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Audio of Eisenhower Speech at Met Found

by Jamie Stengle, Yahoo! News - Associated Press

As commander of Allied forces in Europe during World War II, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower explicitly ordered his troops to safeguard objects of cultural and historical importance whenever possible – even while fighting a war of devastating destructiveness. Now, historians can hear the reasoning behind Eisenhower’s order, in his own words, thanks to the recent recovery of a speech he gave on April 2, 1946, at New York’s Metropolitan Museum of Art.



Digging through museums archives, **Robert Edsel, founder of an arts preservation organization** based in Dallas, discovered the recording of Eisenhower’s speech that the general delivered when he was honored with a life fellowship from the museum.

Transcripts of the speech have long been available. But, “when you have Gen. Eisenhower saying it and when you hear his words, it’s electrifying,” said Edsel, whose nonprofit, the Monuments Men Foundation, honors those who helped protect the cultural treasures in Europe during World War II.

Gordon “Nick” Mueller, president of the National World War II Museum, said the audio will be featured in a future exhibit dedicated to the Monuments Men at the New Orleans museum.

The records Edsel discovered were lacquer discs, which can’t be played on traditional record players and are fragile. The recording has been transferred to a digital format.

“It’s a remarkable audiotape. There’s always a difference between reading a transcript and hearing the general giving a speech on the importance of art,” said **Karl Weissenbach, director of the Eisenhower Presidential Library and Museum** in Abilene, Kan.

He said it was a unique occurrence to hear Eisenhower speak only on the topic of art.

In the speech, Eisenhower said “it may seem strange that a soldier, representative of the science of destruction, should appear before a body dedicated to the preservation of man’s creative ideals as expressed in art.”

But Eisenhower said he understood the importance of cultural treasures and remembered seeing fascination in the faces of soldiers exploring the ancient city of Timgad in North Africa during military operations there.

“The freedom enjoyed by this country from the desolation that has swept over so many others during the past years gives to America greater opportunity than ever before to become the greatest of the world’s repositories of art,” he said.

He praised “the officers and men of the combat echelons whose veneration for priceless treasures persisted, even in the heat and fears of battle.”

Jim Moske, managing archivist at the Metropolitan Museum, said he believed the recordings had “languished on the shelves for decades.”

In bestowing the fellowship, Metropolitan Museum of Art director Francis Henry Taylor, one of the men who had urged President Franklin D. Roosevelt to form the Monuments Men, called Eisenhower, “the man, who more responsible than any other, made it possible for the world in which the great civilizations of the past could continue for future generations.”

Edsel is the author of two books on the so-called Monuments Men, a group from 13 nations who worked to protect precious artifacts from destruction during the war and after the war worked to return works stolen by the Nazis to their rightful owners.

He said Eisenhower’s words were a stark reminder of the U.S. failures since World War II to have the country’s leaders make clear the importance of protecting cultural treasures.

Eisenhower’s granddaughter, Susan Eisenhower, said she enjoyed not only hearing her grandfather’s voice again, but also taking in the current relevance of his words.

“I’m always intrigued by hearing voices from the past talk about things that have contemporary relevance,” she said.