisenhower and General Bradley arrived in the morning to inspect the industrial salt mine at Merkers in which, General Eddy had reported, was stashed away the entire German gold reserve. We were met at the mine head by Generals Eddy and Weyland, also a Colonel Bernstein from the Finance Section of SHAEF. The party was ushered into a primitive freight hoist operated by an unprepossessing German civilian. The General began counting the stars on the shoulders of those about him as the jittery elevator rattled with ever-accelerating speed down the 2,000 feet [sic] of pitch-black shaft. He glanced up at the single cable now barely visible against the diminishing patch of sky. "If that clothesline should part", he observed thoughtfully, "promotions in the United States Army would be considerably stimulated." A voice from the darkness, that of General Eisenhower. "O.K., George, that's enough. No more cracks until we are above ground again." At the bottom of the shaft we stepped out into a dimly lit tunnel leading to a high-vaulted area not unlike the champagne cellars of Reims. Boxes, cases, crates, stacks of paper currency, gold coin and bullion, jewels, paintings, dental bridgework and fillings. More than 100 million dollars' worth, Colonel Bernstein estimated. In a corner by itself a dozen sizeable bales of Reichsmarks. "What are those?", General Eisenhower asked. "They are earmarked to meet future German Army payrolls", the interpreter explained. "I doubt if they will be needed", General Eisenhower said.'

Above: Here, Eisenhower, flanked by Lieutenant General Omar N. Bradley (left), Commanding General of the 12th Army Group, and Major General Manton S. Eddy commanding XII Corps, is pictured 'walking through one of the underground treasure chambers'. The clue to the location is the inscription on the crates on the left identifying them as coming from the Antiken-Museum (ANT) in Berlin. The items from this museum came with the last two consignments from Berlin. That on March 27 comprised 72 crates of the Antiken, plus 188 from the Skulpturen-Abteilung, 38 from the Islamische Abteilung, 52 from the Volkerkunde-Museum, 37 from the Zeughaus-Museum, 3 from the Museum für Vor- und Frühgeschichte, one each from the Gemälde-Galerie and the Ägyptisches Museum, and 20 crates and 231 folders from the Kupferstich-Kabinett. On March 30, another 19 crates arrived from the Antiken-Museum, plus 45 each from the Skulpturen and Volkerkunde, 3 from the Vor- und Frühgeschichte, 51 paintings from the Gemälde-Galerie, 27 crates and 9 parcels from the Ägyptisches Museum and 5 crates and 553 folders from the Kupferstich-Kabinett. However, owing to the lack of fuel for the transport below ground, and time, not all the crates from the former delivery were moved into Room No. 20 (where most of the art was stored) and none from the latter. They were provisionally stored in the main tunnels where this picture was possibly taken. (US Signal Corps)



Reflecting on his tour of the mine with Eisenhower down a tunnel lined with priceless paintings, General Patton (centre) observed in his memoirs: 'The ones I saw were worth, in my opinion, \$2.50, and were the type normally seen in bars in America'. The shadows and the narrow passageway suggest that this shot was taken in one of the tunnel corridors or in the haulage way in front of the elevator shaft. A great many paintings and packages of Reichsbank currency were abandoned in the tunnels when, on April 4, the Americans interrupted the frantic, post-Easter underground rearrangements by the Reichsbank and museum custodians responsible for the treasures in the Kaiseroda mine. (USNA)



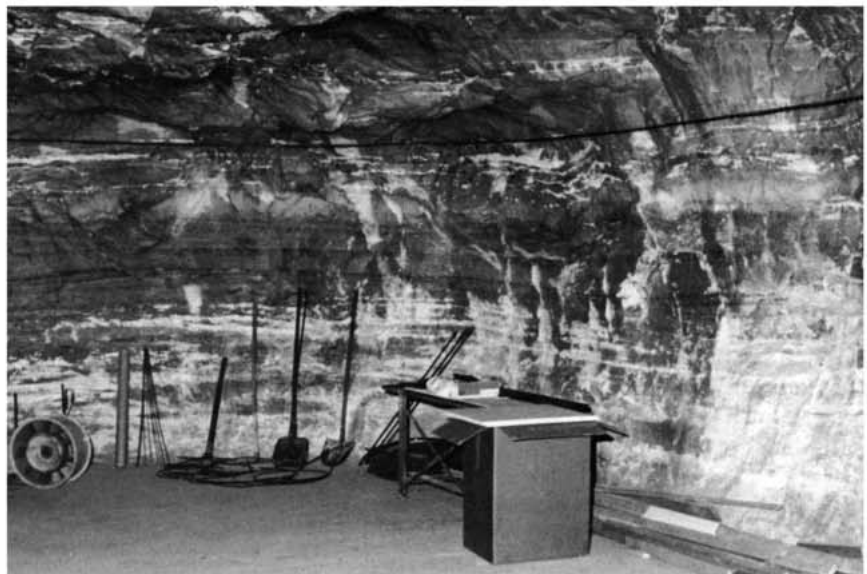
More certain are the pictures taken when the party reached Room No. 8.

The last task left for the late afternoon of April 11 were the arrangements made 'in anticipation of distinguished visitors ... [expected on] Thursday morning ... [These were] to see that the mine and shaft equipment was functioning properly and that German civilians were available for questioning if needed.' Colonel Bernstein and other staff personnel had been caught underground during a power failure in the mine earlier in the day. At 10.30 a.m. on April 12, the distinguished visitors — Generals Eisenhower, Bradley, Patton, Eddy, and members of their staffs — arrived for a subterranean tour of the Merkers mine. Before they descended in the main working elevator to the passage way, the party was briefed by Colonel Bernstein about the treasure. He provided a preliminary estimate of its value, how it came to be shipped there, and discussed the plans for moving it to Frankfurt. These 'were orally approved by the visiting officers'.

The generals were then shown Room No. 8, where the meticulously stacked and organised rows of bags and packaged currency, banknotes, gold coins, and bars of gold bullion were laid out. Behind these at the far end of the 210ft x 75ft vault were suitcases crammed with obvious SS loot.

