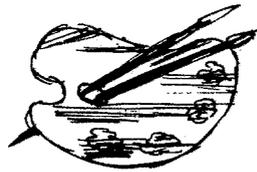


The Army Art Program



Marian R. McNaughton

THE U. S. Army Art Collection is a rich and often neglected source of material for research and study in military history. As the student of military history becomes acquainted with war art, he discovers that historical illustrations are useful in a variety of ways. Sketches from sight are frequently the most authentic and sometimes the only descriptions of important battles, uniforms, and equipment of the past. Furthermore, modern narrative military paintings provide valuable insights into the life, thoughts, and feelings of the American soldier in his own time.

Since man first marched off to war, battles and heroic feats have been popular subjects for painting and sculpture. Military campaigns were commemorated on the temple walls of Egyptian pharaohs and Khmer emperors and in the palaces of Assyrian kings. Sculptures, relief panels, and vases of the intellectual Greeks and Chinese as well as the richly carved columns and arches of the conquering Romans also bear eloquent testimony to man's desire to memorialize his achievements in combat. European art in the Middle Ages was almost entirely of religious subjects, but the Renaissance in Italy brought about both a resurgent interest in commemorative sculptures and the creation of the earliest battle paintings on canvas or wood panels. Until the twentieth century, in the United States military art was the independent activity of a disparate group of courageous and industrious individuals. Throughout its history, nevertheless, the U.S. Army has fostered art by permitting both soldier and civilian artists to accompany troops and make sketches as the spirit moved them.

Combat art has become important as historical document, source of patriotic inspiration, and, in some cases, expression of artistic genius. The artist has played a diverse role in attempting both to record and to interpret his experiences in war. The advent of the camera in the nineteenth century reduced his role as a reporter without diminishing the value of his art as

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historical document. Since his function as a reporter was not as necessary as before, the combat artist had greater freedom to communicate his impressions through personal interpretation and to involve the viewer by appealing to his emotions. But the most successful military artists still maintained a balance between personal and visual reality.

Each American war since the Revolution has had its own artists. As aide-de-camp on the staff of General George Washington, John Trumbull drew scenes of the War of Independence which he later developed into full-scale battle paintings. A large number of painters and engravers recorded battle scenes of the War of 1812, but no one artist rose to prominence. James Walker trudged with the troops and sketched the battles of Contreras, Churubusco, and Chapultepec during the Mexican War; Winslow Homer supplemented the work of the great photographer, Mathew Brady, in recording events of the Civil War; while a soldier assigned to the 71st Infantry in the Spanish-American War, Charles Johnson Post viewed the bombardment of Santiago Bay from his transport and filled two sketchbooks during the Santiago campaign. Frederic Remington rode with the 5th Cavalry in the 1880s covering the Indian campaigns of the northern plains. Armed with sketchpad and pencil, these men and scores of others deepened our knowledge of the infinite drudgery, horror, courage, and even humor of warfare. Most of this art passed into private collections and by the later part of the nineteenth century began moving into the Smithsonian Institution and other museums.

Establishment of the Army Combat Art Program

In World War I, as a result of a War Department decision to make a pictorial record of the terrain, uniforms, equipment, and actions of the war, eight artists selected by Charles Dana Gibson went to France to record the activities of the American Expeditionary Forces. After the war the art work was deposited permanently in the Smithsonian Institution, and no lasting program evolved from the project.

There was a more extensive effort in World War II. Late in 1942, thanks to Assistant Secretary of War John J. McCloy and General Brehon Somervell, commander of the Services of Supply, the Corps of Engineers established a War Art Unit in its Operations and Training Branch, Troops Division. Associated American Artists, an organization founded in 1939 by the artist Reeves Lowenthal, recruited artists for the War Art Unit. In

1943, the War Department established an art committee, composed of leaders in the art world and military historians, to work closely with Associated American Artists and make the final selections of artists. Some of the most talented painters of the 1930s and 40s were chosen—Reginald Marsh, Jack Levine, Joe Jones, Mitchell Siporin, Aaron Bohrod, and Henry Varnum Poor, whose works are now much desired by major American museums. Through graphic arts, oil paintings, watercolors, and drawings, twenty-three military and twenty civilian artists set out to make a pictorial record of the U.S. Army in time of war. They were instructed to depict events of outstanding military importance, incidents in the daily life of the soldier in training, frontline operations, combat and service support, and characteristic views of the countryside in which operations were conducted. They sketched and painted people, places, and equipment and documented each piece of art with information concerning the military unit, object, and persons depicted and with the date and place of completion.

