

Bringing Back Memories: GIs, Souvenir Hunting, and Looting in Germany, 1945

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Seth A. Givens

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This thesis titled
Bringing Back Memories: GIs, Souvenir Hunting, and Looting in Germany, 1945

by
SETH A. GIVENS

has been approved for
the Department of History
and the College of Arts and Sciences by

Ingo W. Trauschweizer
Assistant Professor of History

Benjamin M. Ogles
Dean, College of Arts and Sciences

ABSTRACT

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As the United States Army drove deep into Germany in early-1945, American soldiers stole and appropriated objects on a large scale. While GIs did take items when marching through Allied countries, what occurred in Germany throughout the final campaigns was different and more extensive. Not only was there souvenir hunting on the battlefield – taking pistols, helmets, and flags from German soldiers – but also widespread looting of civilian homes. Servicemen justified their actions by claiming wartime necessity, opportunities for profit, keepsakes, and revenge for Nazi atrocities. Drawing on memoirs, journals, personal papers, and interviews, this thesis seeks to divide American soldiers' stealing into two categories, souvenir hunting and looting, and to extrapolate the four major reasons why GIs looted. Using archival evidence, this work will also examine the U.S. Army's reaction to soldiers' rapacity, its policy-making processes, and the civil-military relationships in Europe throughout the dying days of World War II.

Approved: _____

Ingo W. Tauschweizer

Assistant Professor of History

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To my parents – and why not?

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INTRODUCTION

Attics, basements, and garages across the United States have served as resting places for many of the objects American soldiers brought home with them from their war in Europe. Each item has a story, just like the GI who for varying reasons picked up a pistol from a German officer, took a flag from a town square, selected a diamond bracelet from a bureau, or even picked a book off of a library's shelf. Why was the World War II American soldier so prone to collect souvenirs? For such an unassuming question, there exists no simple answer. To strike at the heart of the subject, this thesis examines how factors such as time, place, motivation, and opportunity converged to allow troops to collect souvenirs and loot across the European Theater of Operations (ETO).

This work focuses on American soldiers' conduct in Germany, but does so by comparing their actions in the other western European countries of France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. While there were cases of GIs looting in Allied countries, a whole new breed of pillaging emerged when advance units broke through the Siegfried Line in August and September 1944. Soldiers were no longer in friendly territory but rather the enemy's homeland, and the unspoken code of conduct changed. Despite Supreme Headquarters, Allied Expeditionary Force (SHAEF) presenting explicit instructions to American troops that there was to be no looting in Germany, GIs "liberated" with impressive efficiency. U.S. troops became expert looters and plied their skills all across Germany with eagerness unmatched by American soldiers before or

since.¹ As a result, taking from both German soldiers and civilians, servicemen brought back an unfathomable amount of loot to the United States.

The scope of troops' souvenir hunting and looting in Germany must be compared with Allied countries in order to fully quantify the prevalence of such behavior. No historian has attempted to estimate the scope of such actions in Germany during 1945.² Though it is widely-accepted inside, and outside, the history field that such behavior was commonplace, no data exists to quantify the argument. The General Board, United States Forces, European Theater, a division established after the war to "prepare a factual analysis of the strategy, tactics, and administration employed by the U. S. Forces in the European Theater," did not quantify looting but wrote, "Pillaging and looting in conquered and liberated areas were offenses of frequent occurrence and constituted a special disciplinary problem."³ The only person who has ever speculated about the prevalence of looting in writing was a veteran. Raymond Gantter, a sergeant in the 1st Infantry Division and a graduate of Syracuse University, postulated in his memoir that

¹ There have been very few attempts to study, let alone mention, souvenir hunting and looting in American conflicts before World War II. For the Civil War, Mark Grimsley, *The Hard Hand of War: Union Military Policy Toward Southern Civilians, 1861-1864* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995) is an excellent monograph on the Union Army's behavior in the South and Command's response to reports of looting. Paul Fussell, though in passing, does mention souvenir hunting in several places within his seminal work on World War I. Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 18, 67. Denis Winter does a much better job discussing souvenir hunting in World War I than Fussell. Although the discussions are not specifically about American soldiers, the work does attempt to discuss profit-making, albeit on superficial level. Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1979), pp. 103, 117, 206, 251.

² The closest an historian has come to providing scope to the subject was Richard Holmes' argument that "Looting was widespread in both World Wars, whatever military law-books may have said about it." Richard Holmes, *Acts of War: The Behavior of Men in Battle* (New York: Free Press, 1985), p. 354. Historian William Hitchcock was more opaque with his assertion that "looting and theft were constant features of the liberation landscape" throughout 1945. William I. Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe* (New York: Free Press, 2008), p. 42.

³ Julien C. Hyer, et al., report to Judge Advocate General, "Military Justice Administration in the Theater of Operations. Reports of the General Board," United States Forces, European Theater, no. 83, p. 18.

“eighty percent of the men [in his unit] looted, whenever and wherever possible.”⁴ While this estimation is merely conjecture, it can be argued that Gantter does have some authority to hazard a guess, as he was witness to extended months of fighting, from France to Germany.

Extant literature on American troops in World War II has shifted away from operational histories and evolved into works with a decidedly broad scope.⁵ One key aspect of the war that scholars have continually failed to grasp, however, is souvenir hunting and looting, leaving a gap in the historical record. There have been some attempts to discuss the subject in the context of larger monographs, but these are tertiary examinations and lack any thorough analysis.⁶ Rather than giving the topic sufficient analysis, historians act only as narrators and simplify an overly-complicated subject. Therefore, no single volume has sufficiently analyzed this central aspect of armies at war.

The only monograph that solely focuses on American soldiers' looting in World War II is Kenneth Alford's *The Spoils of World War II: The American Military's Role in the Stealing of Europe's Treasure*. Treading in uncharted territory, this 1994 work set out to uncover a subject about which little specifics were known in the scholarly world.

The Spoils of World War II, however, is not thoroughly convincing, nor does it achieve a

⁴ Raymond Gantter, *Roll Me Over: An Infantryman's World War II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), p. 189.

⁵ The trend began as New Military History became firmly entrenched by the 1980s. The first was Lee Kennett's *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1987). The best-known monographs came later: Peter S. Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2003); Gerald F. Linderman, *The World within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1997); John C. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1998); Peter Schrijvers, *The Crash of Ruin: American Combat Soldiers in Europe during World War II*. New York: New York University Press, 1998).

⁶ See Linderman, *The World Within War*, 109-110; McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood*, 76-77; Derek S. Zumbro, *Battle for the Ruhr: The German Army's Final Defeat in the West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 2006), pp. 276, 380-381.

comprehensive discussion. Ostensibly, the book appears to cover a vast subject, but upon closer inspection it becomes clear that the focus is singularly upon American soldiers who stole highly valuable works of art, as well as cultural treasures. Aside from the work's narrow examination, Alford's discussion is also highly polemical. With phrases such as, "The sheer stupidity of some of the looting is exemplified by the treatment of rare books," the work does little to engender expectations of impartiality from the reader.⁷ Alford's tone, then, is not that of an unbiased narrator and analyst – the prose inadequately hides the work's sanctimonious inflection. It is, in short, merely a condemnation of the U.S. Army for their supposed role in stealing Europe's treasures, not an examination of such. While the introduction speaks entirely of individual soldiers and their propensity to take civilian objects, the body of the work discusses only a small group of men who took cultural items: the Monument, Fine Arts, and Archives Division (MFAA) of the U.S. Army. The division, created to retrieve historical and cultural objects from the battlefield to ensure their safety, was responsible for the majority of the rescued art works that fill Europe's museums today.⁸ Alford discusses solely the MFAA's role in taking items for their own profit, and subsequently condemns the entire Army for the actions of a handful of men in a division of no more than 400. What about those items that were not cultural treasures? The looting of major art works was extremely uncommon; American soldiers, by far, took more worthless items from German citizens than they did invaluable artifacts. Why do historians continually look at

⁷ Kenneth Alford, *The Spoils of World War II: The American Military's Role in the Stealing of Europe's Treasures* (New York: Birch Lane, 1994), p. xi.

⁸ The most recent discussion of this division is Robert M. Edsel, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (New York: Center Street, 2009).

cases such as the disappearance of the Hesse crown jewels?⁹ *The Spoils of World War II*, then, is woefully lacking in a thorough examination of looting during World War II.

Gerald Linderman's *The World within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II*, though one of the best works on soldiers in World War II, gives souvenir hunting and looting little mention.¹⁰ There is a brief observation of looting, but the discussion lacks any substantial analysis. Rather than examining soldiers collecting items both on the battlefield and in homes, Linderman discusses only military objects that GIs took and German soldiers' anger at such trophy-taking.¹¹ Paul Fussell's *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War*, gives neither souvenir hunting nor looting any discussion. Fussell only mentions souvenirs in passing – all anecdotal evidence of GIs taking objects serves only to prove a separate argument.¹² By overlooking why soldiers collected trophies on and off the battlefield, *Wartime* fails to

⁹ After the war, the U.S. Army requisitioned Kronberg Castle, on the outskirts of Frankfurt am Main, as a country club for officers. Captain Kathleen Nash, the appointed hostess of the club, and two friends discovered a wooden box underneath fresh concrete while in the castle's subbasement. When the group opened the box, they discovered the Hesse Crown Jewels. The cache of necklaces, crowns, and jewelry was worth, at the time, millions of dollars. Rather than turning in their find, Nash and her two friends took the diamonds out of their settings and sold the gold in Switzerland. Upon the family's return, they discovered the missing box, prompting the Army's Criminal Investigation Unit to act. In the end, Captain Nash and her lover, Colonel Durant, received substantial prison terms. Kenneth D. Alford, *Nazi Plunder: Great Treasure Stories of World War II* (New York: Da Capo, 2008), pp. 148-149; Michael J. Kurtz, *American and the Return of Nazi Contraband: The Recovery of Europe's Cultural Treasure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 201-202.

¹⁰ There are counterparts to Linderman's work for Germany and Great Britain. Stephen G. Fritz, *Frontsoldaten: The German Soldier in World War II* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1995) is the only monograph to examine the German soldier in World War II, and follows in the same model as *The World Within War*. The best work on British soldiers, and following more closely along the lines of this research, is Sean Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils: D-Day to VE-Day, the Reality behind the Heroism* (Gloucestershire: Arris Books, 2004). Longden is the only author to offer an extended study of soldiers looting in World War II, albeit troops of the British Empire, and the only one who differentiates looting for keepsakes and necessity. Sean Longden, *To the Victor the Spoils*, pp. 229, 232-233.

¹¹ Gerald F. Linderman, *The World within War: America's Combat Experience in World War II* (New York: Free Press, 1997), pp. 109-110.

¹² Paul Fussell, *Wartime: Understanding and Behavior in the Second World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 117, 269, 289.

analyze an important component of troop behavior in combat. William Hitchcock's *The Bitter Road to Freedom: A New History of the Liberation of Europe*, one of the best works of the war's end from the civilian perspective, briefly mentions soldiers looting but only in Allied countries. Though Hitchcock does have the proper venue in which to discuss the relationship between GIs and civilians, and also the effects of looting, he focuses on narrative rather than analysis. *The Bitter Road to Freedom* offers no discussion of why soldiers looted. It retreats into incomplete analysis with which Alford would agree, and insinuates that all rapacity was for reasons of profit.¹³ John C. McManus' *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II* is the best work of GIs as a collective group, and does touch upon looting, but its cursory glances neither fully explain GIs' actions nor do they illuminate the complexities of the issue. McManus posits that frontline soldiers were not the greatest looters; it was, rather, the support troops in reserve who were indiscriminate with their thefts.¹⁴ Though his analysis is supported by the available documents and memoirs, *The Deadly Brotherhood* does not expound on the subject further. Thereby, the work insufficiently discusses GIs' stealing, the motivations for such actions, the interplay between military men and civilians, or the military's reaction to soldiers' activities. Peter Schrijver's *The Crash of Ruin: American Combat Soldiers in Europe during World War II*, thought to be one of the best works on GIs in World War II, gives no discussion of souvenir hunting or looting during the war. While his work does solely focus on how soldiers viewed Europe, the lack of any mention of soldiers taking objects is shortsighted.

¹³ Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom*, pp. 41, 91-92.

¹⁴ John C. McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood: The American Combat Soldier in World War II* (Novato: Presidio Press, 1998), pp. 71-72.

All monographs that have included a tertiary discussion of soldiers taking objects in war have overly-simplified the topic and do not answer the question, Was all looting American soldiers did in World War II the same? These peripheral discussions tend to lump every infraction into one category, simply referring to it all as looting. This classification obscures a deceptively complex topic. Due to the intricacies of the situations in which American soldiers stole objects, there should actually be two classifications: souvenir hunting and looting. The purpose for this distinction lies in the context with which the looting took place. The historiographical cataloging of GIs taking items as simply looting obscures the scope of what soldiers took, why the troops stole the objects, and in what context they took the items. Only upon these categorical distinctions can the widespread looting and pillaging of 1945 by Americans on the Western Front become clear to the casual observer.

What is more, historians labeling all stealing as looting ignores the legal precedents that govern warfare. Under the Laws and Customs of War on Land set forth by the Hague Convention of 1899, soldiers were legally permitted to take objects from enemy soldiers. Combat is an unspoken agreement between opposing forces, and as such all participants in uniform have generally accepted their lot and understand they have entered into a contract. The convention stipulates that combat, because of the agreed upon risks that both sides enter into, must not be judicially classified as murder. Under Section I, Article 4 of the Laws and Customs of War on Land, the defeat of the enemy yields to the victor the military spoils of war, including abandoned equipment, personal

weapons, and military papers.¹⁵ Thus, souvenir hunting is sanctioned under the rules of war.

This distinction between soldiers in uniform and noncombatants means looting from civilians needs to be another classification altogether. While it is possible to be categorized as the spoils of war, this is too limiting. Even though international law during 1945 allowed for soldiers to appropriate the enemy combatant's belongings, Articles 46 and 47 of *Laws and Customs of War on Land* outlines that "Private property can not be confiscated," and "Pillage is formally forbidden."¹⁶ Therefore, one cannot simply lump all instances of soldiers stealing objects as looting. Since World War II was a total war, it was difficult for civilians in most countries throughout continental Europe to not be seen as a participant in the war. As a result, GIs perpetrated acts that some argue are moral failures. Political philosopher Michael Walzer called looting, as well as rape, "morally reprehensible," and argued such actions represent "a loss of control as well as a criminal act."¹⁷ There were unarmed participants, whose only claim to actually being a part of the war was their almost total absence of rights and ability to resist the wishes of their conquerors.

GIs themselves saw the two actions as completely disparate from one another. Veteran Raymond Gantter differentiated picking up items from the battlefield and homes when he said, "I make a distinction between confiscation and looting. All weapons, for

¹⁵ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The Hague Conventions of 1899 (II) and 1907 (IV) Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land, Pamphlet No.5* (Washington D.C.: Carnegie Endowment, 1915), p. 9.

¹⁶ Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *The Hague Conventions of 1899 (II) and 1907 (IV)*, p. 24.

¹⁷ Michael Walzer, "Two Kinds of Military Responsibility" in *The Parameters of Military Ethics*, Edited by Lloyd J. Matthews and Dale E. Brown (Washington: Pergamon-Brassey's, 1989), p. 69.

instance, however outmoded or rusty, were legitimate prizes according to the rules of warfare, as were cameras.” Conversely, “there were strict orders prohibiting the seizure of jewelry, silverware, personal belongings, clothing, food, and so on. Sometimes a special order was issued, putting a specific *Verboten* on leather goods, furs, etc.”¹⁸

Therefore, historians practice a form of categorical confusion when they relate stories of soldiers taking a Luger from a German officer and of troops searching homes for valuables as both instances of looting.

Despite the lack of secondary literature on the motivations of troops, there are recollections of veterans who have explained their actions. Often times their explanations are part of journals, memoirs, and interviews, unassumingly imbedded, just as another anecdote of life in World War II. Chapters 1 and 2 rely heavily upon these sources, and attempt to interpret soldiers’ recounting of instances where they took objects off of the battlefield and from German homes. There are those who are skeptical of relying upon the individual’s perspective in journals, memoirs, and oral histories due to accuracy of facts, as well as memory and objectivity. One certainly can question memory and its susceptibility to the erosion of time, as there is always the inevitable distortion of reality the individual unknowingly places on their own historical record. However, veterans’ discussion of their souvenir hunting and looting are often frank – after all, the ex-soldier seeks to gain little by admitting to a widely-known reality that occurred throughout Germany. Historian Peter Kindsvatter defends the use of memoirs as sources in his work, *American Soldiers*, when he says “. . . the fact remains that this written and

¹⁸ Raymond Gantter, *Roll Me Over: An Infantryman’s World War II* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2007), p. 190.

oral testimony is the primary available source for learning about the combat experience.”¹⁹ While these sources provide insight into the motivations and environment of GIs in combat, the perspective of the U.S. Army and SHAEF as institutions emerges from official records. As a result, Chapter 3 relies heavily upon memos and orders that SHAEF sent to its subordinate channels, and how each command down to the company level interpreted this discourse.

Why is the question of souvenir hunting and looting significant? First, souvenir hunting speaks to a larger theme throughout warfare. By examining how American soldiers executed their own brand of souvenir hunting while in Germany during World War II, one can draw parallels to how troops behaved in other wars. The significance of soldiers seeking war trophies also allows a look into why those who go into combat acquire mementoes. What motivations drive soldiers to pick up the enemy’s weapons, flags, helmets, and other pieces of equipment? What do soldiers then do with those items?

Second, interpreting soldiers looting items from homes is an important component in uncovering civilians’ initial impression of their conquerors. Herein lays a window into the social history of fighting in Germany. World War II ushered in a new era of warfare. Vast expanses of frontier could become battlefields within short order, as armies were more mobile than they had ever been. Frontlines stretched not just for unseen miles, but across national borders. Since the war was continent-wide, civilians had few choices or opportunities to escape the fighting. Therefore, many families chose to remain in their

¹⁹ Peter S. Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers: Ground Combat in the World Wars, Korea, and Vietnam* (Lawrence, University of Kansas Press, 2003), p. xvii, xviii.

homes and wait for the fighting to pass, hoping not to become a casualty. Troops were tense, frightened, and their social sensibilities had been perverted throughout the rigors of combat. It was in these situations that German civilians' initial contact with American soldiers was in a less-than-hospitable environment.

Third, it is pertinent to study souvenir hunting and looting because the lack of a thorough discussion adds to an incomplete political history narrative. How did their interaction with German civilians compare to the experiences in Allied countries? American soldiers' looting in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg strained relations between the U.S. Army and civilian local governments, and had the propensity to become a much larger problem. How, then, did SHAEF perceive GIs' actions with regards to the effects on political relationships? The answers to these questions can shed light onto another form of civil-military social interaction during the war.

Fourth, souvenir hunting and looting has ties to operational history, and allows one to track how GI rapacity evolved as the American armies pushed eastward. Strategic decisions played key roles in how American soldiers could take things from homes – they had little effect on souvenir hunting. In anticipation of the offensive into Germany, commands made decisions that indirectly allowed GIs to loot on a larger scale in Germany than what could have occurred otherwise. The evolution of operational procedures from the Siegfried Line to Germany's eastern borders shifted the way in which the Army fought and the way soldiers could loot.

Finally, examining souvenir hunting and looting can illustrate how the U.S. Army reacted to its soldiers' actions which lay outside the parameters of allowable behavior. These procedural mechanisms for dealing with troops provide a look inside the decision-making processes that did not involve strategic or tactical concerns. Troops' everyday lives were consumed by all aspects military, a prospect unfamiliar to an army predominately made up of citizen soldiers. Therefore, souvenir hunting and looting tended to be a way to turn their plight into an advantageous situation. These actions, however, had a reaction from command. Therefore, this study can shed light on how the U.S. military allowed, or disallowed, their soldiers certain freedoms. Did commanders permit their troops some liberties while in war? The answer to that question can illustrate the military's concern, or lack thereof, for civilian property. As a result, these aspects can show how American society governed its interactions with other peoples, for every collective action reflects a culture's belief system and world view. To that end, souvenir hunting and looting, though a relatively small examination into the environment of combat, can be illustrative of larger themes in war.

CHAPTER 1: GIS AND SOUVENIR HUNTING

Stumbling down a dark cellar, the soldiers entered a large chamber chiseled out of bedrock. Fifty feet long, thirty feet wide, and ten high, the room's walls were filled with metal bottle racks holding several thousand fifths, liters, and magnums of champagne and wine. The room was bustling with soldiers, some drunk and others in the process. The mob of GIs fumbled around in the dark, and frantically loaded boxes, bags, and their pockets with as much alcohol as they could before it was all gone. Outside the alpine home was a scene of utter chaos. It was "Hitler's last garden party," complete with an "insane confusion of lights, drunk, rubble, and rain, [which] was twice confounded by the shouting, pushing hordes of soldiers" who had come up the mountain when the other GIs were in the cellar.²⁰ It was 7 May 1945, World War II in Europe was over, and American soldiers from the 3rd Infantry Division and 101st Airborne were celebrating the occasion at the expense of Adolf Hitler's wine cellar in his mountainside retreat at Berchtesgaden. It had been over five months since American troops had stepped back into Germany after being pushed out during the Battle of the Bulge. Steadily marching across the country, the soldiers left in their wake an impressive swath of looted pockets before it all culminated with the systematic looting of Hitler's *Berghof*. It was the symbolic end to the American servicemen's nation-wide souvenir hunt.

The American soldier in World War II, for the most part, was an avid souvenir hunter on the battlefield. Soldiers stuffed their war trophies into barracks bags alongside their uniforms, letters from home, and all other personal belongings. Some servicemen

²⁰ David Kenyon Webster, *Parachute Infantry: An American Paratrooper's Memoir of D-Day and the Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008), pp. 290-291.

packed their bags so full of “liberated items” they had little room for other objects.²¹

After Victory in Europe Day (VE-Day), the first GIs to leave the continent boarded liberty ships, and steamed home with an impressive assortment of trophies. European Theater of Operations, United States Army (ETOUSA) orders allowed the men to take souvenirs “to the fullest extent practicable” on their trip. The 28th Infantry Division, one of the first units sent back to the U.S. after the war, interpreted those orders loosely and brought home 20,000 weapons to their 5,000 men.²²

What did soldiers take as war trophies? Pfc. David Webster’s letter home to his parents on 13 May 1945 illustrates quite well what sort of items GIs brought back with them, and how they acquired them: “We have picked up and looted individuals from the Wehrmacht, the S.S. – very snappy, thoroughly hated soldiers – and the Luftwaffe, officers, noncoms, and privates.” From these Germans, “we have obtained pistols, knives, watches, fur-lined coats, camouflaged jackets (from a Luftwaffe officer who did not appreciate the fact that I was relieving him of excess weight).” As the victors, Webster and soldiers like him were able to take whatever they liked from their enemy counterparts. “Most of these soldiers have taken it in pretty good spirit, but once in a while we get an individual who does not like to lose his watch. A pistol flashed in his face, however, can persuade anybody.” Souvenir hunters established a hierarchical list of German items that GIs wanted the most, and Webster’s cache fit this mold: “I now have a Luger, two P-38s (similar to Lugers), a Schmeisser machine pistol, two jump smocks,

²¹ Roscoe C. Blunt, Jr., *Foot Soldier: A Combat Infantryman’s War in Europe* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 1994), p. 84.

²² Earl F. Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany, 1944-1946* (Washington D.C.: Office of Military History, 1975), p. 329.

one camouflaged winter jacket, several flags about three feet by two, and a watch. If they ever let us, I'll mail some of this back.²³ Webster's letter is illustrative of the varied items soldiers sought, and is consistent with other troops' souvenir collections.

Why did soldiers desire war trophies? There are four primary motivations for why GIs looted on the battlefield: keepsakes, profit, necessity, and revenge. The varying reasons for why servicemen took objects evolved over time, one building on the other. At first, soldiers took objects as keepsakes, as it was a good opportunity to impress his family and friends, or just a quiet reminder to himself of a formative period in his life. Keepsakes were a good initial reason for taking the odd item off a dead or surrendering German *Soldat*, but once the entrepreneurial-minded soldier realized there was a market in selling pistols, knives, and flags to the non-combat troops in the rear, a new motivation for looting arose. During the harsh winter of 1944 and 1945, some soldiers looted out of necessity. Shortages in supplies during the February and March offensives prompted GIs to take German equipment, as well as non-standard issues like field glasses, watches, and personal vehicles. Later on, with the memories of the aftermath the retreating Germans left in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands, and then the realities of the concentration and labor camps within Germany, American soldiers stole *Wehrmacht* troops' pictures of loved ones, wedding bands, and other personal items not for keepsakes, profit, or necessity, but rather revenge.

²³ David Kenyon Webster, *Parachute Infantry: An American Paratrooper's Memoir of D-Day and the Fall of the Third Reich* (New York: Bantam Dell, 2008), pp. 436-437.

