

# Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front

By Todd DePastino



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“A deeply felt, vivacious and wonderfully illustrated biography.” —Clancy Sigal,  
*Los Angeles Times Book Review*

A self-described “desert rat” who rocketed to fame at the age of twenty-two, Bill Mauldin used flashing black brush lines and sardonic captions to capture the world of the American combat soldier in World War II. His cartoon dogfaces, Willie and Joe, appeared in *Stars and Stripes* and hundreds of newspapers back home, bearing grim witness to life in the foxhole. We’ve never viewed war in the same way since. This lushly illustrated biography draws on private papers, correspondence, and thousands of original drawings to render a full portrait of a complex and quintessentially American genius.

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## **Bill Mauldin: A Life Up Front** By Todd DePastino Bibliography

- Rank: #952233 in eBooks
- Published on: 2009-06-15
- Released on: 2009-06-15
- Format: Kindle eBook



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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Historian DePastino (*Citizen Hobo*) eloquently memorializes cartoonist Bill Mauldin, who won fame as the leading spokesman for the American combat soldier during World War II, in this authoritative biography. Mauldin (1921–2003) grew up in Depression-era New Mexico in a dysfunctional family. After studying at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts for one year, he joined the newly mobilized 45th Infantry Division of the Arizona National Guard. Mauldin then became the *45th Division News*'s cartoonist. Deployed to North Africa in 1943, Mauldin participated in the invasions of Sicily and Italy. In 1944, while on staff at the GI newspaper *Stars and Stripes*, Mauldin created his signature characters, the weary and disheveled infantrymen Willie and Joe. Willie and Joe became soldiers' heroes and anathema to brass such as Gen. George Patton, who threatened to throw Mauldin in jail for his characters' indolence. After the war, Mauldin published bestselling cartoon collections, worked briefly as an actor, ran unsuccessfully for Congress and ended his career with two Pulitzer Prizes for editorial cartooning. Thoroughly researched and sprightly written, DePastino's balanced biography is a solid introduction to an American original. Classic Mauldin cartoons are an entertaining bonus. (Feb.)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Every critic who reviewed *A Life Up Front* welcomed this biography; apart from Mauldin's own memoir, *Back Home* (1947), it is the first full-length biography of the man. Because DePastino was the first to provide such a work, critics were inclined to be forgiving even when they found failings, such as a focus on career over personal life. The book's sympathetic subject and engaging illustrations couldn't have hurt either. While a few reviewers suspected DePastino of hero worship, they also appreciated his thorough research and his candor in describing the difficult episodes of Mauldin's later life. Given the usual glowing treatment of "The Greatest Generation" and "The Good War," the overall assessment was that *A Life Up Front* is a respectful but balanced biography.

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Review

DePastino's bio serves not only as an appreciation of Mauldin's artistry but also as a complex portrait of an iconoclast who started out as the Greatest Generation's court jester but grew to become its conscience.

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**Darrell Fowler:**

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