The generals also inspected the paintings and other art objects found stored in Room No. 20, further down the same mine tunnel, and alongside the tunnel at various places between the elevator and that room. Finding some 393 paintings protected only by loose wrappings or portfolios, the generals sifted through some of the 1,214 cases filled with paintings and miscellaneous objets d'art, 2,091 boxes containing engravings, drawings and prints as well as 140 rolls of oriental rugs and tapestries. These were all sent to Frankfurt on Tuesday, April 17, after the entire monetary, bullion and currency shipment — recorded as \$241,113,302 — had been delivered and secured at the depository. Two days later, a 'Top Secret' inventory was sent to US

Centre: With Bradley behind and Patton on the left, Eisenhower inspects one of the many suitcases filled with Nazi loot. We saw Colonel Bernstein (on the extreme right) making an inventory of the same case on page 11. Right: This is the rear part, inaccessible to visitors today, because of the projector wall.



Army Chief-of-Staff George Marshall indicating that preliminary assessment of the original monetary and bullion shipment from Kaiseroda consisted of, in addition, 18 sacks of gold or silver bars and '189 boxes, parcels, and suitcases containing silverware, coins, jewelry etc' thought to be 'SS property'. The inventory did not mention the former custodians of the paintings or objets d'art, or the boxes of engravings, prints, and drawings, or the rolls of carpets and tapestries. Whether these treasures were SS loot or stored for one or more of the Reich museums had yet to be ascertained.

After General Eisenhower's party left Merkers to inspect the nearby Buchenwald subsidiary camp at Ohrdruf, Colonel Bernstein assigned Lieutenant Colonel Moore the task of marking the money containers and preparing shipping documents for the movement of the treasure from the mine scheduled to begin on Saturday, April 14. Interrogations of the Reichsbank chief cashier, Otto Reimer, and the manager of the bank's Precious Metals Department, Albert Thoms, as well as Wintershall A.G. officials (Ernst Puntman, Walter Polnicke, Dr Waldemar Meyer, Hans Richter, George Peters) and employees (Dr Veil, Dr Schawe, Rathke, Kurzel, Enger, Boerner, and Rudolph) that



The locations of some of the masterpieces left in the tunnel can be precisely identified. This spot (left) can be immediately recognised as being in the main tunnel between Shaft No. 2 and 3 ([5]



on plan on page 3). The picture is *Winter Garden* by the French impressionist Edouard Manet (1832-83). Right: The girder has since been removed.

afternoon and evening provided information that other art and archival treasures were hidden in neighbouring Wintershall mines. Commander Fisher was assigned responsibility for preparing the inventories of treasure located in these mines and gathering financial and property control intelligence information.

Arrangements on Friday, April 13, were confounded by the news that President Roosevelt had died during the early afternoon (Washington time) on the day before. Nevertheless, with Lieutenant Colonel Cragon designated as the receiving officer in Frankfurt for the gold, silver and paper currency, and 32 10-ton trucks from the 3628th (this may be a typing error as the movement order states 3632nd) and 4263rd Quartermaster Truck Companies arriving by 7.30 a.m. the next day, Colonel Bernstein was able to start the loading as scheduled at 9 a.m. on Saturday.

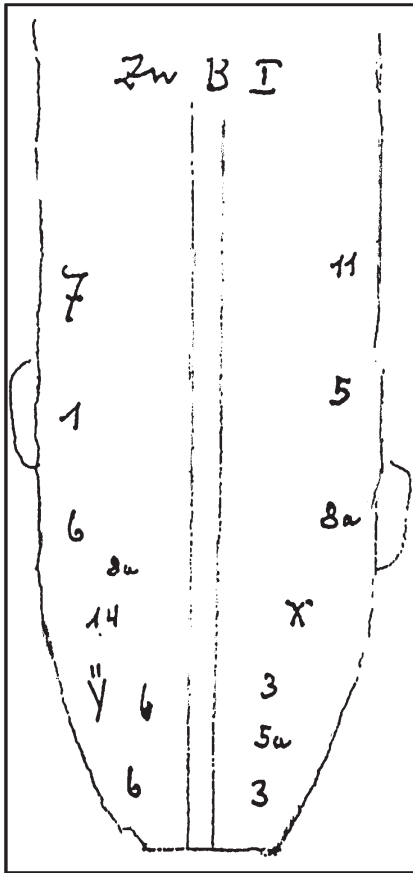
The interior of the art chamber is not so easy to identify. Master Sergeant Harold Maus of the HQ and Service Company, 1303rd Engineer Regiment examines a painting by the 18th-century Spanish artist Francisco de Goya (1746-1828). Above it hangs a stencil from a later era!



Room No. 20 is not open to visitors but it was specially unlocked for us so that we could picture the interior. It is now



used to store test drilling/boring samples (in oblong wooden boxes) from this and other mines in the area.



Professor Dr Rave prepared this sketch plan (left) on April 11, 1945, recording the contents of Room No. 20: 'Found at "X": about three dozen suitcases of staff personnel. "Y": about 20 crates of a water maintenance agency from Königsberg. Stored from the deliveries (from March 20, 1945, onwards): 1. Ägyptisches Museum: 19 (?) crates. 2. Skulpturen-Abteilung: about 60 crates [not shown on plan]. 3. Islamische Abteilung: 1 (?) crate, 10 rugs. 4. Schloss-Museum: about 60 crates [not on plan]. 5. Schloss-Museum: 150 rugs. 6. Gemälde-Galerie: about 40 crates. 7. National-Galerie: 342 unpacked paintings on beam gratings. 8. Kupferstich-Kabinett: about 60 folders in two crates [not on plan]. 8a. Kupferstich-Kabinett: 28 small crates with handles (top quality). 11. Volkskunde-Museum: about 6 crates. 14. Library of Reich Minister of Education Bernhard Rust (private property): 79 crates.' This picture (above) was most likely taken in the room as the tapestry rolls and parcels on the left are tagged 'Schl.M'. (Schloss-Museum) which arrived on March 22 when there was still time — and fuel — to move them to Room No. 20. Several of the boxes stencilled 'Sk.Abt' (Skulpturen-Abteilung) have pictures of the object pasted on the outside. (US Signal Corps)

To facilitate rapid removal, Jeeps with trailers were lowered into the mine to the 1,600-foot level and used to haul the treasure from the gold vault to the foot of Nos. 2 and 3 shafts. The trailers were disconnected from the Jeeps and hoisted to the surface, pulled by hand to loading ramps where the material was hand-loaded onto the trucks. Officers of the 357th Infantry and from Colonel Bernstein's G-5 staff checked the treasure on to the trailers in the vault and one officer accompanied each trailer to the hoist, staying with the load until it reached the surface where it was passed to the officer preparing inventories for each truck. The officer who had accompanied the trailer returned with it to the interior of the mine for another load.

