MILITARY CARTOONS AND DEMOCRACY
A COLLECTION OF MILITARY CARTOONS AND THEIR INFLUENCES ON DEMOCRACY

JAMES L. KNUTSON AND DAVE WILSON

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN
"If we don’t have a sense of humor, we lack a sense of perspective."

-Wayne Theibaud, Yank Magazine
INTRODUCTION
By James L. Knutson and Dave Wilson

Throughout history, humor and satire have played an important role in promoting democracy and boosting morale during combat and peace time. The military cartoons created during these times were rendered by talented enlisted artists who understood how to make light of a serious situation. These cartoonists expressed a humorous but often truthful account of the varied opinions shared by the enlisted men and women.

The cartoons in this collection may vary in style and subject matter, but they all take aim at the topical, everyday experiences from the office to the field of battle. Some of the artists in this collection would continue their careers after service and become household names such as Dik Browne (Hagar The Horrible) or Bil Keane (The Family Circus) or Wayne Theibaud, who would eventually emerge as a significant Modernist artist. Most of the information included with this project was originally printed in Yank Magazine during World War II or with special permission from various syndicates. Many of the cartoons reproduced in this collection contain historically important notations from art directors and editors that provide insight to the cartooning process.

This project is the third in a series of the visual arts exhibits promoting democracy. It is also designed to display with the researchers’ two previous war art projects, “Rendering Democracy” and “Promoting Democracy: Mobilizing a Nation Through War Posters.” The researchers of this project will interpret various cartoons on their artistic and topical content, but also analyze why some maintain their message to this day.

This project highlights the role of the visual arts in boosting morale and promoting democracy during times of peace and war.
This editorial cartoon drawn by cartoonist H.T. Webster shows South Dakota artist and illustrator Harvey Dunn sitting on the front lines with his orders as a World War I combat artist. Commissioned as one of eight war artists, Dunn was one of the most fearless with his graphic depictions of devastation and emotion. Below is an example of a Harvey Dunn oil painting from 1918 called “The Battle Of Belleau Woods,” which depicts the extreme combat situations he would place himself in for the sake of the image.

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Demonizing the enemy was a common tactic in fighting the war. As graphically illustrated by these examples, the cartoonists depict the Nazi regime as demons crazed with power and hatred.

The image below taken in the U.S. Army Center for Military History gives an idea of how the researchers compiled information.
During World War II, the editors of “Yank Magazine” played a major role in keeping up the morale of the service men by bringing them a wide range of news and images from the war and home. The following cartoons were originally commissioned by “Yank Magazine” staff artists and poked fun at the daily routine of soldiers in and out of combat, from the Atlantic to the Pacific. One of the most identifiable characters featured in the magazine was the “Sad Sack” created by Sgt. George Baker. “Sad Sack” represented the un-glamorous, un-Hollywood side of being a soldier. After the war, several of the contributing artists would emerge as award winning cartoonists, illustrators, and fine artists.
The "Sad Sack" is always on the bad-luck but predictable side of every event. As shown in the next three examples from "Yank Magazine", Sgt. George Baker opens with morale-boosting situations, but delivers the joke by showing irony in the everyday life of enlisted men.
A difficult moment for any enlisted man is that adjustment back into everyday life.
Douglas Borgstedt was a self-taught editorial cartoonist whose works appeared in popular magazines such as the "Look", "The New Yorker", and "Saturday Evening Post". During World War II, he entered the army, became the first features editor for "Yank Magazine", and drew numerous cartoons for the publication. These are a few examples that show his unique sense of humor and how it pushed limits of correctness.
"Hey, look — I'm a Sherman tank!"
Wayne Thiebaud’s art background was influenced by comic strips. After working briefly for Walt Disney studios, he entered the Army Air Force during WWII where he produced a regular comic strip. After the war he would eventually emerge a leading American Modernist artist. The following cartoons are seldom-seen examples of his early works as an illustrator.