SOLDIERS' MOTIVATIONS FOR SOUVENIR HUNTING

Keepsakes

Keepsakes have been a military tradition since the dawn of warfare. Returning from battle, soldiers have brought back with them a hodgepodge of worthless trinkets, military spoils of war, and other proofs that they were in battle. World War II was different than the American wars that preceded it, in that when the soldiers returned they brought back with them possibly the most extensive collection of enemy equipment than ever before or since. Owing to the prevalence of hunting for keepsakes were the limitless possibilities for GIs to obtain items. "If I saw something that they [German soldiers] had that I wanted, I took it," declared Francis O. Ayers. "They didn't argue. Trust me, they didn't argue about it!"²⁴ For the average soldier in the European Theater of Operations (ETO), acquiring objects for keepsakes was the initial impetus for picking up war trophies; and of all the objects soldiers picked up for keepsakes, there was nothing more superlative than flags. The profusion of Nazi flags that defiantly hung in destroyed military emplacements and were unceremoniously discarded in village squares were mute testimony to a once powerful but now passing regime. To many GIs, possessing the enemy's colors was not just a good boost for morale, but also emblematic of complete victory.²⁵ The swastika was an immediately recognizable symbol, the rallying point to

²⁴ Francis O. Ayers, interview by Kate Landdeck and Ramaah Sadasivam, 8 May 2001, in Knoxville, Tennessee, University of Tennessee Center for the Study of War and Society Veteran's Oral History Project, Knoxville, Tennessee.

²⁵ For veterans' perspectives on taking flags, see Roger Austin, *One Man's War: Through the Lens of a Combat Engineer* (Rochester: Austin Books, 2009), p. 144; Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 213; Lovern Nauss, *Troubleshooting All the Way: A Memoir of the 1st Signal Company and Combat Telephone Communications in the 1st Infantry Division, 1944-1945* (Wheaton: Cantigny First Division Foundation, 2005), p. 131; Preston A. Price, *The Last Kilometer: Marching to Victory in Europe with the Big Red One, 1944-1945* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press, 2002), p. 100.

which the American people had gathered to destroy a movement that had destroyed peace. The U.S. Army, upon collecting Nazi flags from towns throughout Germany, even gave the colors to GIs to “be used as souvenirs.”²⁶

Within the American Army, a hierarchy of trophies evolved over time. What stood at the top of every GI’s wish list were German pistols. Small, easily carried and tradable, and an automatic status symbol, the German pistol “was the ultimate to souvenir-hunting GIs.”²⁷ It became easier for soldiers to acquire the pistol they desired after the collapse of the Ruhr Pocket in late April 1945.²⁸ Growing numbers of German troops surrendered, and the disarmament areas which appeared all across the country supplied U.S. forces with plenty of weapons. As Sergeant Donald Burgett of the 101st Airborne reported, “At the end of the first day, we had a stack of pistols of all description well above six feet high, and about twelve feet in diameter. Troopers constantly picked through this pile for choice Lugers, Walthers, Berettas, P-38s, old ‘Broomstick’ models, and so on.”²⁹ By the end of the war, GIs found numerous opportunities to acquire a prized pistol. Whether through taking the weapon from a dead or surrendering soldier, bartering, or selecting just the right one from a disarmament pile, any type of pistol the soldier had wanted was in vast abundance.

²⁶ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, “Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment,” 8 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

²⁷ Charles B. MacDonald, *Company Commander* (Short Hills: Burford Books, 1947), p. 148. Soldiers’ mentions of Lugers could fill volumes, but for the best examples, see Austin, *One Man’s War*, p. 144; Blunt, *Foot Soldier*, p. 85; Ross S. Carter, *Those Devils in Baggy Pants* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1951), p. 33; Albert Handaly, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Marion Peter, 13 November 1996, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey; Robert Kotlowitz, *Before Their Time: A Memoir* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), p. 131.

²⁸ Zumbro, *Battle for the Ruhr*, 392.

²⁹ Donald Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine: A Screaming Eagle in Germany* (New York: Bantam Books, 2001), p. 163.

Military trophies served as the keepsake item veterans returned home with, and reminded them of the time in their life that had been so pivotal in forming who they were. For the majority of American soldiers while in-theater, however, the initial acquirement of souvenirs can be regarded simply as for the want of keepsakes. It is what those soldiers did with the items afterwards that force more specific clarifications and classifications of souvenir hunting.

Profit

Once the *Wehrmacht* was firmly in retreat by January and February 1945, and once the Allied armies began pushing into Germany's interior, some soldiers turned their sights towards acquiring loot for profit. With the German army disintegrating, massive numbers of *Soldaten* surrendered to the Allies, turning over large quantities of military equipment. After frontline soldiers chose the best examples for their own souvenir collections, what remained was ripe for selling or bartering to rear-echelon troops, usually for exorbitant prices. Lugers, regarded as the most enviable keepsake, became the object GIs bought and sold the most often. The rear echelon noncombatants, the business-savvy troop's main outlet for profit, coveted the pistols the most because of their ability to tell harrowing stories of how they acquired the weapon. The truth often, however, entailed paying a veteran a handsome sum of money.³⁰ With the closing days of the war quickly approaching, support troops scrambled to obtain their own keepsakes; and that generally meant working within the structure of a war trophies market that enterprising troops had created. With high demand, and eager customers, the flags,

³⁰ James Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin: A Paratrooper at War in Europe* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), pp. 311-312.

pistols, and helmets that GIs had once acquired as keepsakes were now perfect opportunities to make quick money.

When it was clear that the German Army began disintegrating by the end of April 1945, floods of *Wehrmacht* and *Schutzstaffel* (SS) troops streamed westward, out of the clutches of the vengeful Red Army. With the profusion of troops surrendering, opportunistic GIs were presented a chance to profit from the situation.³¹ Andre Beaumont lamented in later years that he was not one of those soldiers who turned their plight into an advantageous venture. “It's too bad we didn't have an empty truck,” Beaumont said. “We could have piled up all those weapons and Luger pistols and all that stuff and sold it as souvenirs and we would [have] become millionaires, because there was a big market in [German weapons], especially Luger pistols.” For the enterprising GI, he “could sell those for a couple of hundred dollars. Guys from the Air Force, you know, they would die for something like that.”³² William Foley mirrored Beaumont's estimation that Lugers were worth “\$100 apiece in rear echelon,” but he also added that the death's-head ring that SS soldiers wore, “rare as they were, should be worth anywhere from \$50 to \$150 apiece.”³³ While Andre Beaumont only saw his missed opportunity later, Sergeant Charles Crowder of the 82nd Airborne was one of the soldiers who took advantage of a long column of surrendering German troops: “I obtained a burlap bag, mounted a motorcycle with a sidecar and, as the enemy troops marched by, I told them to throw their pistols in the bag. I started taking watches and rings until the bag was full. I

³¹ William C. Braly, *The Hard Way Home* (Washington, D.C.: Infantry Journal Press, 1947), p. 5.

³² Andre Beaumont, interview by Shaun Illingworth, 13 December 2005, in Millsboro, Delaware, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

³³ William A. Foley, *Visions from a Foxhole: A Rifleman in Patton's Ghost Corps* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 209.

figured this was my chance to get rich.”³⁴ It was not difficult for the average GI to profit greatly while fighting the war – all it took was the opportunity and the inclination.

Those soldiers in support roles also took advantage of German prisoners. The vast Rhine meadow prisoner of war camps, the *Rheinwiesenlager*, gave some GIs a steady supply of objects they could sell.³⁵ The U.S. Army had built the seventeen camps to house the 1.5 million prisoners General Eisenhower and his staff expected once the Allied armies had crossed the Rhine.³⁶ Once constructed, the *Rheinwiesenlager* presented a situation where GIs were not taking the items but rather buying them to sell for a profit. Before German prisoners were taken off the battlefield, they were typically relieved of wristwatches, rings, field glasses, or any other item deemed to have commercial or any other value.³⁷ After being relieved of any article GIs wished to take, soldiers escorted the German prisoners of war (POW) to a containment camp.³⁸ Once there, the Americans subjected the *Soldaten* to another search which caught any more items that escaped the first stripping. Some soldiers experienced being “beaten, kicked,

³⁴ Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, p. 311.

³⁵ For the best look at these camps, and at how the U.S. Army treated German prisoners of war, see Stephen E. Ambrose and Günter J. Bischof, eds., *Eisenhower and the German POWs: Facts Against Falsehood* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992).

³⁶ Medical Department, *United States Army Preventive Medicine in World War II, Volume IX*, Prepared and published under the direction of Lieutenant General Leonard D. Heaton, Surgeon General, United States Army Editor in Chief, Colonel Robert S. Anderson, M.C., USA Editor for Preventive Medicine, Ebbe Curtis Hoff, Ph.D., M.D. Assistant Editor, Phebe M. Hoff, M.A. (Washington, D.C.: Office of the Surgeon General, Department of the Army, 1969), p. 380.

³⁷ Stephen Hart, Russell Hart, and Matthew Hughes spoke of German troops waiting for GIs to strip them of their possessions when they said, “Most soldiers, however, awaited the ignominy of being mobbed by enemy troops, who stole medals and Luger pistols, since every GI wanted a souvenir.” Stephen Hart, Russell Hart, and Matthew Hughes, *The German Soldier in World War II* (Osceola: MBI Publishing Company, 2000), p. 148.

³⁸ There are precious few memoirs from German soldiers who served on the Western Front; most recollections are from those men who fought in the East. The best work, if not for its readability and thoughtful tone, is Johann Voss’ *Black Edelweiss*. Though Voss never specifically speaks about souvenir-hungry American soldiers, his experience becoming an American prisoner is useful, chiefly because Voss was in the *Waffen-SS*. Johann Voss, *Black Edelweiss: A Memoir of Combat and Consciousness by a Soldier of the Waffen-SS* (Bedford, Aberjona, 2002).

slapped, the throwing of steel helmets like hammer-throwing into the multitudes, the taking of all possessions except clothing.”³⁹ The GIs did not keep all of the objects because “razors, cigarettes, canned goods, spare clothing, rucksacks, blankets, canteens, ponchos, loaves of bread, mess tins, sandwiches, laundry bags, crackers, pocket knives, scissors, eyeglasses, letters, pocketbooks, and anything else that a landser may have carried to help him endure the war” were thrown into a heap at the entrance to the camp.⁴⁰ To discard the burgeoning mountains of personal effects, the American troops drenched the objects and set them on fire.⁴¹

For the most part, prisoners used what few belongings they managed to retain as bargaining tools to get the necessities of camp life – predominately American cigarettes – from either their fellow countrymen or American guards. One *Wehrmacht* soldier recorded, in disheartened observation, a scene of degradation:

Last night I awoke, went walking around the enclosure and discovered a swarm of my comrades trading with the American guards. They now disgrace themselves in front of the very same men that they describe as common criminals, scraping their bits of English together and motioning through the wire . . . two cigarettes for one Iron Cross, First Class; four cigarettes for a gold wedding band; two packs of twenty cigarettes for a good wristwatch. One of us knows of a German soldier in our transport group, who is apparently in possession of cigarettes and conducts business for himself. He now has seventy rings. Later at home they will say that the Americans took their rings from them.⁴²

For some GIs, camp duty meant they did not have to steal from a German prisoner. It could be much easier to barter with a POW than forcibly searching random prisoners.

³⁹ Edward N. Peterson, *The Many Faces of Defeat: The German People's Experience in 1945* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1990), p. 28.

⁴⁰ Zumbro, *Battle for the Ruhr*, p. 394.

⁴¹ Peterson, *The Many Faces of Defeat*, p. 28.

⁴² Zumbro, *Battle for the Ruhr*, p. 396.

Furthermore, even those in captivity could make a profitable venture from their comrades' misery.

Raymond Gantter best explained the profit-making air in the dying days of World War II when he said,

For the opportunist who was in the right place at the right time, for the ruthless – no matter where he might be – for the shrewdly dishonest who *made* opportunity where none existed, there were juicy pickings. And the marrow was so rich, the sprawled bones so heavy with fat, that the wonder is not that so many men were dishonest, but that so many men were not.⁴³

While Gantter is not speaking solely about selling war trophies, his comment about GIs who constructed profit-making schemes speaks well to the impromptu businesses that came to fruition by the end of the war. The soldiers' desire to make profit in a war zone had much to do with their generation's experiences.⁴⁴ The Great Depression had a profound impact on troops' financial outlook on life.⁴⁵ As a result, Americans carried two distinct financial habits with them to the ETO. Some GIs constructed clever profit-making schemes while others' devil-may-care attitude towards money prompted them to make and spend money freely. As Private Richard Courtney wrote, "The older men seemed more inclined to think up ways to make money as they needed it for their families at home. At age nineteen I was just glad to be alive and to smell the lilacs."⁴⁶ The war had provided some soldiers a perfect opportunity to make money. Selling war souvenirs

⁴³ Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 393.

⁴⁴ Historian Richard Holmes has gone so far as to say the "prospect of financial gain in a time-honoured inducement for soldiers . . ." Richard Holmes, *Acts of War*, 355.

⁴⁵ Robert Sterling Rush, *Hell in Hürtgen Forest: The Ordeal and Triumph of an American Infantry Regiment* (Lawrence, University Press of Kansas, 2001), p. 66.

⁴⁶ Richard D. Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge: An American Infantry GI in Europe during World War II* (Carbondale/Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), p. 112.

was an opportunity to augment a soldier's combat pay, and help out the family back home. There were, however, plenty of soldiers who had Private Courtney's view.

After American units reached the last remaining bridge spanning the Rhine River at Remagen on 7 March 1945, operations picked up speed.⁴⁷ This momentum slowed to a crawl by the end of April, as some outfits were ordered into positions to await further directions. Those GIs who had accrued rest and recuperation (R&R) time in the rear took advantage of the privilege due them, and headed to Paris, Brussels, or the Riviera.⁴⁸ Combat soldiers traveled to the Allied urban centers in droves at the end of April 1945, and some took with them souvenirs they had accumulated. Arnold Lasner was one such GI. Heading to Paris for R&R, Lasner took with him several handguns along with cartons of cigarettes. The U.S. Army had a hotel set aside for soldiers on furlough, which gave Lasner and soldiers like him an opportunity to sell war trophies to a vast cross-section of troops. After selling the pistols they had brought, Lasner and his buddies "lived it up."⁴⁹ While preparing to leave the city, the war ended; so rather than returning to their unit, the group stayed and lived off their profit for more one more week.

The impromptu-businessman's customers were not always rear-echelon troops encountered in the field, or a hotel filled with soldiers on R&R. Some transactions bordered on the extraordinary. While with the Third Army when it crossed the Isar River in southern Germany, Solomon Leader was witness to one of the more peculiar scenes in

⁴⁷ Colonel David E. Pergrin, *First Across the Rhine: The Story of the 291st Engineer Combat Battalion* (Pacifica: Pacifica Press, 1989), p. 220-221.

⁴⁸ GIs even tried to visit cities without first authorizing their trip. Before the U.S. Army reached Germany, cases of soldiers who went absent without leave (AWOL) became a problem when units passed through the areas around Paris. As historian Lee Kennett stated, the First and Third U.S. armies reported ten thousand soldiers AWOL after crossing the Seine near Paris. Kennett, *G.I.*, p. 153.

⁴⁹ Arnold Lasner, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Dustin Elias, 26 April 2002, in Plainfield, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

World War II. A prisoner of war camp full of Americans was only a short distance from the Isar, and Leader's unit had recently liberated the compound. With nowhere particularly to go, the recently-freed POWs stayed with the combat troops and were present when the liberating outfit came under mortar attack while crossing the river. "[W]e were lying in a ditch; mortar shells are coming in," Leader recounted. The POWs had "been given some lump sum payment . . . They had American money. We were paid in occupation Marks and guys would offer two hundred dollars for a pistol." The former prisoners asked the assaulting GIs for any souvenirs that were for sale, saying, "'We're going home. We don't have any souvenirs.'" In disbelief, Leader watched the men go from GI to GI, asking for even rusty bayonets, anything they could take home. Meanwhile, Leader thought "'How am I going to survive, you know, crossing this Isar River here?'" I'm lying in this ditch, mortar shells are coming in; they didn't care."⁵⁰ The ever-present lure of souvenirs, however, drove some men to go to great lengths for their own memento.

Necessity

Though soldiers' entrepreneurial spirit drove some to construct profit-making schemes, there was a much more practicable reason for GIs to take German military hardware. In the rapid march across Germany, some servicemen picked up equipment not for keepsakes or profit but out of necessity. While the American Army was the best-supplied military force in the war, GIs still coveted some objects that German soldiers

⁵⁰ Solomon Leader, interview by Kurt Piehler and Bret Marin, 6 March 1995, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

carried: watches, field glasses, and certain weapons.⁵¹ These small items made combat life more livable, but American soldiers also took objects such as *Wehrmacht* military transportation to joyride through the German countryside.

Soldiers clamored for usable items like watches and field glasses simply because of the practicality.⁵² Due to its usefulness, U.S. troops relieved almost all *Wehrmacht* soldiers killed or captured in battle of their watches, and it was certainly rare for a surviving *Soldat* to return home with his.⁵³ Watches were important to the GI; simply knowing what time it was back home was sometimes enough to keep a soldier going. However, there were also practical military reasons for a serviceman to own a watch, as every GI had to take turns on guard duty at night. Having a watch gave the soldier the ability to count down the minutes of when his duty was over. Timepieces were also useful when preparing for pre-planned assaults, and ensuring that the unit was in sync. Since the U.S. Army did not issue GIs timepieces, those who wished to know the hour had to rely upon the lucky ones who had a watch.

The Army also did not also freely issue binoculars, despite their usefulness for officers. As Bruce Egger rationalized, “My convictions against looting did not keep me from taking a pair of field glasses. . . . The Army didn’t provide the squad leaders with

⁵¹ Richard Carafano, *GI Ingenuity: Improvisation, Technology, and Winning World War II* (Westport, Praeger, 2006), though a bit meandering, is a good place to begin a look into GIs and their use of technology.

⁵² For soldiers’ anecdotes and discussions of stealing out of necessity, see John B. Babcock, *Taught to Kill: An American Boy’s War from the Ardennes to Berlin* (Washington, D.C.: Potomac Books, 2007), pp. 42, 140; Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 312; Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 264.

⁵³ The best anecdotes of taking watches from German soldiers appear in: Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, p. 43; Blunt, *Foot Soldier*, p. 297; Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 104; Irgang, *Etched in Purple: One Soldier’s War in Europe* (Washington: Potomac Books, 2008), p.212; Megellas, *All the Way to Berlin*, p. 312; Werner Carl Sturm, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Ken Gilliland, 1 March 1996, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey; Herchel Thompson, interview by Seth Givens, 16 July 2009, in Portsmouth, Ohio, Cantigny First Division Oral History Project, Wheaton, Illinois; Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 264.

field glasses and I felt I could put the glasses to good use during the remainder of the war.”⁵⁴ For a leader, having a clear view of the battlefield before ordering the soldiers to attack could be the difference between useless casualties or a costless victory.⁵⁵

GIs did not limit themselves to weapons or small accessories to their kit. Their propensity to steal vehicles became a problem once the American armies marched into Germany. While advancing briskly and with few signs of German resistance, units with free time tended to make use of the civilian vehicles and abandoned Wehrmacht equipment that had been drained of the Nazi’s invaluable fuel to the last drop.⁵⁶ With the surrendering German soldiers came the wholesale relinquishment of not just their personal equipment but the units’ mechanized supplies. “The Regiment,” David Webster wrote, “always so short of vehicles that it had to use farm carts and captured trucks the first few days in action and borrow transportation like D.U.K.W.s thereafter, suddenly found itself completely motorized, with every man who could drive the proud owner of his very own near-new vehicle.”⁵⁷ By the time the American armies had reached Bavaria the situation of disarmament became a virtual playground, and soldiers took advantage of the collection points for German transportation. Webster commented best on this phenomenon when he said,

The auto park beyond the wire at the south end of the enclosure was rapidly filling up with every conceivable type of civil and military vehicle. . . . News of

⁵⁴ Bruce E. Egger and Lee MacMillan Otts, *G Company’s War: Two Personal Accounts of the Campaigns in Europe, 1944-1945*, Edited by Paul Roley (Tuscaloosa/London: University of Alabama Press, 1992), p. 238.

⁵⁵ Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 264.

⁵⁶ For other anecdotes about stealing German vehicles, see Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, p. 200; Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 87; Irwin Gordon, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak, Ashley Perri, and Sea Jin Lee, 5 November 2003, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

⁵⁷ Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 293.

the giveaway spread with the speed of light, and the throng of paratroopers who came to help themselves gave the Sunday air of a giant used-car lot where everything was free and nothing was guaranteed. Men argued over choice staff cars, while others raced motors, tested brakes, or siphoned gas to refuel previously selected autos.⁵⁸

With no German opposition, and essentially nothing to do, the soldiers could choose any vehicle they wanted from a huge motor pool, and obtain weapons that caught their eyes.

The choices ranged from motorcycles to Volkswagens, and even Schwimmwagens. The cowboys in Webster's unit even "rode S.S. horses and soon formed the 506th Parachute Calvary, a marching, racing, and polo society that lasted till the horses were finally worn out."⁵⁹ It was an embarrassment of riches for those units located around collection points for German transportation. Every squad in Webster's outfit "had two or three Opel Blitz trucks . . . for military duties and at least one informal vehicle for scrounging and Fraulein expeditions." Even his "platoon sergeant went helling down the highways, siren shrieking and bell clanging, in a civilian fire engine. He was the terror of Bavaria."⁶⁰ This haven of vehicular experimentation and freedom meant that suddenly infantry units were fully motorized, and most officers had their own personal vehicles.

One such officer was Captain Joe Dawson, an infantry company commander. In a letter to his brother on 8 September 1944, Dawson spoke about his new personal command car. "I captured a beautiful Packard 1942 model coupe that is a dream," he wrote. "Am having it restored to good condition and repaired as all the windows were blown out when one of my men tossed a hand grenade in and took care of the captain

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 296.

⁵⁹ Ibid., p. 293.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p. 293.

who was driving it.” Dawson was optimistic about his new car’s chance of survival when he wrote, “Will let you know more about it though when the war is over and I can reclaim it.”⁶¹ The majority of vehicles that GIs picked up had an exceptionally short life expectancy. If it was not destroyed during an operation, or because of neglectful treatment, it became a victim to the Army’s round-up of illegal transportation.

The Allied high command wanted desperately to curb the joyriding. In a Judge Advocate General (JAG) report immediately following the war, a general board attempted to grapple with the military offenses U.S. troops committed in Germany. The report concluded that with the failure of junior officers to enforce orders, it was impossible to combat the improper use of transportation by American servicemen, and the joyriding still proceeded.⁶² Furthermore, the problem of GIs joyriding reached even SHAEF. In a report to all Allied commanders, General Eisenhower complained of the unauthorized use of vehicles, stating that it was impeding the disarmament of the entire German military.⁶³

The pragmatic soldier also helped himself to German weaponry. As historian John C. McManus argues, if a soldier’s “firearm did not perform adequately, he found one that did.”⁶⁴ While the U.S. Army was better supplied than any other military in World War II, they did not always have superior firepower. The German MG-34 and MG-42 were better weapons than the American M1919 A6, .30 caliber machine gun, and

⁶¹ Joseph T. Dawson, letter to brother, 8 September 1944, 1991.54, Box 3, McCormick Research Center.

⁶² Julien C. Hyer, et al., “The Military Offender in the Theater of Operations,” p. 9.

⁶³ General Eisenhower to USSTAF, “Captured Enemy Vehicles,” 30 May 1945, SHAEF, Box 91, Folder 1, RG 331, NACP.

⁶⁴ McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood*, p. 14.

the reputation of their tell-tale buzz-saw report was known throughout the theater.⁶⁵ The German machine guns' high rate of fire, coupled with ease of operation and maintenance, made the weapons a viable option for crews in a pinch. Using German rifles and machine guns, however, were exceptions to the rule. Though many combat soldiers carried enemy sidearms, situational necessity dictated the use of other enemy weapons. American troops most widely used German equipment during the operations in France. Due to the speed of operations, and the complications in logistics, enemy weapons were invaluable to units that had no other alternative.⁶⁶ While in Germany, however, supply lines were well established and threat of aerial attack meant uninhibited travel from ports that served as arteries for operations. GIs, then, had less need for German weapons than had been the case in France. Furthermore, American troops had grown accustomed to the sounds of their weapons compared to those of the German's. Implementing an enemy rifle or machine gun, then, was a risk, and the GI had to remain cognizant that his fellow soldiers could mistake him for a foe.⁶⁷

Revenge

By the time American soldiers pushed into Germany-proper, many had seen first-hand some of the ruthlessness *Wehrmacht* and SS units' perpetrated throughout France, Belgium, and the Netherlands.⁶⁸ U.S. soldiers were overwhelmingly angered by the incidents of civilian massacre they found, but their anger grew precipitously upon

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 42.

⁶⁶ Lieutenant General W.B. Smith, Lieutenant General, U.S. Army, Chief of Staff to Secretary, London Munitions Assignment Board; Office of the War Cabinet, London, "Disposal of Usable Material Captured From the Germans", 21 November 1944, RG 331 SHAEF, RG 331, Box 91, Folder 8, NACP.

⁶⁷ Kennett, *G.I.*, p. 156.

⁶⁸ For anecdotes of German units' brutality, see Blunt, *Foot Soldier*, p. 60; Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 275.

liberating concentration and labor camps. The Holocaust and Nazi Germany's use of slave labor had a profound effect on American soldiers, and reminded them why they were fighting. Generally, GIs' response to the camps was a belief that all questionable treatment of the Germans was vindicated, including stealing.⁶⁹ While servicemen took the same items from *Soldaten*, the reasoning for the GI changed. They were no longer stealing for a keepsake, for profit, or for necessity – it was now for revenge.

