

45th Infantry Division Museum in Oklahoma City includes Bill Mauldin cartoons

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By CHARLIE PRICE / Special Contributor to The Dallas Morning News

OKLAHOMA CITY – As [World War II](#) infantrymen, Willie and Joe told tales other soldiers understood all too well. But instead of the blood and dirt of war's reality, Willie and Joe's adventures were drawn in the ink and paper of an artist's mind.

Willie and Joe, the creation of Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist [Bill Mauldin](#), are still spinning yarns today in Oklahoma City's 45th Infantry Division Museum.

The cartoon was drawn with a front-line perspective of warfare and symbolized the weight of war on the average American soldier. Using humor and horror to tell a largely satirical story of the camaraderie and chaos of war, Mr. Mauldin first chronicled Willie and Joe's tour of duty in drawings for the *45th Division News* and later for [Stars and Stripes](#), a newspaper published for the U.S. military.

Mr. Mauldin, who was awarded the [Pulitzer Prize](#) for editorial cartooning in 1945, became the cartoonist for the *45th Division News* in 1940. His cartoons were appearing in *Stars and Stripes* by 1943, and he was assigned there in 1944. Mr. Mauldin created many of the 200-plus original works featured in the collection in 1944 and 1945.

His drawings are an important part of the 45th Infantry Division Museum's eclectic collection, which focuses on the triumphs and tragedies of the infantry division known as the Thunderbirds.

Created as a [National Guard](#) unit, the 45th Infantry Division was called into service for World War II and fought as part of Gen. George S. Patton's 7th Army during the Sicilian campaign. [Patton](#) called the Fightin' 45th "one of the best, if not actually the best, division in the history of American arms."

The museum, which occupies a 1937 Works Progress Administration armory, chronicles the 45th Infantry Division's World War II engagements in the European Theater. In addition to exhibits on the American GI, World War II weapons and Nazi artifacts are on display, including items from Adolf

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Oklahoma City's 45th Infantry Division Museum features Bill Mauldin's work.

Hitler's Munich apartment, his Eagle's Nest mountain lodge above Berchtesgaden, Germany, and his Berlin bunker.

The 45th Infantry Division fought for more than 500 days in Italy, France and Germany and left its mark on American military history.

"Born at sea, baptized in blood," Patton said of the 45th Infantry Division, "your fame shall never die."

Ensuring that the Thunderbird legacy lives on, the 45th Infantry Division Museum is preserving Patton's promise, and Willie and Joe are leading the charge.

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