

the mudroom

Without Gary Mortensen, images from U.S. wars, like this film of a P-51D Mustang flying over Europe during World War II, could be lost.

Semper Film

Gary Mortensen brings images of wars past and present to life.

NO ONE ALIVE today can remember firsthand the tension-filled, pre-battle hours of the Spanish-American War. But that doesn't mean the moments are lost: Buried in the 12,000 hours of footage that comprise the National Combat History Archive, a 14,000-square-foot warehouse in Hillsboro, is a single 20-second clip of soldiers nervously checking their gear before the fighting begins. The scene is eerily similar to what you see today in Iraq, says Gary Mortensen, a military-history buff who, three years ago, founded the archive (open by appointment) with his friend Scot Laney in order to preserve the heroics and tragedies of war. Since then, the pair have digitized more than one million photos of every American war since 1898. Together they also produced *This Is War: Memories of Iraq* (currently being screened around the state) from over 400 hours of film and 70,000 photos taken by Oregon National Guard members deployed in Iraq. Footage like this isn't always easy to watch, but it does shed light on the realities soldiers face—whether they're serving in the Philippines or Fallujah. —Kristen Hall-Geisler