American fighting men, however, were relatively understanding of Germans troops. As fellow soldiers, they could relate to the lives they lived and the miseries they shared.⁷⁰ To GIs like Stuart T. Brandow, there were three different groups of German soldiers. “You had the paratroopers, the SS and the regular soldiers,” Brandow argued. “The SS, they were mean. They just had no feelings, the same way with the paratroopers. The regular soldier was just like you and I. They probably wanted to be home with their kids or with their family, just like us, and you had to respect the regular soldier.”⁷¹ Some GIs became ruthless with the way they treated German soldiers, especially SS troopers, as veteran Andre Beaumont explains: “The ones that we really did not have much sympathy for were the SS, who wore black uniforms and they had the little lightning rods symbols, and, anyway, they were the real fanatic, Nazi killers.”⁷² GIs had good reason to disdain SS troopers. During the Battle of the Bulge, the 1st SS Panzer Division and the U.S. 285th Field Artillery Observation Battalion stumbled upon each other outside the town of Malmédy, Belgium. The German tankers took around ninety GIs prisoners,

⁶⁹ Peter Schrijvers, *Crash of Ruin*, pp. 204-205.

⁷⁰For discussion of GIs' opinion of German soldiers, see Kennett, *G.I.*, pp. 159-162, 216-217.

⁷¹ Stuart T. Brandow, interview by Shaun Illingworth, Michael Kuzniak, and Peter Bronzino, 30 March 2006, in Woodbridge, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

⁷² Andre Beaumont interview, 13 December 2005.

marched the men into an open field, and cut them down with machine gun fire. Those who were merely wounded, the SS killed with a pistol-shot to the back of the head.

When finished, eighty-six Americans lay dead.⁷³ News of the 17 December murder of the GIs at Malmédy coincided with reports of SS troopers dressed as U.S. soldiers infiltrating American lines.⁷⁴ When word of both the massacre and the subterfuge reached GIs, it convinced the Americans that SS men were not fighting the war by the same rules. As such, the U.S. troops offered no quarter to the German unit.

Concentration and labor camps such as Buchenwald, Dachau, and Landsberg did little to help the *Schutzstaffel's* reputation once American units began liberating the compounds in Germany.⁷⁵ As Beaumont reports, “[W]e were certainly well aware of several of the massacres during the Battle of the Bulge that were committed by SS and, certainly, we learned enough about their fanaticism from all the guys who'd fought in Normandy and so on.” As a result of GIs’ experiences with SS units, “the common [approach], the standard operating procedure, was that if you see an SS, you shoot him on sight. We did not take any SS prisoners and they rarely surrendered anyway, because they knew they were going to be shot, because they shot our prisoners.”⁷⁶ Therefore, it was easy for American soldiers to single out the SS and seek revenge. The unique skull and crossbones ring that SS soldiers wore was a prized possession, not just for the German

⁷³ Robin Neillands, *The Battle for the Rhine, 1944, Arnhem and the Ardennes: The Campaign in Europe* (London: Cassel, 2005), p. 281.

⁷⁴ Samuel W. Mitcham, Jr., *Panzers in Winter: Hitler's Army and the Battle of the Bulge* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), p. 30; Frank Hoxie Smith, unpublished memoir, *Combat Experiences of Frank Hoxie Smith*, McCormick Research Center.

⁷⁵ A monograph that examines the concentration camps the U.S. Army liberated is Robert H. Abzug, *Inside the Vicious Heart: Americans and the Liberation of Nazi Concentration Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985). Although Abzug focuses primarily upon the American public’s response to the reports, there are discussions of soldiers’ reactions as liberators of the camps.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

troops themselves but also for souvenir hunters. Even in surrender, troops did not question a GI's taking retribution out on an SS man, as soldiers admired the acquisition of the ring.⁷⁷

Due to the stress of extended periods of combat, front-line GIs' patience for some German servicemen's reticence to obey orders became increasingly short. There were some American soldiers who adopted a policy of swift retribution if German military men showed undue pride. Frank Irgang saw an enemy aircraft shot down in an open field near his unit one day while in Germany. Irgang's commander ordered that he and two other GIs approach the airplane. After "it skidded to a stop in the mud, the pilot climbed out, shed a suit of coveralls, and stood with his hands on his hips." The Americans ordered the pilot to return to their unit with them, but the man replied in an arrogant tone of voice, "I am a colonel, and I demand that I be taken prisoner by someone of at least that same rank."⁷⁸ Irgang left one of his buddies with the German, and he and the other GI went back to report the situation to their lieutenant. The three Americans returned to the aircraft, and the "lieutenant ordered him to come along, but he refused. The lieutenant shot him down." The group of soldiers took the pilot's watch and leather gloves, which uncovered a ring on the man's finger. After Irgang failed to slip the ring from the German's knuckle, the lieutenant with "his bayonet he cut the finger off and removed the ring."⁷⁹ Certainly, war had hardened some men, and made such situations perfectly explicable. While there were soldiers who lessened their hatred of the enemy

⁷⁷ Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 168-170.

⁷⁸ Irgang, *Etched in Purple*, p. 211.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

towards the end of the war, there were others whose loathing grew, sometimes with violent conclusions.

After stealing objects for keepsakes, profit, and necessity, the American serviceman came to rationalize his looting by claiming victor's justice over the defeated enemy. After all, GIs thought, the Germans had done the same thing throughout Europe, so it was merely recompense.⁸⁰ In a letter home, Captain Joe Dawson sent along a handkerchief he took from a German colonel, urging his father to "use this little memento as a gift of the *Reich*." Dawson noted the quality of the cloth's material, and said "It should be, after stealing from the world their most valuable assets for the last five years."⁸¹ In the eyes of the average American soldier, it was a condonable act to take a *Wehrmacht* soldier's watch or other belongings because the German serviceman had probably stolen it in the first place. Some soldiers posited that the "Germans had taken them from Poles, French, Czechs, and so forth," so it was merely payback.⁸² "The men who looted rationalized that the Germans had done the same thing in the countries they had occupied," Bruce Egger recounted. "I maintained that we should not come down to the level of the Germans, but after I heard about the slave labor and concentration camps I realized we had a long way to go to reach their level of degradation."⁸³ The deeper the American army went into Germany, the easier it was for soldiers to collect souvenirs. It not only became easier to physically acquire war trophies, but it also became much easier to justify it all.

⁸⁰ Austin, *One Man's War*, p. 144.

⁸¹ Joseph T. Dawson, Letter to father, 28 September 1944, 1991.54, Box 3, McCormick Research Center.

⁸² Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 104.

⁸³ Egger and Otts, *G Company's War*, p. 237.

At the same time that GIs appeared to take for revenge it seemed that they also began to devalue souvenirs. Whereas before, German loot would have been prized, it came to a point where it was easily expendable. The sheer amount of souvenirs available to GIs made it easy for the soldier to sell his prized Luger or Nazi flag since he knew he could always pick up more virtually wherever he went. Having the benefit of being in an artillery outfit, Pfc. Courtney and his squad mates had places where they could put their trophies. "Our trucks and jeeps all carried Nazi flags and all sorts of souvenirs," Courtney recollected. "A favorite trick was to take down a street sign reading *Adolf Hitler Platz* and fasten it to the hood of a jeep. One day we had a large picture of Adolf on our radiator, but we decided we didn't like it there so we tacked it up on a fence and threw our trench knives at it."⁸⁴ The abundance of souvenirs, combined with the novelty of war loot having worn off, soldiers destroyed a good portion of what they collected.

ACCEPTABLE RISK: THE DANGERS OF SOUVENIR HUNTING

Although souvenir-hunting seemed to be a sport for troops, there were inherent dangers with collecting trophies. GIs' reputation for seeking out loot preceded them, so much so that civilians called the First Division the "American SS," a moniker given them because of their savagery in combat and rapacity in collecting souvenirs.⁸⁵ By the time the Allies reached Germany, the investigative soldier faced the possibility of triggering booby traps when collecting souvenirs. Hoping Americans could not pass up a Luger, a flag, or a helmet, German soldiers began booby-trapping their positions before retreating

⁸⁴ Courtney, *From Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 86.

⁸⁵ Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 329.

eastward.⁸⁶ As a consequence, American soldiers became wary of situations that looked out of the ordinary.⁸⁷ GI Maurice Meyers, while coming under a mortar attack, noticed a dead German officer, his Luger still holstered. Meyers' initial reaction was to take the pistol, but his mind went to the cadre's admonition in training that dead bodies may be booby trapped. He "didn't touch it, but, a friend of mine came running along and he was a gung-ho Southerner. He stopped, took the Luger, and got away with it, but, I was afraid, you see. So, you don't take chances if you don't have to, things like that."⁸⁸ The very fact that Meyers received cautions of booby trapping while in training speaks to the prevalence of the act. Germans soldiers' actions, too, illustrate their understanding of the souvenir-hunting American, and the possibility of turning the GI's habits into a dangerous gamble.

Aside from triggering possible traps, GIs also faced strict consequences if captured with German equipment. Rumors quickly spread throughout the U.S. Army about Germans shooting American soldiers for having an article of enemy issue on them. Andy Adkins, a mortar platoon second lieutenant with the 80th Infantry Division recorded in his diary on 12 April 1945 the dangers of being caught with enemy weapons. After fighting the Hermann Göring Division while attempting to take Erfurt, Germany,

Part of a squad from Company E had been caught in a house sitting in the open. . .
 . They chose to surrender and came out with their hands up. Three of them had

⁸⁶ For anecdotes about encountering booby-traps, see Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, p. 186; Blunt, *Foot Soldier*, p. 85. Historian Stephen Fritz lists several anecdotes of GIs tripping booby traps while searching for souvenirs in his work, *Endkampf: Soldiers, Civilians, and the Death of the Third Reich* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2004), pp. 110, 171.

⁸⁷ Arthur C. Wenzel, interview by Shaun Illingworth and Patrick Clark-Barnes, 11 April 2005, in Tinton Fall, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

⁸⁸ Maurice Meyers, interview by Shaun Illingworth and Michael Ojeda, 14 April 2000, in Watchung, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Lugers strapped to their belts . . . Their SS captors didn't even question them. Instead, they put a bullet through each of their heads.⁸⁹

GIs with loot had to make a decision about what to keep or dispose of when fighting.⁹⁰ Pfc. Rocky Blunt of the 84th Infantry Division, after being ambushed by a Panzer unit, quickly buried his P-38 pistol in the snow, for to be found with it “meant instant execution.”⁹¹ Sergeant John Babcock, with the 78th Infantry Division, when surrounded during a firefight at night, threw away his Luger, an SS dagger, watches, and a pocketful of German medals. Though he was ultimately not captured, he understood that if he was “Discovered with such items, my captors were not likely to deliver me unharmed to one of their comfy stalags.”⁹² Merely executing GIs for having articles of German issue was not enough for some. There were cases of German soldiers cutting Xs into dead American soldiers' chests, and then positioning the loot at the convergence of the lines.⁹³ The message was simple, direct, and unquestionable: do not get caught with German equipment.

This harsh penalty dealt to Americans for possessing German equipment worked both ways, however. American soldiers were just as likely to punish *Soldaten* for having US-issued objects. On 31 January, Raymond Gantter saw *Wehrmacht* prisoners in the custody of a sister platoon:

They were regarded as cold-blooded murderers of innocent American soldiers, and they were beaten . . . And their ‘crime’? The American cigarettes in their pockets, the small items of GI equipment they wore? The odds were, they had picked up these things, as we'd picked up the German loot *we* were carrying

⁸⁹ Andrew Z. Adkins, Jr. and Andrew Z. III. *You Can't Get Much Closer Than This: Combat with Company H, 317th Infantry Regiment, 80th Division* (Havertown: Casemate, 2005), p. 195.

⁹⁰ Irgang, *Etched in Purple*, p. 212.

⁹¹ Blunt, *Foot Soldier*, p. 159.

⁹² Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, p. 187-188.

⁹³ Linderman, *The World within War*, p. 109.

about. And I mean we *really* carried it! Nine out of ten of us wore or carried some article of German issue – as I was then wearing a German Luftwaffe belt – which we’d picked up somewhere. These prisoners were part of a victorious German army that had swept through an area lately held by Americans. It was natural that they would have in their possession bits of the vast litter that a retreating army leaves on the field.⁹⁴

Presuming that the enemy obtained loot through the murder of their countryman was probably an automatic reflex for most soldiers, regardless of their uniform.⁹⁵ For Sergeant Babcock, he understood that GIs and Germans alike risked their lives when acquiring souvenirs, and mused that “For sure, if we had found American souvenirs on a Kraut prisoner, he would have been long gone before he ever made it to our POW cage.”⁹⁶ These circumstances, of course, depended on the proximity to the end of the war, as well as the units involved. Stories of American soldiers being gunned down for possessing German equipment occurred most frequently during the Battle of the Bulge and the early weeks of the push into Germany. By spring, the majority of German units would not have risked dealing with captured Americans with such harshness. There were those, however, who still fought with tenacity when defeat was imminent, such as the Hermann Göring Division at Erfurt.

CONCLUSION

In sum, it is not possible to pinpoint why the GI was prone to collecting souvenirs, though it is provable that time and place were important determinants in souvenir-hunting. Of the four motivations for collecting German equipment, necessity can be exclusively prescribed to combat soldiers, as they generally took only what they

⁹⁴ Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 130.

⁹⁵ Irgang, *Etched in Purple*, p. 235-236.

⁹⁶ Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, p. 188.

needed. Those following the front-line, conversely, had no real combat need for most items. What they did have was time, and therefore those troops were not constrained by combat, and had more time to explore.⁹⁷ These soldiers, then, had an opportunity and motive to collect and sell objects. After all, a dead or surrendered *Soldat* had no use for his equipment, and it did not make sense to leave the objects when one could make a profit selling trophies to soldiers even farther in the rear.⁹⁸

The search for war trophies also evolved between D-Day and VE-Day. German equipment was a novelty while in France, and soldiers lusted after their own Luger and Nazi flag. However, by the time soldiers were in the heart of Germany, large caches of trophies had become commonplace. What is more, by the dying weeks of the war, the combat soldier had no real necessity for the German equipment that helped keep him alive. The rear-echelon soldier's desire for souvenirs never waned, however. Front-line troops spoke of such soldiers' lust for objects when they referred to them as "the Lootwaffe."⁹⁹ Let us, however, not point merely to the rear-echelon troops as the biggest souvenir-hunters of the ETO. There were large numbers of front-line soldiers who managed to build sizable collections of trophies. A major determinant, then, came down to each GI's personality and where their moral compass steered them.

Though amassing souvenirs was nothing new to warfare, the sheer scale of souvenir hunting that the U.S. Army undertook during World War II in the European Theater has not been seen since. Indeed, the Vietnam War soldier faced significant

⁹⁷ Gene Garrison, *Unless Victory Comes: Combat with a Machine Gunner in Patton's Third Army* (Havertown: Casemate, 2004), p. 217.

⁹⁸ Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 167.

⁹⁹ Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, p. 151.

restrictions on mailing war trophies; and today, soldiers sending war trophies home is, for all intents and purposes, near non-existent.¹⁰⁰ Perhaps it was these limitations that kept souvenir-hunting down in later wars. Perhaps, too, it was the lack of necessity to take enemy materials, or even the dearth of objects to take. Whatever the reasons behind this disparity, each soldier had his distinct rationale for collecting trophies. Possibly the most poignant explanation for why so many American soldiers collected souvenirs while fighting was Sgt. Babcock's comment to a correspondent who asked about this GIs proclivity. Babcock's response: "Hey, buddy, a soldier's a soldier, and soldiers loot . .

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¹⁰⁰ PFC Harry Brassens, "Soldiers Face Penalties for Mailing Contraband," *The American Traveler: 1st Infantry Division, Republic of Vietnam*, 13 April 1968, p. 4. Richard Holmes argues that "With the exception of mercenaries who may be encouraged to participate in a hazardous operation by the prospect of personal gain, it seems unlikely that modern soldiers are much influenced by the profit motive on the battlefield." Holmes, *Acts of War*, pp. 354-355.

¹⁰¹ Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, p. 152.

CHAPTER 2: GIS AND LOOTING

“We are devastation,” wrote Sergeant Raymond Gantter in a letter home on 23 April 1945. “Where we have passed, little remains – no cameras, no pistols, no watches, very little jewelry, and damn few virgins. We leave behind us a spoor of broken dishes, emptied fruit jars, and plundered, dirty houses. And our general attitude (which I’m inclined to share) is: So you wanted total war? You believed in it, boasted of it? Well, this is it!”¹⁰² World War II had indeed reached Germany’s citizens by the end of February 1945. Initially emanating from the U.S. Army’s Rhine River bridgehead at Remagen, a tidal wave of American troops and equipment pushed out towards Frankfurt to the south and Kassel to the north. In front of the armies, German civilians were either displaced or bombarded by a total war that had gathered menacingly on the horizon. Those who elected to endure whatever the war might bring huddled in cellars, awaiting the front to pass and hope their homes and lives would be spared. The civilians who sought sanctuary elsewhere left one uncertainty for another. The villages they returned to were often times scarred by not just falling artillery pieces and small weapons but also the whims of soldiers.

This harsh reality to which Germany had awoken was a product of the American soldier’s experiences and trials that had collectively led up to the point where he waited to cross into the enemy’s homeland. When the GI arrived in Germany, his mindset changed from what it had been while fighting in Allied countries. He was standing on the enemy’s soil and was determined to take the war to the country that had ignited such devastation and misery throughout Europe. The conflict had stolen the American citizen

¹⁰² Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 343.

soldier from his home and family, and forced him to put his life on hold to fight against a determined foe. As a result GIs wanted to ensure the Nazi state was thoroughly defeated. They also believed it was their right to act as victors and all that came with the accomplishment. Civilian possessions, then, became fair game.

To jokingly legitimize their actions once in Germany, GIs labeled their looting with a term that quickly spread across the entire army. As Pfc. Richard Courtney of the 26th Infantry Division explained, “American soldiers loved to loot the German homes. We called it ‘liberating.’”¹⁰³ Several offshoots followed: commandeering, appropriate, secure, confiscate, and a host of other tongue-in-cheek synonyms. Using these terms as justification to take items from civilians that the U.S. Army viewed as a military risk to the offensive, but often times with no pretense at all, GIs had the tacit authority to enter German homes and take what they liked.

As with military souvenirs from the battlefield, soldiers took civilian possessions for four main reasons: necessity, profit, keepsakes, and revenge. Initially, necessity drove GIs to steal from civilians more than any other reason. The harsh winter of 1944-1945 prompted soldiers to seek out whatever items they needed to stay alive. Therefore, GIs stole for food or warmth. While profit dominated souvenir hunting on the battlefield, it played a lesser role in looting noncombatants. Homes contained a myriad of objects, so it was impossible for a hierarchy of items to grow up like it did with Lugers and other military materials. Keepsakes ranged from worthless everyday civilian items to priceless artifacts squirreled away in mineshafts and cellars in an attempt to escape the bombing raids that decimated Germany’s cities. Finally, servicemen stole for revenge due to the

¹⁰³ Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 95.

same reasons as those on the battlefield. Soldiers tended to take revenge on civilians who were ardent Nazis or those unwilling to cooperate with American orders. More importantly, ransacking and plundering abandoned homes was the GI's way to punish faceless Germans in absentia.

“A VERITABLE CAULDRON OF BANDITRY”¹⁰⁴: HOW LOOTING WAS POSSIBLE

To understand the many reasons why GIs looted in Germany, one must first clarify how it was possible for them to loot. In an attempt to ensure civilians were not interfering with Allied military operations, V Corps enacted in October 1944 a plan to evacuate a five-by-ten mile grid in the Eupen-Malmédy area of Belgium.¹⁰⁵ The plan targeted German-speaking Belgians, and was to counter any civilian attempt to frustrate operations in the area. The policy proved too unrealistic and unmanageable, however. It was eventually discarded for the simpler protocol of controlling the population from their homes.¹⁰⁶ The failure of V Corps' plan, and the subsequent decision to proactively control the German civilian population, led to the ease with which soldiers could steal items. What took place was an unintentional built-in process of looting.

While the American Army advanced into the heart of Germany in March and April, swallowing up quaint villages and large metropolitan areas alike, units were ordered to conduct house-to-house searches for any weapons, equipment, radios, cameras, or harbored German soldiers. Commanders feared civilians would mount a resistance movement with the help of military units. Although the threat never fully

¹⁰⁴ Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom*, p. 92.

¹⁰⁵ Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany*, p. 135.

¹⁰⁶ Schrijvers, *The Crash of Ruin*, p. 191.

materialized, American units inspected all houses for any equipment the so-called German “werewolf” units could potentially use to disrupt the Allied advance.¹⁰⁷ This standard operating procedure gave American troops free access to homes, and the implicit sanction to evict families from their property.¹⁰⁸

Aside from the house-to-house searches, GIs found yet another opportunity to pillage homes. Units requisitioned houses as places to accommodate soldiers over-night, giving the owners minutes to evacuate.¹⁰⁹ German homes offered troops those comforts which they had all but forgotten after weeks and months living in foxholes. If GIs were lucky enough to capture a city that had not been badly damaged, there were endless numbers of houses and buildings to explore. Soldiers like Livy Goodman, whose unit had taken Hanover, investigated apartment buildings and sat at desks while smoking cigars, talking to any German who would answer their phone after the Americans randomly dialed numbers.¹¹⁰ “Each night, if we were lucky enough to be near a village, we went from house to house attempting to get rooms for our troops,” Roger Austin recollected.¹¹¹ American servicemen matter-of-factly told themselves, “[b]etter them than us.’ They’d started the war and we had spent too many nights out in the open in Holland, Bastogne, and in Alsace.”¹¹² Some units, however, preferred to requisition

¹⁰⁷ For a monograph on resistance units in Germany, see Perry Biddiscombe, *The Last Nazis: Werewolf Guerrilla Resistance in Europe, 1944-1947* (Stroud: Tempus, 2006).

¹⁰⁸ Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 144.

¹⁰⁹ Richard Thomas Alexander, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Jake White, 4 April 2003, in Canton, North Carolina, Center for the Study of War and Society Veteran’s Oral History Project, Knoxville, Tennessee; James G. Handford, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Yaelle Cohen, 25 October 1996, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹¹⁰ Livy Goodman, interview by Tara Liston and Barbara Tomblin, 10 May 1996, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹¹¹ Austin, *One Man’s War*, p. 144; Albert Handaly interview, 13 November 1996.

¹¹² Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 99.

those homes that civilians had abandoned when fleeing before the invading armies arrived. Rather than disrupting noncombatants, some GIs believed it was “safer to occupy the outbuilding and post guard,” since soldiers reasoned that it did not make sense to “rattle civilians when we were still having problems with the remnants of Hitler’s soldiers.”¹¹³ Other units, however, upon capturing a town “would sort of wander around” since “during the day we didn’t do much because we did all of our stuff at night.”¹¹⁴ No matter whether the house was occupied or vacant, the mysteries of what surprise a bedroom’s bureau drawers contained or what a GI could find in a corner cupboard was all part of the mystique of searching and staying in homes.

Soldiers who had even a basic grasp of the German language generally acted as the advance party for units before they would bivouac for the night. As a rule, the GI interpreter tended to choose the largest and most opulent houses for their outfit. These civilized quarters offered an extravagance they had long since forgotten, and also offered ample amounts of souvenirs. Pfc. Roscoe Blunt’s language skills held him in good stead:

My basic knowledge of the German language made me a handy guy to have around when it was necessary in each city or town to locate adequate quarters for the platoon. My job was to evict the occupants from their homes once we had found what we wanted. It was considered a choice detail, for it meant I invariably wound up with first pick of the houses – and the souvenirs.¹¹⁵

As Blunt’s account testifies, for some duties the soldiers’ axiom of “Never volunteer for anything” did not apply.

¹¹³ Austin, *One Man’s War*, p. 144.

¹¹⁴ Edwin Kolodziej, interview by Neal Hammerschlag, 16 February 2001, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹¹⁵ Blunt, *Foot Soldier*, p. 215.

SOLDIERS' MOTIVATIONS FOR LOOTING

Necessity

More often than not, German houses contained objects that soldiers needed more than they necessarily wanted as a keepsake. Even though Germans had been living on war rations by the time the U.S. Army had arrived, homes still contained items GIs had not seen in some time. Nearly constantly on the advance since June 1944, frontline troops had been deprived the luxuries found in homes. In a letter to his parents, Pfc. David Kenyon Webster commented about what greeted his unit when they entered Germany:

Ever since we entered this country, we have been living in private houses complete with electricity and hot and cold running water. The owners of our houses evacuated on two hours' notice, so we sleep on good beds (you can't get much out of a house in two hours) and cook with proper utensils. Physically speaking, it's just like home.¹¹⁶

Elements or vestiges of civilized life were in short supply while huddled in a water-filled foxhole or stretching out on loose straw in a French farmer's hay loft, but German homes offered the comforts long since forgotten.

Overwhelmingly, troops tended to steal the necessities for staying alive and keeping warm.¹¹⁷ After the bitter and taxing Battle of Hürtgen Forest beginning 19 September 1944, and the Ardennes offensive in late-December, the Allies attempted to push quickly into Germany, but they became bogged down by the winter weather.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁶ Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 435.