The system of checking the treasure began with one officer and one enlisted man stationed at the inside of the door of the vault. That officer checked and called out the numbers as the bags were taken out of the door and loaded on to the Jeep trailers. The enlisted man at the door wrote the number on a sheet of paper to be used as a load slip for each container in the load. Once hoisted up, the officer on the trailer signed the load slip and turned it over to the G-5 currency section officer supervising the loading at the truck ramps. An enlisted man from the currency section called out the numbers of the items as they were put into the truck and the officer checked the load slip in order to verify that each item which left the vault below was loaded on the truck. The truck loading officer recorded the truck and trailer number, the names and serial numbers of the drivers and assistant drivers, and any special guards assigned to that particular truck, and initialed the load slip so the security officer could return it to the vault where the enlisted man at the entrance checked it against his register to verify that all containers removed from Kaiseroda were inventoried and accounted for.

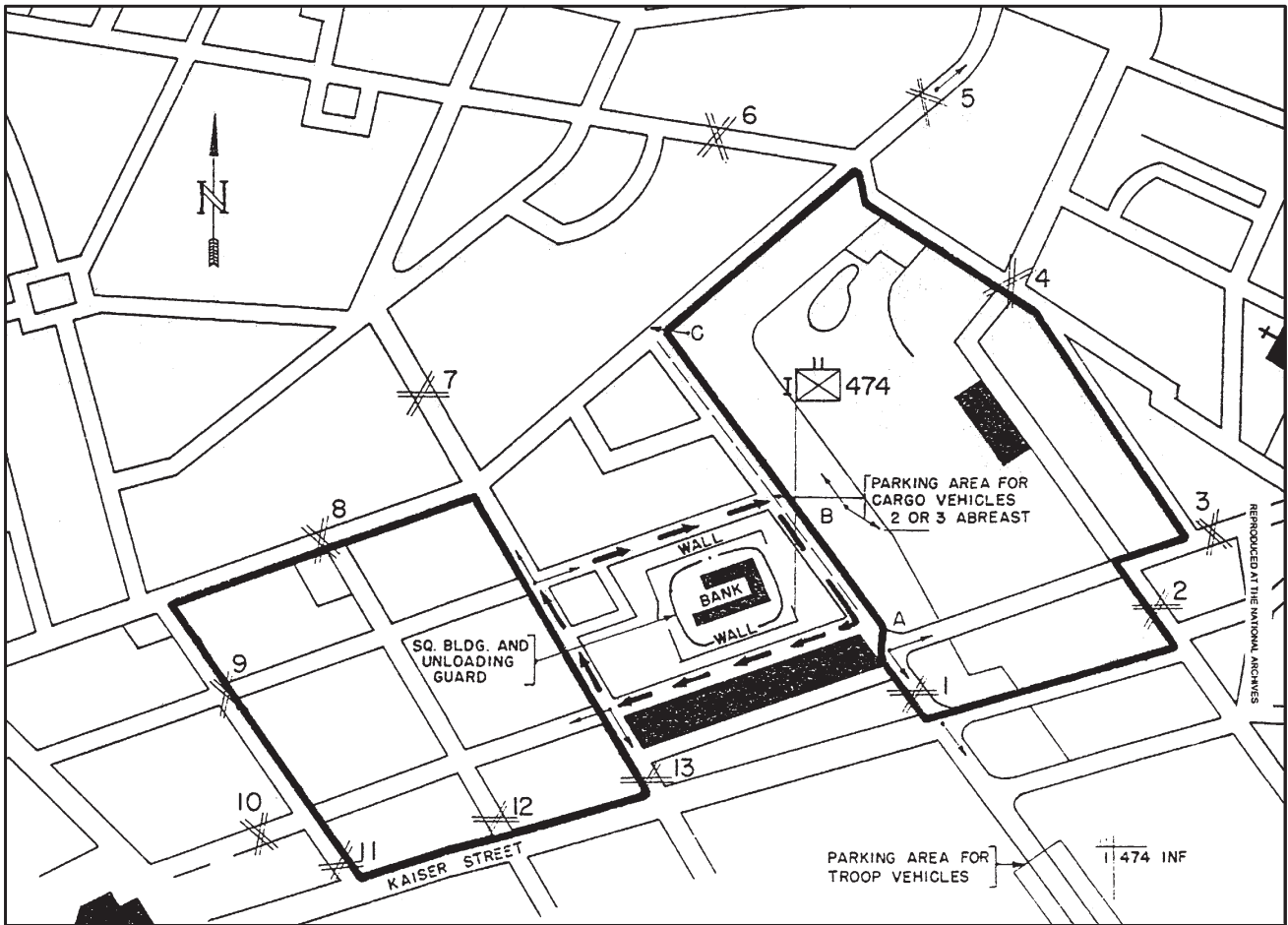
While the treasures from Room No. 8 and the corridors of Kaiseroda mine were being loaded, Colonel Bernstein called a meeting

with Lieutenant Stout of MFA&A, Captain Dunn of US Group Control Council, and Lieutenant Colonel Barrett of 12th Army Group to arrange the movement of approximately 400 tons of fine art stored in Room No. 20 and other parts of Wintershall's mines in the Merkers area. These were brought to

the surface on April 15 and 16. Loading of these precious masterworks was to begin at 12 noon on Monday, April 16, using 39 10-ton trucks procured from an American Frankfurt-based Highway Transportation Division. These arrived in three convoys of 13 each by 9 a.m. on the Monday morning.



