

# PASS IN REVIEW

*"Shedding Light on Idaho's Military History"*



The official newsletter  
of the Idaho Military  
Historical Society and  
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## Combat Art

By Hayley Noble

Visual representations of war become synonymous with the very mention of war itself. One of the most obvious examples is the photograph that came to symbolize World War II, Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima taken by Joe Rosenthal. Any mention of World War II is oftentimes associated with that photo, and the subsequent Marine Corps war memorial that was modeled after it. With the invention of photography, and its



ability to document moments in time, many ask why combat art is still relevant and practiced<sup>1</sup>. When photography was still in its beginning phases in the Civil War and World War I, art was used as the more practical option for capturing a battle or it was done by people who were not at the battle, imagining what they thought the war would look like<sup>2</sup>. Once photography became reliable during World War II, military art programs grew exponentially, counter-intuitively it would seem. Originating in the

in the Civil War, wartime photography became a significant aspect of reporting conflicts and continues to the present. With



increasing reliability on photography to document said exploits, one would think that painters and sketchers would cease to exist on battlefields, but that is not the case. These facts illustrate how combat art does more than just document. The military artists evoke emotions within their work, interpret events, and help others understand war in a different way. Without the deep emotions of the artist, perhaps the products would be nothing but propaganda, instead of catharsis<sup>3</sup>.

1. "Combat art" is defined here as sketches or paintings done by actual servicemembers witnessing the events of war, training, or downtime.

2. Frederick Voss. *Reporting the War: The Journalistic Coverage of World War II*. (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press for the National Portrait Gallery, 1994), 136.

3. Dennis L. Noble. *Forgotten Warriors: Combat Art From Vietnam*. (London: Praeger, 1992), 166.

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## From the Director's Desk...

Jeff Packer, Executive Director



The past few months have been trying times for everyone including the Idaho Military Museum. We were closed for the months of April and May as per the guidance from Governor Little. We reopened on 9

June and have been doing great. We have had more than 200 visitors from many states since reopening and look forward to many more. All employees, docents and volunteers are very happy to be back. We couldn't get along without them. The museum looks forward to the future and we hope to see many more visitors come through our doors as things improve.

### PASS IN REVIEW

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Comments or article suggestions are welcomed. Call the Museum at 208-272-4841 or visit us on line at [museum.mil.idaho.gov](http://museum.mil.idaho.gov).

## JAPANESE TYPE 99 LIGHT MACHINE GUN

Mischa Brady

Museum Curator of Collections

The Type 99 was designed under the guidance of Kijiro Nambu (September 22, 1869 - May 1, 1949) and followed much of what made the Type 96 a field success for the Imperial Japanese Army. Design of a light machine gun - the Type 99 - was begun in 1939 to which a military procurement contract followed for production to begin that year. The Type 99 entered service in 1939, alongside the still issued Type 11 and Type 96 series machine guns - and would serve the Imperial Japanese Army through August of 1945 - the Empire of Japan's final participation in the war.

Manufacturer(s):	State Factories - Imperial Japan
Produced:	1939
Roles:	Fire Support/Suppression/Defense
Action:	Gas-Operated
Caliber(s):	7.7x58mm Arisaka
Sights:	Iron
Overall Length:	46.50 inches
Barrel Length:	21.65 inches
Weight (Unloaded):	25.13 lb
Muzzle Velocity:	2,300 feet-per-second
Rate-of-Fire:	900 rounds-per-minute



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## Combat Art from page 1

Art reveals what is significant to the artist and therefore, shows differing interpretations of certain events. Exploring the artwork done by combat artists allows the



viewer to discern information about the artist's background and culture, emotions and reactions related to war, and the viewpoints of everyday combatants.

Thousands of pieces would come out of World War II and Vietnam as military art programs took off. Varying styles and media were experimented with, creating a legacy of art that spans from literal realism to expressive almost abstract works of sur-



realism<sup>4</sup>. The purpose was to be historical records; therefore, the only requirements were that the subject of the work needed to be recognizable, and no portraits.