The artists were assigned to teams which usually consisted of an officer, a civilian, and two technical sergeants. Thirteen units went within four months to all theaters of operations, but the artists barely had time to reach their destinations when their tours were terminated for lack of funds. Although the program lasted for only slightly longer than six months, February to August 1943, approximately 2,000 pieces of art were produced. The War Department Art Committee screened these paintings and selected 1,500 as of sufficiently high artistic or military and historical value for retention by the Army. Works not selected by the committee were returned to the artists.

When Daniel Longwell, editor of *Life* magazine, learned of the program's end, he visited the Secretary of War and offered to employ some of the Army's civilian artists. *Life* paid their salaries, but the Army continued to furnish transportation and billeting. The Army reassigned some of the military artists to other Army duties where they continued to paint and organized others into a War Art Unit under the Historical Branch, Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2. Finally, however, questioning the propriety of diverting funds for the prosecution of the war to the administration of the Army's art project, Congress terminated the program in the Military Appropriations Act of 1945 which provided that

no appropriation shall be available for payment to or expenditure on account of any civilian personnel employed outside continental United States to paint or otherwise produce war scenes except by means of

photography, or to paint portraits, or for payment to or expenditure on account of any military personnel within continental United States who engage in decorative art projects or painting portraits to the exclusion of regular military duties.¹

Initially the work of the War Art Unit of the Historical Branch was given to the Corps of Engineers, but responsibility shifted to the Pictorial Division of the Public Information Division, and in February 1945 to the War Paintings Office in the Bureau of Public Relations. By May 1945 the War Paintings Office had received approximately 1,300 paintings, and an estimated 700 more were expected to come in from the field. A few months later, the Secretary of War transferred responsibility for the war art to the Office of the Army Headquarters Commandant where a Historical Properties Branch was established to provide for collecting, processing, and preserving Army paintings and other objects of historical interest. In 1950 the art activity was transferred to the Historical Division of the Special Staff, later renamed Office, Chief of Military History.

Present Holdings and Program

Pre-World War II Art: The Army Art Collection contains twelve small oil sketches of the battle of Chapultepec by James Walker who was in Mexico City at the outbreak of the Mexican War. When Americans were ordered to evacuate, Walker fled over the mountains to Pueblo, joined the American forces, and served as a civilian interpreter on the staff of Brig. Gen. William J. Worth. He remained with Maj. Gen. Winfield Scott's army until it captured Mexico City. During the Civil War, encouraged by General Scott, Walker accompanied the Army of the Cumberland and painted both the *Battle of Lookout Mountain* and the *Battle of Chickamauga*. The Army owns both of these paintings together with Thomas Nast's *Saving the Flag*, the only other Civil War painting in the collection.

American World War II Art: The War Department Art Committee's selection of 1,500 paintings, watercolors, and drawings formed the nucleus of the Army's World War II art collection. Further pictorial documentation of the war was undertaken by Abbott Laboratories, a manufacturer of medical supplies. With Associated American Artists serving as consultants, Abbott sponsored seven different war art projects from 1942 to 1945. Under one of the war projects, Abbott produced, in cooperation with The Surgeon General's Office, a fine collection

1. War Department Bulletin No. 12, 1944, p. 5.

of Army medical paintings by such well-known artists as John Steuart Curry, Peter Blume, and Joseph Hirsch. In 1945 Abbott presented this collection of 144 paintings to the Army.