The removal of the Merkers treasure trove began on Saturday, April 14, following a carefully-planned procedure to ensure nothing went astray. In all, the monetary cache was valued at \$241,113,302 — then the equivalent of £60 million at the exchange rate of \$4 to £1 — in today's terms possibly £1,300 million. (The military exchange rate fixed in 1945 for the Reichsmark was RM10 to \$1 or RM40 to £1). Here, 1st Lieutenant John A. Busterud of HQ Company, 1st Battalion of the 357th Infantry, the commander of the battalion's munitions and security platoon, checks off the numbers stencilled on the bags of gold as they are removed from Room No. 8. There was a double-check as the bags were taken out of the chamber and again when each load reached the surface and was loaded onto the trucks for onward shipment to the depository which had been prepared in Frankfurt. (Courtesy J. A. Busterud)



FRANKFURT

The gold convoy departed from Kaiseroda mine at 8.45 a.m. on Sunday, April 15, just one hour after the loading was certified as completed. Colonel Bernstein and his staff travelled to Frankfurt by car 'to make arrangements for receiving and storing the gold and currency within the vaults', according to Morris's report to General Crawford. The convoy arrived in Frankfurt at 3.45 p.m., having travelled on secondary roads as well as the Autobahn without any incident. Unloading began immediately and continued throughout the night until everything was secured in vaults by 1.30 p.m. on Monday, April 16.

The convoy carrying the 400 tons of art, loaded during that Monday until the job was completed at 9 p.m., left Merkers at 8.30 a.m. the next day, Tuesday, April 17. Morris's report stated there was 'approximately the same strength security guard as the gold convoy with the exception that fewer tactical aircraft were used'. Instead of the anticipated 39 trucks in the art convoy, 26 were loaded with art, two were loaded with prisoners, and two were empty for use in case a transfer of loads was necessary. The remaining nine trucks were sent to Forward Class III Depots to bring back empty jerricans to the Frankfurt area.

Just after dark on Tuesday, April 17, less than two weeks since the major discovery of precious metals, bullion, currency, and objets d'art in Merkers, everything was secured in the building in Frankfurt, now designated as the Frankfurt Exchange Depository (FED). Under supervision of Lieutenant Stout and Captain Dunn, the boxes and cases of art objects were placed in the protected areas according to each department of the German state museums. By 10.30 p.m., a tentative inventory of the gold, silver and currency was in the hands of General McSherry. At this point, the Americans

A designated route from Merkers to Frankfurt had been drawn up by HQ 1st Battalion of the 474th Infantry, the unit now responsible for safe transit. From the mine, the convoy would use Reichsstrasse 62 to join the Autobahn at Bad Hersfeld. Leaving the A5 at Bad Homberg, Frankfurt was entered from the north via the Friedberger Landstrasse to the city centre where the whole area surrounding the Reichsbank building on Adolf-Hitler-Allee had been cordoned off. There were road blocks at 13 places surrounding the bank, 1, 5 and 8 comprising heavy machine gun squads, the remainder half-squads of riflemen. Heavy machine gun positions were also established at A-C. The routes for foot patrols (solid line and arrowed) were also specified. In addition, once the convoy arrived, scout cars were to be deployed at Road Blocks 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 and 12 and Quad .50-calibre AA guns to perform ground defence at 2, 3, 9, 11 and 13. Five more .50s were to be located within the perimeter for anti-aircraft protection.

already had clearly separated the SS loot that would become Shipment 1 from the other assets: the gold, coins, bullion, monetary

reserves, from the Berlin central Reichsbank, the objets d'art from the state galleries and other Third Reich plunder.



The Reichsbank building was renamed by the Americans the Frankfurt Exchange Depository but today it is the Landeszentralbank Hessen.



FROM BUCHENWALD: SHIPMENT 16

At 5.30 p.m. on the afternoon of Wednesday, April 11, an American staff vehicle pulled out of the stream of the Third Army's military traffic passing the main gate of Buchenwald concentration camp. The car turned in at the front entrance where Lieutenants Edward Tenenbaum and Egon Fleck, two Psychological Warfare Division (PWD) officers, stepped out to be greeted by members of the inmate committee made up of all the nationalities incarcerated in the camp. As the *Buchenwald Report*, organised by inmate Eugen Kogon and submitted to PWD, SHAEF, by 2nd Lieutenant Albert G. Rosenberg (commander of Detachment B, 4th MRB Company), on May 11, 1945, expressed: 'A total of 21,000 prisoners had been rescued — 3,000 French, 2,000 Poles, 2,000 Czechs, 5,000 Russians, 600 Yugoslavs, 200 Italians, 200 Spaniards, 2,200 Germans, 6,000 other anti-fascists. They owed it to the US Third Army and their own international collaboration that on April 11, 1945, fascist slavery had ended for them and a new life in freedom had begun.'

Indications that the inmates intended to take matters into their own hands were made known to the Americans as early as April 8, when a home-made radio began to transmit

Buchenwald — literally 'Beech Forest' — never existed as a village, the innocuous-sounding name being coined for the concentration camp built on the northern side of Ettersberg Hill, north of Weimar, in 1937. Units of the US Army's 4th and 6th Armored Divisions reached the camp on April 11, 1945 but, based on arrangements worked out at Allied meetings at Malta (January 1945) and Yalta (February 1945), the Americans turned over the area to the Soviet forces when the formal zoning of Germany came into effect on July 1. The Soviets then used it as an internment camp — *Speziallager Nr. 2* — until 1950, shortly after the German Democratic Republic was organised. Between 1954, when the GDR earmarked it for memorialisation, and 1958 when Otto Grotewohl, the Prime Minister, dedicated it as the first anti-Nazi memorial on German soil, a large monument, incorporating three mass graves, was erected on the south flank of Ettersberg Hill. During the 40 years under GDR control, literature available at the camp emphasised the 'anti-fascist' nature of Buchenwald as a memorial site; now, like all historical sites in the former GDR, Buchenwald has been subjected to a 'revision of the basic concept' or, as the Germans so well put it: 'Überarbeitung der Gesamtkonzeption'. At Buchenwald, this revision focuses on war crimes issues: evidence derived from the American discovery of the treasures in the quarry as well as the collusion between the SS and the 'German political prisoners' (a euphemism for the German communists who were interned there) in the internal administrative operations of Buchenwald as a concentration camp. (RIOD)

'SOS Buchenwald', according to Armin Walther, a German inmate whose job at the camp was to build and repair communication equipment for the SS. Thus, by 2.10 p.m. on April 11, when Combat Team 9 of the 9th Armored Infantry Battalion of the 6th Armored Division of the Third Army arrived at the main gate on their way to take the Weimar sewage treatment plant, prisoner

shock-troops had taken control of the command tower at the camp gate by disarming and holding as prisoners those SS guards who still remained after the camp administration had fled. Armed groups of inmates systematically began patrols outside the perimeters to capture any SS who were hiding in the surrounding forests once the American tanks were in the immediate vicinity.