When comparing the formal quality of Thiebaud’s cartoons with his later work, it is easy to see the unique painterly quality in his style that emerges in the 1960’s. The bold brush and ink line work found in his cartoons clearly influence the thick, clean, linear application of oil color found in his 1960’s Pop Art cake and pie paintings. Ironically, his subject matter was pulled from the lighthearted pleasures of everyday life, in an era when conflict - such as the Vietnam War, race riots, and political unrest - was the norm.

In his own words, “If we don’t have a sense of humor, we lack a sense of perspective.”

Thiebaud’s cartoon to the left reads, “You’ll have to rewrite this regulation. Why, even a child can understand it!”
Sgt. Dick (Dik) Browne, who is better known as the creator of the "Hagar the Horrible" and co-creator of "Hi and Lois" comic strips, is featured here in an early cartoon for the Army. He entered the Army working with an engineering unit and was later promoted to Staff Sergeant. During WWII, his cartoons would appear in Army and Air Force newspapers.
Bil Keane, who is best known as the creator of "The Family Circus", is shown here with these early comics for "Yank Magazine". It is interesting to note his simple sense of visually setting up the joke, clearly foreshadowing his approach with "The Family Circus."
"I just had a helluva dogfight."

- Airedale - Pilot
- Bloodhound - Medic
- Chow - Mess Sgt.
- Police - M.P.
- Setter - Goldbrick
- Pug - 1st Sgt.
- Water Spaniel - Amphibian Engineer
- Retriever - Stretcher-Bearer
- St. Bernard - Chaplain
- Wolfhound - 2nd Lieutenant
The three cartoons featured here are interesting for all the marks made by the editors and supervisors of “Yank Magazine”. In some instances, the history of the bureaucratic levels become more interesting than the cartoons.
"PT. POINDEXTER W. VANBATTENGAHRT-BOTTINGWELL, SIR!"

"SOUVENIR OR NO SOUVENIR, HALEY, TAKE THAT DAMN THING OFF!"

"5RICA"
Hollywood was significant in shaping the glamorous image of service men during WWII. For example, the cartoon to the left depicts Cary Grant being bailed out by his Master Sergeant. This use of humor breaks down the elite, egotistical status of the celebrity and drops him down to the equal status of service men. Notice how the cartoon above sarcastically illustrates that fine line between reality and celebrity, making further commentary on the acts of war.
"I AIN'T IMPERSONATIN' NOBODY.... IT'S JUST THEM GODDAMN CARRIER PIGEONS!"

"YOU DON'T INHALE, BREWER!"

"AND WHAT THE HELL IS YOUR NAME?"
Unacceptable by today’s standards, these two cartoons from WWII exemplify what was acceptable humor amongst military publications distributed to the service men.
That Guy Moran — He Certainly Shines When It Comes to Camouflage.

I Didn't Realize I'd Been Away So Long.
"That's Herman — he's permanently our prize man."

"Rickon we oughta pray?"

YANK
FAR EAST
The back cover of “Yank Magazine” Tokyo Edition, December 28, 1945 – The insert below is a detail of the text located at the bottom of the cover.

"... So I said to the general, ‘The way I figure it is, they’ll try to strike on our left flank, and if I were you, sir—I still called him sir, understand, because I was as yet a pfc—if I were you, sir, I’d pull the heavy-weapons company around here.’ Well, to make a long story short, that’s how we managed to close the gap. Mind you, you won’t find it in the history books, but it was no coincidence that I made corporal the next week. There was some talk about a Congressional Medal, but about that time I was shaking with a little number the colonel in charge of the motor pool had his eye on. One night he comes around to her place early, and I don’t take off in time because I don’t hear him coming. Well, to make a long story short, that’s how I got busted to private. I never told you, did I, about the time I inspected our outfit and there I was in the front rank? Well, he comes up just in time, because I had the germ of an idea kicking around in my head and I couldn’t get next to our own CO on account of prejudice against me from some of the junior officers, so I caught like’s eye as he was passing down the line, and I said, ‘General, the way I see it is...’"