¹¹⁷ Leader interview, 6 March 1995: "They [Third Army commanders] were very concerned about rape and looting. There was a lot of looting, but I only took what I felt I could use."

¹¹⁸ For more on the Hürtgen Forest, including the conditions with which the soldiers had to contend, see Charles MacDonald, *The Battle of the Huertgen Forest* (New York: Jove Books, 1963) and Rush, *Hell in Hürtgen Forest: The Ordeal and Triumph of an American Infantry Regiment* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2001).

Both the Allies and the Germans tried to remain in their heated homes when they could, sheltered by the snow and wind with actual roofs over their heads. Soldiers' priorities turned to acquiring objects that could keep them warm, be it clothes, kindling, or the like. Riflemen were limited with the number of items they could carry, but artillerymen were blessed with trucks to pull their artillery pieces. One artilleryman recounted about the Saarlautern Campaign in January 1945 that “[o]ur squad had liberated a small barrel stove that we brought with us on the truck. We carried it in, unhooked the big stove in the room, and hooked up our small one to the pipes because it heated up much faster. We learned to carry this stove along [in our truck] to use it whenever we could.”¹¹⁹ Stealing and transporting actual stoves were rare occurrences, but soldiers did often take articles to augment their winter gear.

Scarves, gloves, coats, and anything else usable was a likely candidate on the GI's wish list. Soldiers found creative ways to remain warm, as Donald Burgett illustrated in his memoirs. Burgett and his squad were billeted in a home when his officer gave orders to move out. The last thing he took from the house was “a fur collar I ripped from a woman's cloth coat hanging on the wall near the front door. As we rode I took the small sewing kit from my musette bag and sewed the fur to the collar of my combat jacket. With the collar turned up, the fur kept the cold wind from my face and neck.”¹²⁰ Every item was for the taking in homes, and the need for clothing prompted soldiers to think up creative ways to stay warm. An artillery soldier wrote of moving through the mountains of Thüringen in central Germany, saying, “The weather turned chilly at night as we

¹¹⁹ Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 66.

¹²⁰ Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 115.

headed east, and I wore my [German] paratrooper's coat. Some of the guys had found rabbit skin vests which they wore under their combat jackets."¹²¹ Necessity is the mother of invention, and soldiers' actions were no exception to that rule.

Aside from keeping warm, the American serviceman was on a continuous search for fresh food. Although GIs often had plenty of K- and C-rations on hand, they took great delight in eating any unprocessed food they could find. Fresh food was, like some items they stole from houses, one of the creature comforts that transcended the military and the war. "We would acquire a sheep or a small animal, a calf, and butcher it for our own purposes, for our own meal, just as something to get away from the rations, the K-rations, C-rations and like that," said Irwin Gordon.¹²² Most GIs, though, raided chicken coops across Germany, resulting in what must have been a severe deficit of the fowl for at least a little while. Andrew Adkins Jr. of the 80th Infantry Division summed up the GIs frequency of raiding chickens when he said, "I had been eating so many eggs lately that I began to cackle."¹²³ Sergeant Herchel Thompson commented on stealing chickens by saying, "A soldier wouldn't be in his right mind if he didn't. You've got to keep yourself alive first. . . . We'd steal a chicken – we wasn't too good to steal something. That's the way everybody done; they'd have done that to us, too."¹²⁴ Farmyard animals of all sorts were fair game, and civilians found themselves without the livestock upon which they so heavily relied. The winter of 1944 prompted many GIs to take whatever opportunity they

¹²¹ Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 90.

¹²² Irwin Gordon interview, 5 November 2003.

¹²³ Adkins, Jr. and Adkins III, *You Can't Get Much Closer Than This*, p. 216.

¹²⁴ Herchel Thompson interview, 16 July 2009.

had to augment their diet, as the soldiers had subsisted almost entirely on military rations.¹²⁵ In one such instance, Private Roscoe Blunt and his friend

. . . ran to a nearby farmhouse to ‘liberate’ some food. The farmer adamantly denied having any, but a carbine in his gut changed his story. Finding several cows and a flock of chickens, we filled our helmets with warm milk and eggs. Then, after raiding the farmer’s sub-cellar, we loaded our pockets and overcoats with beets, Schnapps, ham and potatoes. More and more, we rejected the Army’s contention that C-, D-, and K-rations constituted a balanced diet.¹²⁶

Discontented with army food, soldiers had no qualms taking from German civilians.

Though most civilians held great contempt for the soldiers who stole from them, servicemen like Blunt generally “felt no qualms about stealing from him.” GIs took their stolen food and created a feast as best they could: “The eggs were fried in our helmet, the meat eaten raw and the Schnapps was passed around.” The average soldier would do “Anything to take the dust out of our throats and the edge of our hunger.”¹²⁷

Sometimes servicemen did not even have the option of eating military rations because of slow logistics. Sergeant Lovern Nauss of the First Infantry Division explained this situation when his unit was on the outskirts of Aachen during September, 1944. As Nauss said,

Because the division’s food, equipment, and ammunition all had to be hauled to the front lines by truck all the way from the Normandy beachhead, many First Army units often had to depend on captured or foraged rations to supplement their own limited food supplies. . . . [A] ready source of fresh meat, even one that had previously belonged to noncombatants, was a welcome addition to a unit’s normal food supplies.¹²⁸

¹²⁵ For soldiers explaining their distaste for C-, D-, and K-rations, see Stuart T. Brandow interview, 30 March 2006; George Wilson, *If You Survive: From Normandy to the Battle of the Bulge to the End of World War II – One American Officer’s Riveting True Story* (New York: Random House, 1987), pp. 129-130.

¹²⁶ Blunt, *Foot Soldier*, p. 238.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹²⁸ Nauss, *Troubleshooting All the Way*, p. 122.

Therefore, it was not always heartless apathy that led soldiers to steal from civilians, but simple necessity. Despite this need, commanders attempted to prevent their troops from taking civilian sources of food. The Military Police was to ensure that animal theft was curtailed; otherwise the German populace would rely even more on American sources for food. There were instances, however, where necessity rose above just the individual soldier's wants. As Andrew J. Ciampa recollected, his unit was short of food, and his superiors told the soldiers they were permitted to "go to the countryside and beg all the food you want.' So some of the boys had bags and would ask some of the farm people if they had any food we could use."¹²⁹ Ciampa's retrospection certainly was not a common occurrence, but it does prove that in some circumstances officers permitted their units to depend on civilians sources for food while in Germany.

The struggle to survive sometimes trumped any feelings of remorse soldiers might have had. Herchel Thompson summed it up best when he spoke of the justification for stealing food: "That's war. You don't go out and shoot somebody unless you're mad at him or don't like him, so it goes down to getting the food off of him. You'd steal his food out of his mouth if you could. People think they understand war over here in America; we don't know what war is. We don't know – really, you don't. But, anything to survive – survival comes first."¹³⁰ As Richard M. Hale asserted, "Once you get in on the front, in competition, it's sort of a no-holds-barred thing, and you contend with whatever are in the elements and the locality with what you can, and you make it work."

¹²⁹ Andrew J. Ciampa, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak and Neal Hammerschlag, 16 April 2001, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹³⁰ Herchel Thompson interview, 16 July 2009.

That meant “it’s not all SOP [standard operating procedure], the way we learned all of this stuff in basic training or Officer Candidate School. You have to make things, what we called ‘field expedient.’”¹³¹ Necessity, therefore, was the driving force behind the majority of soldiers’ stealing food while in Germany.

Alcohol, though not a necessity in the strictest sense of the word, was something the majority of GIs searched for while in homes. Historian John Keegan, in his work *The Face of Battle*, argues that soldiers drinking in war is an “inseparable part both of preparation for battle and of combat itself,” since the reality of death shakes men’s “anxieties, however young and vigorous they be, rather than excite their anticipation.”¹³² Alcohol was an escape for GIs, and their chances of acquiring drink of any sort were frequent. David Webster recounted that “Wine, beer, and all blends and ages of hard liquor were available for the asking in almost every house and Bierstube within short driving range. If a sudden thirst overwhelmed you en route, you stopped the first stray German soldier and took his canteen. None of them ever carried water.”¹³³ The U.S. Army’s offensive into Europe took units through some of the most famous alcohol-producing regions on the continent. Wine and champagne were never in short supply throughout France; the Rhine River Valley offered up Germany’s best wines; and though short on grains to make mass quantities of beer, southern Germany’s beer culture was still intact, as was Czechoslovakia’s.

¹³¹ Richard M. Hale, interview by Shaun Illingworth and Nicholas Ferroni, 14 February 2003, in Edison, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹³² John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), p. 326.

¹³³ Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 293. Veteran Sam Balloff also spoke to the same end when he said, “Every [German] house – they were very big homes – has a wine cellar.” Sam Balloff, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Olivia Blair, 12 March 2004, in Knoxville, Tennessee, University of Tennessee Center for the Study of War and Society Veteran’s Oral History Project, Knoxville, Tennessee.

GIs searched tirelessly for hidden bottles of cognac, schnapps, champagne, and wine. The easiest way to acquire alcohol, however, was to find the source. As veteran Harry Van Zandt remembered, “. . . every time you went into a town, the first thing everybody started looking for was the local distillery or brewery.”¹³⁴ Some soldiers even “found warehouses with candy bars and bottles of brandy.” Upon tasting both and not liking either, the men “stood on the road and passed them out to other GI vehicles.”¹³⁵ Most soldiers were not fortunate to procure their drink so effortlessly. Civilians went to great pains to conceal their valuables, alcohol certainly included, in hidden niches located throughout their homes.¹³⁶ Their efforts, however, were most often for naught. Much like a game they would have played as children, GIs made seeking out alcohol from the civilian’s hiding spot a sporting challenge.¹³⁷ “The only thing our boys would look for is – the Germans had good wine and we knew it,” Frederick Bing remembered. “Well, under the big pile of briquettes was very good wine and our boys knew that. So you would go into a place and the next thing you know, two of the group were always assigned to get the shovels out and they ‘liberated’ the wine. So in Heidelberg they liberated two cases and the first case they consumed that night, needless to say, they

¹³⁴ Harry Van Zandt, interview by Tara Liston and Tara Kraenzlin, 11 March 1996, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹³⁵ Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 80.

¹³⁶ Veteran John Babcock spoke of this when he said, “Practiced looters soon learned that valuables were not likely to be out in plain sight, or located in bedroom drawers and kitchen cupboards. They headed straight for attics, obscure trap doors, and the cold root cellar dugout used to preserve potatoes, sugar beets, and turnips. The most unlikely places yielded occasional silverware, jewelry, schnapps, wine, or family valuables.” Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, p. 187. For other instances, see Henry E. Giles and Janice Holt Giles, *The GI Journal of Sergeant Giles* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, and Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1965), pp. 91, 292, 322, 342, 352, 371.

¹³⁷ Historian Stephen Fritz went so far as to call GIs’ tendency to search for loot “The chronic American sport of souvenir hunting . . .” Fritz, *Endkampf*, p. 171.

weren't in very good shape by morning.”¹³⁸ Soldiers often reasoned that if Germans had possessions worth retaining, the civilians would go to great pains to hide them safely away. Due to this belief, many GIs searched for bottles and flasks that did not exist.

Depending upon the commander, most officers allowed their soldiers some leeway with alcohol consumption. Despite this leniency, the cases of GIs actually drinking while in combat seem to have been infrequent.¹³⁹ By the time units reached the heart of Germany in April, they often had more alcohol than they could either carry or drink. Andy Adkins remembered that his unit had so much champagne they “were even getting particular about what brand we drank. If it wasn’t pink champagne, we threw it away.”¹⁴⁰ When his regiment was later in Nürnberg, Adkins’ commander ordered that his men receive a liquor ration from a two-and-a-half ton truck “whose sole mission was to carry the beverages we picked up here and there.” According to Adkins, the colonel “didn’t mind how much his men drank as long as they drank it like a man.”¹⁴¹ Though this example is only of one regiment, there is nothing to suggest that the experience of the 317th Infantry was atypical.

On the company-level, Charles MacDonald mentions several times throughout his memoir, *Company Commander*, how his men searched for and enjoyed alcohol along with their officers.¹⁴² It seems commanders took umbrage with soldiers looting alcohol only on a case-by-case basis. These occasions were prompted by civilian complaints –

¹³⁸ Frederick Henry Bing, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak, Kevin Bing, and Stephen Kempinski, 18 November 2003, in Emerson, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹³⁹ Adkins, Jr. and Adkins, III, *You Can’t Get Much Closer Than This*, p. 210.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁴² MacDonald, *Company Commander*, pp. 144, 161.

when wine and liquor cellars were liquidated – or when soldier drunkenness got to unmanageable levels. What is more, officers often referred these matters to entities outside of their unit, such as a Civil Affairs Officer or the Military Police. The 16th Infantry Regiment’s Military Government Officer reported on 10 March 1945 that “A number of instances was [sic] reported where the Allied nationals were supplying liquor to the American soldiers who in turn were becoming quite drunk on the heady brews which these nationals were distilling on their own farms.” The matter seemed to warrant no further attention from other channels, as the Military Government Officer simply recommended civilians should refrain from giving alcohol to Americans.¹⁴³ In another instance, troops of the 16th Infantry had raided a wine cellar in the town of Oberpleis, outside the city of Bonn. GIs had taken 2,000 bottles of champagne and 1,500 bottles of wine from Heinrich Liechtenberg. The Public Safety Officer, though they had ample evidence for the crime, could not definitively charge any specific soldiers, and because there was no officer present, it was impossible to obtain any further information. As a result, the Public Safety Officer referred the matter to the Military Police.¹⁴⁴ While it is unclear what became of Herr Liechtenberg’s case, it is clear that the wheels of justice, with regards to matters of GIs stealing alcohol, turned slowly. As this instance occurred

¹⁴³ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5 “Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment,” 10 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

¹⁴⁴ Headquarters Military Government Detachment H-7 H-2 to Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment, “Looting of Private Wine Cellar,” 24 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

in March 1945, it could be safely assumed that the 16th Infantry and the 1st Division moved eastward from Oberpleis within short order of the crime.¹⁴⁵

Profit

“Don't ever let anybody ever tell you that we didn't loot. The American Army were great looters,” veteran Alexander Gordeuk affirmed. What is more, “We looted what you could turn into cash and carry easy. We really did, there was no stopping it.”¹⁴⁶

Gordeuk's statement strikes to the core of one of the motivation for troops to steal civilian possessions. While taking clothing and food was stealing because of necessity, the GIs' proclivity to confiscate cameras, watches, and jewelry was nothing of the sort. After the *Wehrmacht* collapsed in front of the Allied advance around April, and the decidedly weak *Volkssturm* dissipated, troops no longer had to steal to stay alive. The war had fully turned, and so did the motivations to loot.

By March, while the army was steamrolling through Germany, troops had the ability to collect goods to sell. Depending upon the number of points the GI had accumulated, they were granted passes to visit cities like Paris, Metz, Nancy, and Brussels. For soldiers like Staff Sergeant Roy W. Brown, “one of the best things that happened was a chance to travel on your own . . .”¹⁴⁷ Soldiers needed objects outside of what the Army had issued them, and as a consequence cameras became a big ticket item. As Harry van Zandt reported, “Everybody was most interested in getting a good German

¹⁴⁵ For other instances of soldiers writing about alcohol, see Russell W. Cloer, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak, 11 September 2001, in Venice, Florida, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey; Price, *The Last Kilometer*, p. 184; Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 333.

¹⁴⁶ Alexander Gordeuk, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Richard J. Fox, 1 April 1996, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹⁴⁷ Roy W. Brown, interview by Sandra Stewart Holyoak, 12 March 1996, in Chandler, Arizona, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

Leica camera.”¹⁴⁸ The German Leica was world-renowned, and one of the most expensive on the market, making it a must-have for soldiers. “I helped myself to a nice Leica camera and one other camera,” Lloyd Kalugin remembered. “That’s how I took the pictures of the concentration camp. We called it liberated.”¹⁴⁹ At the small town of Nerenstetten, north of Ulm, an army unit ordered the mayor to turn over all cameras. The mayor, in hopes of satiating a soldier’s personal request for his, gave the American an old camera he owned. The German’s hopes of his prized Leica remaining safely hidden in his basement were dashed when he learned the soldier had already stolen the camera, silverware, and money before the official visit.¹⁵⁰ Not only were individual’s cameras at risk, but also entire factories. Kalugin’s unit was later ordered to take Jena, an important industrial center, south of Leipzig. Most of Jena’s importance was due to the presence of the Carl Zeiss optical systems factory, and the GIs were well aware of the company’s reputation. “They used to make very good cameras,” Kalugin remembered, “and we knew that. Boy, we were rubbing our hands, ‘Oh, we’re gonna get our hands on these nice cameras,’ right. We get into the town, there were two MPs right in front of the factory. To this day, we don’t know how they got there before we did.”¹⁵¹ GIs, then, desired cameras just as they did Lugers. The consummate U.S. soldier who Germans saw by spring 1945 had a camera around his neck and a Luger strapped to his hip.

Watches, too, were high on the list of items to take from civilians. A common joke spread throughout Germany that USA was actually an acronym for *Uhren stehlehs*

¹⁴⁸ Harry Van Zandt interview, 11 March 1996.

¹⁴⁹ Lloyd Kalugin, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Jason Riley, 3 March 1996, in New Brunswick, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹⁵⁰ Peterson, *The Many Faces of Defeat*, p. 43.

¹⁵¹ Lloyd Kalugin interview, 3 March 1996.

auch, “They steal watches, too.”¹⁵² By the time the U.S. and Red Armies began to meet up across Germany, the market for watches grew from being self-contained within the U.S. Army to extending into selling timepieces to Soviet soldiers.¹⁵³ GIs who came in contact with the Soviets found that they could sell souvenirs quite easily and for a handsome profit. As veteran Alexander Phillips put it, “They came with the money and we came with the merchandise.”¹⁵⁴ To the Red Army soldier, the paper money he was issued was useless in the Soviet Union, but he could trade a watch for a cow when he returned home.¹⁵⁵ Conversely, the American soldier could take the paper money and exchange it for greenbacks. The only losing party in the arrangement was the German whose watch was stolen. When Roscoe Blunt went to Berlin during the final days of the war, Red Army soldiers immediately approached him at the Soviet side of the Brandenburg Gate. The soldiers were “bartering for watches, cigarettes, anything they could bring back to Mother Russia. Beforehand, I had set the hands to the correct time on my Telegram & Gazette \$2 Ingersall [sic] carrier’s watch that hadn’t worked in months, and sold it instantly to a Russian soldier for \$75, and a carton of American cigarettes for \$100.”¹⁵⁶ Alexander Phillips, like Roscoe Blunt, took the opportunity while

¹⁵² Peterson, *The Many Faces of Defeat*, p. 49.

¹⁵³ This situation grew to such heights in the immediate post-war period that some on President Truman’s staff at the Potsdam Conference in July 1945 were selling watches to Soviet troops for Occupation currency. They would then exchange the bills for American dollars. General Lucius D. Clay, the later American military governor in Germany spoke of this situation: “. . . it [selling watches] was damn prevalent among a lot of people. Some of Mr. Truman’s personal staff sold wristwatches and whatnot in Berlin, and turned the military Occupation currency in for dollars. I don’t want to be critical. I’m just trying to give you the atmosphere, because, really and truly, I don’t believe they fully appreciated the fact that the United States government was paying for all that.” Jean Edward Smith, *Lucius D. Clay: An American Life* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1990), pp. 303-304.

¹⁵⁴ Alexander Phillips, interview by Shaun Illingworth and Matthew Lawrence, 3 August 2007, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

¹⁵⁵ Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 111.

¹⁵⁶ Blunt, *Foot Soldier*, p. 279.

in Berlin to sell watches to Soviet soldiers: “I had two wristwatches, one ran and the other one didn't. I sold them for two hundred dollars. Shoes, they'd buy the shoes off you, hundred dollars. They had nothing, they had some money, but they had nothing.”¹⁵⁷ Therefore, while American troops often sold battlefield trophies to each other, civilian loot had other outlets, such as the Red Army.

Civilian pistols and other weapons garnered the GI's attention as well. Another standard operating procedure made it exceptionally easy for soldiers to have their pick of civilian weapons. The units who searched house-to-house for items that Germans could use to disrupt the Allied advance placed the weapons in a pile within the city.¹⁵⁸ Some U.S. commanders simply ordered the *Bürgermeister*, the mayor, to notify the townspeople to turn in all arms and ammunition, thus making the GI's job even easier.¹⁵⁹ Upon entering towns, the Military Government Officer attached at the regimental level of infantry divisions, notified all civilians to report to the town square for the purpose of reading the military government proclamation.¹⁶⁰ Any disobedience with the order to

¹⁵⁷ Alexander Phillips interview, 3 August 2007.

¹⁵⁸ The best discussions of the military reasons for confiscating certain civilians possessions can be found in: Adkins, Jr. and Adkins, III, *You Can't Get Much Closer Than This*, p. 193; Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 151; Price, *The Last Kilometer*, p. 109; Office of the Chief of Staff, p. 34, “Public Safety Manual of Procedures, Military Government of Germany,” September 1944, SHAEF, Box 11, RG 331, Box 1, NACP; Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany, 1944-1947*, pp. 134-135.

¹⁵⁹ For anecdotes regarding units ordering German civilians to place objects in the town's center, see Adkins, *You Can't Get Much Closer Than This*, p. 193; John W. Gorman and Dorothy Yundt with Patrick Quinn, *Compass: U.S. Army Ranger European Theater, 1944-1945* (New York: iUniverse, Inc., 2009), p. 82; David Rothbart, *A Soldier's Journal: With the 22nd Infantry Regiment in World War II* (New York: iBooks, 2003), p. 293.

¹⁶⁰ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, “Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment,” 6 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

turn in all weapons and ammunition “would be severely dealt with.”¹⁶¹ Once the citizens gave all weapons over to American forces, the Regimental S-4 disposed of the cache through ordnance channels.¹⁶² Commanders ordered the civilians to not only relinquish all weapons but also cameras, binoculars, and radios – all objects that civilians could use in coordinating an attack against U.S. forces. It was the job of the *Bürgermeister* to provide the Military Government Officer attached with regiments a list of all persons in town who owned cameras.¹⁶³ Standard operating procedure dictated that U.S. troops would return all binoculars and cameras to the *Bürgermeister* after any threat had dissipated.¹⁶⁴

GI restraint rarely occurred, though, as soldiers took the opportunity to pick up those items they may have been wanting for some time.¹⁶⁵ As Lloyd Kalugin observed, “When we took a town's surrender, we would insist that they all bring out their cameras, their guns, and knives, and swords. In that sense, yes, the GIs would help themselves.”¹⁶⁶ Civilian authorities had an easier time collecting radio sets than other objects deemed to have any military value. Since all sets were taxed, Postmasters compiled lists of those residents who bought a radio.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶¹ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, “Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment,” 1 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

¹⁶² 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, “Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment,” 5 March 1945, McCormick Research Center.

¹⁶³ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, “Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment,” 2 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

¹⁶⁴ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, “Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment,” 6 March 1945, McCormick Research Center.

¹⁶⁵ Frederick Henry Bing interview 18 November 2003.

¹⁶⁶ Lloyd Kalugin interview, 3 March 1996.

¹⁶⁷ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, “Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment,” 5 March 1945, McCormick Research Center.

Once the mayor returned with military equipment such as “pistols, antiquated rifles, knives, bayonets and swastika flags of all shapes and sizes,” the soldiers took what they wanted from the pile. Some GIs sold what they took out of these piles of civilian weapons: “I retrieved a beautiful chrome-plated, pearl-handled .25 caliber automatic,” Private Blunt remembered. “It was a masterpiece of beauty and I now regret having sold it on the ship coming home for \$65. Today, it would have been priceless to me.”¹⁶⁸ To the average American soldier, the spring of 1945 was a perfect opportunity to augment their monthly pay.

Benefitting from the lessons that towns in western Germany had learned, some villages farther to the east would proactively collect all weapons and Nazi paraphernalia before American troops arrived.¹⁶⁹ As veteran Frederick H. Bing recalled, “. . . any town you went into they have a square there with a fountain, you know, the little German towns, it was loaded with flags and swords and guns.” The townspeople would have everything “thrown out of the houses onto to this square so you couldn't say, ‘That's your gun, that's your sword’ and the white flags were hanging out of the windows. They put like little white towels and they'd hang them out that they had surrendered.”¹⁷⁰ Due to fear of retribution, then, German civilians reasoned that those individuals who were either ardent Nazis or had joined the Party simply for reasons of social advancement could not be punished if all objects were piled in the town square before U.S. soldiers searched their homes.

¹⁶⁸ Blunt. *Foot Soldier*, p. 250.

¹⁶⁹ Harry Van Zandt interview, 11 March 1996.

¹⁷⁰ Frederick Henry Bing interview, 18 November 2003.