Tenenbaum and Fleck described their arrival at Buchenwald in the following words: '... turn[ing] a corner onto a main highway, ... [we] saw thousands of ragged, hungry-looking men, in orderly formations, marching East. These men were armed, and had leaders at their sides. Some platoons carried German rifles. Some platoons had Panzerfausts on their shoulders. Some carried 'potato masher' hand grenades. They laughed and waved wildly as they walked, or their captains saluted gravely for them. They were of many nationalities, a platoon of French, followed by a platoon of Spaniards, platoons of Russians, Poles, Jews, Dutch, mixed platoons. Some wore striped convict suits, some ragged uniforms of the United Nations, some shreds of civilian clothes. These were inmates of Buchenwald, walking out to war as tanks swept by at 25 miles an hour.'

By nightfall, Tenenbaum and Fleck had first-hand evidence of the orderly processes by which the inmate committee had begun to manage the camp. Spending their first night in beds in Block 50, the Typhus Experimental Laboratory where victims of typhus injections had been observed as they died, they began immediately on April 12 (the day of General Eisenhower's inspection of the Kaiseroda mine at Merkers and the Ohrdruf camp) to interview some of the inmates.

By evening, Eisenhower had been notified that Buchenwald had been liberated. But in the words of Fleck and Tenenbaum: 'The full truth about Buchenwald will never be known. To approach it, a large staff of interrogators would be necessary, as well as some means of protecting witnesses. The look of terror in the eyes of inmates when certain questions were asked was not lost on [us]. Names of informants are not given in this report. They are still in Buchenwald, and would undoubtedly be in gravest danger if what they said ever becomes known there. The major informants are two Allied intelligence agents who were caught by the Germans.' (These were probably two British

The American Army immediately established humanitarian and relief missions throughout Buchenwald concentration camp . . . yet the Commander-in-Chief has not lived to see the final victory. The Stars and Stripes fly at half-mast in front of the SS-Kommandantur building following the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12 — the day after US forces arrived. (RIOD)

spies, Wing Commander Forest Yeo-Thomas and Captain Christopher Burney, who had been apprehended by the Germans earlier during the war and incarcerated in Buchenwald.)

Completed by Saturday, April 14, two days before Lieutenant Rosenberg's four-man team arrived to do an in-depth study of Buchenwald for Psychological Warfare Division (PWD) SHAEF, the Fleck-Tenenbaum preliminary report as revised from the original was not released by 12th Army Group Headquarters PWD until April 24 to SHAEF under a 'restricted' security classifi-

cation. By April 24, conditions and the ideological affiliation of the inmate committee at Buchenwald had already been the subject of a parliamentary question in the House of Commons raised by F. E. Smith, MP. Within the ten-day period, delegations from the legislatures of the United States (led by Senator Alben Barkley) and Great Britain (led by the Earl of Stanhope), internationally prominent journalists, US labour leaders, and well-known American clergymen as well as a special French mission had witnessed the horrors and atrocities found at the camp at the invitation of Eisenhower.



The field-guns have long gone but the SS building still survives, albeit with post-war extensions. Picture taken from the balcony of the main gatehouse seen overleaf.



Lord Wright was 'to confirm at first hand ... [the indictments] which it had already made' and his report entitled *Visit of Delegation to Buchenwald Concentration Camp in Germany* was submitted to the UN War Crimes Commission in less than five days, on May 2, 1945. Not only had the delegation visited Buchenwald at the invitation of General Eisenhower, they provided a preliminary briefing at SHAEF Rear Headquarters on their return trip to London on April 27. Describing the functions of the commission as it had been organised, Lord Wright mentioned that Colonel Claude B. Mickelwaite, Staff Judge Advocate of 12th Army Group, and Colonel M. Brannan, Staff Judge Advocate of the US First Army, had greeted the members at the camp and, at the initial meeting, had introduced Major Howard M. McBee, the First Army Judge Advocate staff officer who had been sent to Buchenwald by his superior, Lieutenant Colonel John W. Bonner 'with the view of learning everything possible about the camp so that we would be familiar with it at the time we acquired jurisdiction'. McBee's role as guide and his comprehensive orientation was described in Lord Wright's report as formidable. Indeed, Major McBee had spent all the subsequent waking hours showing the camp and its sub-divisions to the delegation.

As the first concentration camp to be opened to the Allied news media and legislators from Great Britain and the US, and international relief missions, the revelation of the horrific scenes within Buchenwald — like those at Belsen entered by British forces a few days later (see *After the Battle* No. 89) — shocked the world. Eisenhower called in the Allied War Crimes Commission, the inspection team arriving on April 26. R-L: Lieutenant Colonel J. V. Hodgson, US Army (accompanied by Lieutenant Commander Latta, US Navy), Wing Commander E. R. Hopkins (Canada), Dr B. Ecer (Czechoslovakia) and a US Navy escort, Lieutenant Prowse, view bodies left in the enclosed courtyard of the camp crematorium. (USNA)



The building in the background is the mortuary (where no doubt any gold teeth were removed), the crematorium itself being out of the picture to the right. Karel's comparison takes in the wider view to show the relationship between the two buildings.

Meanwhile, in order to complete an encirclement to trap the Germans, Patton's Third Army continued on toward Bavaria to capture a Nazi alpine redoubt alleged to be located there. Control over the area surrounding Weimar, including Buchenwald, was transferred to Lieutenant General Courtney H. Hodges's US First Army which had moved south and east by the time the United Nations War Crimes Commission, headed by Lord Wright, arrived on Thursday, April 26, to inspect Buchenwald.



Left: The Commission inspected the cellars where, the contemporary caption says, 'victims were hung from hooks in the ceiling until dead'. (RIOD) Right: The cellar of the crematorium was probably used for fuel storage for the coal-fired ovens above —



the chute is visible. Deliberately falsifying the historical record, the East Germans enshrined the crematorium to honor the memory of pre-war leader of the German Communist Party, Ernst Thälmann.



