

NCO History Paper- Sergeant William H. Mauldin

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William H. Mauldin was born and raised in the southwest. As a young boy he became interested in books and drawing. From his first drawings of military maneuvers near his home to his creation of “Willie and Joe” during World War II, Mauldin would provide humor for generations. His portrayal of the everyday soldier on the front and later his political cartoons would earn him two Pulitzer Prizes for cartooning, one as a sergeant and one as a civilian. He would become gravely ill and receive thousands of cards and letters from the Soldiers he represented in his “Willie and Joe” cartoon panel. Upon his death, he was honored with full military honors at Arlington National Cemetery.

Mauldin was born in Mountain Park, New Mexico, 1921. His father worked odd jobs and he moved during his childhood throughout the southwest. As his family moved around the southwest, Mauldin found an avid interest in reading, drawing and sketching. At the age of 13, Mauldin sent away for the popular “how to draw” book advertised in *Popular Mechanics* and began to refine his ability. Mauldin was always a little mischievous and his behavior and rebel side would catch up with him in high school. Because of a prank in science class, Mauldin would not complete High School. In Science class he placed a lit cigarette in the mouth of a skeleton. Needless to say the prank was not appreciated by the teacher. Mauldin found himself kicked out of school and bounced around a couple of odd jobs.

At the age of 17 he attended the Art Institute of Chicago for one session. Shortly thereafter during September 1940 he joined the Army National Guard's 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division in Phoenix. Five days later, his unit was activated for World War II and began training for war.

Mauldin's early military career was definitely not stellar, he moved from the motor pool where he was not a very good driver to a rifleman in the infantry. During this time he probably set a record for the most days assigned to KP, he spent 64 days in four months on KP duty; his mischievous behavior was still evident early in his Army career.

Now married and with a son on the way, deployment of his unit to Sicily was getting closer. He was no longer just an infantryman; he was now also working for the division newspaper as a cartoonist. In the early 1940's his unit shipped out for the invasion of Sicily. Mauldin left behind his wife, Jean and son Bruce and landed in Sicily with the rest of his unit. By this time he was working for the *45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division News*.

Mauldin began to draw and sketch Soldiers on the front lines after arriving in Italy. He would spend about a week up front and return to the rear to finish his rough sketches. The cold wet weather and lack of light made it hard to finish his drawings at the front. The Mediterranean edition of *Stars and Stripes* began to notice his cartoons; he was offered a job working out of Rome. His cartoon panel of front life became "Up Front" featuring two front line Soldiers; "Willie and Joe."

Mauldin said, "My business is drawing, not writing." (Mauldin 1) His portrayal of Willie and Joe reflected his more than three years with the 45<sup>th</sup> Division; by 1945 the division had fought in dozens of campaigns and major battles. He drew pictures of the infantry because that is what he knew. According to Mauldin, "I draw pictures for and about the dogfaces because I

know what their life is like and I understand their gripes.” (Mauldin 5) Mauldin did receive some criticism for focusing on one branch of the service over others; he was fine with the criticism he felt “he was in a pretty good spot to judge any effect the cartoons might have had on the morale of the rear echelon.” (Mauldin 5)

Mauldin didn't try to portray the war in a broad picture minded way, he said “my reactions are those of a young guy who has been exposed to some of it.” (Mauldin 7) He felt that if his cartoons gave the people back home an opportunity to understand “these strange, mud-caked creatures who fight the war” (Mauldin 8) then they were beginning to appreciate their countrymen who were doing the fighting.

Mauldin commented that he didn't make the infantryman look noble, because an infantryman could not look noble if he tried. (14) He added, “They are rough and their language gets coarse because they live a life stripped of convention and niceties.” (Mauldin 15) This portrayal of the unshaven, coarse infantryman was drawn for the enlisted soldier and would draw criticism from officers.

Mauldin's cartoons just like all the articles in *Stars and Stripes* were approved for publication in the paper. His cartoons were checked for Operational Security violations because the Germans also got the paper regularly through diplomatic channels and off Americans who were captured with copies in their possession. Mauldin didn't mind his cartoons being checked for valuable information he said, “I simply try to draw cartoons for the guys.” (Mauldin 32)

His honest portrayal of life in the trenches endeared him to the enlisted troops, but not necessarily to the officers. One officer in particular did not like Mauldin's characterization of Soldiers.

General George S. Patton, Third Army Commander, demanded *Stars and Stripes* drop the cartoon early in 1945. General Dwight D. Eisenhower, aware of the morale value of Willie and Joe arranged a meeting between Mauldin and Patton in France. (Steinberg) Mauldin in later years said, "I was scared to death. For 45 minutes Patton lectured me on military history and his theories of discipline. It was a very eloquent chewing-out." (Steinberg) The General spoke and the sergeant listened. Because of Eisenhower's intervention, Willie and Joe continued.

Another famous journalist that emerged during the war had this to say about Mauldin. "Sergeant Bill Mauldin seemed to us over there to be the finest cartoonist the war had produced. And that's not merely because his cartoons are funny, but because they are also terribly grim and real. Mauldin's cartoons aren't about training-camp life, which is most familiar to people at home. They are about the men in the line—the tiny percentage of our vast Army who are actually doing the dying. His cartoons are about the war." Ernie Pyle. (Mauldin back cover)

While Mauldin's cartoons were loved by soldiers on the front and back home, his work was being noticed and even recognized with awards. For his cartoons drawn in 1944, Mauldin won a Pulitzer Prize for cartooning in 1945. Mauldin would be the only member of the military to win any Pulitzer Prize to date. In fact, he would win his second Pulitzer in 1959 as a civilian.

As Mauldin's military service neared its end he contemplated what would happen to Willie and Joe. In 1945 his book titled *Up Front* was published and on its way to a number one best seller in addition, his cartoons were syndicated around the world. He thought about killing Willie and Joe at the end of the war but did not. They quietly ended just like Mauldin's own service in the Army. Willie and Joe would only appear several times during his civilian career.

Like many soldiers he had a rough time adapting to life after the war, for the next ten years he wrote some unpublished novels, acted in two war movies and ran unsuccessfully for Congress in New York.

During 1958, in St. Louis as bad weather grounded his plane, he visited the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, where he landed a job as a replacement for their artist, Dan Fitzpartick who was about to take a leave of absence. The next year, he won his second Pulitzer Prize. In 1962 he was hired by the *Chicago Sun-Times*, where he would later retire.

In retirement the honors to Mauldin's Willie and Joe continued. Willie and Joe were honored on a U.S. Postal Service stamp as part a series of stamps commemorating the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II

Unfortunately in his last years Mauldin battled alcoholism and Alzheimer's. He was in a California nursing home and probably thought the world had forgotten him. A World War II veteran, Jay Gruenfeld located Mauldin and began a campaign to get other veterans to share their memories with the creator of Willie and Joe. More than 10,000 veterans of all ages responded and a whole new generation of readers discovered the work of Bill Mauldin.

Mauldin would die January 22, 2003; seven days later on a fitting cold and damp day Willie and Joe would have appreciated he was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery.

Mauldin emerged from a raucous youth and a troubled start in the 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division to become one of the most influential and respected cartoonists of the 1940's. His body of work inspired thousands of soldiers in World War II and brought the front home to the American people through the lives of Willie and Joe.

Even though he entered this world from humble beginnings and led a troubled life, his real life portrayal of the everyday “Joe” will live on through his cartoons.