While some servicemen took weapons out of the pile for themselves and to sell for profit, other units were ordered to destroy what they collected.¹⁷¹ Donald Burgett recounted his unit demolishing confiscated weapons:

. . . we had searched the German houses at Inzell and found many weapons, most of which were beautiful hunting firearms. Among them were Browning semiauto shotguns, over-and-under of high quality, rifles, drillings, and many weapons any one of us would love to own. There were also many antiques among the weapons, swords, daggers, and parts of armor. I found a Roman bronze short sword, which I felt would have some value to a collector, but we were ordered to destroy all weapons.¹⁷²

Burgett's unit stacked blocks of TNT in a pile, "then placed all the ammo we could find for the firearms on top, ancient and modern, even powder horns and flasks of black powder." Putting the firearms "on the pile, some of the finest sporting firearms I have ever seen, [they] lit the fuse, and took cover behind a large house. We produced a loud explosion and waited close to the wall of the house until it had all settled."¹⁷³ Robert Inglis' unit also destroyed the objects confiscated from German civilians: "I saw some beautiful cameras, and beautiful hunting rifles, and things thrown in a pile, and run over with a tank to smash them because they were property of German civilians that could be used for military purposes."¹⁷⁴ Between soldiers taking weapons for themselves and the ordered destruction of all firearms, the number of personal weapons that Germans owned must have dropped to a level never before seen in the country.

GIs collecting watches, cameras, and guns was certainly one way to make profit in a war zone, but there were more direct routes. From Belgium to Germany, American

¹⁷¹ For examples of these instances, see Alexander Gordeuk interview, 1 April 1996; Gorman, Yundt, and Quinn, *Compass*, p. 82; Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 151.

¹⁷² Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 151.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

¹⁷⁴ Robert Inglis, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Michael, 27 October 1998, in New Brunswick, New Jersey, Rutgers Oral History Archives of World War II, New Brunswick, New Jersey.

soldiers cracked, broke into, and blasted bank safes. Though most would-be bank robbers were never truly successful due to a myriad of reasons, *Bürgermeisters* filed enough reports to suggest it was a common occurrence.¹⁷⁵ Upon entering a town in Germany, Herchel Thompson's unit investigated the local bank that had been destroyed. The vault, however, was still intact and its contents were still a mystery to the GIs. One of the soldiers drilled holes into the door, put in charge powder, and exploded the vault. Rather than rewarding the troops for their effort, all that the safe was protecting were worthless Weimar-era *Reichsmarks*.¹⁷⁶ While in Germany, Stuart T. Brandow's unit did the same as Thompson's and raided a local bank. They, too, found worthless notes, but still gave it to the civilians rather than destroying the find.¹⁷⁷ Soldiers' attempts to abscond with banks' contents were the height of schemes to get rich quickly. GIs viewed the situations as advantageous opportunities, and reasoned that if they did not take the money someone else would. In the end, the get-rich-quick ventures were merely wishful thinking. Townspeople were omniscient enough to anticipate American troops' bank robberies, and moved all valuables elsewhere.

Keepsakes

Attempting to qualify what civilian items soldiers took is difficult due to the infinite possibilities of what might be in any given home. Just as there was an endless

¹⁷⁵ For examples of reports from the regimental level regarding troops attempting to break into bank vaults in Belgium and Germany, see Headquarters 1st U.S. Infantry Division, Office of the Provost Marshall, "Investigation of Alleged Safebreaking and Theft of Funds" to Commanding General, 1st U.S. Infantry Division, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center; 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, "Journal of Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment," 11 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

¹⁷⁶ Herchel Thompson interview, 16 July 2009.

¹⁷⁷ Stuart T. Brandow interview, 30 March 2006.

array of objects from which the GI could choose, there are limitless reasons why each soldier took what they did. Perhaps it was something he thought a family member would like, or even something that reminded him of his own home. Stepping foot into abandoned German houses might have been the first time that many GIs had been in a proper home since they left for Europe. Certainly, those soldiers who had spent time in Allied towns during the push east did not have the freedom to explore. Therefore, troops had the opportunity to peruse homes and see how German civilians lived.¹⁷⁸ What the average soldiers saw in German urban centers was an illustration of the middle class affluence that the country had built up before the war. Most men realized that the houses could have passed as American residences in their own towns, and some were even better than what they encountered in the United States. To reconnect back to that part of their lives, GIs had the opportunity to take something that would remind them of home. This random nature of civilian keepsakes that soldiers took is embodied in anecdotes of troops selecting random books from destroyed libraries, taking trinkets from houses, or even medieval weapons from collections.¹⁷⁹

Acquiring mementoes had a quality of tourism to it, as well. More often than not, being shipped to the ETO was the soldier's first venture out of the United States.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, much akin to the traveler returning home with keepsakes of their visit to a foreign country, GIs brought back with them items that proved to their family and friends they had seen the war first-hand, participated in it, and survived to tell the stories. Albeit far from being tourists, GIs were still a long way from home, and hoped to bring back

¹⁷⁸ Schrijvers, *The Crash of Ruin*, pp. 141-142.

¹⁷⁹ Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 156; Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany*, p. 199.

¹⁸⁰ Schrijvers, *The Crash of Ruin*, p. 206.

something to commemorate their trip. What they brought home, though, could be unassuming. Those items that GIs took for keepsakes on the battlefield were obvious trophies, as they were military equipment. Conversely, the civilian items that soldiers took could easily be hidden away, thereby serving to be a personal memento for perhaps private recollection.

Keepsakes could also be quite large, though, as well as priceless works of art. Many galleries and museums in Germany had disseminated their collections throughout the countryside in order to escape Allied bombings of urban centers. Hidden away in cellars and mine shafts, GIs stumbled upon these objects while exploring areas. Some troops took advantage of a situation where there was no clear owner and absconded with the items. The Monument, Fine Arts, and Archives Division of the U.S. Army, a division specifically created to protect against such instances, had difficulty in detecting and protecting these artifacts and works of art.¹⁸¹ Priceless souvenirs, then, were just as liable to disappear as something inexpensive and easily replaceable.

Revenge

While GIs most often stole because of necessity, and could find use in looting for profit, sometimes servicemen took items for revenge. German atrocities tempered many soldiers' resolve to carry out justice against ardent Nazis.¹⁸² However, for the most part, American troops did not actively seek revenge upon the common German citizen. Servicemen did not randomly steal from civilians out of revenge; it was rather against

¹⁸¹ G-5 Internal Affairs Branch to Assistant Chief of Staff, G-5, "Report on Monuments, Fine Arts and Archives for Month of Feb. 1945," 31 March 1945, MFAA, RG 239, Microfilm 1944, Reel 70, NACP.

¹⁸² Maria H. Höhn, *GIs and Fräuleins: the German-American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), p. 27.

specific civilians, and generally a reaction rather than an unprovoked act. These were prompted actions meant to teach lessons to, for example, farmers who stubbornly refused to share their food. What is more, this revenge was meant to punish die-hard Nazis and convince them they truly were defeated, and to be the avenger of justice against those Germans who were associated with prison, labor, or extermination camps.

While GIs thought it was enjoyable to pillage even unimportant Nazi party members' homes, it was even better to get a chance to steal from the highest ranking officials. When American units reached Berchtesgaden on 4 May 1945, the symbolic retreat for the Nazi elites, commanders declared open season on plundering the town. As Pfc. David Webster recounted, his company commander made a speech when they entered Berchtesgaden: "'We're going to live in these houses,' he said. 'They were built as apartments for the families of the Gestapo police that used to guard Hitler, so we don't care what you do to them or take from them as long as you keep them neat.'"¹⁸³ In some units, any action that directly affected political players or their families was sanctioned by commanders.

Despite some officers openly condoned stealing Nazi officials' property due to guilt-by-association, GIs tended to not have the same feeling towards ordinary civilians.¹⁸⁴ The average German, to most American servicemen, was not automatically guilty. A War Department report in the monthly digest entitled *What the Soldier Thinks*

¹⁸³ Webster, *Parachute Infantry*, p. 282.

¹⁸⁴ Petra Goedde, *GIs and Germans: Culture, Gender, and Foreign Relations, 1945-1949* (New Haven: Yale, 2003) does a good job of analyzing the intricacies of the initial contact between American soldiers and German civilians. Though the work lacks any discussion of looting, it is useful as a social history of the last days of World War II; In *Endkampf*, Stephen Fritz argues that the relationship with Germans was seamless because GIs best identified with the Germans, out of all Europeans they had encountered. Fritz, *Endkampf*, p. 56.

found that the majority of servicemen did not actually harbor any hatred towards the average German. In a poll, sixty-five percent of soldiers when asked what they would like see happen to Germany after the war replied, "Punish the leaders but not the ordinary Germans."¹⁸⁵ There was some confusion for GIs, however, with regards to General Eisenhower's non-fraternization order of 12 September 1944. The nine-page directive specified that GIs were to avoid "mingling with Germans upon terms of friendliness, familiarity or intimacy, whether individually or in groups, in official or unofficial dealings."¹⁸⁶ Lieutenant Daniel Lerner toured Köln after the fight for the city was over, and afterwards sent a report outlining his conclusions about the situation to Lieutenant Colonel Gurfein, Chief of Intelligence, Psychological Warfare Division. Lerner concluded that "Sometimes G.I.s get the idea that non-fraternization means that they must be 'mean' to the Germans. This expresses itself mainly in the form of increased looting and purposeless destruction of property." However, despite soldiers' brusqueness with German property, "Cases of mishandling of German civilians by soldiers seem to be very rare."¹⁸⁷ Therefore, GIs treated German civilians well but sometimes stole for retaliatory reasons.

Servicemen often took food from civilians who left their homes out of fear of the advancing armies. Since the soldiers never saw the people from whom they were stealing, they viewed their pillaging as retribution against all Germans. Richard Courtney commented on taking civilian food on his unit's push towards Czechoslovakia:

¹⁸⁵ War Department, "Hatred of the Enemy," *What the Soldier Thinks*, no. 7, 8.

¹⁸⁶ Goedde, *GIs and Germans*, p. 50.

¹⁸⁷ Lt. Daniel Lerner, Sig C., to Lt. Col. Gurfein, Chief of Intelligence, Psychological Warfare Division, 20 March 1945, "Relations Between U.S. Soldiers and German Civilians", Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

“Rimlingen was like a ghost town as all the Germans had moved east with their retreating army. Here we looted eggs, and they tasted good as we cooked them on our German frying pans. We were giving the Germans a taste of what they had been doing to others for years.”¹⁸⁸ Stealing food for the soldiers, then, served the dual purpose of providing them sustenance and also punishing civilians.

Though Courtney and his buddies looted from an empty home, some soldiers took food as retribution against civilians who were uncooperative. In situations where a scowling farmer yelled at GIs to go away, soldiers would raid vegetable cellars of eggs, pickled beets, flour, potatoes, smoked ham, and other goods from well-stocked larders. In one instance a soldier explained his unit’s actions by saying, “My stomach had not once been truly filled since leaving England and to satiate my persistent hunger was the most important thing to me.” Many soldiers matter-of-factly agreed that having the Germans’ “countryside and homes ravaged was a price the vanquished had to pay in wartime.”¹⁸⁹ This sentiment was often reserved for not all Germans but those who were openly contemptuous of American soldiers. Frontline troops tended to not steal from random civilians, but directed their feelings of revenge towards men like the stubborn farmer as an unquestionable confirmation that Germany truly was a defeated nation.

While the frontline soldier did not take harsh liberties with average German civilians’ possessions, support troops were known to. Those GIs who followed combat operations would sometimes ascend on recently-taken towns and lay waste to homes. Soldiers on the divisional level who were close enough to the fighting but not actively

¹⁸⁸ Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, p. 80.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

engaged at all times – artillery, engineers, tank destroyers – believed they should share in the spoils of war they helped, in some respects, the division to win. Infantry soldiers, however, took umbrage with their colleagues’ sense of entitlement. Perhaps the best contemplation of this dichotomy put to paper was Raymond Gantter’s resentful observation:

I reflected bitterly as we trudged out of town. Here was this goddamn bunch of engineers, and they came into a town we fought to take. While we slugged it out, they sat on their tails on the other side of the river. When it was all over they followed us in. They were more brutal, more ruthless in their treatment of civilians, than *we* were – and surely, if there is ever *any* justification for brutality (which I doubt) it is with the combat outfits, with the men who’ve seen their friends killed in the taking of towns such as this. But we have little desire to make the civilians suffer. Usually we treat them as considerately as we can and are grateful to them when they’re kind. Now the women and the children had to leave this place, go to some other corner of this weary, God-forgotten land. Maybe someday they’d come home again and to a place they wouldn’t recognize, their houses obscenely filthy, their furniture scarred and smashed and burned for kindling, their livestock devoured, their cupboards bare, and their wine cellars empty. So it’s war, maybe, but there are degrees of war, as there are degrees of peace.¹⁹⁰

There was a palpable disconnect between frontline soldiers, those in immediate support, and the troops in the communications zone. The infantryman saw the hell they wreaked upon civilians on a daily basis, and for the most part felt remorse for their part in the destruction – these men, after all, were citizen soldiers, not professionals.¹⁹¹ Frontline troops commiserated with citizens they helped displace, as they shared the terrifying experiences of combat together. The soldiers who were close enough to hear the sounds of war, but were not confronted with the possibility of death with every decision they made, could likely not understand the infantryman’s restraint from stealing for

¹⁹⁰ Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 313.

¹⁹¹ The best example of a soldier questioning how war affected his civility appears in John B. Babcock’s *Taught to Kill*, pp. 191-192.

revenge.¹⁹² Though it was difficult for the front-line GI to take civilian items for malicious reasons, they did take freely from abandoned homes. Those civilians they did not see were faceless representations of the war that brought them to Europe and placed them in their plight. For that reason, it was easier for GIs to steal from homes left abandoned, as every item they took was payment for their troubles and vengeance against the Nazi state.

LEADING BY EXAMPLE: OFFICERS LOOTING

Despite support troops' reputation for being the most voracious looters, officers were just as efficient, if not more so, at stealing civilian possessions. Captains, majors, and colonels stole different objects from noncombatants than what the ordinary GI took, however. For three reasons, officers could steal objects worth infinitely more than what the men below them were collecting. First, wherever units stopped for the night, officers were billeted in the most luxurious houses, and the contents of mansions were at their disposal. Second, officers had their own personal vehicle, which translated into an ability to transport loot larger and more resplendent than what the average soldier could carry. Last, officers could be avaricious because they had an outlet for the objects they were acquiring. Being permitted to send uncensored packages home meant captains, majors, and colonels were able to remove a fair amount of valuables from Germany. As a result, officers most often stole those cultural treasures that authors such as Kenneth Alford cite so often in their works.

¹⁹² For more insights into infantrymen's opinion on support troops taking loot, see Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, pp. 295, 327.

Infantry lieutenants and captains, those officers of the company level and below who shared the same hardships as their men, were not party to such looting. Just as the regular infantryman, these officers were forced to carry everything they needed. As a consequence, any added weight was unwelcome, and the soldier abandoned the unneeded objects after weary feet and shoulders rejected the extra burden. As Raymond Gantter reasoned, “It’s not that the cupidity of officers was greater, but that – by virtue of their bars, their leaves, their eagles, or their stars – they had greater opportunities.”¹⁹³ Therefore, officers’ ability to loot expensive objects was due to the privilege associated with rank.

This privilege meant officers were reserved the best homes for billets. Though the enlisted man and non-commissioned officer could thoroughly search homes for loot, captains, majors, and colonels generally had the benefit of being quartered in the nicest houses when their units would halt their advance. What is more, officers commanded large areas which could encompass a multitude of affluent families’ homes. The GI, conversely, did not have the freedom to explore such a vast area as officers could.¹⁹⁴

“Looting in mansions was always good, and many an officer’s home in the States is now enriched by objets d’art he did not purchase,” Gantter goes on to suggest.¹⁹⁵

Officers also had the added convenience of transportation. While meant as a means to easily review and administer orders to their units, the personal jeep became the officer’s loot carrier.¹⁹⁶ Furthermore, a commander’s jeep came with trailers to transport

¹⁹³ Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 190.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 190; Alexander Gordeuk interview, 1 April 1996; Werner Carl Sturm interview, 1 March 1996.

their personal belongings. This, too, added to the ease at which officers could accumulate “those ‘little things’ picked up en route,” as well as “fine hunting rifles and shotguns, chests of sterling silver, rugs, oil paintings, fur coats, all the cumbersome things the overladen doggie was forced to pass up because he was physically unable to carry them on his back.”¹⁹⁷ Vehicles, then, were an important deciding factor in what officers could steal compared to their men.

Officers’ privileges secured their ability to send packages home without threat of being confiscated or even censored.¹⁹⁸ Their men, however, had more trouble successfully sending their trophies home. Customs officials, it seemed, were less skeptical of officers’ parcels, and as a result there was a disproportionate percentage of war trophies that successfully made it through ports. As a result, Gantter argues, “officers could – and *did* – send home fur coats, sets of fine china, boxes of silverware, lace curtains, Oriental rugs and the like, and the doggie did not, because the doggie would have had his ass chewed and been asked to explain his ‘outrageous looting.’”¹⁹⁹ Officers also stole and mailed home objects that they could easily sell in the United States.

Alexander Gordeuk reflected on mailing his commander’s cache after the war:

One of the officers, a major, after the war was over, he asked us to box some material for him. He had a weapons carrier full of loot, he even looted cloth. We were short on nylons and apparently the Germans were making a similar cloth in bolts. He knew enough to steal whole bolts. I wouldn't have had the faintest idea what to steal. He stole guns that were collector quality, and the Germans were great gun collectors. . . . He knew their value; he probably came home with tens of thousands of dollars in collector's guns and pistols. So he made us crate all this stuff, and when an officer sent stuff home his was not inspected, so it went on home to his home. If we wanted to send something home we would have to have

¹⁹⁷ Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 190.

¹⁹⁸ Werner Carl Sturm interview, 1 March 1996.

¹⁹⁹ Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, pp. 191-192.

an officer inspect it before it could go. I remember boxing up all his loot and all of us GIs were really ticked off that the major would do this. He probably came home and bought the finest house in town someplace and probably had money to spend beyond that. Oh, the loot he brought home.²⁰⁰

Not only did size determine what the infantryman took but also value. The regular GI did not have accessibility to the priceless objects that officers did. Officers, also, were generally educated men, and realized the value of objects that other soldiers may have disregarded.²⁰¹ Troops wanted items they could use or sell to their fellow GIs in short order. To steal expensive objects and keep them until they returned home was not feasible.

FINDERS, KEEPERS: THE PSYCHOLOGY OF LOOTING

How GIs coped with the stresses of extended combat varied greatly. The environment to which they awoke each morning was one that shocked civilian sensibilities. While the world in which they lived was unapologetically straightforward – they would either survive, be wounded, or die – the ways each man reacted to the stresses of combat were not as well-defined. Some soldiers adopted a nonchalant demeanor in order to cope with warfare, driving some to recklessly loot German homes. The realization that they could die at any moment meant GIs cast off the social mores that governed their behavior while in civilian life. John Babcock’s recollection of watching his unit loot a German town is the best psychological explanation for soldiers’ actions:

Once small arms fire died down, indicating that defenders were bugging out, they resorted to the conquering soldier’s cruel sport: looting. . . . Dependable soldiers, even very good soldiers, seemed to go a little bit crazy the first time that reduced combat pressure allowed options other than simply staying alive.

²⁰⁰ Alexander Gordeuk interview, 1 April 1996.

²⁰¹ Ibid.

Accountability to family, friends, and neighbors is a strong tenet among American high-school-aged boys. These guys were a long way from home, in an environment that embraced violent death and encouraged brutality. Recklessness surfaced where caution had reigned. There was no one from their home scene to hold them accountable, or to tell on them. They reacted like little kids left unattended for too long at home. They ran wild.²⁰²

For those soldiers who looted without abandon, it was inconsequential what ramifications their actions could bring. They no longer lived in an environment that placed restrictions upon their decisions, and were immersed in what historian Gerald F. Linderman dubbed “the world within war.”²⁰³ Ernie Pyle, war correspondent and often considered the GI’s best friend, even commented on soldiers’ indifference when he said, “Our men have less regard for property than you raised them to have. . . . The stress of war puts old virtues in a changed light.”²⁰⁴ Babcock analyzed the changes he saw in not only himself but also those men in his unit, especially after one man confided in Babcock that he had just raped a German woman.²⁰⁵ His observation is exceptionally pertinent, as it illustrates the struggle that some soldiers felt between the sensibilities they brought with them from civilian life and the distortions that combat placed upon those principles:

²⁰² Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, pp. 186-187.

²⁰³ Gerald Linderman’s *The World within War* is a boots-on-the-ground look at the American combat soldier in Europe during World War II. Primarily relying on infantrymen’s letters, diaries, and memoirs – 500 soldiers, all told – Linderman seeks to explain how GIs prepared and coped with battle, how they viewed their enemies, how they related to each other, and how they thought of home. The book argues that the day-to-day life front-line troops experienced was so fundamentally different from rear-echelon soldiers’ that combat was a parallel reality, a world within war. Battle constructed new relationships, with friend and foe alike, and altered the social constructs that had dictated how the men interacted in civilian life. The world in which they lived forced them to become callous, and for some it even became an existence that was alluring. It was life simplified to its basic necessity: survival.

²⁰⁴ Ernie Pyle, *Here is Your War: Story of G.I. Joe* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), pp. 242-243.

²⁰⁵ The only book to examine GIs and rape in World War II is sociologist J. Robert Lilly, *Taken by Force: Rape and American GIs in Europe during World War II*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). Lilly reports there were 14,000 cases of U.S. soldiers raping civilian women throughout Europe, including Britain. Just as with looting, cases of rape spiked once the American Army reached Germany, owing to the argument that the GI’s frame of mind changed upon entering the enemy’s country.

That night in the creekside village frightened me about myself and my fellow soldiers. Given even a brief pause in the intensity of war, what we sought for release did not paint a pretty picture. I knew that conquering soldiers were a rough lot throughout history: rape and pillage. Should I expect that we citizens-turned-soldiers would be any different?

Prolonged battle had changed us profoundly, although we didn't really know in what ways. Some innate mechanism allowed us somehow to erect a protective screen that compartmentalized our sensitivities and sensibilities. Fundamental values and moral qualities survived to emerge when called on by many of us, no matter the degree of trauma we had experienced.

Basic behavior values didn't prevail for everyone, and were topsy-turvy in greater degree among the new men who had not been humbled by bitter combat. For some among the battle-hardened . . . relentless pressure had permanently eroded or erased norms of behavior and respectability. For some, those precious values never fully retreated.²⁰⁶

Babcock's analysis points to the extreme of how each soldier dealt with the trauma of extended combat, but it does so poignantly.

While some GIs looted for a psychological release after the rigors of battle, others did so for comical reasons. These men stole civilian possessions simply because they could. As the victors, American soldiers believed they were entitled to whatever item piqued their interest. Rather than looting for keepsakes, profit, necessity, or revenge, these men stole because they thought it was humorous. It was this motivation that Richard Courtney talked about when he recounted looting German homes:

It was comical to see infantrymen slogging along with their rifles over their shoulders and carrying a brass lamp, marble table top, china bowls, paintings, and even tapestry. About a mile outside whatever town we had just left, the weight would begin to tire the GIs and they would toss their prize into the nearest ditch with a shrug. So what! We will pick up something else in the next town. If the German civilians had only followed us about one mile they could have recovered almost of their belongings.²⁰⁷

²⁰⁶ Babcock, *Taught to Kill*, pp. 191-192.

²⁰⁷ Courtney, *Normandy to the Bulge*, pp. 95-96.

What of the objects that soldiers took but never kept? Overwhelmingly, the GI did not keep the items he took from homes. The act of stealing the object generally satiated the initial desire to impulsively act.²⁰⁸ In the end, looting homes throughout Germany was a form of entertainment for GIs. Many veterans would probably nod their head in agreement and chuckle with Richard Courtney's laconic explanation when he said, "To us it was a funny part of war."²⁰⁹

Humor is an important component of the American soldier and war. S.L.A. Marshall commented that "It is not the least of his fighting assets that the American soldier has a sense of humor which can survive the shock and strain of engagement and can make a battle stand still."²¹⁰ Lee Kennett, in his work *G.I.: The American Soldier in World War II*, said humor was a "kind of safety valve" for the troops.²¹¹ Peter Kindsvatter, too, spoke of this dynamic when he argued "Humor helped soldiers make light of miserable physical conditions."²¹² Therefore, Courtney's recollection is pertinent, as it combines the GI's need for humor with looting.

CONCLUSION

U.S. soldiers' looting was as varied as the men who were committing the acts. While souvenir hunting offered only a finite amount of objects from which to choose, looting included a countless amount of possibilities for the GI simply because every house had the potential to be different than the last. Whether for reasons of keepsakes,

²⁰⁸ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

²⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 95-96.

²¹⁰ S.L.A. Marshall, *Men Against Fire: The Problem of Battle Command* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2000), p. 185.

²¹¹ Kennett, *G.I.*, p. 143.

²¹² Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, p. 117.

necessity, profit, or revenge, looting noncombatants' possessions was a country-wide reality with which German civilians had to live. While the largest motivation for souvenir hunting was to augment a paycheck, looting was for immediate personal gain. That gain came in the form of sustenance, warmth, or simply momentary fun. The very term GIs' used for their actions – "liberating" – is a window into how they viewed the reasons for their behavior: denoting military necessity, while playfully justifying the importance to take the item in order to save it from German occupation, as it were.

