

World War II



U.S. NAVAL HISTORICAL CENTER

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Bill Mauldin's Willie and Joe were only two of the many cartoon heroes beloved by American GIs.

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"Our soldiers are fully prepared to repulse this insolent attempt [to attack New Britain]," boasted Radio Tokyo. In fact, neither the Americans nor the Japanese were prepared for the ordeal awaiting them in the merciless jungles.

30 *Italian Invaders Routed at Beda Fomm*

By J.D. Latimer

Paraphrasing the words of Prime Minister Winston Churchill, Foreign Secretary Anthony Eden summed up the counteroffensive launched by the British against the Italians in North Africa in December 1940: "Never has so much been surrendered by so many to so few."

38 *Justice Under the Sun: Japanese War Crime Trials*

By Robert Barr Smith

Like their German counterparts, Japanese government and military officials had to face the judgments of the Allied victors once the shooting had finally stopped.

ABOVE: American Maj. Gen. Myron C. Cramer, Australian Sir William F. Webb, Chinese Justice J.A. Mai and Soviet Justice I.M. Zaryanov prepare to announce their verdicts on April 8, 1948, at the Japanese war crime trials held in the former War Ministry building in Tokyo.

COVER: American troops who surrendered in the Philippines in April 1942 undergo the brutal ordeal of the *Bataan Death March*, in a painting by James Dietz. After the fortunes of war had turned, many of the surviving Japanese captors would answer for their crimes (story, P. 38).

Cover art: James Dietz

World War II gave rise to numerous comic strips and brought fame to the artists who drew them.

By Ron Goulart

Comic strips and cartoons were important morale builders for millions of United States service personnel during World War II. Thanks to the Camp Newspaper Service and publications like *Yank* and *Stars and Stripes*, enlisted men and women, no matter where they were stationed, had access not only to several of their favorite homefront comics, like *Dick Tracy*, *Joe Palooka* and *Li'l Abner*, but also to a batch of GI-created features that were raunchier and more outspoken than the homegrown stuff, such as *The Wolf*, *Sad Sack* and Bill Mauldin's *Up Front*.

Also, there was Miss Lace, the sexy star of *Male Call* by Milton Caniff, the civilian creator of *Terry and the Pirates*, who donated the strip as his contribution to the war effort. In the interests of morale-building, comics were allowed more leeway in the service publications, and the GI comics got away with breaches of decorum not permitted in civilian newspapers.

Even before the Selective Service Act introduced the draft in 1940, there had been a great many camp newspapers across the country and even some overseas. But the number of papers began growing in 1940, and after the United States entered the war, hundreds more started up as millions of Americans entered military service. While the majority of the papers were printed on presses, about a third were produced by more primitive processes such as mimeographing.

In the spring of 1942, the *Stars and Stripes* weekly newspaper, gone since World War I, was revived. It appeared first among U.S. Army personnel in England, and eventually editions appeared in various European and African combat areas. *Yank*, a weekly magazine that was a slim variation of such then-popular slick magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *Collier's*, was also



"Don't just stand there! . . . Do something!"

Sergeant Leonard Sansone's The Wolf was a popular cartoon among American fighting men overseas—as much for the artist's skill at drawing attractive women as for the series' leering, wolflike GI protagonist.

COURTESY OF RON GOULART

launched in the spring of 1942 and distributed to U.S. servicemen around the world.

News organizations now began operating to ensure that the hundreds of service publications around the world had features and artwork. The main organization in charge of comics and cartoons was the Camp Newspaper Service. Set up in the summer of 1942, it was operated by the editors and staff of *Yank* from the GI weekly's offices on 42nd Street in Manhattan.

George Baker was born in Lowell, Mass., and attended high school in Chicago, where he also spent about a month in the Academy of Fine Arts. He headed west in 1937 and went to work for Walt Disney, assisting on several of its full-length animated cartoons, including *Pinocchio*, *Dumbo* and *Bambi*. He was drafted in June 1941, and, as he later confessed, "most of my evenings in the Army were spent drawing

cartoons of army life using the Sad Sack as the bewildered civilian trying to be a soldier." Baker eventually entered his hapless, sausage-nosed GI in a contest for servicemen cartoonists. It won and was widely reprinted in camp newspapers. That notoriety resulted in Baker's being invited to join the staff of *Yank*, and *Sad Sack* debuted there in the weekly's first issue in April 1942.

Baker's pantomime two-tier comic strips, which made good use of his mastery of perspective, resembled storyboards for animated cartoon sequences and almost never pictured the luckless Sack winning at anything. "To me," Baker said, "he was the pictorial representation of the humility and resignation to abuse the civilian feels on entrance to the gigantic machine, the Army."

Although he was a champion loser, Sad Sack appealed to servicemen. In 1944 a collection of the

Yank strips was reprinted by Simon & Schuster and sold nearly a quarter of a million copies in hardcover. That same year the Bell Syndicate, which handled comic strips ranging from *Mutt & Jeff* to *Don Winslow of the Navy*, picked up *Sad Sack* and placed it in nearly 50 civilian newspapers in the United States.