By the end of the Vietnam War, the Army would own more than four thousand pieces of art<sup>5</sup>. This proliferation led to the establishment of the National Veteran's Art Museum in Chicago in 1981, showcasing a variety of pieces, all completed by veterans for public viewing<sup>6</sup>.

Despite the success of these former programs, the number of combat artists in war-zones slowly waned after Vietnam. Recently, with troops in the Middle East, combat art is still lobbied for as a necessity in war. In 2010, the Marine Corps employed only one full-time combat artist, Kristopher J. Battles. Battles and his predecessor, Michael D. Fay,



have expressed concern over the future of the program, which has been so dramatically reduced. Battles clarifies that "we're not here to do poster art or recruiting posters...What we are sent out to do is to go to the experience, see what is really there and document it as artists"<sup>7</sup>.

4. James Pollock. "US Army Soldier-Artists in Vietnam." *War, Literature & the Arts: An International Journal of the Humanities* Vol. 21 (2009): 252. Accessed March 27, 2017.

5. Klish. *Art of the American Soldier: Documenting Military History Through Artists Eyes and in Their Own Words*, 11.

6. <https://www.nvam.org/about>

7. Carol Kino. "With Sketchpads and Guns, Semper Fi." *The New York Times* July 14, 2010. Accessed March 23, 2017. [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/arts/design/18marines.html?\\_r=2&page-wanted=all&](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/18/arts/design/18marines.html?_r=2&page-wanted=all&)

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# The Life of Willie Willey

## One of Idaho's Most Unique and Spirited Individuals

Jeannette Duvall-Ward  
IMHS Board Member

You know one of those characters you might meet once in your life who leaves an indelible impression on you?

Well, Willis R. Willey was just that kind of an individual. In fact, he helped build Farragut Naval Training Station during WWII. And, he did it with barely any clothes on, no matter the weather conditions. His "minimal clothes on mantra" often times landed him in jail.



Willis was born on September 15, 1884 in Mount Ayr, Iowa, a farming community. From the very beginning, he showed a strong interest in the great outdoors. When he reached age 21, he headed west to Spokane and worked various jobs gaining skill and a good reputation for being a hard worker. Willis fell in love with the pine covered hills and small farms of the area. His jobs were generally in farming and construction. It was his love of farming that eventually led to his "lack of clothes."

He was working around his stump ranch, an undeveloped farm in the bush where animals graze among the stumps of felled trees. He realized he could chop and saw better when he had his shirt and shoes off. He gradually took off more clothes and, in time, his skin and his overall health could handle any weather condition. Of course, he almost always had a pair of khaki cutoffs on and a sun visor. In snowy conditions, he would oftentimes wear boots. Willis was dubbed "nature boy."

Willie, as his friends called him, finally bought his own farm. He believed he could now live his life in his own way on his own land – he felt the laws of nature were supreme.

It wasn't long after he bought his farm that he received a call that his mother had passed away. Willie entrusted his nephew, A. E. Murphy, to look after his farm and animals for about six weeks while he traveled back to the home of his mother. A. E. Murphy's pay was free rent and food from the farm.

His trip to his mother's farm required more than six weeks. His nephew was not able to stay longer so Willie asked him to request a neighbor to take on the task. This is where Willie's troubles really began.

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## The Life of Willie Willey from page 5

When he got back to his farm, he could tell it had been neglected. A.E. Murphy never notified the neighbor and insisted Willie owed him more money, including labor costs which were not part of their agreement. Because Willie knew he didn't owe the money, he refused to pay. Murphy sued and won. His farm was auctioned off for the judgment and a new owner was named. Willie still refused to honor the court order.