A miscellaneous group of 1,200 drawings and cartoons, including several "Sad Sack" and "Private Dave Breger" strips published in World War II editions of *Yank* magazine, formed yet another addition to the Army collection in 1946. In 1955 Bill Mauldin augmented this group by donating four "Willie and Joe" cartoons which had been published in wartime issues of *Stars and Stripes*.

Henry Luce formally presented the entire collection of 1,050 *Life* paintings, which included Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps subjects, to Deputy Secretary of Defense James H. Douglas on Pearl Harbor day, 7 December 1960. The paintings were placed in the custody of the Army's Chief of Military History, who agreed to preserve the collection intact and display it publicly.

German Art: Many of the countries in World War II, both allied and enemy, had war art activities, but from the outset Germany had the largest program, both in the number of artists employed and in their output. To supervise the program Hitler appointed Capt. Luitpold Adam, a World War I combat artist who took charge of the war painters and press artists in the Propaganda Replacement Center in Potsdam. The work of this group and the subsequent artists division of the German high command, also under Adam's direction, brought prodigious results. The quality of the German works is uniformly high, although they had to serve the purposes of Hitler, who favored monumental realism and opposed expressionism. Within the restrictive bounds of realism, nevertheless, the German artists appear to have insisted upon a certain latitude in their choice of subjects. In any case, the resulting works give an impression of authenticity because Adam insisted that the painters work at the front during combat.

At the close of the war, U.S. military government ordered that all art collections relating or dedicated to the perpetuation of Nazism be closed permanently and the works seized. The office of the theater historian in Europe began to collect all available art works in this category. Gordon Gilkey, an Army Air Forces captain who was assigned the task of gathering the art, gave a fascinating report of his search for paintings in several improbable hiding places. Part of the huge *Kunst der Front* (Front Art) collection owned by Hitler was concealed in storage bins in a salt refining plant, and the smaller paintings from his collection were found in a second-floor dance hall in a cafe in St. Agatha, Austria. Gilkey found watercolors and drawings from

Luitpold Adam's high command collection in the attic of an abandoned woodcutter's hut on the Czechoslovak border and Himmler's SS war art in the Kellheim Liberation Hall. The *Haus der Deutschen Kunst* (House of German Art) and the basement of the Hitler Building in Munich yielded parts of the private collections of Hitler, Himmler, and Bormann. In 1947 the Army assumed custody of over 8,000 pieces of German war art assembled by Gilkey, and three years later the collection received a smaller group of historical objects and paintings collected by Army historians in Germany. Included in the latter group were ceremonial swords, medals, memorabilia of Hermann Goering, and four watercolors painted by a youthful Adolf Hitler between 1914 and 1917. Between 1951 and 1956 this collection was reduced by the return to the German government of 1,600 pieces that were determined to be neither militaristic nor propagandistic, the donation of approximately 28 watercolors and drawings to Australia and 26 to New Zealand, and the transfer of 300 pieces of art to the Department of the Air Force.

Japanese Art: Japanese war artists produced enormous, often imaginary, land and sea battle paintings for display in military museums and other official buildings. As early as November 1945 Capt. Hermann W. William, chief of the Historical Properties Section, Military District of Washington, cabled U.S. Army Forces, Pacific, requesting that all available Japanese war paintings and drawings be collected and shipped to the United States for inclusion in an exhibition scheduled for January 1946 at the Metropolitan Museum in New York City. Captain Williams stated that the paintings would "be of permanent value to the War Department." The collection was assembled in the summer of 1946, too late for the New York showing, and no further shipping instructions were issued by the War Department. The paintings remained with the Chief Engineer, General Headquarters, Army Forces, Pacific, until the summer of 1951 when the Department of the Army directed that the war art be forwarded to Cameron Station in Alexandria, Virginia. The shipment, consisting of 154 paintings, was received in the Office of the Chief of Military History the following September and became part of the Army Art Collection.

The Japanese art was the subject of a number of discreet inquiries from representatives of the Japanese government in the years that followed, and in 1967 the Japanese embassy formally requested its return. In March 1970 the paintings were lent to the U.S. State Department which in turn forwarded them on indefinite loan to the Japanese government. They are

presently located in the National Museum of Modern Art in Tokyo.