Looting in Germany was also different from the stealing that occurred in the Allied countries. Ostensibly, this is because American soldiers were fighting in the enemy's homeland, as well as this mindset of "liberating" civilian possessions. Deeper, though, are reasons of differing social interactions with noncombatants. When American forces pushed into Germany in September 1944, and then again in February 1945, the war, in a sense, changed. These changes on the part of the Americans were to do with how soldiers viewed, interacted, and treated civilians. Troops' mindsets had to change when arriving in Germany. Towns and villages became even more dangerous than they were in Allied countries. American soldiers not only had to worry about *Wehrmacht* ambushes in urban centers but also about the threat from German civilians. Noncombatants in France, Belgium, and Luxembourg could be helpful, but in Germany they were a threat and a hindrance, and therefore held with suspicion. It was also a different war for SHAEF. Once the frontlines moved through Allied countries, order could be handed back to civilian officials, thus restoring local government. Germany, however, was the enemy, and local governments were considered poisoned, stacked with

card-carrying Nazi Party officials who were not to be trusted. The way SHAEF handled civil matters, the way in which it rebuilt the country, and even the way it handled its troops' misbehavior had to be different. As a result, the compilation of these conditions influenced the soldier's mindset when fighting in Germany.

CHAPTER 3: THE U.S. ARMY ACTS

Although American soldiers had rampantly souvenir hunted and looted throughout the entire duration of Operation Overlord, SHAEF did make attempts at curbing such action. While Headquarters issued no clear orders to halt GIs souvenir hunting on the battlefield, it did want desperately to end looting. What occurred, then, was the full weight of the Allied Expeditionary Force coming down on the issue of looting, but in the end failing to effect any great change. The ordinary GI may not have been cognizant of it, but throughout 1944 and 1945, SHAEF and subordinate commands spent countless hours constructing intricate orders that were to govern troop behavior. When reports came back in the summer of 1944 that soldiers were looting on an alarming scale, Headquarters tackled the situation with the issuance of unrealistic declarations and vague directions that told subordinate commanders to fix the problem without supplying any substantial advice how to do it. The operations into Germany, in SHAEF's view, were to be different than what occurred in Allied countries. Troop commanders were to ensure that discipline in their unit was held to the highest standards possible. However, what typified these orders was a disconnect between SHAEF commanders and those officers in the field, and a struggle took place between Headquarters' demand for stricter discipline and combat effectiveness. The study of General Eisenhower and his staff's attempts at curbing looting in Germany during 1945, then, is a lesson in the ineffectiveness of orders that sometimes reigns supreme during war.

LEARNING BY DOING: LOOTING IN ALLIED COUNTRIES

By the time American troops broke the Siegfried Line, SHAEF had more experience dealing with its soldiers' absconding with civilian property than it would have liked. Throughout Allied countries, reports flooded into headquarters about troops looting in friendly territory. Indeed, the orders and plans to prevent plundering in Germany were born from the experiences in France, Belgium, and the Netherlands. Of the occurrences in Allied countries, it is beneficial to examine France and Belgium as two case studies into civilians' reactions to GIs looting and SHAEF's subsequent response.

The looting in France prompted General Marie Pierre Koenig, Commanding Officer of the Free French Forces in London, to write a letter to Lieutenant General Walter Bedell Smith, General Eisenhower's Chief of Staff, outlining the problems and urging SHAEF to fix the misbehavior. On 16 August 1944, Lt. Gen. Smith sent his reply:

Dear General:

I am deeply grateful for your bringing to my attention the matter of plundering by Allied troops in France, and particularly for the way in which you dealt with this shameful matter. I have talked with General Eisenhower on the telephone about it. He is deeply shocked, and is personally taking action with all commanders concerned to stop immediately this reprehensible action.

We are also issuing a General Order on the subject, and I will immediately make whatever arrangements are possible to censor packages sent from France. Frankly, I see no reason why packages should be sent from France to either Britain or America. . . .²¹³

SHAEF reacted quickly to these reports, and set out to investigate such allegations, though much of the damage had already been done. In response to the deluge of reports that Headquarters received, the Provost Marshal launched investigations, G-1 drafted

²¹³ Lieutenant General W.B. Smith to General Koenig, Commander Free French Forces, Letter with Regards to U.S. troops looting in France, 16 August 1944, SHAEF, Box 11, RG 331, NACP.

memos for Army Group commanders, and G-5 (Civil Affairs) tried to smooth over relations with the public. Follow-up reports state that it was near impossible to find the perpetrators of such crimes, as too much time had elapsed between the looting and the investigation; it was also difficult to prove the crime was actually committed by U.S. personnel, or at all.²¹⁴ However, despite the difficulties, more civilian complaints from other Allied countries came in to headquarters, complete with detailed reports of destruction and looting of churches and civilian homes, rapes, drunken attacks, and more.

Lawlessness of American troops became so unbridled in France that the *Journal de Cherbourg* ran a story in November 1944 about the situation around their town:

Scenes of savagery and of bestiality actually desolate our countryside. Plunder, rape, murder: all security has disappeared . . . It will end badly: the exasperation in the people has reached a peak. Pitchfork[s] will join in the fight. Never has one witnessed such a debauchery of outrages and crimes. The law of the jungle will be a necessity since the authorities prove to be powerless. Sympathies that were growing firmer are disappearing. It's too bad.²¹⁵

Though this is a rather damning editorial from a French newspaper, the context is unclear. Was there an ulterior motive with this particular news source, or even a political motivation? Some explanation can be apportioned to a general feeling that swept across France once the front moved through the country. For some Frenchmen, the invasion of Europe was not liberation but an intrusion upon their everyday lives, even if that life was one under German occupation. As William Hitchcock posits, “When liberation did arrive, it came not all at once but in a series of devastating, prolonged, murderous blows, delivered by air, sea, and ground bombardment and by the lethal weapons of the Allied

²¹⁴ Lieutenant General J.G.W. Clark, Memo concerning Looting in Netherlands, 19 March 1945, SHAEF, Box 11, RG 331, NACP.

²¹⁵ Le General d'Armee A. Juin to General Eisenhower, “Relations with Civil Population,” 3 November 1944, SHAEF, Box 12, RG 331, NACP.

soldiers.”²¹⁶ In the weeks and months after pushing the German forces from France, American and local authorities “operated in an environment they themselves had violently uprooted.”²¹⁷ Hitchcock goes on to argue the “liberation shattered the long-settled Norman countryside,” and “the presence of millions of armed soldiers, with enormous power and few constraints, unsettled the local inhabitants and invited criminal misbehavior of all kinds.”²¹⁸ Therefore, Allied soldiers looting throughout France was an identifiable point of contention for those who wished to bemoan the anguish that the war had brought to their homes. It is clear that SHAEF was more than aware of such grumblings – the *Journal de Cherbourg* article, specifically – and scrambled to institute some sort of damage control before the situation escalated.

Overwhelmingly, the crimes American soldiers committed in France could be apportioned to the rear-echelon, support troops. Too much time on servicemen’s hands, coupled with too much wine and calvados, a local apple brandy, meant that discipline fell and infractions rose. The same situations occurred in Belgium during the winter of 1944 because of the stalemate between the German and American armies during the Battle of the Bulge; however, frontline troops were the offenders rather than the rear-echelon.

Captain T. Jennings, an Intelligence officer, toured the frontlines for three days directly after the Battle of the Bulge. In his report, Jennings outlined that GIs had in fact looted on a considerable scale. For the most part, soldiers stole objects that would keep them warm during the bitter winter of 1944. Most troops lacked proper winter attire and equipment, and looked to civilian possessions for items that promised even a small

²¹⁶ Hitchcock, *The Bitter Road to Freedom*, p. 27.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

increase in warmth. To this end, Belgian civilians were understanding of American soldiers' actions and refused to take umbrage with the theft of their possessions, simply concluding "*c'est la guerre*", that's war. Jennings reported "an almost unanimous acceptance of the fact that the carrying off of stoves and the destruction of furniture for firewood were fairly pardonable acts in view of the intense cold and the extremely harsh conditions of combat."²¹⁹ Although civilians understood why GIs stole stoves and destroyed furniture, they did not condone the theft and destruction of possessions that constituted no military need. Communities throughout the Ardennes area had witnessed some sort of looting and destruction, and soldiers left in their wake demolished cupboards, floorboards that had been pried up, and the charred exteriors of strong boxes blown open in search of valuables. Jennings concluded that certain "acts officially attributed to U.S. soldiers exhibit a perverse and unnatural spirit which can only be described as vandalistic. Even when one makes due allowance for the fact that nerves were keyed to an abnormal pitch in such a bloody and tremendous struggle," the report went on to say, "it is not easy for civilians to excuse troops' behaviour in some cases."²²⁰

As in France, the majority of soldiers' wanton looting was preceded by the intake of alcohol. GIs' actions were not predicated on a disregard for civilian possessions but rather too much inaction and too many opportunities to obtain liquor. Jennings' report indicated the existence of an organized traffic in "bad cognac and worse wood

²¹⁹ Captain T. Jennings, SHAEF, P.W. Section, Intelligence Section to Major I.R. Deacon, I.C., C.I.C., "Report on Pillage by U.S. Troops during Ardennes Campaign", No Date, SHAEF, Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

²²⁰ Ibid.

alcohol.”²²¹ Local citizens took advantage of static fighting lines and traded or sold “semi-poisonous liquors of only too recent distillation” for foodstuffs.²²² Some enterprising Belgians sold their questionable alcohol for prices as high as 600 francs per bottle to GIs who wanted extra warmth and an escape from stress interspersed with boredom.²²³

Belgium, then, was different in several respects from France. First, it was not rear-echelon troops who looted civilian homes but rather front-line soldiers. Both groups shared the common denominators of free time and easy access to alcohol, but the difference was who precisely was perpetrating the crimes. Prior to the Battle of the Bulge, the frontline moved steadily, and combat action was for the most part constant, that situations such as what occurred in Belgium did not arise. When units became static, however, such as the support troops in France and the combat troops in Belgium, looting and destruction was more likely. Second, the reaction from civilians in France and Belgium were entirely disparate. Both countries experienced looting on the same scale, but the citizens viewed and handled the situations quite differently. While the ordinary Belgian reasoned “*c’est la guerre*,” the French complained bitterly and filed a copious amount of reports to American commands – even French generals and officials became involved. Despite the differences in looting and reactions from these two countries, SHAEF dealt with both nations in the same manner. Any crime that American troops committed while in Allied countries was, in Headquarters’ view, reprehensible. The lessons learned while in France and Belgium taught every level of the American Army

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Ibid.

²²³ Ibid.

how to deal with looting before they entered Germany. Whether they heeded those lessons was another story altogether.

SAVING THE OCCUPATION: PREVENTING INDISCIPLINE IN GERMANY

Before any American troops set foot into Germany, SHAEF was aware of the possibility that GIs would loot, which was assuredly a product of their experiences in Allied countries. In the Public Safety Manual of Procedures for the Military Government of Germany, published in September 1944, the Army pragmatically concluded looting was going to happen, “either by civil population or by troops.”²²⁴ The manual’s authors suggested that the key to containing looting lay “in the judicious use of preventive, deterrent, and detective methods, close cooperation being established between Public Safety Officers, Military Police and civil police.” That, in turn, translated into a procedure for dealing with towns in Germany that never fully came to fruition. According to the manual, those Public Safety Officers traveling with combat units were, upon entering a town, to coordinate with local police and then locate and assess what goods and places were most vulnerable to looting. Furthermore, the military government was prompted to give consideration to the proximity of the towns to military camps and civilian areas that housed “potential offenders.”²²⁵

While the Military Government planners expected there would be looting and planned around that assumption, SHAEF took a preventative and firm stance. In a report titled “Memorandum of Behavior of U.S. Troops in Germany,” commanders made it clear that there was to be no looting, as the “behavior of U.S. troops in Germany, from

²²⁴ Office of the Chief of Staff, pp. 22-23, “Public Safety Manual of Procedures, Military Government of Germany,” September 1944, SHAEF, Box 11, RG 331, NACP.

²²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 22-23.

the time of first entry throughout the occupation, will have great significance and lasting effect upon the German people.”²²⁶ The importance of soldiers’ good conduct also had historical precedence. Looking to the occupation after World War I, the military stressed its failure to sufficiently prevent Germany from waging war again, and warned against repeated shortcomings. The officers and men of the Allied forces, then, were to “establish a course of conduct which will help to prevent the necessity for a third such entry” into Germany.²²⁷ Soldiers were to be educators, not conquerors. SHAEF planned to teach Germany “a positive lesson.”²²⁸ American troops, through their good behavior, were to cultivate a respectful relationship with the German populace. That, in turn, would lead the nation to realize that their “support and tolerance of militaristic leaders, their acceptance and furthermore of racial hatreds and discriminations, their claims to being a ‘Master Race’, has brought them only suffering and defeat and has caused all other peoples of the world to look upon them with distrust.”²²⁹ In order to do this, however, American troops could not take liberties or act in a manner that would foment German nationalism or solidarity. Therefore, soldiers were not to “indulge to excess in intoxicating liquors, or commit any acts of pillage or violence.”²³⁰ The American soldier, therefore, was instrumental to the success of the occupation and a reformed Germany.

Though commanders understood that GIs’ good behavior towards civilians was paramount, they also wanted to ensure that soldiers treated cultural works with respect.

²²⁶ SHAEF, “Memorandum of Behavior of U.S. Troops in Germany,” No Date, Box 11, Folder 5, RG 331, NACP.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid.

²²⁹ Ibid.

²³⁰ Ibid.

In an early draft of *Pocket Guide to Germany*, a pamphlet the Army Information Branch prepared in 1944, the language towards looting, for unknown reasons, was more pointed than what the Army Service Forces eventually published. The pocket guide was an attempt to educate GIs about Germany before entering the country. It included pragmatic sections such as key phrases in German, a small guide to currency, weights, and measurements, and even useful facts about the weather and geography the soldiers would encounter. Aside from the practical uses of the pamphlet, however, there was an underlying theme. One could find constant reminders throughout the booklet that all Germans remained the enemy, and as such they should always be viewed with suspicion. Though the finished product does not hide a vitriolic tone, earlier drafts contained an even more scathing message: “You are now in Germany. As a victorious army you occupy the home-land of a people whose vast military might you have broken on the battle-field and whose poisonous philosophy of life you will help to eradicate from the world which it had outraged.”²³¹ The pocket guide that eventually went to press never mentioned looting, but an earlier draft spoke directly to why soldiers should abstain from stealing cultural works:

The Germans have looted or destroyed the works of art in the lands they over-ran; we must not, in revenge, sink to their level and earn from posterity a like condemnation. Let it be said of us soldiers of the allied Armies that in the land of our enemies we were faithful trustees of the world’s heritage of art.²³²

²³¹ SHAEF, Draft of Pocket Guide to Germany, ca. September 1944, Box 11, Folder 5, RG 331, NACP.

²³² Ibid. The copy that soldiers did end up with saw a substantially abbreviated discussion of why soldiers should not steal. In the first section of the pamphlet, titled “Your Job in Germany,” it reads: “One of the greatest challenges of the Peace to come is to make certain that the German people will take their place as law-abiding, useful citizens in the family of nations. On German soil, you are expected to observe local laws and regulations except as modified or amended by your own military authority. Local customs, especially those touching upon religion, are to be given consideration and respect. Respect property rights. Vandalism is inexcusable. Rifling of orchards and field and unauthorized appropriation of food stores are

While there was a moral high-ground logic to this admonition, there were also reasons of practicality. Headquarters was more than aware that the treasures of Germany, and also the treasures of Allied countries that Germany had taken, were tucked away in random houses and hidden underground.²³³ In order to escape Allied bombings, German museums, libraries, archives and art galleries removed their holdings from the urban centers where they were located and deposited them throughout the countryside. What is more, Nazi officials' notorious art thievery was well-known, and as a result Washington had promised the safe return of the looted art works to the proper owners.²³⁴ Directives from officials ordered commanders in the field to safeguard these objects and ensure their

contemptible and punishable by court martial." Army Information Branch, Army Service Forces, *Pocket Guide to Germany* (U.S. Government Printing Office, September 1944), p. 1.

²³³ Lieutenant General W.B. Smith to General Omar Bradley, "Looting by Allied Troops," 30 March 1945, SHAEF, Box 11, RG 331, NACP.

²³⁴ There have been extensive works produced on Nazi Germany looting Europe's treasures, and for the U.S. Army's attempts to recollect the pieces. See: Gerard Aalders, *Nazi Looting: The Plunder of Dutch Jewry During the Second World War*, Trans. Arnold Pomerans, Erica Pomerans (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 2004); Kenneth D. Alford, *Nazi Plunder: Great Treasure Stories of World War II* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001); Alford, *The Spoils of World War II*. Avi Beker (editor), *The Plunder of Jewish Property during the Holocaust: Confronting European History* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); George Carpozi, Jr., *Nazi Gold: The Real Story of how the World Plundered Jewish Treasures* (Far Hills: New Horizon Press, 1999); Richard Z. Chesnoff, *Pack of Thieves: How Hitler and Europe Plundered the Jews and Committed the Greatest Theft in History* (New York: Doubleday, 1999); Robert M. Edsel, *The Monuments Men: Allied Heroes, Nazi Thieves, and the Greatest Treasure Hunt in History* (New York: Center Street, 2009); Hector Feliciano, *The Lost Museum: The Nazi Conspiracy to Steal the World's Greatest Works of Art* (New York: Basic Books, 1998); Peter Haining, *The Mystery of Rommel's Gold: The Search for the Legendary Nazi Treasure* (London: Anova Books, 2007); Peter Harclerode and Brendan Pittaway, *The Lost Masters: World War II and the Looting of Europe's Treasurehouses* (New York: Welcome Rain Publishers, 2000); Michael J. Kurtz, *America and the Return of Nazi Contraband: The Recovery of Europe's Cultural Treasures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Michael J. Kurtz, *Nazi Contraband: American Policy on the Return of European Cultural Treasures, 1945-1955* (New York: Garland, 1985); Martin Lorenz-Meyer, *Safehaven: The Allied Pursuit of Nazi Assets Abroad* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007); George Mihan, Translated by Harry C. Schnur, *Looted Treasure: Germany's Raid on Art* (Knoxville: Alliance Press, 1944); Lynn H. Nicholas, *The Rape of Europa: The Fate of Europe's Treasures in the Third Reich and the Second World War* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995); Elizabeth Simpson, *The Spoils of War: World War II and Its Aftermath: The Loss, Reappearance, and Recovery of Cultural Property* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 1997); Arthur Lee Smith, *Hitler's Gold: The Story of the Nazi War Loot* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1996).

return to the rightful owners.²³⁵ GIs absconding with a famous French, Belgian, Italian or Dutch painting they happened to find in a cellar was, therefore, a situation SHAEF wanted desperately to avoid.

Army edicts that governed troops' behavior came not just from the military but also the U.S. government. Just as outlined in the pocket guide, government officials believed the paramount importance of the occupation was the protection of cultural treasures. In a War Department pamphlet from 12 May 1944, planners outlined the procedures for protecting monuments and art. Commanders were to ensure that one of their primary tasks was to instruct and discipline their troops. The booklet goes on to say,

Even well disciplined troops tend to regard themselves as free to use anything which is obviously abandoned or damaged, especially in enemy territory. . . . A temptation may be operative amongst troops to destroy objects which seem to symbolize the enemy. Or they may also be out on the souvenir hunt. It is best to enforce strict rules regarding the collection of souvenirs, discouraging thereby, on the part of the civilian population, pilfering and the sale of stolen objects to troops.²³⁶

However, despite the wishful thinking of the manual's authors, many of these outlines and rules were clearly unobtainable and at odds with the reality that was presented once troops began taking German territory. The guidelines that SHAEF and the War Department provided to commanders presumed that there would be looting, but a specific type. Orders and pamphlets focused specifically on soldiers stealing cultural treasures; no planners took into account that GIs would take ordinary items, as well.

²³⁵ SHAEF G-5 to Chief of Internal Affairs Branch, "Pillage and Wanton Damage by Allied Troops", 20 March 1945, Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

²³⁶ War Department, "Civil Affairs Information Guide: Field Protection of Objects of Art and Archives," pp. 5, 12 May 1945, Department Pamphlet No. 31-103, referenced at MHI Library.

The construction of orders to ensure the prevention of looting was a difficult proposition, but the implementation of these orders was even more of a monumental undertaking, no matter their origin. To ensure that American troops maintained their discipline, SHAEF ordered the officer corps to closely govern the conduct of its soldiers. Orders with regards to conduct, including looting, were to originate from the Commanding General, ETO and be sent to all U.S. troops, “prescribing their proper conduct, and will doubtless be coordinated through SCAEF [Supreme Commander, Allied Expeditionary Force] with similar orders issued by the British command.”²³⁷ More importantly, and SHAEF’s insurance that no looting would occur, military planners threatened harsh punishment to not only offenders but also their commanding officers if troops committed infractions:

Officers down to the company level throughout the American command should be notified that they will be held strictly accountable for the conduct of the men under their command, and that looting, desecration of public places and similar offenses committed by troops collectively will bring drastic disciplinary action against commanding officers.²³⁸

Therefore, SHAEF and Eisenhower made clear the importance of troops’ conduct by warning officers of punitive action in the event that soldiers’ conduct was counter to orders.

Army planners saw troops’ actions as inextricably linked with the success of the future. In contrast, planners subordinate to SHAEF, such as the Military Government, viewed the discussion of looting and souvenir hunting as a foregone conclusion: soldiers were going to do it, and the structures needed to prepare for it. What is more, SHAEF

²³⁷ No Author, “Memorandum of Behavior of U.S. Troops in Germany,” No Date, Box 11, Folder 5, RG 331, NACP.

²³⁸ Ibid.

anticipated the eventuality from the top-down, while Civil Affairs planners chose to tackle the problem on the ground with military police and government personnel. This disparity between planning – even the importance of the subject, itself – is indicative of the detachment between SHAEF and its subordinate command structures.

GIs' actions were, indeed, integral to the success of the occupation because of the poor reputation that civilians could assign Americans. However, there was another reason why Headquarters wished to combat a lack of discipline on the part of their troops. German propaganda convinced some Allied civilians, and the majority of German noncombatants, that American “gangsters” would run roughshod over towns and villages, plundering homes and raping women.²³⁹ Indeed, German propaganda painted both Soviet and American soldiers in the same light, and tried to dispel the popular belief that GIs would treat civilians with leniency. Historian Stephen Fritz argues that Joseph Goebbels' propaganda sought to “show the kindred nature of the enemies in the east and west.”²⁴⁰ SHAEF wished to counteract such claims by ensuring that officers kept discipline in the ranks, thus defeating the affects of Germany's promulgation. GIs, though, were not expected to treat German civilians with the same cordiality as they would allies. Headquarters expected to treat the enemy with caution and indifference, more than anything. In a report titled “Lax Discipline as a Source for Enemy

²³⁹ Fritz, *Endkampf*, pp. 44-46, 49; Goedde, *GIs and Germans*, pp. 62-63; Schrijvers, *Crash of Ruin*, p. 138.

²⁴⁰ Fritz, *Endkampf*, p. 45. Fritz goes on to quote Goebbels from a statement the Minister of Propaganda made later, in March 1945: “Up to now we have handled the Anglo-Americans much too mildly. . . . As a result morale in the west has become . . . worse. Through our atrocity campaign against Bolshevism we have succeeded in again strengthening our front in the east as well as putting the civilian population in a state of absolute readiness for defense. That we have not succeeded as well in the west primarily goes back to the fact that large parts of the population and also our troops believe the Anglo-Americans will treat them leniently. . . . Our previous propaganda, as the consequences demonstrate, has failed in its effect on the German people.” Fritz, *Endkampf*, p. 45.

Propaganda,” Colonel H.G. Sheen, Chief of the Counter-Intelligence Branch, G-2 (Intelligence), wrote to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1 (Personnel), SHAEF, on 24 January 1945.²⁴¹ Within the report, Sheen outlined the role of G-2 with regards to civil population and intelligence, and also stressed the importance of troop discipline. Intelligence reports in France alerted G-2 that soldiers’ actions were affecting the mission: “. . . when such relations are adversely affected by the indiscipline of troops to such an extent as to serve as a source for enemy propaganda it is the responsibility of Intelligence to report such circumstances to the appropriate authorities.”²⁴² In order to combat the unfavorable opinion that GIs were garnering, Sheen suggested strongly that looting had to stop, lest German propaganda succeed in alienating the American liberating force from their allies, the French. Sheen went on to write,

It is suggested that good relations with the people of FRANCE can best be restored, and enemy propaganda best defeated, by the imposition of stronger disciplinary controls and the indoctrination of troops with a wholesome respect for the severity and swiftness of military law when properly enforced.²⁴³

Therefore, SHAEF faced a two-front campaign against soldiers looting while in Allied countries. The first was a reputation that German propaganda had already placed upon soldiers before the invasion force arrived in liberated nations. The second was the reputation that American troops earned from their own actions. Rampant looting served to validate complaints of those citizens who bemoaned the coming of war to their

²⁴¹ This military shorthand will be used throughout to denote the Assistant Chiefs of Staff. These were commanders and offices that handled specific duties at corps and division level. In the World War II U.S. Army there included: G-1 (Assistant Chief of Staff, Personnel), G-2 (Assistant Chief of Staff, Intelligence), G-3 (Assistant Chief of Staff, Operations and Plans), G-4 (Assistant Chief of Staff, Logistics), and G-5 (Assistant Chief of Staff, Civil Affairs). These offices acted as intermediaries between levels of command, and as such played a prominent role in the plans for preventing looting as well as carrying out those orders.