Willie was not one to abide by the law, especially when he felt he'd been swindled. He moved back to "his" farm that was just sold. He tilled the soil and planted a crop. He also moved up to 15 old cars on the land, ploughed up the road and wired up the fence. He had also recently received nationwide attention in a Spokane Spokesman-Review magazine section and in Sunday newspaper supplements across the United States. Pictures were included and the title read "Are We Wearing Too Much Clothing?"

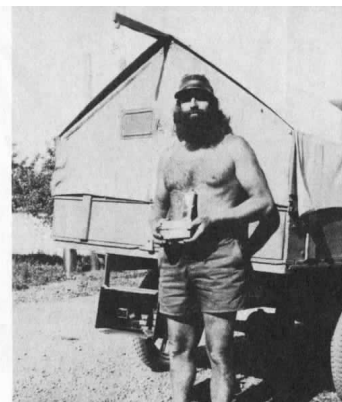
In 1932, Willie decided to forget "his" ranch for a while and to start traveling. He had become quite famous and appeared in many newspapers, so he thought he could sell picture post cards of himself in the cities. His fame was attributed mostly to his many brushes with the law over his land



troubles and his "back to nature" garb. He would even show up to court in nothing but his khaki shorts and a sun visor.

With his love for travel, Willie needed to build himself a "truck home," a home on wheels. It included a Model T Ford motor on a Model A Ford truck chassis, with an Oakland radiator and a Studebaker rear end. All of this was surmounted by an aluminum painted wood-and-tin house. It was quite the sight.

Willie and his  
home on wheels, 1931  
[L. Merlin Norris]



"War threatened and then engulfed the United States. Gas rationing stepped in to curtail Willie's traveling, but he joined in the war effort and soon was working as a carpenter's helper in the building of the Farragut Naval Training Station near Sandpoint, Idaho.

"This second-largest naval training station in the United States was formally established on September 15, 1942, and was visited by President Franklin D. Roosevelt on September 21. The station was still under construction, and we wonder what President

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## The Life of Willie Willey from page 6

Roosevelt would have thought if he had seen bearded Willie Willey in his sun-tan shorts, smiling and waving with hammer and saw while hanging onto the framework of a new building that cool fall day."

"H.F. Wellhouser, who had known Willie in the twenties, saw him working at Farragut as a carpenter in his usual attire." Only this time, he had a carpenter's apron on.

Animals were almost always seen with Willie. They were his pets. "He could be seen playing with skunks like one would play with a kitten. Some of his snapshots showed him holding a snake in one hand, a skunk in the other, guinea pigs in his lap, and a raccoon perched on one shoulder." He had other pets at different times like an opossum, rabbits, white mice, and a hairless South African dog (blind in one eye).

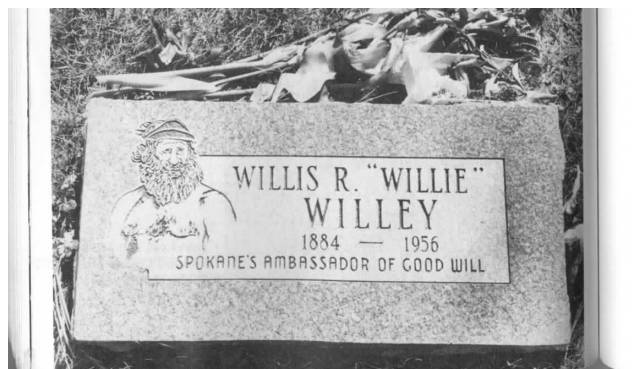


Neither the public nor the press knew about Willie's real problems. He was well past 70 and tried, but did not qualify, for social security or public assistance. He was barely making enough to feed him and his animal friends. "He chilled more easily, slept more, and was getting a bit careless, making mistakes."

One of Willie's mishaps included dropping a can of gas while trying to refuel a gasoline lantern in his car. The gasoline exploded. His vehicle was gone, but he survived with some first, second, and third degree burns. His animals were not in the car at the time. Days later he left the hospital with optimism about the future.