Leonard Sansone was also born in Massachusetts. He got into the comic book business in New York City in 1940 and turned out adventure features for such titles as *Mystic Comics*, *Blue Bolt* and *Startling Comics*. He was drafted into the Army early in 1942 and began drawing *The Wolf* panel for the camp paper at Fort Belvoir, Va. It was picked up by the Camp Newspaper Service, and Sansone spent the war in Manhattan drawing, as *Life* called it, his "wolf in GI clothing." He worked in the Camp Newspaper Service office at *Yank*,

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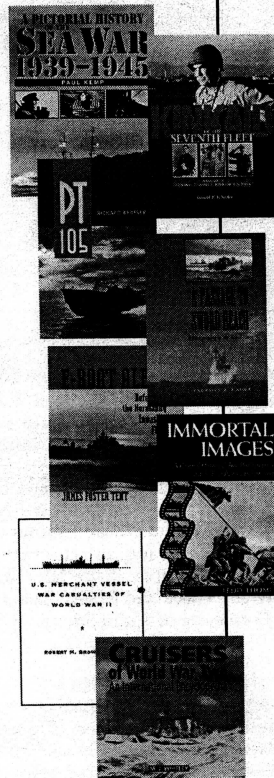
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which was just across the street from the New York *Daily News* building, and eventually reached the rank of staff sergeant.

"Wolf" was a popular term for an aggressive woman-chaser in the early 1940s. Animator Tex Avery used a similar, though more exuberant, character in several of his wartime animated cartoons, notably in *Red Hot Riding Hood* in 1943.

The Wolf was rarely seen in actual pursuit of a woman, and much of the humor of the panel derived from the fact that only the reader apparently saw his shaggy head and was aware of his true character and goals. In one typical panel his pretty dinner partner is criticizing him by saying, "Food—food—food! Is that all you ever think of?" Although he was the antithesis of Sad Sack, the Wolf was just as popular, and at the height of his fame he appeared in nearly 3,000 service papers each week. In his introduction to a 1945 collection of Sansone's cartoons, Milton Caniff said, "Every soldier thinks himself a pretty hot deal, capable of endless conquests," and that was why the Wolf was easy to identify with. Sansone, too, was an excellent cartoonist and especially good at drawing attractive women, certainly another reason for the panel's popularity.

The most popular comics feature in the service newspapers, however, was the work of a civilian. Milton Caniff was classed as 4F (physically ineligible) because of phlebitis contracted from an insect bite in his youth, but "I wanted to do some work for the guys who had to fight; something just for them," he explained. While *Stars and Stripes* and *Yank* could not accept contributions from civilians, the *Camp Newspaper Service* could. Initially Caniff donated a weekly GI version of his popular strip *Terry and the Pirates*. Neither Terry nor any of the various pirates showed up in this version. It concentrated on the wisecracking blonde from the strip, Burma, and was basically a gag feature. Burma resided in China and fraternized with enlisted men, plus an occasional officer, and her meetings with amorous servicemen provided most of the humor. Tame by today's standards, this government issue *Terry and the Pirates* usually featured a few risqué double-entendres. The new strip debuted in October 1942. Caniff produced two versions, one in outline only, for those mimeographed papers, and a fully rendered version for the other papers.

Fairly soon, Caniff's bosses at the newspaper syndicate that was handling the civilian version of *Terry* informed him they wanted him to quit using any of his characters for an alternate version. Rather than give up the GI strip, Caniff merely invented a new leading lady. "I wanted a short, sexy name..." he said. "I gave her black hair. I viewed her as innocent but sexy as hell. She might be playing poker with you, but she won't necessarily be going to bed with you." The defining word for Lace was

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maybe, and she retained her unattainable ranking for the duration of the strip. Caniff said he did not base her on anyone specific, but Miss Lace in her early appearances did look quite a bit like the popular 1940s actress Gene Tierney.

The new strip, *Male Call*, was first published on January 24, 1943, and ran for four years. At first Lace lived in the same part of China that Burma had frequented, but the strip soon stopped mentioning any specific locale. Most of Caniff's enlisted men were as innocent as Lace herself, and though they rarely passed up a chance to get her in a position where they could gaze down her cleavage, they almost never forced their attentions on her.

When Dave Breger was drafted at the beginning of 1941, he was already in his early 30s and a struggling magazine cartoonist in New York. He was shrewd enough, however, to use his time in the Army to build himself a successful lifetime cartooning career. Breger created an autobiographical gag panel titled *Pvt. Breger* and sold it to *The Saturday Evening Post*. Soon thereafter, Hearst's King Features began syndicating a daily *Pvt. Breger* to newspapers around the United States. Breger started doing yet another version for *Yank* in June 1942, titled *G.I. Joe*. Breger is generally credited with coining the G.I. Joe name.

Born in Chicago, Breger was a self-taught cartoonist, and his drawings always maintained a homespun look. Although Breger eventually became a lieutenant and served as an overseas correspondent for both *Yank* and *Stars and Stripes*, his cartoon counterpart remained a private, a foot soldier and yet another of the hapless GIs who would always remain civilians inside. Private Breger never lost the hope that he would eventually figure out military life, and he approached war's discomforts, indignities and dangers with a tentative optimism. Breger drew his bespectacled hero as a condensed, forlorn caricature of himself.

Among the other features created by servicemen was Dick Wingert's *Hubert* panel. A Midwesterner with some art school training, Wingert was drafted in 1941, and the following year he found himself a private first class in England. Assigned to the staff of the revived *Stars and Stripes*, Wingert created his squatty, slovenly perennial private with the tomato nose.

Cartoonist Fred Lasswell had begun assisting Billy DeBeck on *Barney Google* in the early 1930s and was there when the cantankerous Snuffy Smith was introduced. During World War II, Lasswell became a Marine Corps staff sergeant and worked on the Marine monthly magazine *Leatherneck*. He contributed a strip called *Hashmark*.

Another Marine cartoonist, Fred Rhoads, joined the Corps in 1942. Because he had attended art school, he was assigned to the *Leatherneck* staff after completing basic

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