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WHEN WILLIE COMES MARCHING HOME

"His story is taken from Government files...because they didn't want it!" giggled the newspaper ads in 1950, adding a picture of Corinne Calvet in a tight, off-the-shoulders blouse, captioned, "Yvonne of the French Underground...she almost made Willie lose his Good Conduct Medal." If the tone of the ad seems a bit uncomfortable, it may be because no one knew quite what to make of John Ford's odd service comedy, starring Dan Dailey as a small town boy who is treated as a hero when he enlists at the start of World War II--only to become an object of scorn when the Army stations him Stateside. Even when Dailey goes to France on a dangerous, top-secret mission, no one believes he was ever gone. William K. Everson notes that Willie is "more like a Preston Sturges movie than a John Ford movie"--not only for its similarity with Sturges' earlier Hail The Conquering Hero, but for the presence of William Demerest, Sturges' most brilliant stock player, as a bellicose American Legionnaire. Critical opinions are sharply divided; Charles Silver describes Willie as "an almost pure case of a giant twiddling one thumb," Peter Bogdanovich considers it, "a look at the Army by a Navy man," while ^acontemporary review^g cites it as "a runaway farce...with a lively flair for broad strokes of comedy." In any case, Willie is one of the most rarely-screened of Ford's mature films--making this a must for ~~any~~ serious Fordians.

--Michael Goodwin

Directed by John Ford. Produced by Fred Kohlmar. Screenplay by Mary Loos and Richard Sale, from story by Sy Gomberg. Photography by Leo Tover. With: Dan Dailey, Corinne Calvet, William Demerest,

Mae Marsh, Jack Pennick, Hank Worden. (1950, 82 minutes