Buchenwald was a work camp and the inmates were employed both in the nearby quarry and at radio and armament factories. The bombing of the Gustloff-Werke, which lay south-east of the semi-circular SS-Kaserne (barracks), by the Eighth Air Force on August 24, 1944 was later used by the GDR to claim that Thälmann died in the attack. However, the Fleck-Tenenbaum report (drafted by the two US Psychological Warfare Division officers who were first to arrive at the camp) states otherwise: 'This bombardment was used as an excuse for the murder of Ernst Thälmann, the famous German communist leader, though Thälmann had never been in Buchenwald.' (RIOD)

It was not until the War Crimes Commission delegates had left on the morning of April 27 that Major McBee was able to track rumours about treasure hidden in the nearby quarry ('Steinbruch' in German) by interrogating two German ex-prisoners, Armin Walther and Kurt Mascheswki. They found Friedrich Mueller, another ex-prisoner who had worked in the disinfection section of Buchenwald, who denied knowing anything about 'hidden property taken from the inmates of the camp'. Instead, Mueller took Major McBee to the quarry to show him a cave where, at the orders of the SS, he had placed a poison gas canister which, he claimed, was a sham.

Once it was determined that the area in the camp quarry was not booby-trapped by poison gas, Major McBee brought two inmates who had formerly worked in the quarry to the site and 'upon questioning them . . . discovered two air raid shelters had been located near the spot Mueller indicated. These shelters had been completely covered by blasting, the marks of which showed near the upper rim of the quarry.' Later, after making arrangements for a German civilian work detail from Weimar for the next day, April 29, Major McBee 'crawled through . . . [a small hole made into entrance No. 1 of what ostensibly had been two air raid shelters] and made an investigation of that part of the tunnel [where there were] . . . several suitcases, and wooden boxes, and also a few barrels visible'. Such was the discovery of what was to become part of Shipment 16.

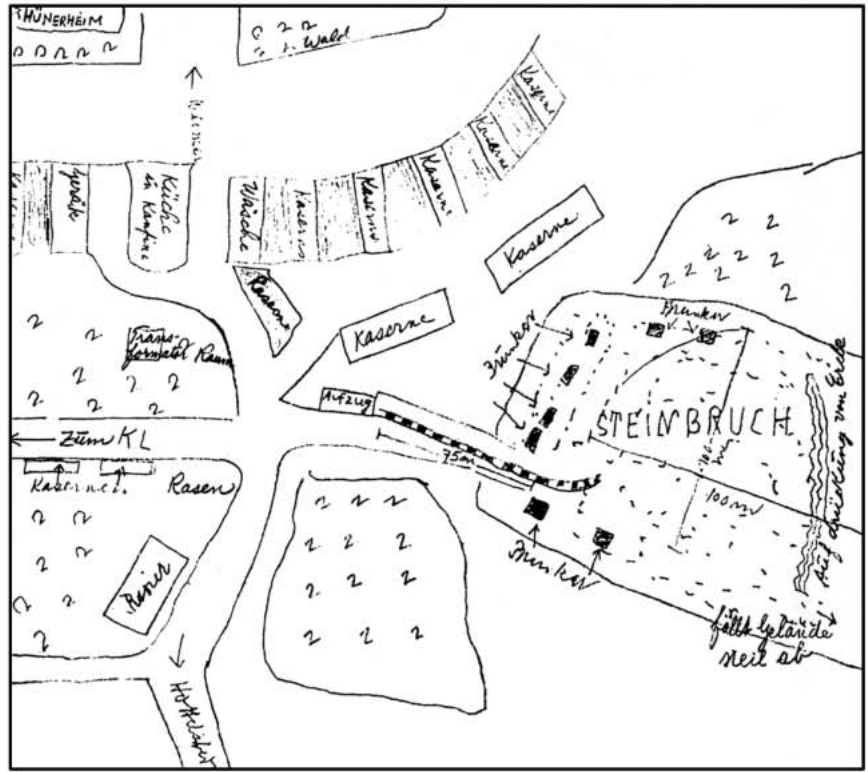


Air raid shelters for the use of the camp personnel were tunnelled into the side of the quarry which lay just west of the SS barracks. (BWA)



All but six of the SS barrack blocks were demolished in the 1950s. (See plan on page 2.) Of the rest, only foundations remain but the ramp of the tip-cart rail line from the quarry floor can still be discerned.

Two days before Buchenwald was transferred from the jurisdiction of the Third Army, the First Army's Chief of War Crimes, Lieutenant Colonel John W. Bonner, ordered one of his investigating officers, Major Howard M. McBee to familiarise himself with the camp. As the escort of the War Crimes Commission until they left on April 27, McBee learned of rumours that the SS had hidden valuables in the quarry and located the area later that day. After digging for three hours, a small opening was made into the first bunker and McBee crawled inside to find several suitcases, wooden boxes and barrels which were removed. Preparations were made to excavate the area on the following day using a German civilian work detail from Weimar. Once a second entrance was opened, everything in the tunnels and bunkers was removed. On May 2, Colonel Bonner inspected the interiors with McBee and, being satisfied that nothing was left, ordered the tunnels to be sealed. *Right:* This hand-drawn sketch of the quarry was found in April 1945 among SS documents by members of the US First Army G-5 (Finance) and became one page of a report that accompanied the inventory of the SS loot sent to Frankfurt from Buchenwald as Shipment 16. From a topological perspective, features like buildings, roads, and foliage do not conform to distances, positions, or structures as they were in April-May 1945.



Colonel Bonner's affidavit describes the assembling of the hidden treasure: 'Major McBee then continued to bring the suitcases containing property from the tunnels to my office when it was found that more space was needed and the Inspector General then made arrangements to use a separate building at this headquarters. All of the property in my office was then transferred to the newly acquired building and finally all of the property taken from the tunnels was deposited therein. The last of the property was removed on 1 May 1945. This property included bars of gold, US currency, US gold coins, diamonds, various precious stones, boxes of silver spoons, watches, clocks, and various other items of property. . . . After all the property was taken from the tunnels, I made arrangements with the Engineer Section of this headquarters to close the entrance to the tunnels by blasting so that no one would be injured or killed in case of a cave-in. The entrances to the tunnels were blasted and a bulldozer was used to finish covering the holes.'