Now Willie needed a car. He went to a good friend who made it happen. He was given a car free as long as he carried an advertising sign on it. The next morning, Willie stopped at the Market Basket to buy food for him and his animals. "Attendants said he was 'acting peculiarly' and that his car was nearly struck by another when he drove onto the street."

Two hours later, May 12, 1956, while rounding a curve quite fast; Willie was seen leaning across the front seat. His car hit a tree. He died from his injuries. The actual cause of death was a cerebral anemia – he had fainted at the wheel just before his car rounded the corner. None of Willie's family could attend the funeral because they lived too far away. But, more than three hundred from the local area gathered to honor him.



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# Volunteer Spotlight

## Mike Swenson

Jeannette Duvall-Ward  
IMHS Board Member

Mike Swenson can be seen on a regular basis at the Idaho Military Museum, once a week volunteering. He's a docent. He talks to patrons, runs the gift shop, takes messages, and watches after our artifacts. As a docent, he says, "You have to know when to help a visitor and when not to help. They need time to look at the artifacts and read," he said.

Mike likes learning from the patrons too. One of the visitors told Mike that he was stationed at Farragut Naval Training Station during WWII. He did something wrong and was put in the brig and was getting only bread and water. He went on to tell Mike that he bribed the guards to feed him more to gain weight. This is just one of the many stories a docent hears when volunteering at the Museum.

In wondering what brought him to our Museum. Mike said he retired early and liked history, especially military history. He looked on Volunteermatch.org and found us. He's been volunteering now with us for 11 years. But, we're not the only organization he supports with his time. The Boise Zoo, Morrison Center, Aquarium, his church, and of course his family gets those free hours of his. One might say Mike is a "hardcore" volunteer.

When asked, why do you think military museums are important for people to see or know about? Mike was firm in his answer. "We need to know where we came from."

Besides, our Museum is also entertaining, is the best value, and it is free.

"Once in a while, I give military talks and I meet interesting people from all over the world who come to our Museum," Mike said. "The kids who come are particularly fun. They are very hands on and want to feel they're a part of things. Something I do for the kids is take pictures of some of our artifacts and equipment then turn them into pages to color. They like that."

Mike wants to encourage others to volunteer. He was asked what he would say to someone considering volunteering here. "You have to like people and have an interest in history. Being consistent and reliable is important too." And, maybe you just might meet a WWII Veteran or the Rugby team from New Zealand, or if you're really lucky, a whole bus full of elementary school children.





## The Life of Willie Willey

from page 7

For nearly forty years, Willie made headlines throughout the U.S. no matter where he went. He made even bigger headlines with the announcement of his sudden death. The public loved Willie.

He never got his farm back and never stopped trying.

Though Willie Willey was a long-time resident of Spokane Washington, he was thought by many as: "Willie: Nature Boy, Ambassador of Good Will, Traveler—and Friend...To each, Willie represented something a little bit different." And, to Idaho, character or not, he represented a job well done in being a part of the building of Faragut Naval Training Station. Thank you Willie for your service to us here in Idaho.

Editor's Note: This story was summarized from the book, *The Life of Willie Willey, Nature Boy, Traveler, Ambassador of Goodwill* written by Keith L. Yates.

## MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Don't forget to renew your IMHS membership!

A renewal form is available on our webpage: <https://museum.mil.idaho.gov>

Annual renewal rates are:

General Membership:	\$25
Senior (60 and older):	\$15
Associate (Spouse):	\$10
Student:	\$10
Lifetime Membership:	\$375

(Lifetime payment may be spread out over a one-year period)

The Idaho State Tax Commission offers a tax credit for contributions to Idaho's educational entities which include "An Idaho public or private nonprofit museum."

The Idaho Military Historical Society is such an organization and donations to the Society qualify for this credit. Please remember the Museum as you plan your donations for the year.



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