²⁴² Colonel H.G. Sheen to AC of S G-1, SHAEF, 24 January 1945, “Lax Discipline as a Source for Enemy Propaganda” Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

²⁴³ Ibid.

doorstep, and sprouted the seeds of doubt that German Intelligence had planted. Both instances, though, served to undermine the success of the liberation in Allied countries.

The problem of troop discipline affecting the success of the invasion of Europe was not confined to just friendly nations, however. Before entering Germany, SHAEF was aware they would face the affects of an even more entrenched propaganda with regards to how GIs would act. Most German civilians had no reason to be skeptical about propaganda against the American soldier as compared to the Allied countries. To the ordinary German, U.S. troops were not a liberating army but an occupying force. Like in Allied countries, propaganda had led civilians to believe that GIs would behave like a conquering army, and freely take the liberties soldiers think are afforded them. The job of refuting these beliefs would fall not just on the shoulders of troop commanders but also Military Government officers. These men had the benefit of securing individual towns and villages directly behind the front – sometimes even in conjunction with frontline units – whereupon they were able to oversee order.²⁴⁴ While combat officers were expected to prevent only their soldiers from looting, the Military Government officers had the responsibility to prevent such action by any other people who entered the town, military or Displaced Persons (DPs).²⁴⁵ In response to the allegations that the occupying forces would act in accordance to German propaganda, Military Government officers were prepared to make it clear to civilians that any instances of looting or rape

²⁴⁴ Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany*, pp. 134-135, 141.

²⁴⁵ Displaced Persons or DPs, as the U.S. Army dubbed them, were predominately slave laborers from places Germany had invaded, such as France, Poland, and the Soviet Union. Many of their camp guards fled in the face of the advancing armies, allowing the laborers to roam freely. Starving and seeking revenge, Displaced Persons traveled throughout Germany looking for food and taking liberties with German civilians whenever they saw fit. The U.S. Army had some difficulty attempting to round up these people, as they were disrupting peaceful transitions for military government officials.

were to be reported to authorities immediately, and the proper disciplinary actions would be taken.²⁴⁶

VICTOR'S JUSTICE: SHAEF REACTS TO LOOTING IN GERMANY

Keen not to allow soldiers the same latitude in Germany as they had in Allied countries, the most important reaction to looting in liberated territories came in the form of the many memos released outlining how American soldiers were to act once on the enemy's soil. In almost every correspondence within SHAEF, reports cite repeatedly that lawless looting in Germany could foil a successful occupation. Ironically, Headquarters was more inclined to demand higher standards of discipline from its troops in Germany than they had in friendly countries. Military planners were convinced that detection and punishment were the surest means of deterrence, and therefore proclamations defining the offence of looting and prescribing penalties with respect to it were to be clearly and continually presented to troops.

SHAEF then issued vague orders and unclear directions to commanders. At no level, however, did any commander outline how their men were to be stopped from looting, aside from maintaining strict discipline. One such example of an order is Lieutenant General W.B. Smith's 30 March 1945 letter to 12th Army Group commander, General Omar Bradley, with regards to conduct of soldiers:

Looting carried on in liberated countries must, by every human standard, be considered a more despicable offence than when practiced in enemy territory. Nevertheless, such behavior in Germany will have very serious results and if persisted in may seriously endanger the objects of the occupation. . .

²⁴⁶ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, "Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment," 12 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

The Supreme Commander takes a very serious view of the reports which have reached him which would seem to indicate that Junior Commanders are lacking in a true appreciation of their responsibilities which must adversely affect the standard of discipline of their units.

Army Group commanders are, therefore, to give the matter their immediate and urgent attention and to take the necessary steps to insure that there shall be no further cause for complaint.²⁴⁷

While it is clear that SHAEF wanted to ensure that looting did not occur in Germany as it had in Allied countries, all suggestions as to how those orders should be carried out are entirely ambiguous. Apart from the substantial difficulty in interpreting orders, there was also no advice on how to catch and prosecute soldiers who looted when operations were occurring at such a frantic pace. The requirements of maintaining the war effort must have placed significant limits upon disciplining troops to the standards that SHAEF would have wanted to see. Army Group commanders merely saw to it that Headquarters' orders were forwarded to subordinate channels, sometimes verbatim.

The month previous to Lieutenant General Smith's letter to General Bradley, in February 1945, the 12th Army Group commander sent an open letter to his commanders about looting in Allied countries. As Bradley put it, "We are a conquering army, but we are not a pillaging army. We do not destroy property unless the enemy forces us to do so. When our men perform such acts in liberated countries it gives rise to adverse public opinion."²⁴⁸ Bradley went on to recite the standard order regarding looting by saying, "Prevention of such acts lies in discipline and control of your men. I desire that you give

²⁴⁷ Lieutenant General W.B. Smith to General Omar Bradley, "Looting by Allied Troops," 30 March 1945, SHAEF Box 11, RG 331, NACP.

²⁴⁸ General Omar Bradley to Generals of First, Third, Ninth, Fifteenth U.S. Armies, "Protection of Property Belonging to Allied Nationals," 14 February 1945, SHAEF, Box 11, RG 331, NACP.

this matter your immediate and continuing attention.”²⁴⁹ By the time the orders reached Army commanders, they simply repeated what their Army Group commander had told them, which was the original order from SHAEF. One such example is Lieutenant General Alexander Patch’s letter to all divisional commanders in his Seventh Army about how troops were to conduct themselves in German-speaking Alsace:

The heinous offense of looting is not to be tolerated in the liberated territory of Alsace and, moreover, will not be tolerated in the conquered area of Germany. The fact that the act is committed in an active combat area is not an excuse. All commanding officers will administer prompt and adequate punishment to all individuals guilty of looting. . . . It is directed that this memorandum be read to all Troops.²⁵⁰

Though this is a clear-cut edict, whether it was actually read to all troops in the Seventh Army is unclear.

What did divisional and regimental commanders think of these edicts?

Concentrating on the 16th Infantry Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division, it is apparent the orders which had begun at SHAEF reached, in some capacity, the regimental level.²⁵¹ In a 6 March 1945 memo to all officers of Combat Team 16, the commander addressed the subject of looting.²⁵² “Since crossing the Roer River,” the memo begins, “there has been an increased amount of looting and vandalism on the part of members of CT [Combat

²⁴⁹ Ibid.

²⁵⁰ Lt. Gen. Alexander Patch to Commanding Officer, All Units, Seventh Army, “Looting,” 16 December 1944, SHAEF, Box 11, RG 331, NACP.

²⁵¹ Veteran Alexander Gordeuk testified to this in interview: “We were advised very sternly, I know our battalion was advised because I did it as Information and Education non-com. Our company appeared before the battalion people and told them about the Geneva rules of warfare: you don’t shoot civilians, a prisoner, et cetera, whatever they are, we reviewed them, that looting is not to be done, unless it’s war material or war related, then you can steal it. But you’re not supposed to go into a civilian house and steal his bathtub, or his dishes, or whatever.” Alexander Gordeuk interview, April 1, 1996.

²⁵² A Combat Team augmented infantry regiments during World War II. CTs assisted regiments in being self-supporting by having their own light tanks, artillery, mechanized cavalry, combat engineers, and various other support units. Combat Team 16 should, then, be read to simply refer to the 16th Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division, as the CT was subordinate to its mother regiment, the 16th I.R.

Team] 16.”²⁵³ While SHAEF anti-looting orders tended to point towards reasons of moral high ground and the success of the occupation, CT 16’s commander reasoned with legal precedent: “Under the Articles of War and the provisions of the Geneva Convention no distinction is made between enemy or friendly civilians. Although we are at war with the German State we are obligated by these regulations to guard and protect public and private property.”²⁵⁴ The memo then becomes specific about how soldiers are to act when it says, “Looting civilian homes and property is punishable under the Articles of War, and will not be tolerated. It is directed that soldiers entering houses and other establishments to secure billets will not disturb private property.”²⁵⁵ Though these orders were likely a forwarding of SHAEF orders, and probably meant in good will, the majority of units did not heed such decorum simply because the Articles of War forbade it.

“Immediate steps will be taken by all organization commanders, all officers, and non-commissioned officers of the 16th Infantry to see that vandalism, looting, and souvenir hunting ceases immediately,” the commander went on to outline. If the regiment’s actions continued, “Summary Courts will be held on the spot by all field officers of the 16th Infantry and attached units for the purpose of punishing the offenders, providing the nature of the offense does not warrant trial by higher court.” Much of the looting was a product of billeting soldiers in German homes. While some units tended to be hesitant of sharing homes with civilians, GIs gladly laagered in buildings with no

²⁵³ Captain Lincoln D. Fish, Adjutant, 16th Infantry Regiment by order of Commander, CT 16, to All Organization Commanders, CT 16, “Looting,” 6 March 1945, Historical Records of the 1st Infantry Division and its Organic Elements, Box No. 140, Reel No. 3.17, McCormick Research Center.

²⁵⁴ Ibid.

²⁵⁵ Ibid.

occupants.²⁵⁶ CT 16's commander threatened to deny his troops even the comfort of seeking shelter in abandoned homes when he wrote, "Furthermore, the right to billet troops in buildings will be denied organizations who fail to comply with the above regulations – pup tents are still a recognized shelter for officers and enlisted men."²⁵⁷

The commander's stance was clear: there was to be no looting in German homes. If such action persisted, those soldiers responsible would be punished and the unit would no longer stay indoors. SHAEF orders followed the same guidelines, but nothing Headquarters produced was as specific as Combat Team 16's commander's orders.

How did company commanders interpret and implement these orders, though? It is clear that most company commanders thought nothing of allowing their troops to loot what they liked. In Charles B. MacDonald's seminal combat memoir, *Company Commander*, he makes no attempt to hide his troops' love of souvenirs and their looting. MacDonald is rather open about his soldiers' liberating a civilian vehicle for his own use, of taking wine from cellars and eggs from chicken coops, and even stealing the contents of a hat factory while there was a lull in fighting.²⁵⁸ MacDonald's stance with his troops does not seem to be an isolated officer's lax commanding style. Many instances throughout all combat units mirrored John P. Irwin's conversation with his company commander on 10 April 1945. After securing a small German town, the captain was discussing the battle with Irwin's tank crew. When walking away, the officer turned around and said, "Oh, one thing more. The colonel reminds us all that there is to be no

²⁵⁶ Austin, *One Man's War*, p. 144.

²⁵⁷ Captain Lincoln D. Fish, Adjutant, 16th Infantry Regiment by order of Commander, CT 16, to All Organization Commanders, CT 16, "Looting," 6 March 1945, McCormick Research Center.

²⁵⁸ MacDonald, *Company Commander*, pp. 114, 144, 170, 217.

more looting. Seems some people have complained about things being taken from their homes. The rule is *no looting!*' Then, half under his breath: 'And if you do any, see that you don't get caught!'"²⁵⁹ This exchange was not an isolated instance between a company commander and his soldiers. American soldiers' consistent looting throughout Germany is testimony to the prevalence of this line of thinking.

Despite SHAEF's orders, and in defiance of even regimental orders, GIs' looting in Germany failed to slow in pace throughout the spring of 1945. Rather than reports coming into Headquarters from civilians, as what happened in Allied countries, Army officers on the ground in Germany were generally those complaining of the severity of looting. Soldiers in the Monuments, Fine Arts, and Archives Division (MFA&A) and the Military Government kept SHAEF well apprised of the lack of discipline with frontline and support troops. In response, Headquarters continued to issue more anti-looting orders, all complete with the same language that could be found on memos before American soldiers entered Germany – the only differentiating factor between these orders, often times, was the date on the paper.

All conversations about looting throughout March and April 1945 were merely the same commanders discussing the same shortfalls, and offering up the same orders to fix the situation. In an ineffectual circle of Army bureaucracy, officers of G-1, G-2, and G-5 reported to SHAEF on the status of looting in Germany, whereupon Lieutenant General W.B. Smith would send a letter to Army Group Commanders. Those commanders, in turn, would order G-1, G-2, and G-5 to launch investigations into the

²⁵⁹ John P. Irwin, *Another River, Another Town: A Teenage Tank Gunner Comes of Age in Combat – 1945* (New York: Random House, 2003), p. 83.

matter. The faults in curbing GI looting lay in junior commanders' failure to implement SHAEF orders on the ground, something of which Headquarters was well aware.²⁶⁰

However, despite this knowledge, SHAEF continued to issue memos which contained the same language that all previous correspondence had. In a letter from G-1 to G-3 and G-5, 29 April 1945, Colonel H.E. Kessinger, Executive Officer to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1, disagrees strongly with a study that SHAEF had undertaken about the failure to control looting in Germany. Kessinger goes on to write,

In view of the large number of displaced persons, refugees and liberated prisoners of war with which the Army Group must deal at the present time, it is considered out of the question to expect them to maintain order and prevent looting with the manpower they can make available for this purpose. . . . No useful purpose would be served by addressing an expostulatory letter to the Army Group commanders at this time.²⁶¹

Despite the vagueness of this letter as to whether Kessinger is specifically speaking about looting by civilians, DPs or GIs, it seems to provide an insight into how the actual soldiers and commanders on the ground viewed SHAEF orders regarding plundering. Rather than concurring that there should be more memos and letters to commanders, this letter seems to politely admonish Headquarters for continually attempting to attack a problem that was probably impossible to solve with more men and more paperwork.

Though looting was rampant throughout Germany, there were some successful attempts to combat GIs' rapacity through means other than memos. No commanding body higher than the regiment addressed looting through action, however. Most responses to looting were prompted by Military Government officers working in

²⁶⁰ Colonel H.E. Kessinger, Executive Officer to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-1 to Policy Branch, "Looting by Allied Troops", 23 March 1945, Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

²⁶¹ Colonel H.E. Kessinger to G-1, G-3, G-5 SHAEF, "Control of Looting in Germany," 27 April 1945, SHAEF, Box 11, RG 331, NACP.

conjunction with regimental commanders. Public Safety and Military Government officers – those units attached to G-5 – were the most successful in discovering and handling instances of looting in Germany. Regular combat regiments often carried out SHAEF's orders with regards to GIs' looting only when cases were brought forth by Military Government officers.

One such case occurred on 6 March 1945. While a Military Government Officer was inspecting the town of Weilerswist, 20 kilometers south of Cologne, he discovered four GIs in the process of looting a home. Since the soldiers belonged to the 16th Regiment of the 1st Infantry Division, the officer turned the GIs over to the regimental executive officer, and confiscated the loot. The four soldiers were tried and punished by a Summary Court, and the Military Government Officer returned the objects to their rightful owners – there is no indication as to just what that punishment was.²⁶² Two days after the Weilerswist incident, the Military Government Officer attached to the 16th Infantry Regiment responded to a Bürgermeister's report in Bornheim, due east of Weilerswist. In short order, a lieutenant in the Recon Company of the 654th Tank Destroyer Battalion brought one of his men to the Military Government Officer, and accused the soldier of vandalizing and looting the Bürgermeister's home. Upon returning two cameras, a writing folder, and decks of playing cards, the GI was ordered to report to his Commanding Officer for disciplinary action.²⁶³

²⁶² 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, "Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment," 6 March 1945, McCormick Research Center.

²⁶³ 16th Infantry Regiment, G-5, "Journal, Military Government Officer, 16th Infantry Regiment," 8 March 1945, McCormick Research Center.

It is clear from these two cases that those soldiers caught looting by Military Government officers were not tried by a G-5 court but handed over to the regiment, where punishment was meted out by the Commanding Officer. Those units that did not have Military Government details attached to them looted with relative freedom. The very presence of a G-5 officer prompted regimental commanders to take action when their soldiers were either discovered or accused of stealing civilian items. Due to SHAEF orders, Military Government Officers were executing the mission given to them when they answered accusations of GIs looting. Regimental commanders, for their part, were duty-bound to see the cases through, as they had received SHAEF's orders, as well, albeit from their division. Military Government Officers, however, fought an uphill battle when trying to address and prosecute looting cases. First, there were a finite number of G-5 men in-theater and attached to regiments. Their mission, even if they were not tasked with the responsibility to curb looting, was a monumental undertaking. The town had to be rid of weapons, cameras, and radios; the G-5 officer had to take stock of food supplies for the civilians; and the local government needed to be thoroughly screened to ensure all Nazi officials were purged. Second, they combated not only German civilians' fear to complain about American soldiers' looting, but also the close-knit bonds of combat units. To the ordinary GI, a Military Government Officer was a representation of the Army ensuring troops were kept in check. Third, with the exception of the Weilerswist case, the majority of looting instances were generally well in the past before civilians reported the crime. Units moved rapidly through Germany during the push

towards Czechoslovakia and Berlin. As a consequence, G-5 officers had little time to investigate looting cases before units moved to another town or village.

REPORTING THE REPORTERS: LOOTING, SHAEF, AND THE PRESS

By April 1945, the American armies were steadily pushing through Germany. Spirited resistance from the *Wehrmacht* was sporadic, and the *Volkssturm* was found to be completely ineffectual. War correspondents had much to write about, and the majority of it was good news. In April alone, the Ruhr Pocket collapsed, the Americans reached Nürnberg, and the Red Army began its assault on Berlin. The restrictions that the U.S. military placed on war correspondents' stories still existed, however, in the heady days of spring, 1945.²⁶⁴

Richard Stokes, war correspondent for the St. Louis Post Dispatch, was a successful journalist by the time he was with General Patton's Third Army in April – he would later go on to run more stories than any other correspondent at the Nürnberg War Crimes Tribunal. He had a checkered history with the U.S. Army before arriving in the ETO. In June 1942, Stokes and several other reporters took part in a 24-day tour of war plants throughout the United States as guests of the National Association of Manufacturers, all in order to report on advancements in military technology. Army censors, however, redacted the correspondents' stories, creating an outcry from Washington journalists and taking the military to task on censorship restrictions.²⁶⁵ In April 1945, Stokes' reporting once again caught the military's eye. On 21 April 1945,

²⁶⁴ For a monograph on Army-press relations in World War II, see Michael S. Sweeney, *Secrets of Victory: the Office of Censorship and the American Press and Radio in World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001).

²⁶⁵ *Time Magazine*, Monday, Jun. 08, 1942, "The Press: Censorship Fantasia"

Brigadier General Frank A. Allen, Jr., Director, Public Relations Division, SHAEF, sent a report to 12th Army Group's G-1 about a story Stokes had recently written. Due to press censorship guidelines, the story was stopped and sent to the Assistant Chief of Staff for further discussion about whether the subject warranted action. The story, while offering up evidence that American soldiers were looting fairly regularly in Germany and thus showing the GI in a bad light, was important to SHAEF for another reason than just public relations. The Army was more concerned with the story's effect on other GIs than offending families back home by asserting that their sons, brothers, and husbands were undisciplined thieves. SHAEF posited that "the publication of such stories would undoubtedly lead to an extension of such looting as may now be taking place, as naturally other soldiers would feel they should take advantage of what appears to be becoming a general habit."²⁶⁶ Therefore, the military was worried that an announcement of troops' looting would suggest to other soldiers that officers were doing nothing to quell the actions early on.

The 12th Army Group took the allegations within Stokes' dispatch seriously. The war correspondent's writings proved to commanders that looting was going on, and it was large in scale. What is more, the Public Relations Division was concerned about not just looting but also souvenir hunting: "Attention is also drawn to the allegation that prisoners of war were stripped of decorations, money, watches, cameras, field glasses and trinkets."²⁶⁷ Those in the division were likely well aware of the Geneva Convention provisions against taking surrendering soldiers' personal belongings. To make matters

²⁶⁶ Brigadier General Frank A. Allen, Jr., Director, Public Relations Division to AC of S, G-1 (MAIN), "Looting by Allied Troops," 21 April 1945, Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

²⁶⁷ Ibid.

worse, as it was a breach of all SHAEF memos about soldiers' behavior in Germany, Stokes made mention of officers' complicity in looting and souvenir hunting. As the Public Relations Division reported, "The implication that officers and MPs take part in looting also appears to warrant investigation."²⁶⁸ What the command had, then, was a damning external report about GIs' actions in Germany, and it all ran counter to what SHAEF orders and memos had outlined to junior commanders even before entering enemy territory.

After the Public Relations Division forwarded the news story along with its apprehensiveness to G-1 of 12th Army Group, the matter traveled up the chain of command. Within three days, the issue had arrived at SHAEF and orders were sent back down to act. Colonel H.H. Newman, Assistant Adjutant General, SHAEF, on 24 April 1945, sent a message to 12th Army Group commander, Omar Bradley. The message, by the orders of the Supreme Commander, urged Bradley to investigate the press dispatch and determine "whether corrective action is necessary."²⁶⁹ Stokes' story had initiated the orders for an investigation, but Newman made it clear that the findings were not to be "based upon nor mention the inclosed [sic] press dispatch."²⁷⁰ When Bradley's report about troops looting in Germany was completed, he was to furnish a copy to headquarters

There was an institutional precedent for the actions taken against Richard Stokes' news piece. All censors in the Army were provided with outlines of what kinds of stories were to be stopped before allowed being sent on to press bureaus. On 6 March 1945, the

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Colonel H.H. Newman, Assistant Adjutant General to Commanding General, 12th Army Group, "Report of Looting," 24 April 1945, Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

Chief of Press Censorship sent to the Director, Public Relations Division a memo outlining the guidelines for what news stories were allowed to go to press and what should be stopped. Specifically, the memo dealt with “Looting and Misbehaviour by Allied Troops.” The Chief took a pragmatic stance with regards to looting when he said “As our forces advance into Germany, cases of looting or misbehaviour on the part of our troops may occur.”²⁷¹ The censors’ responsibility was to “remember that security may be involved in the protection of fighting efficiency of our forces through their discipline and morale.”²⁷² Therefore, war correspondents’ stories about looting, not unlike Richard Stokes’, could potentially serve to harm the fighting efficiency of American forces. Commanders understood that dispatches reporting soldiers looting could give license for other troops to act in kind, thus undermining discipline, morale, and combat effectiveness.

Stokes’ news piece was in breach of Paragraph 2 of the Press Censorship’s memo. The paragraph outlines what dispatches were to be stopped and sent to higher channels. Censors were to stop “Any reference which suggests that looting is permitted by the Allies or that officers ignore cases of looting.”²⁷³ What is more, stories were to be stopped if there was any reference “to mass looting or organized looting.”²⁷⁴ To clarify this definition, the memo specified that “This will be interpreted to mean instances in which an organized group of soldiers are involved in one case of looting, or where

²⁷¹ Chief, Press Censorship to Director, Public Relations Division, “Looting and Misbehaviour by Allied Troops,” 6 March 1945, Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Ibid.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

several instances of looting occurs within one unit or regiment.”²⁷⁵ Therefore, the Army was prepared for its soldiers to loot in occupied territories, a realization that was certainly prompted by the experiences in liberated countries.

Conversely, there were two specific contingencies for news stories about looting that the censors were permitted to go to print. First, pieces that reported “Isolated instances of looting by individual soldiers or not more than six soldiers working in unison” were permitted. Second, “Facts of their court-martial and punishment” were allowed through to publishers.²⁷⁶ The consent to print stories such as these was born out of the belief that one man stealing objects could easily be explained. More importantly, the printing of stories outlining the punishment given to perpetrators was to warn other soldiers from committing the same acts. Allowing these stories through, then, was not merely to report the news but to serve as warning for would-be offenders, and prevent further infractions.

Three important points can be concluded from Richard Stokes’ dispatch and the Press Censorship Division’s guidelines. First, the existence of a memo outlining what censors should and should not pass with regards to stories about looting is illustrative of the importance the Army placed on soldiers’ infractions and the reporting of them. What is more, the memo’s creation points to the realities that SHAEF knew would certainly greet them while in Germany. More importantly, the very details the memo provided exemplifies the foresight public relations officers had in crafting censorship guidelines, and suggests that SHAEF had previous experience in dealing with specific instances.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

Certainly, no memo would outline such specific eventualities without previously tackling such instances. The halting of Richard Stokes' news story demonstrated the censorship net that the Public Relations Division had casted, and shows how seriously SHAEF took reports of their soldiers looting while in Germany. While the correspondence between the Public Relations Division, G-1, and SHAEF reads as if they were surprised that GIs would perpetrate such incorrigible acts, the very existence of the press censorship memo suggests that commanders were more than ready for such actions, and even more ready to squelch the reporting of them.

AN UNKNOWING ACCOMPLICE: U.S. CUSTOMS, SHAEF, AND WAR TROPHIES

Most GIs had accumulated a sizable cache of war trophies by the end of the war. Those who did not jettison their souvenirs and loot on long marches, sell it to the highest bidder, or had it stolen, either mailed or carried the trophies back to the States.²⁷⁷ GIs, however, were aware of the challenge they faced with mailing. The enlisted man's packages were censored, and if deemed dangerous, or maybe just for reasons of greed, the parcels were confiscated. As Sergeant Gantter said, "we believed firmly that postal inspectors in the States would open the packages of an enlisted man with more alacrity than those mailed by a major or a colonel."²⁷⁸ Therefore, officers were able, and did with alarming regularity, send home an array of souvenirs. A way around the postal service was taking advantage of friends returning home on furlough. Once stateside, the

²⁷⁷ Adkins, Jr. and Adkins, III, *You Can't Get Much Closer Than This*, p. 190; Grady V. Corley, interview by G. Kurt Piehler and Joseph B. Harvey, 1 September 2000, in Kingsport, Tennessee, University of Tennessee Center for the Study of War and Society Veteran's Oral History Project, Knoxville, Tennessee.

