

THE DEVASTATION OF WAR

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(1) The universal devastation of war is vividly portrayed in a simple "Willie and Joe" cartoon by Bill Mauldin. In the center of the picture is a large window, part of a house that has apparently been destroyed by bombs. The thick, wooden frame appears to be broken, and just a small section of outside wall remains to support it. Small individual window panes divide the larger frame into nine equal sections. Only the pane of glass in the middle section remains intact. Sharp, jagged edges, remnants of the former eight panes, surround the single undamaged window section.

(2) Standing directly behind the window is the figure of Willie, dressed in the uniform of an American G.I. His face is unshaven. He wears a camouflage helmet and his wrinkled shirt has a dark stain on the left breast pocket. A rifle is slung over his left shoulder. Willie appears to be in a daze, as if mesmerized by the destruction that surrounds him. He is staring at the single pane of glass in the window. His expression, penetrating eyes and a drooping mouth, suggests a feeling of sadness or perhaps even despair.

(3) Joe, Willie's companion, is dressed just like Willie and stands at the far right of the cartoon. His profile view and position within the drawing suggest that he is not as important a figure to the theme of the picture. The matter-of-fact expression on his face reflects none of Willie's dejection. Joe's mouth is partially open and his left arm is raised to point in the direction of the unbroken pane of glass. His simple words to his friend reveal both his awareness of the situation and its effect on Willie, "Go ahead, Willie, if ya don't bust it ya'll dream about it all night."

(4) This simple drawing is an interesting study in contrasts. The window and the two soldiers are drawn with clarity and detail. The contrast of black on white contributes to a feeling of gloom. While the strong, sturdy vertical and horizontal lines of the window frame and pane of glass suggest stability, a feeling of movement and chaos is created by the use of diagonal random lines to depict the surrounding scene. The destruction appears more impressionistic, yet one can easily identify within the rubble the broken leg of a ladder-back chair and a child's striped ball partially hidden behind cracked support beams and crumbling bricks. In this environment of tremendous devastation, the unbroken pane of glass sticks out like a "sore thumb." The irony that such a fragile item has survived such destruction gives a feeling of tension.

(5) This simple "Willie and Joe" cartoon which successfully portrays the effects of war's devastation on man and his surroundings has a timeless quality. All wars are destructive. Yet an unbroken pane of glass, the focus of this drawing, is evidence of amazing survival in an environment of total destruction. Willie and Joe have survived too. While both men are in a position to make the destruction complete, they also have the ability to salvage the remnants and rebuild.