Korean War Art: Although the Army provided no funds for an official art program during the Korean War, Robert Baer, a civilian cartographer and painter, executed a number of drawings and paintings which were acquired by the Office of the Chief of Military History for inclusion in the Army Art Collection.

Vietnam War Art: As the Vietnam War began to escalate, the Chief of Military History looked toward an art program for that war. Basic to the program as it developed was the conviction that the art history of the war should be recorded by the young and impressionable soldier as well as the mature professional artist. Thus the program provided for pictorial documentation of Army activities by both civilian and military artists, selected from volunteers on the basis of competency by a Department of the Army art committee.

The Army Chief of Staff approved the civilian portion of the program in March 1966. Thereafter OCMH recruited professionals in the Washington area, and art societies recruited other artists in the New York and Boston areas. Selected artists traveled in an assigned area for a maximum of thirty days, observing and sketching with a view toward producing paintings after returning home. The Army paid their transportation and other expenses and furnished art supplies. As volunteers, however, civilian artists were not paid salaries and were not under contract to produce a specified number of paintings but were free to donate to the Army as many or as few works as they wished. The military portion of the program, announced in June 1966, called for the use of soldier artists, who were placed on temporary duty assignments of 120-35 days and worked in two- to five-man teams. The teams spent sixty days in Vietnam visiting military units and sketching and photographing the activities observed and then proceeded to Hawaii to translate their preliminary sketches into studio paintings. The program was expanded in 1969 to permit pictorial documentation throughout the world. Civilian artists completed assignments not only in Vietnam but also in Thailand, Germany, Korea, the Canal Zone, and the United States, including Alaska, while teams of soldier artists toured Vietnam, Thailand, and Korea.

Although the Army artist was instructed to document completely each sketch and painting, he was given few instructions on subject matter, style, and technique and was permitted almost complete freedom of expression. Consequently

artists not only recorded firefights, swamp patrols, and village searches for hidden Viet Cong, but they also depicted with compassion and realism a wounded soldier, a bereaved Vietnamese family, and a relaxed fellow artist surrounded by fascinated Vietnamese orphans. Varied in form and expression according to the artist's individual interpretations, the Vietnamese collection presents a broad view of man's experience in war.

Portrait Programs: Portraiture also holds a significant place in the Army's pictorial archives. The earliest official program originated during the tenure of Secretary of War William Worth Belknap (October 1869-March 1876). With the centennial year in mind, Belknap and his assistants assembled portraits of all of the Secretaries of War who had served before that time. They compiled a list of forty former secretaries, including the two predecessors of the secretaries, Horatio Gates, President of the Board of War in 1777-78, and Benjamin Lincoln, Secretary at War, 1781-83.

They found only one portrait in the possession of the War Department—that of Timothy Pickering, who held office in 1795. Another painting, of Benjamin Lincoln, was purchased from a dealer in New York City. The remaining thirty-eight portraits were copied from existing portraits or painted from life by some of the most talented artists of the period—Daniel Huntington, Henry Ulke, Robert Weir, and John Wesley Jarvis. These portraits and those of succeeding secretaries presently adorn the Pentagon corridors.

In 1971 the Office of the Chief of Military History began a three-year program to commission portraits of all Army Chiefs of Staff from 1903, when the office was created, to the present. This program was made possible by the generosity of former Secretary of the Army and Mrs. Robert T. Stevens who, in April 1971, offered to finance the entire cost of the project. The twenty-six paintings, done by the best portrait painters available to the Army, hang in a special hall in the Pentagon.

Minority Art: The Army Art Collection contains a negligible amount of minority art devoted to military participation by black Americans, Indians, Mexican Americans, Puerto Ricans, Oriental Americans, and women. Because of a steadily increasing number of requests for exhibits of such material, the Chief of Military History developed a bicentennial project for a group of paintings on the military contribution of minorities and obtained the approval of the Army staff bicentennial committee. In the spring of 1975 eighteen artists who were themselves members of

minority groups were commissioned to execute paintings showing acts of heroism or other significant military contributions by members of American minorities from the Revolution to Vietnam.