—Sgt. Tom Flannery and Sgt. Al Hine
These three examples from the Korean conflict are interesting from an artistic viewpoint. Unlike the WWII examples, there appears to be a shift towards flat, light and dark contrast. Additionally, they appear to reference the style of newspaper political cartoons.
Even today, cartoons are still a driving force used to boost the morale of our service men and women. The example above, from the first Gulf War, acknowledges the increased presence of women in the military, unlike the sexist portrayal of women during WWII.
IF THEY'RE GONNA MAKE ME EAT THIS STUFF THEY BETTER GIVE ME MORE TOILET PAPER THAN THIS!

THIS GUY SURE COULD USE A BREATH MINT!
(Left) While conducting research at the Navy Art Collection, the researchers came across a series of impressive caricatures honoring a General’s retirement.

(Above) All of the dinner guests, including President Truman, autographed their respective caricatures.
Cartooning was used extensively when designing training posters for the Navy. The poster above is one in a series using this character to promote health and personal hygiene.

Similar to newspapers honoring sports heros, the "Navy Times" honored their best with an illustrated biography describing their heroics.
This is Hippieville, Zawiki...
What characters!
How can you tell the boys from the girls?
Easy, the boys carry bigger guitars!

What are we doing in Hippieville, Hitch?
Oh, I think it's a good idea to see how these kids live.

Dynamite! Scrap old G.I. peris! GET IT all together, man!

Like wowie, man! GET ANY BREAD... man. OUT OF SIGHT!

Cool! FREAKY! Right on. HIP! LET'S GET OUT OF HERE!

Where you SWABS been? You're LATE! AHH! IT'S GOOD TO HEAR ENGLISH BROKEN AGAIN!

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Cartoonist Hank Ketcham is best known as the creator of the popular comic strip “Dennis the Menace.” However before becoming a full time cartoonist, he was a full time navy man during WWII. Ketcham developed a naval version of the Army’s “Sad Sack”. “Half Hitch” ran in a few publications during WWII, but it did not have the title that we associate with it today. But by the early 1960’s, newspaper syndicates were looking for new, topical subject matter that dealt with the our current involvement in Vietnam. Ketcham believed the Navy was being short-changed as the newspaper comics promoted the Army Air Corps, so “Half Hitch” was re-introduced.

Working and researching closely with the Navy Department, under the guidance of Admiral Elmo Zumwalt, Ketcham accurately developed a cast of characters depicting believable situations commonly associated with the Vietnam era - best demonstrated by the “Half Hitch” example in this collection. Here we have “Hitch” and his buddy “Zawiki” walking into Hippleville on liberty. As they encounter the new bizarre language spoken by the younger “non-conformist” generation, we are also reminded in the last panel of the **$!@** conformity found in the previous generation. Cussing was acceptable, good vibes were not.

When researching for the “Rendering Democracy” project, Dave Wilson knew that Ketcham allowed the Navy Department to take over the property of the “Half Hitch” series for use where it could be effective. However, as a developing artist in junior high, Wilson began a correspondence (as shown above) with Ketcham until his passing in 2001. Ketcham’s letter also reveals how genuine his support was for emerging artists / cartoonists.

Ultimately the creation of this research project was influenced by Wilson’s correspondence.
The cartoon above was created during WWII by Pvt. Tom Creem for “Yank Magazine.” It is interesting to note how this piece is unlike previous cartoons in this collection, in which a joke is visually setup. Creem’s technique is tight and controlled, the environment is believable and subtle, and the emotion exits entirely in the text, not in the image. The “Doonesbury” strip from 2001 (following) has uncanny similarities in appearance and attitude. Both cartoons address the quiet, reflective moments in the aftermath of conflict where individuals’ differences are put aside for comfort.
DOONESBURY

by G.B. Trudeau

WELL, GUESS I BETTER GET GOING...

YEAH... SEE YA, Z.

PEACE OUT, DAWG!

SAME BACK ATCHA, CITIZEN!
Get Your Second Hand
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