

## What you didn't know ...

### About Strategic Communication:

For me, the defining story for today's strategic communication for national security is found inside tents and foxholes in World War II's European setting. Bill Mauldin, a young Soldier who created and drew the Willie and Joe cartoons for Stars and Stripes Newspaper, entered Lieutenant General George Patton's tent to hear one side of the argument. "He chewed me out," Mauldin told me in 1984 as he remembered the experience. "He did not think my cartoons belonged in the newspaper." Mauldin went on to explain that the upset Patton felt portrayals of the nation's Soldiers should show the spit-and-polish of professionalism. "He had his stars and I had General Dwight Eisenhower," Mauldin said referring to the winning side of the argument.

I think the reason Mauldin had Eisenhower's support for foxhole realism in the published cartoons was that Eisenhower knew that these provided a way for people to understand war. General officers plan and execute grand strategies and, for that, they are remembered in the history books. Willie and Joe, though, reached millions of people and were able to touch their hearts by telling the personal story of the men who executed the small pieces of those war strategies. Mauldin's gift for drawing the everyday personal wins and losses, trials and tribulations probably communicated more accurately and effectively about that war than did all the press releases put out by the military. Mauldin took the individual Soldier who actually fought and made him a strategic communicator that the common Joe could understand and believe.

Eisenhower understood that aspect of communications. I am not sure Patton understood in the same way.

The reason Mauldin's story of Patton and Eisenhower resonates today is that these two generals represent, in a rather broad way, the opposing viewpoints on communication that still exist.

On the seemingly Patton side, you have the mentality that if the leader says it, it must be true and therefore people must believe it. In the simplest scenario, consider a platoon leader asked about the caliber of troops under his or her command. My bet is the answer will run along the lines of: "These are the best Soldiers in the Army." While this may be human nature to say, just these words alone do not make those Soldiers the best. Without visible signs that demonstrate and validate the accuracy of the comment, the words may communicate more an unsaid devotion of the leader to his or her troops than reality. But the words also open the door to the unspoken possibility that the leader is concerned more about how it all reflects upon himself or herself than being a supportable claim.

And it is here that the Eisenhower side comes in with an understanding that there's a need for creating grander contexts in communication — more than just making out-of-the-blue, wishful statements. Strategic communication in our free-press and free-speech world is like that. The situation, environment, facts, analysis and opinion all have a way of making things credible in a person's mind



as he or she tries to make sense of conflicting information. The highest and most desired result of strategic communications is a fully informed, involved public drawing its own independent conclusions from all sorts of information. Official communications don't always accomplish the goal because many people, especially today, do not trust official communications alone. During World War II, the public had a different view of their officials and were more willing to accept what the official word was coming out of the various government departments. With newspaper and radio as the primary media, however, the public was starved for images of what "our boys" were going through. Mauldin's cartoons filled that bill. He spoke to the attitudes and plight of the common Soldier with an eloquence and simplicity that no other media could accomplish. His art was larger than Willie and Joe. It was even larger than the Eisenhowers and Pattons and the Bradleys. It was taken in by the American public and made their own. This country adopted Willie and Joe as their own sons, brothers, fathers and uncles. Willie and Joe made the war real and human and, in a way, private for everyone who saw the cartoons.



This was Mauldin's true success — and it was Eisenhower's communication wisdom in recognizing this. In Willie and Joe, Mauldin found Everyman and thrust him onto the stage of greatness. Mauldin's Willie and Joe humanized a huge dehumanizing event. Through his art, Mauldin brought the war home and gave people a reason to believe in it and to own it, support it and believe in it. Willie and Joe kept it real.

Strategic communications is not a narrow path. It is a broad avenue of many lanes, all leading to the same end point. In this day and age of electronic communications, it is harder and harder to control what goes out to the public like it was in World War II when information was censored. I doubt Americans like this form of censorship anyway. They want news and facts and they will take them where they can find them.

Today, the human capital — the Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines who are tromping the streets of Faluja or riding in convoys through the IED strewn streets of Baghdad — are the best storytellers because people can identify with them so easily. They are the kids down the street or the nephews or nieces who went off to join the Army to learn a skill. They are the kids who played little league and who led cheers at their high schools. They are the career service men and women and they are those who enlisted to have an adventure and get a big bonus for college.

Today's bloggers and others are doing the same as Mauldin. These simple photos and stories have opened a national debate on not just how we treat our prisoners and fight wars, but who we are as a people. The goal of strategic communications is to encourage people to take ownership of an event or idea and to participate in the discussion. So the question is not whether or not it's a good idea that this information gets out, but rather how leaders react. With today's sophisticated citizenry, this is no longer the province of sloganism or bumper-sticker logic. Strategic communications need to be, first, planned with the audience in mind and second, managed when they are discovered. When a communicational path resonates with the public, it needs to be nurtured, fed, watered and given air and sunlight to grow. And for that, communications need to be real.

Strategic communications for the Army's Space efforts need to be able to show the technical, tactical and personal sides of the effort. Space is different from the infantry. However, it plays a constant supporting role to infantry operations. In fact, it supports all aspects of land warfare. The story, then, is that the technology supports the tactical-strategic side of operations and it is engaged in by human beings. Each element has a story to tell. Each element has its unique history and legends and myths. I believe that people who believe in our Space products are the best ones to tell the story. Whether they are providers of products or users, their stories are the stories of the success of Space in the military. Finally, each of these stories needs to be told in such a way that Willie and Joe would understand.

That's street-level talk.

— Michael L. Howard  
Editor in Chief