Use of the Collection

The Center of Military History maintains a comprehensive file on Army art as a research aid to students, writers, military historians, museum curators, and magazine and book publishers. A card index is cross-referenced by artist, title, size, and medium. A separate card index includes subject, geographical area, nationality, arm of service, theater of operations, and military organization. Another file of interest to scholars is the photographic index of art works in the collection; approximately one half of the collection has been photographed and prints are available in albums for easy reference. A continuing effort is made to search out and collect biographical information on all artists represented in the collection.

A conservation program involves both storage and handling of the active collection and the renovation of approximately 150 paintings each year. Exhibits of fifteen to thirty paintings each are available for temporary showings by such public and private institutions as museums, art galleries, schools, colleges, community centers, banks, department stores, and shopping centers. The art exhibits help to supplement written military history and encourage its study and use by stimulating the viewer's imagination. One powerful work of art can reflect vividly the significant functions and accomplishments of the Army. It can permit easy mental reconstruction of the atmosphere in which an historical event took place, and at the same time it can illustrate both the American soldier's experience and his spirit as perceived by the artist. Thus the art collection is used to stimulate *esprit de corps* and foster public awareness of the Army's role in peace and war.

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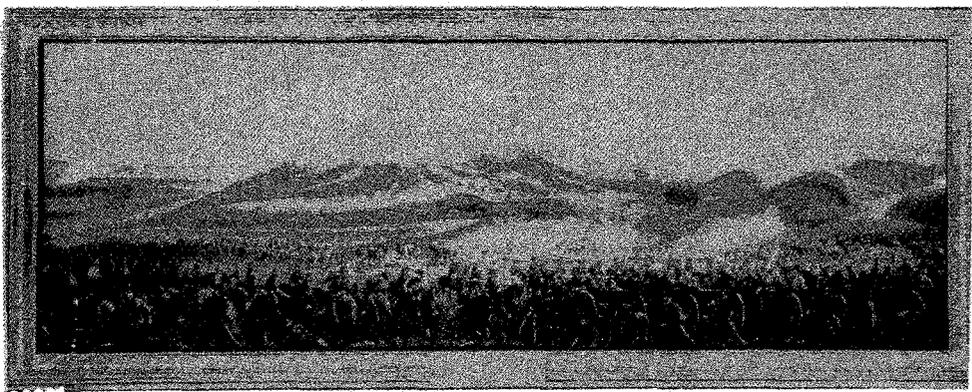
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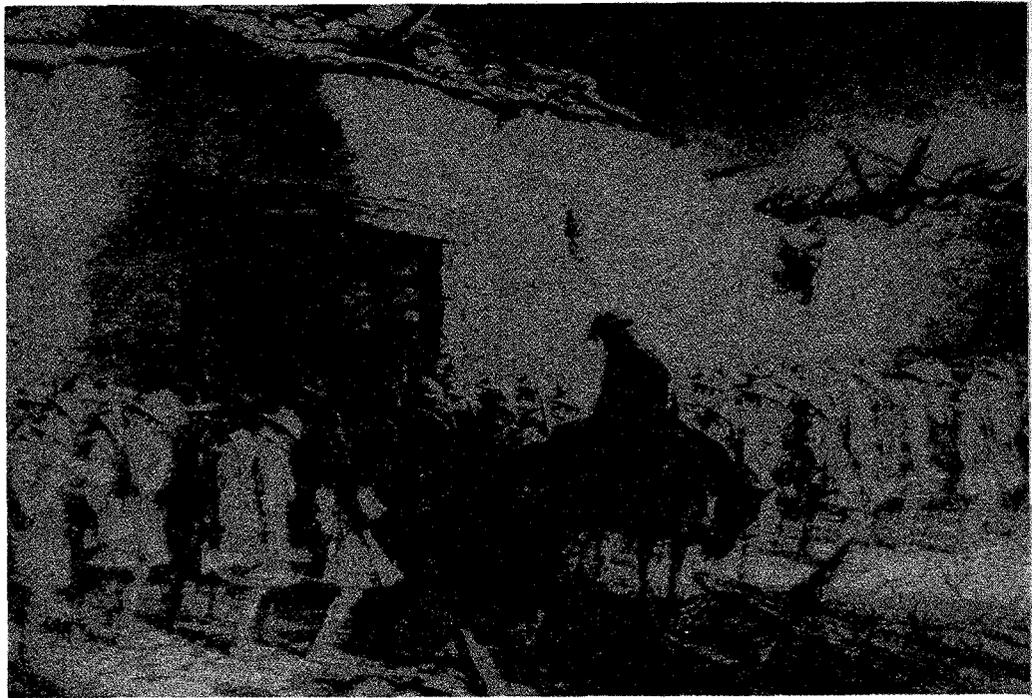
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Top: *First Rhode Island Regiment, 29 August 1778*, by Jerry Pinkney (CC 102245)