²⁷⁸ Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 191.

GI on leave was to mail the souvenirs to his buddies' hometowns.²⁷⁹ Those men who attempted to take souvenirs home with their other belongings faced a gauntlet of way stations, all checking for dangerous or illegal trophies. Apart from random checks from officers at transit camps in Europe, GIs also had to outsmart officials before boarding the victory ship home and then finally at customs once stateside.²⁸⁰ Due to these obstacles, some soldiers did not want to take the risk of sending home what they had collected. Bob Harmon collected thirty guns while as an artilleryman in Germany, but he ridded himself of all but one, simply "because there was a threat that the Army would be unhappy if you tried to take more than one home."²⁸¹ For GIs like Harmon, they decided to dispose of their souvenirs rather than facing a delay in being discharged from the Army.

The U.S. Army did attempt to curb the abundance of packages of war trophies that were flooding into the United States.²⁸² Their successes, however, were limited. The Provost Marshal General ordered the Commissioner of Customs to conduct a survey during the war to determine how many GI parcels were inspected upon entering ports. The results pointed to a severe deficiency in the effectiveness of customs officials, as

²⁷⁹ Joseph T. Dawson, Letter to family, 3 July 1944, 1991.54, Box 3, McCormick Research Center; Egger and Otts, *G Company's War*, p. 240.

²⁸⁰ Demetrius Lypka, *A Soldier Remembers: A Memoir of Service in the 1st Infantry Division, 1941-1945* (Chicago: Cantigny First Division Foundation, 2007), pp. 229, 231; Spencer F. Wurst, *Descending from the Clouds: A Memoir of Combat in the 505 Parachute Infantry Regiment, 82d Airborne Division* (Philadelphia: Casemate, 2007), p. 254.

²⁸¹ Bob Harmon, interview by Daniel Burnstein, 17 January 2002, in Seattle Washington, University of Tennessee Center for the Study of War and Society Veteran's Oral History Project, Knoxville, Tennessee.

²⁸² There was eventually an attempt to cut down on the number of souvenirs that entered the country, but much later. For those GIs who wished to take a pistol home after the war, they had to have their commanding officer sign what was simply called a "certificate," but what is called in militaria circles a "capture paper." By signing the certificate, the officer signified that he had "personally examined the items of captured enemy equipment." The certificate went on to say that "the bearer is officially authorized by the Theater Commander, under the provisions of Sec VI, Cir 155, WD, 28 May 1945, to retain as his personal property the articles listed in Par 3, below."

only four to five percent of packages were examined upon entering the country.²⁸³ This lack of examinations prompted officials to act, but the lack of success continued.

The Bureau of Customs blamed this shortcoming on a severe lack of personnel to handle the volume of packages they were receiving from overseas. Due to manpower shortages throughout the country, customs officials did not have the sufficient amount of people to thoroughly inspect the packages that contained a sizable amount of not only war trophies but also government property. The Commissioner of Customs requested 180 military personnel to augment his employees in examining packages, but the Director of Personnel, Army Service Forces denied the request because the military was unable to provide a sufficient number of men. Without the assistance of the Army, and lacking the requisite personnel, customs officials debated other ways to increase the amount of packages screened. In March 1945, Customs undertook a study to determine whether the use of machinery to inspect parcels would be practical at large ports. A derivative of an X-Ray machine, dubbed the Inspectoscope, meant that customs personnel could increase the amount of packages scanned, and thus stop the entry of explosive ordinance and other unauthorized objects.²⁸⁴

The Commissioner of Customs was not alone in trying to stop packages that were considered dangerous or illegal. The Director of Intelligence, Army Service Forces, was responsible for drafting policies regarding the possession of war trophies. In conjunction with the Provost Marshal General, the Director of Intelligence, Army Service Forces, published a War Department Circular that outlined what items of captured enemy

²⁸³ Provost Marshal General, U.S. Army, *History of the Office of the Provost Marshal General, World War II, 1946*, MHI Library.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

equipment custom office were to retain. Throughout May and June 1945, the Provost Marshal General received a flood of reports about war trophies entering customs ports that were either unauthorized or mailed in violation of the War Department Circular.²⁸⁵ The reports were then forwarded to theater commanders overseas, and requested that those officers dispense punishment as they saw fit. Overwhelmingly, however, commanders viewed the situation as merely a minor disciplinary infraction and considered the confiscation of the war trophies as proportional to the crime committed. By July 1945, by order of the Provost Marshal General, reports outlining the confiscation of war trophies at ports were no longer necessary.²⁸⁶

GIs who wished to mail their souvenirs and loot home faced a line of defense at American ports, as custom officials were on the outlook for soldiers who had committed larceny. The stealing of U.S. government material was a rampant problem, and those who stole such objects sometimes attempted to send it home.²⁸⁷ As a result, those packages containing war trophies were subject to screening, and then possibly being retained by officials. The War Department Circular is illustrative of the seriousness with which some in the military viewed the mailing of captured enemy equipment. However, there was a spike and then a fall in just how seriously the military viewed GIs' loot. Throughout May and June, when soldiers in the ETO were finally static and had a chance to send home their trophies – and after those who wished to make a profit had sold their loot to other soldiers – the Provost Marshal General viewed the influx of mail coming

²⁸⁵ Ibid.

²⁸⁶ Ibid.

²⁸⁷ Office of the Chief Historian, European Command compiled report, *Law, Order, and Security: Occupation Forces in Europe Series, 1945-1946* (Frankfurt am Main: U.S. Army 1947), MHI Library, pp. 75-78.

from the theaters as threatening. However, by July, the importance of notifying commanders about packages containing war trophies had fallen. This could be a product of the infeasibility of notifying those commanders of every instance that a soldier disobeyed orders, as such a large amount of mail was coming from the ETO in late-spring 1945. Conversely, it could be indicative of the slowing rate of packages coming from the theater. Regardless of the reasons, GIs had taxed U.S. customs in the last months of war with the sheer number of packages they were mailing home – so much so that the War Department; the Provost Marshal General; the Commissioner of Customs; and the Director of Intelligence, Army Service Forces scrambled to address the situation.

CONCLUSION

In the fog of war, the Military Government and Public Safety Officers had a difficult time adhering to Public Safety Manual of Procedures that SHAEF had published in September 1944. All military plans to curb looting rested on the quick and efficient control of urban and rural areas. The Army, however, fought an impossible task when attempting to take control of a situation that, by all rights, was so completely out of control during the spring of 1945. No planner could have foreseen the tidal wave of displaced persons, prisoners of war, and others who thoroughly made portions of the Public Safety Manual of Procedures obsolete before it was even able to get off the ground. No planner, too, could have foreseen junior commanders' reticence in reporting and punishing looting in Germany. Officers in platoons and companies, after all, experienced the same terrifying rigors of combat as did their men. To believe that rank

and officers' duties would trump the bonding experiences that can only come from the battlefield was unreasonable.²⁸⁸

The ordinary soldier, therefore, was caught between two guidelines that SHAEF had constructed about how to behave in enemy territory. While in training, the GI was taught to hate the German, and to ensure the complete defeat of Nazi Germany. Before entering enemy territory, however, SHAEF ordered all soldiers to act with discipline and refrain from looting, lest the moral high ground be lost. The Chief of Internal Affairs, G-5, addressed this conundrum to G-1 when he wrote, "It is appreciated that a degree of 'toughness' may be desirable in occupied territory and it is not suggested that we should instruct our troops to act in Germany as they have usually in liberated territory . . ."²⁸⁹ For the GI who faced death or dismemberment daily, the subtle nuances between these orders were lost in the haze of combat.

SHAEF orders also lacked contingencies for the types of looting that occurred in Germany. Little thought was put into the situations in which GIs could loot, or even what kind of soldiers was perpetrating the crime. Planners who constructed all orders for the prevention of looting did not understand that it was difficult to control support and combat troops alike with the same orders. Despite the different reasons for why

²⁸⁸ For discussion of officers in the German Army allowing their troops to loot in both the Western and Eastern fronts, see Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Bartov concludes that despite *Wehrmacht* orders that there was to be no excessive looting during the occupation in the West, the command's initial allowance of living off the land gave license to unnecessary plundering. Therefore, France experienced looting by both German and American soldiers, and may account for why the French were so exasperated with GIs' looting – they did not expect their allies to do it. The German army in the Eastern Front, conversely, openly encouraged its soldiers to loot. Bartov concludes this was a concession, an escape valve to relieve pressure, as to avoid the army's disintegration in a high-tension situation. The point Bartov makes about stress relief could possibly be attributed to the American Army, too; but it certainly depended on the individual officer to make that decision.

²⁸⁹ Brigadier General, Chief, Internal Affairs, G-5 to G-1, "Pillage and Wanton Damage by Allied Troops", 22 March 1945, Box 11, Folder 7, RG 331, NACP.

Eisenhower and his generals did not want to see U.S. soldiers looting – be it for reasons of friendship in Allied areas or the threat of sabotaging a successful occupation in Germany – they viewed all stealing as unacceptable. Essentially, taking a trinket from a civilian's home was the same as absconding with a priceless piece of artwork hidden in a salt mine. To SHAEF, no matter what the object taken, there were uncontrollable ramifications for those actions. Headquarters also believed, quite wrongly, that frontline soldiers were those most likely to steal civilian and state possessions while in Germany. According to plans, Military Government Officers were to stabilize recently-occupied areas, thereby sufficiently anticipating all threats of military personnel committing crimes. What SHAEF did not account for, however, was that systematic looting occurred behind the Combat Zone, and that the Communications Zone – i.e. support troops – were those most responsible for mass-looting.

There is a vast difference between how SHAEF dealt with the looting which occurred in Allied countries and that which took place in Germany. SCAEF was forced to handle a precarious situation in France, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. Those reports that reached G-5 officers about American soldiers stealing and destroying civilian possessions came from much-needed allies. SHAEF took an exceptionally hands-on approach to these reports because of the political implications looting could have on relationships. GIs' rapacity forced action from the highest channels. Not only did Allied countries have ample evidence to complain about American soldiers acting out of character, but they also had the ability to compare the ordinary GI to the *Soldat*. Though living under a foreign power for several years, the French, the Belgians, and the

Dutch could always argue that the German, at least, did not steal and destroy their homes. Conversely, SCAEF had no power to which he had to answer in Germany. The only repercussions that governed American behavior in Germany, as SHAEF saw it, was the intangible concept that there would be the loss of moral high ground. This, however, is merely a mental construct of how one perceives their enemy may react. There was the threat of political ramifications while in Allied countries, as there were actual governments. Germany, however, was to be whitewashed and begun anew. The government, then, offered no threat, no punishment for GIs' actions.

CONCLUSION

The GIs who celebrated the end of the war at Hitler's Berghof collectively represented the consummate American soldier when they raided the Führer's wine cellars and took whatever mementos were at hand. The celebration they threw for themselves illustrated the spirit of the months they had spent fighting in and marching across Germany. They left behind themselves a German Army that was thoroughly broken, and one that was also thoroughly relieved of its belongings. Abandoned homes, too, were left in disarray, from Aachen to Salzburg, all in the search of hidden treasures.

GIs practiced souvenir hunting throughout Europe, from the frontline combat soldier to the troops in the farthest reaches of the rear-echelon. Their clamor for trophies reached a crescendo in Germany, as servicemen who had not accumulated any souvenirs throughout the war scrambled to take something home. Therefore, the chronology of operations played some part in when soldiers' souvenir hunting fervor peaked. Initially, almost all souvenir hunting was for keepsakes. Soldiers picked up pistols, flags, helmets, medals, and other military items as a memento to take back to the United States with them. As time passed, however, the motivations to take items from the battlefield changed. Necessity was the catalyst for troops when they strapped a Luger to their waist, put a watch on their wrist, or dangled binoculars around their neck. A sidearm added extra insurance in case an instance was to arise where they needed such a weapon. Watches, since the Army did not issue them to GIs, were of great service to the soldier who acquired one. Binoculars best served officers and non-commissioned officers, as those making decisions that could put their men in great danger preferred to survey the

situation that lay ahead of them from afar. Furthermore, picking up German military equipment was a necessity when supply lines became stretched during the winter of 1944 and 1945.

After the Battle of the Bulge, word spread throughout the U.S. Army about SS troops killing unarmed GIs outside Malmédy, Belgium. This news, coupled with reports of Germans infiltrating American lines wearing U.S. uniforms, drove soldiers to seek souvenirs out of revenge. Therefore, taking objects for revenge occurred most often in the final months and weeks of the war. Their anger, though, was not aimed at the *Wehrmacht*, *Luftwaffe*, or *Volkssturm* but SS troops. GIs sought the death's head ring, SS daggers, or any other item that was directly related to the infamous German unit. The U.S. Army's discovery of concentration and labor camps deep in Germany further angered American soldiers and hardened their resolve to exact revenge upon the SS.

Finally, GIs became eager souvenir hunters for reasons of profit. Soldiers sought pieces of equipment that epitomized the German military, most importantly the Luger pistol. Although troops stole the same objects for keepsakes, it is what they did with the trophies that turned their action into a profit-making venture. The rise of a market for tradable goods between frontline and rear-echelon soldiers expanded souvenir hunting. As a result, a cyclic action occurred, whereby the demand for Lugers, Walthers, daggers, helmets, and medals spurred on the imaginations of profit-savvy GIs and encouraged them to collect items in order to sell or trade later.

It may be that the prevalence of taking items for profit would have been less great had there not been the demand from rear-echelon troops. The combat soldier could carry

only a finite amount of weight in heated battles and on marches across the countryside. Therefore, while the most enthusiastic looter may have acquired an enviable collection, he still had to carry his trophies. The endless marching did much to test the GI's love for his acquisitions: the longer the marches, the more soldiers jettisoned what was not necessary to fighting and surviving.²⁹⁰ Harry Arnold explained the rear-echelon's propensity to take objects after his experiences with the soldiers: "A sad fact: A man with a house full of war souvenirs is not an infantryman – he can lug only so much. Noncombat personnel are the most successful collectors of war trophies other than death, dismemberment, and injury."²⁹¹ Rear-echelon troops, since they had spent their war in support areas, wanted to return home with items that were obviously from the German military – jewelry or civilian weapons would not do that. Souvenir hunting for profit was a motivation that was prevalent throughout all of Operation Overlord. It reached its height in the last weeks of the war, however, for two reasons. First, the sheer amount of military hardware that was laying around at the end of fighting meant even the least profit-driven GI could make money if he liked. Second, soldiers who had not served in combat sought to snatch up what items they could before shipping home, lest they return empty handed.

Looting from civilians was different in many ways from souvenir hunting. Though the two categories shared the same motivations, the instances in which it occurred, the types of soldiers who committed the acts, and the ways in which the Army viewed their soldiers' activities make souvenir hunting and looting exceptionally

²⁹⁰ Egger and Otts, *G Company's War*, p. 226; McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood*, pp. 76-77; Herchel Thompson interview, 16 July 2009.

²⁹¹ McManus, *The Deadly Brotherhood*, p. 77.

disparate actions. Overwhelmingly, the largest distinction between the two acts was that the most-prevalent motivation for souvenir hunting was to augment a paycheck while looting was for immediate personal gain. This gain was often in the form of food, warmth, or simply momentary fun.

Of the four motivations – keepsakes, necessity, profit, revenge – looting to obtain keepsakes is the most difficult to prove. German homes had the potential to contain an almost endless array of objects the GI could, for whatever reason he may have had, take home with him. Conversely, those troops who collected keepsakes on the battlefield had only a finite amount of objects from which to choose. The random nature of civilian keepsakes that soldiers took is embodied in anecdotes of troops selecting random books from destroyed libraries, taking trinkets from houses, or even medieval weapons from collections.²⁹² Keepsakes on the battlefield, too, served to illicit a specific reaction from those at home. Upon displaying a German helmet or Iron Cross medal, family members and friends could immediately recognize the objects for what they were: souvenirs from the battlefield. Keepsakes from homes, however, could be unassuming, and thereby served to be a personal memento for the soldier, rather than an outward display of their time at war.

Although souvenir hunting for profit was the most prevalent motivation on the battlefield, looting civilian possessions to make money was less of occurrence. There was less of a market for civilian goods simply because rear-echelon soldiers did not lust for noncombatants' possessions like they did with German military equipment. Furthermore, support troops, because they were close to urban centers in Allied countries,

²⁹² Burgett, *Beyond the Rhine*, p. 156; Ziemke, *The U.S. Army in the Occupation of Germany*, p. 199.

had access to the items that frontline troops sold to one another in Germany. GIs in combat areas desired cameras, watches, and civilian weapons the most. Cameras served a pragmatic function, especially late in the war, as soldiers could finally enjoy their surroundings and take the time to document their experience. Troops took great delight in snapping pictures of the surrendering mobs of Germans they encountered in April and May 1945. It was especially desirable to get pictures of resplendent *Wehrmacht* officers, proud even in defeat, surrendering to dirty, unshaven American troops.²⁹³

Stealing civilian possessions to exact revenge upon the enemy was a frequent occurrence, but it was not without extenuating circumstances. There are lines of demarcation which should be drawn in order to fully examine this motivation for looting. When combat soldiers stole to avenge Germany's actions in the war, it was generally directed towards abandoned homes, not individuals. Frontline troops reasoned that the German military had behaved the same way in other countries, so the anonymous civilians who were in absentia became the recipients of an army seeking retribution. Those same American soldiers rarely took noncombatants' property by force. Troops who were in direct support roles, however, did take more liberty than the infantryman on the frontline, as they believed their contribution entitled them to victor's justice.

²⁹³ GIs spoke of these instances with obvious delight. Raymond Gantter's anecdotes are possibly the most amusing: "Early in the afternoon we saw a heartwarming sight: a long column of prisoners, 161 of them, and striding at their head a German colonel, complete with swagger stick and monocle a la Erich von Stroheim. He stepped along disdainfully, refusing to acknowledge by the flicker of an eyelash the cameras that started clicking the moment he came in sight." Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 232; "The commanding general, elegant in fitted overcoat and monocle, sat erect in a gleaming landau, his aide-de-camp at his side. Behind the carriage trotted the general's saddle horse, the reins held loosely by the aide-de-camp. A captured general was always good camera bait, but it was the sight of that horse that made me race for my camera." Gantter, *Roll Me Over*, p. 336.

Looting for necessity was, far and away, the largest motivation for GIs to steal civilian possessions. Due to the Army's procedure of inspecting German homes for weapons, radios, and cameras – those items which could aid in an uprising movement – soldiers had access to objects they could utilize for warmth and sustenance. Looting to augment uniforms, however, was only a seasonal necessity, as the warmth of spring meant GIs could shed the articles of civilian clothing they had procured. The desire for civilian food never abated throughout the operations in Germany. Soldiers raided chicken coops with regularity in order to vary their diet as best they could.

SHAEF's reaction to soldiers' collecting objects throughout Germany was aimed solely at the prospect of looting. Souvenir hunting, to Headquarters, was inconsequential, as it was sanctioned by the rules of war. The only instances where field grade officers and above were involved with matters of souvenir hunting were the amount of weapons that soldiers were sending home, not the act of hunting for trophies. Commanders in the ETO only gave these instances limited attention because of command structures and organizations stateside, such as the Provost Marshal and customs officials. SHAEF, however, attempted to give the issue of looting its full attention. Disturbed by the magnitude of looting in Allied countries, Generals Eisenhower and Smith sought to prevent the same occurrences in Germany. Despite the experience gained in liberated countries, SHAEF failed to curtail looting in Germany.

There were several reasons why the Army was unsuccessful at curbing looting. First, the vagueness of orders served to ensure that SHAEF's plans for soldiers' conduct in Germany would be ineffective. There were no directions for what commanders should

do if GIs were caught stealing, aside from the instruction that officers should take action immediately. Second, the memos that SHAEF sent to army groups, armies, and corps were unrealistic. The officers for whom the orders were directed were generally more concerned with matters of more immediate concern, such as operational plans, logistical problems, and winning the war. Memos from SHAEF admonishing commanders that troops were not to loot in enemy territory seemed inconsequential when viewed against the backdrop of operational necessities. What is more, Headquarters saw the operations in Germany as a foregone conclusion, and was more preoccupied with post-war issues – SHAEF was essentially attempting to save the occupation of Germany before it even began. Reeling from a civilian backlash in Allied countries about looting, SHAEF was committed to fighting a highly disciplined war in Germany. Third, General Eisenhower and his staff underestimated the bond that line officers have with their men. Those lieutenants, captains, majors, and colonels who led platoons, companies, battalions, and regiments were not quarantined from the combat soldier as were the commanders who were drawing up anti-looting orders. The lack of experiencing the same horrors that GIs faced everyday meant there was a detachment between those men who were fighting to end a war and the planners who were fighting to win an occupation. As a result, SHAEF had no concept of the GI's motivations for looting – to Headquarters, all looting was reprehensible, no matter the reasons behind it. In the end, SHAEF's orders could not overpower combat officers' reticence to enforce rules that spoke of a moral high ground and losing a post-war occupation that had not even begun.

This work has attempted to offer clear-cut, explainable motivations for why GIs collected souvenirs and looted homes in Germany during 1945. The reality of the subject, however, is that it is impossible to fully rationalize every soldier's motivations. Even more difficult is the added dimension of combat, and then how the individual reacts in such an unnatural environment of constant fear, injury, and death. Therefore, this study has focused on the lowest common denominators, those motivations that veterans continued to offer as unintentional explanations for why they hunted for souvenirs and looted. The four motivations this work used as a framework, then, were based on a collective experience. There still exists a component for which cannot be accounted: the psychological. How GIs coped with the stresses of combat varied greatly. Peter Kindsvatter argues that soldiers, when unable to physically leave the combat area, "resorted to various mind games that provided mental escape."²⁹⁴ Looting, more so than souvenir hunting, was certainly an escape for some troops.

There is no evidence to suggest looting continued in any great degree after the cessation of hostilities on 8 May 1945.²⁹⁵ Souvenir hunting, in a sense, still thrived, as troops sold and traded their collections to one another. The lack of reports about soldiers looting after the war seems to have been a product of the occupation. Units were finally stationary after the breakneck pace they set during the offensives in Germany. GIs no longer had the operational situations to search homes as they had during combat, nor did

²⁹⁴ Kindsvatter, *American Soldiers*, p. xxi.

²⁹⁵ Conversely, Norman Naimark reports that looting and rape continued to occur in Soviet zones after the cessation of hostilities. Norman Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945-1949* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 79, 83-89. He even goes on to argue that "Although the Soviets did the best they could to bring their troops under control, it is important to understand that incidents of rape continued up to (and no doubt after) the founding of the German Democratic Republic." Naimark, *Russians in Germany*, p. 89.

they have the insurance that they would not be caught after committing crimes because of units' fast paced movements. American soldiers no longer had an enemy, too. The cloak of evil fell away after VE Day, and what was left with was no longer a state that purported evilness or world domination, but merely the German people. Those fanatics who created and fostered the Reich were presumably a non-issue, either dead or incarcerated. What was left was a German populace that was starving and prostrate before their conquerors. Therefore, the harshness of retribution, most often on the ground level, was softened. It did not make sense for a GI to loot a civilian home after the war, too, because the average German civilian was now a neighbor. Units were no longer on the move, so aspects of discipline that commanders had overlooked during the war were now enforced. If anything, looting gave way to the black market. No longer did soldiers have to steal, as it was simpler to trade with Germans whatever goods or services they wanted.²⁹⁶ After the war, GIs were also supplied with the items that were in short supply during the combat, so looting for reasons of necessity was all but a memory.

Souvenir hunting and looting defined many GIs' experiences in Germany during the dying months and weeks of the war. What, then, do we make of soldiers' own explanations for looting? They run the gamut of self-examination, from intellectual musings to stark realities. In *Soldiers: Reflection on Men in Battle*, J. Glenn Gray attempted to grapple with the reasons why soldiers stole. Gray, a veteran himself and the holder of a Ph.D. in philosophy, theorized that, "Primarily, souvenirs appeared to give the soldier some assurance of his future beyond the destructive environment of the present.

²⁹⁶ For an examination on the black market and Berlin in the immediate post-war years, see Paul Steege, *Black Market, Cold War: Everyday Life in Berlin, 1946-1949* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

They represented a promise that he might survive.”²⁹⁷ While that may be true, some soldiers would likely prefer a simpler explanation for their actions. Perhaps Herchel Thompson’s appeal is enough to warrant a look into GIs’ actions during 1945, and to prompt us to fully understand the reasons behind a soldier’s decisions in war: “I know the American public don’t understand, if they was over there they’d sure understand it. One tour and that would be it. . . . We weren’t a bunch of thieves.”²⁹⁸ Labeling aside, the items that remain in attics and garages today, and those pieces that collectors buy and sell, will forever remain as mute testimony to American soldiers’ time in Europe during World War II. When GIs returned from war they brought back with them memories, not only those locked in their minds but also those mementoes packed away in their barracks bag. What they did with them afterwards is another story altogether.

²⁹⁷ J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1959), 82.

²⁹⁸ Herchel Thompson interview, 16 July 2009.

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