'On 29 April and 30 April and 1 May, nine 2½-ton truckloads of property were removed from the two tunnels and turned over to the Inspector General. . . . On 2 May, . . . Colonel Bonner and I made individual inspections of the interior and found that everything had been removed', stated Major McBee in his affidavit.

The hand-drawn map does not indicate which bunkers were excavated by Major McBee. Our joint authors, Carolsue Holland and Thomas Rothbart, have spent many months on every line of enquiry but no other plan has come to light to pinpoint exactly where the two bunkers opened on April 28 and 29, 1945 were located. The discovery of this misfiled diagram in a US National Archives First Army G-5 Record Group in 1984 generated interest on both sides of the Iron Curtain (which continues even today) to locate the other alleged tunnels. In the winter of 1995-96, when the hillside was bare of foliage, our authors visited the quarry to look for evidence, the best indications being that the two lay just to the right of the ramp.





On Tuesday, May 2, Major McBee transferred custody of the quarry find to the First Army Inspector General.

On Friday, May 5, Colonel Damon M. Gunn, the First Army G-5, issued a memorandum for his subordinate, Major A. H. Whitman, who was designated to assume responsibility for the quarry find from the Inspector General. Colonel Gunn's directives to Major Whitman included crating, packing, and loading so that the convoy could leave for the Frankfurt Exchange Depository by 7 a.m. the next day.

Major Whitman's Annex I of the inventory accompanying the property to be designated as Shipment 16 included the packing schedule for items of special value in addition to a tentative valuation. Before Shipment 16 left Buchenwald for the Frankfurt Depository, 12th Army Group War Crimes Board noted that Colonel Bonner was concerned about assuring retention of at least two of the six 'truck loads of currency, jewelry, gold fillings, silverware, etc. which had

Teams of military personnel, helped by a few Buchenwald internees who had professional knowledge of gems, sorted and counted the valuables recovered from the quarry, estimated at a gross weight of nearly 21 tons! According to Lieutenant Colonel Bonner, his office soon became overloaded, at which point a separate building (since demolished) near the quarry on the grounds of Buchenwald was made available to sort what was to become evidence for future war crimes trials.

been recovered in a cave outside of Buchenwald. . . .'

The convoy transporting Shipment 16 to Frankfurt consisted of six 2½-ton trucks, two armoured cars, one MP motorcycle, and one Chevrolet. It arrived at the FED late in the afternoon of May 6.

By the time Lieutenant Colonel Cragon and Captain Paul McCarroll signed receipts on May 7 for '313 boxes or other containers numbered 1 to 313, inclusive', Major Whitman's shipment was deposited in safekeeping for account of the War Crimes Section, Staff Judge Advocate, 12th Army Group. On May 11, Colonel S. E. Senior, First Army Assistant Adjutant General, provided to General Bradley, the commander of 12th

Army Group, the description, receipts, and annexes dealing with Shipment 16, assuring that it was clearly in the custody of the Frankfurt Exchange Depository.

General McSherry, the SHAEF G-5, inspecting the FED on May 28, issued 'verbal instructions . . . [that] two small boxes (Nos. 313 and 168) from Shipment No.16 stored in room 2 (air raid shelter) were [to be] removed and placed on display in room 15 (vault)'. The memorandum documenting the display, drawn up by Colonel Cragon and his deputy, Major Edward Jesser, reported that 'the boxes were opened and part of the contents displayed. Contents were returned to boxes which were then closed and returned to the original depository.'



Above: More than 600lbs of fountain pens, wrist-watch straps and novelty jewellery were found. Right: Sorting precious and semi-precious stones. (USNA)





Grim reminders: a box containing hundreds of wedding rings (left), and (right) thousands of gold teeth. (USNA)

Major McBee's and Colonel Bonner's affidavits were sworn at First Army Headquarters, then located in Weimar, on May 8, 1945, just one week after the entire treasure from the Buchenwald quarry was turned over to the custody of the Inspector General

and two days after Shipment 16 arrived intact at the Frankfurt Exchange Depository. Altogether, Major McBee's discovery in the quarry constituted an inventory of loot filling 313 boxes, barrels, cases, crates, and packages. As FED records show, the official

accounting of Shipment 16, recorded by Colonel Bernstein during the summer of 1945, stipulates that a total of 313 containers, later re-arranged to 319, were in the custody of the Frankfurt Exchange Depository awaiting war crimes adjudication.



Major Howard McBee looks over his treasure trove, which included more than 17,000lbs of silver tableware, before the

crates were sealed to be transported as part of Shipment 16 to the Frankfurt Exchange Depository on May 6. (USNA)



FROM FRANKFURT: SHIPMENT 1 AND SHIPMENT 16

The official US Army historians, Charles B. MacDonald and Earl F. Ziemke, make no mention of Major McBee's discovery of the Buchenwald treasure that subsequently became Shipment 16, and in February 1994, Brigadier General Harold W. Nelson, the chief of the US Army Center of Military History, explained that their files revealed 'no specific information to indicate that the US Army removed from Buchenwald concentration camp and shipped to the United States valuables that the German SS had confiscated from Jewish prisoners in the camp'.

It is clear that since April 1945, when Colonel Bernstein made the initial differentiation between Third Reich assets and plunder on the one side and Nazi loot on the other, few people, if anyone, noted discrepancies between the complete accounting of the inventory taken from Merkers and the inventory listed as Shipment 1 from Merkers. The designation of shipment numbers was simply Bernstein's way of separating SS loot from other assets.

When allegations of grand theft and major pilferage against American military personnel and occupation forces surfaced in Bavaria during the late summer of 1945 (see *After the Battle* No. 31), classified military records screened out many of the details about the treasures that were in the custody of the Frankfurt Exchange Depository pending the collection of evidence for forthcoming war crimes trials. Political tension between General Lucius D. Clay (an Army career officer who became American Deputy Governor in Germany in July 1945) and Colonel Bernstein (whose patron, US Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau, facilitated his attachment to SHAEF G-5 finance) may have deflected attention away from the latter's systematic classification schemes. Once Bernstein left the European Theater, shortly after the Paris Conference establishing the Inter-Allied Reparation Agency was held between early November and mid-December 1945, security classifications shielded the open exchange of information between the various American commands and agencies about the movement and custody of Nazi loot as well as Third Reich assets and plunder.