Bottom: *Battle of Lookout Mountain, November 1963*, by James Walker (CC 45034)





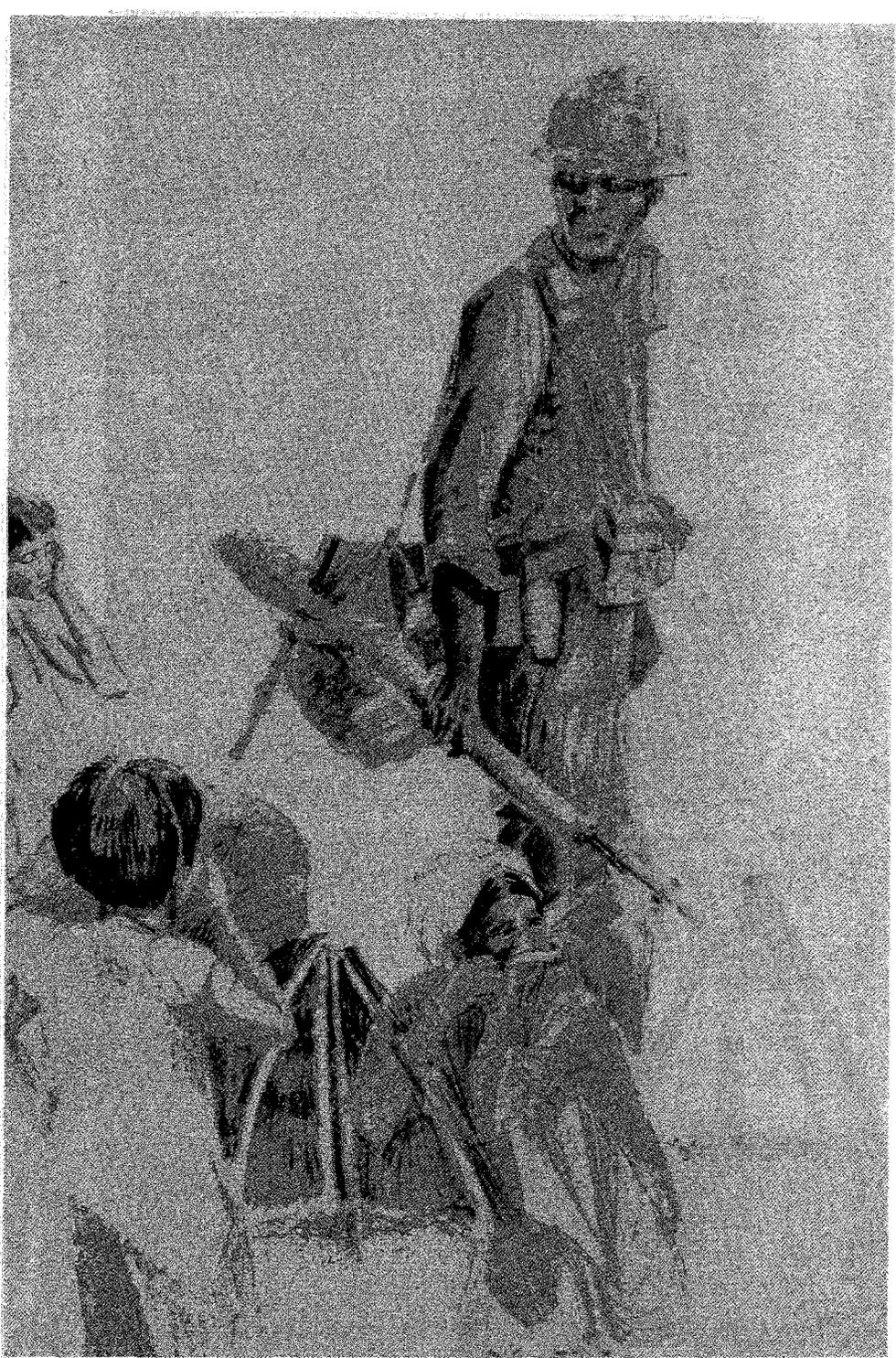
Top left: *The Gatling Guns, Cuba 1898*, Charles Johnson Post (CC 103703)

