



In photo, from left: State Rep. Harvey Kenton congratulates Richard C. Mootz in the House Chamber. Joining Mr. Mootz for the ceremony was Resi Wolfe (daughter) and Maida Graves (daughter).

NEWS:

Delaware Man Honored for Discovery of Treasure, Undermining Nazi Regime

APRIL 7, 2017 – The House of Representatives this week honored a man whose discovery of a vast cache of hidden German treasure may have helped end World War II and limited the spread of Nazi ideology in the conflict's aftermath.

In February 1945, more than 3,900 Flying Fortress bombers attached to the U.S. Eighth Air Force dropped hundreds of tons of munitions on the German capital of Berlin. To safeguard the monetary assets of the waning Third Reich, currency and gold from the Reichsbank -- the central bank of Germany -- were sent to a deep salt mine at Merkers, located about two hundred miles southwest.

Two months later, General George Patton's 3rd Army swept into the region, moving so rapidly the Germans were unable to relocate the concealed hoard.

Enter Private First Class Richard C. Mootz, a Delawarean serving as an infantryman with the 3rd Army's 90th Division. On April 6th, Pvt. Mootz was escorting two women who had just been questioned by the 12th Corps Provost Marshal's Office back to Merkers. As they neared the Kaiseroda Salt Mine, he asked the women about the facility. They told him that weeks earlier German officials had used local and displaced civilians as labor for storing treasure in the mine.

Pvt. Mootz passed the information to his superior. Later that day, American forces entered the mine. What they found was startling.

According to the [National Archives and Records Administration](#), the mine contained over eleven thousand containers, including: 3,682 bags and cartons of Germany currency; 80 bags of foreign currency; 4,173 bags containing 8,307 gold bars; 55 boxes of gold bullion; 3,326 bags of gold coins; 63 bags of silver; and one bag of platinum bars.

The money and precious metals were in the company of an immense collection of valuable artwork. Sheltered in the mine were one-fourth of the major holdings of 14 state museums.

The find was so extraordinary that General Dwight D. Eisenhower, General Omar N. Bradley, and Lt. Gen. George S. Patton, toured the site together.

The mine's shafts, some 1,600-feet below the surface, also housed an estimated 400-tons of intellectual riches in the form of patent volumes from Germany, France, and Austria.

"Germany was one of the most technologically advanced nations in the world at this time," said David Deputy, a former Delaware National Guard brigadier general and Mr. Mootz's nephew. "Information on rocketry and other German advances were being sought by both the Americans and Russians. It was the sensitive nature of this data that resulted in some details of the discovery being kept secret," he said.

Mr. Deputy said it was not until military records were declassified decades later that Mr. Mootz's role in the discovery became evident.

To give Mr. Mootz his overdue recognition, State Reps. Harvey Kenton (R-Milford) and Tim Dukes (R-Laurel) sponsored a House of Representatives' Tribute presented in the House Chamber Thursday afternoon. Mr. Mootz was a long-time resident of Laurel and currently lives in Milford.

"We recognize this exceptional individual for his outstanding service to his country while serving in the United States Army," said Rep. Kenton. "Private Mootz assisted the 'Monuments Men' in the discovery of a massive collection of gold, silver, artwork, and German currency. This was the remaining paper currency and gold reserves of the Nazi

regime, hence, this discovery bankrupted the German Army, bringing an earlier end to the war."

The find may have had repercussions beyond the war.

In internal correspondence a week following the discovery at Merkers, Col. Bernard D. Bernstein (deputy chief, Financial Branch, G-5 Division) wrote the finding of the trove "confirms previous intelligence reports and censorship intercepts indicating that the Germans were planning to use these foreign exchange assets, including works of art, as a means of perpetuating the Nazism and Nazi influence both in Germany and abroad."