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LOOTING OF ART TREASURES AND REPORT OF
VAUCHER COMMITTEE

REPORT BY WING COMMANDER JONES AND DISCUSSION IN COMMITTEE I

Wing Commander Jones reported that he had attended at the office of the Vaucher Committee, who had placed all their facilities at his disposal for the purpose of ascertaining whether it was possible to try Nazis concerned in the looting of art treasures as war criminals. The Vaucher Committee had as its purpose the obtaining of the objects, whereas he had investigated it rather from the point of view of the person or persons concerned in removing the objects.

The Vaucher Committee had in its files between 700 and 800 cases of persons who had been concerned in the removal of art treasures in occupied territories. A card index system was used and on these cards the information as to the person and to the object taken was set out. He went through all the cards and extracted about forty cases in which it appeared that the persons mentioned were directly concerned with looting. He went through this list with Dr. Estreicher, a Polish official, who agreed that these persons were the ones responsible for looting, as it was not considered advisable to put up minor officials or persons who were only indirectly concerned in the looting. On the records of each of these persons mentioned was a definite statement that they were responsible for looting, and he asked Dr. Estreicher if he could supply evidence and details to substantiate this categorical statement. Dr. Estreicher supplied a list of what he had, but it appeared that these statements were based in the main on reports received through the Underground Movement, and names were submitted in each case of persons who would be able to substantiate the statement of looting, but he was unable to express any opinion, as there were no statements or any evidence of what these witnesses would be able to say. The witnesses were mainly Polish and at this stage it would appear that it would be necessary for the investigations to be made in Poland. For instance, the first person on the list was Dr. Gustav Abb, a Nazi, who was appointed the head of the German controlled library in Cracow. Dr. Abb had been the director of the Berlin University library, and he was head of the organisation which removed books from various State and private libraries and transferred them to the Central library. What was not taken was destroyed or sent to be made into pulp. The Polish officials consider that this man was the directing mind behind the movement which seized books belonging to Poland or private citizens, and used them for their own purposes. This was a typical example. Most of the Nazis concerned were librarians or professors of various German universities, who have systematically taken whatever art treasures they wanted in Poland, but there were others, such as the wife of the Mayor of Cracow, who, if she fancied some article in a Polish museum, would take it for her own private use.

Wing Commander Jones was unable to say definitely that any charge could be proved against any of these forty persons mentioned, as all he had to rely on was the categorical statement that they were responsible for looting. The evidence from the witnesses to substantiate that was not available.

A good deal of information is set out in the booklet published by the Polish Ministry of Information on "Nazi Kultur in Poland". Most of this was hearsay evidence, but he considered that the evidence would probably be available to support the accusations.

Mr. Oldham considered that the cases were for the "S" List, but Lord Finlay pointed out that Committee I was only concerned with prima facie evidence, and that some of the cases seemed to be suitable for List A: evidence could be obtained later. Wing Commander Jones stated that he would obtain such information as he could in regard to the cases, and pointed out that the Vaucher Committee also had the names of a number of people who, if not themselves responsible, would be able to throw some light on the present whereabouts of the various art treasures. M. de Baer said they would be listed as witnesses. If Poles, the Polish National Office was responsible, but, if Germans, we should ask that they be held in custody. He added that this was also valuable to the Vaucher Committee.

Colonel Wade asked if the organisation Wing Commander Jones had been talking about was the same as the Rosenberg Org Organisation (Einsatzstab Rosenberg, "E.R.R."), but Wing Commander Jones said he was not referring to any particular organisation which had been set up.

Colonel Behle suggested that Colonel Wade's report when ready would prove very valuable to Wing Commander Jones and proposed that Dr. Schwelb should provide him with a copy of C.87(1) to help him formulate one or two cases for submission to the Commission. The Secretariat would also give him stenographical assistance. Colonel Wade pointed out that his report concerned the western countries and Wing Commander Jones said that his information would supplement it, as it concerned mainly the eastern countries, particularly Poland. Lord Finlay proposed that four submission cases should be prepared.

Colonel Behle and M. de Baer thanked Wing Commander Jones for his report and offered the Committee's help, saying that he was at liberty to attend the meetings whenever he liked. They should endeavour to foster each other's cooperation.