Bottom left: *American Troops in France, 1918*, by Kerr Eby (SC 674237)

Top right: *Dummy Antiaircraft, England 1943*, by Byron Thomas (CC 34354)

Bottom right: *German Supply Train in Russia*, by Max Ohmayer (SC 434807)

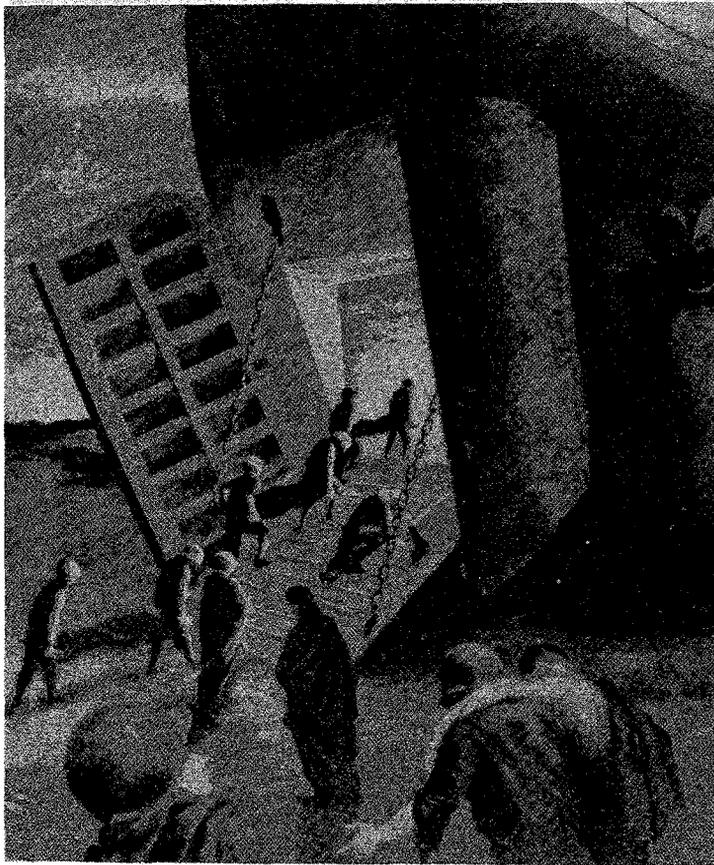




Top left: *Lookout Post, Pacific* 1944, by Paul Sample (USAAVA CCA-37-6)

Bottom left: *The Morning After*, 1944, by Edward A. Reep (SC 674239)

Right: *The Villagers, Vietnam* 1966, by Augustine Acuna (CC 41230)



Top: *The Way Back*, 1944, by
Lawrence Beall Smith
(USAAVA 72 CCA-211-5)

Bottom: *Combat Artist at
Work*, Saigon 1966, by
Paul Rickert (CC 39381)