In the summer of 1945, Colonel Bernstein (bare-headed on right) put on a huge display of captured gold, silver, diamonds, foreign currency and other valuables stored in the underground vaults of the Frankfurt Depository. This was then estimated as the largest concentration of treasure the world had ever seen, valued then at around \$500,000,000, somewhere over £3 billion plus at 1996 prices.

Since a few American officers were suspected of plundering Third Reich treasures, nothing specific about 'Nazi Gold' was retained in the official files. Later, sanitised records were returned to the Office of the Chief of Military History (OCMH). Therefore, details of Colonel Bernstein's 'shipments' remained part of the Frankfurt Exchange Depository papers.

As late as the Potsdam Conference between July 17 and August 2, 1945, the Americans were reluctant to abandon claims not only to the SS loot, but also to the Third Reich assets and plunder. They believed that as a bargaining point, sharing the treasures 'will turn upon how far other nations yield to our views on reasonable definitions of both "restitution", "war booty" and an accounting



After the Buchenwald war crimes trials ended, Colonel William G. Brey, USFET (United States Forces European Theatre) and Chief of the Frankfurt Foreign Exchange Depository, showed Abba P. Schwartz, Director of Reparations for International Refugee Organizations, the assets captured from the quarry and used as prosecution evidence. In 1948, these were sold through the Bank of England by the Inter-Allied Reparation Agency (IARA), which had been set up in January 1946, and the proceeds used to fund refugees. (USNA)

A second organisation, established by Britain, France and the United States in September 1946, was the Tripartite Commission for the Restitution of Monetary Gold which had, as its title implies, the job of handing back gold found in Germany and other countries to its rightful owners. The Commission's first Secretary was a member of the French delegation to the IARA, Jacques Lanson, their offices being set up in Brussels in the Residence Palace at 155 Rue de la Loi (right). Today the same street is host to the massive headquarters of the European Commission, the old Tripartite office now the capital's vehicle licensing office. The Commission sent questionnaires to the governments of those countries which had been overrun by Germany as a first step in the verification of claims for the restitution of gold backing currency missing from their central banks. While these responses were being rigorously checked against the records, the gold in the Frankfurt depository was transferred to the Bank of England in London for safekeeping.



therefore.' Using a precedent from Article LIII of the Hague Regulation of 1907 ('if material is actually in use by the enemy forces or is helping its operations'), the Americans argued that material was liable to confiscation. 'The gold in question, whether or not we recognize that title was in the German state, was clearly being used in behalf of the German state. Accordingly, from a strictly legal point of view, apart from the policy considerations involved, the gold may be treated as war booty.'

Stalin had indicated at Potsdam that the Soviet Union did not intend to make any claims against the American discoveries. But it was not clear whether he intended to make claims against Austria, Hungary or any of the states that fell into the Soviet area of occupation. Late in the summer of 1945, General Clay, Deputy Military Governor of the American zone, was reported to have said that the gold would be used to purchase imported supplies for Germany, indicating some truth to a rumour that the United States intended to claim the gold as war booty. Since General Clay's statement directly contradicted the position of Colonel Bernstein, then director of the finance sec-

tion of OMGUS (Office of Military Government, United States) in Berlin, who kept the US Treasury Department in Washington fully informed, once US policy shifted from harsh economic treatment of Germany to respond to reality after Potsdam, the American occupation forces charted a more lenient course of action.

The modifications in attitude toward the vanquished Germans coincided with the growing divide between the British and the Americans on the one side, and the Soviets on the other. Consequently, when the British proposed the formation of an Inter-Allied Reparation Agency (IARA) in September 1945, the questions about whether the Nazi treasures would be US war booty were once and for all stifled.

On January 14, 1946, the United States and 17 other governments signed an 'Agreement on Reparation from Germany, on the establishment of an Inter-Allied Reparation Agency and on the Restitution of Monetary Gold' which came into force on January 24. By Article 8 of Part 1 of the Agreement, a subordinate agency, the Inter-Government Committee on Refugees was allocated \$25,000,000 in German monetary gold as the

initial installment 'for the rehabilitation and resettlement of non-repatriable victims of German action. . . . The assets of victims of Nazi action who have since died and left no heirs' as well as non-monetary gold, jewelry and dental gold, gold found in church ornaments and tableware, silver wire, and precious stones were added in toto to the original \$25,000,000. In accordance with Paragraph H of Article 8, 'these funds would not be used for the compensation of individual victims, but for the rehabilitation and resettlement of persons eligible' as specified in the agreement. This arrangement established in principle that since the overwhelming majority of eligible refugees were Jewish, the funds would be allocated for the rehabilitation and resettlement of Jewish victims of Nazi action. About 5 per cent of the fund, however, was set aside for non-Jewish victims.

On July 3, 1948, a series of shipments of the remaining assets together with the valuables returned from the war crimes trials began from the Frankfurt Exchange Depository via Pan American Airways to the Bank of England on behalf of the Inter-Governmental Committee on Refugees. The last shipment took place on August 3.



In 1947, Michel Hirigoyen took over the executive position from M. Lanson to be replaced in turn by Colonel J. A. Watson in 1948. In 1953, the Commission moved offices to 50 Avenue des Arts (left), now the Banesto Bank. While gold rightfully the property of governments in the West was fairly easy to resolve, that of countries behind the Iron Curtain was more difficult and, in some cases, the arguments have gone on right up to the present day. The Commission moved offices in 1964 to 9 Rue de la Science (today a notary office) (right), the slimmed-down organisation leasing an office in the British Embassy, currently in Rue d'Arlon, in the early 1970s. Colin Harris was appointed Secretary General in January 1977, working indefatigably over the following 15 years to try to resolve the

outstanding problems. One of the thorniest concerned Albania, probably the most hard-line entity in the Communist bloc. When Harris died in 1992 there was an interregnum until Emrys Davies, former Ambassador and High Commissioner in the British diplomatic service, took over as Secretary General in June 1995. At the time of writing (July 1996), he is the sole remaining member of the Tripartite Commission — itself virtually the last of the many organisations and agencies set up by the wartime Allies — and is very close to success. Agreement with Albania, anticipated within the next six months, will finally close a chapter which began over 50 years ago when an American combat unit stumbled across a treasure trove of unimaginable proportions.