MASTER SGT. HALF-MAST

60 YEARS OF MAINTENANCE LEADERSHIP

By Jonathan W. Pierce
PS Magazine

The very real Audie Murphy and the idealized, but mythical, Sgt. Morales are names well known among the Army's NCO Corps. Both have inspired other NCOs to achieve excellence in leadership and performance, and to seek fellowship among the Army's elite sergeants. They are worthy of emulation.

Sergeants have also been captured in the cartoon art of DC Comics' Master Sgt. Frank Rock of the World War II era and Mort Walker's Sgt. 1st Class Orville P. Snorkel from the "Beetle Bailey" comic strips. No one can deny that Sgt. Rock took care of his men, while Sgt. 1st Class Snorkle takes care of Pvt. Bailey in some rather humorous and unorthodox ways.

Another, less-known sergeant has been the Army's maintenance leader since World War II. Master Sgt. Half-Mast McCanick, a cartoon character, has provided maintenance and supply expertise for Soldiers who use or maintain the Army's vehicles, weapons, equipment and gear. McCanick first appeared in *Army Motors*, an Ordnance Corps publication during World War II.

Half-Mast's original image wasn't exactly complimentary. It took a young Cpl. Will Eisner to straighten Half-Mast out. Eisner's famous comic strip, "The Spirit," was published in newspapers around the country, and he contributed art to the post newspaper at Aberdeen Proving Ground, Md. The Ordnance Corps was quick to see that his abilities could enhance the appearance of *Army Motors*.

Eisner used Half-Mast, Cpl. Connie Rodd, and Pvts. Joe Dope and Fogsnoff to illustrate and enhance the magazine's content. And, troops responded; monthly subscriptions grew to more than 1.5 million copies.

At the close of the war, Army Motors, its cast of cartoon characters and then-Chief Warrant Officer Will Eisner were mustered out.

Unfortunately, during the next five years, Army equipment stocks were dispersed, and maintenance wasn't all that it could have been. With the coming of the conflict in Korea, the Army faced a harsh real-

PS MAGAZINE'S 60TH ANNIVERSARY

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ity: Troops and equipment weren't ready. Soldiers complained that advances in technology had made old equipment outdated, and new, rapidly fielded equipment sometimes had quirks and didn't always come with manuals, tools or replacement parts.

Officials in the Army Field Forces command remembered *Army Motors* magazine and asked the Ordnance Corps to bring it back. Eisner was invited to return as a contract artist. For the next 21 years, one of the leading comic book artists of the nation was also the artist and designer of what was dubbed *PS Magazine*.

Eisner recalled Half-Mast to active duty and Connie Rodd returned as an Army civilian employee. They remain with the magazine today. Dope and Fogsnoff also returned, but by 1957, they had left the service. Others have come and many have gone from the *PS* pages, but Half-Mast has remained the constant backbone of the magazine, providing leadership and technical competence throughout the 60-year run of the publication.

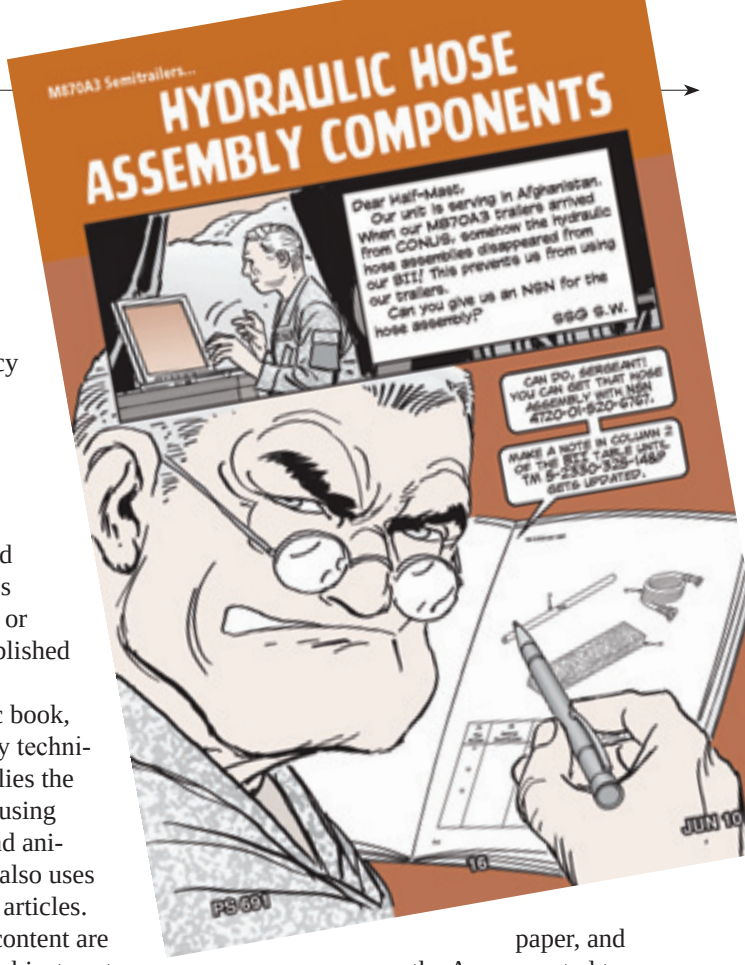
Half-Mast presents an experienced, wise persona and isn't afraid to ask Soldiers straight questions such as, "Would you trust your life, right now, on the condition of your equipment?"

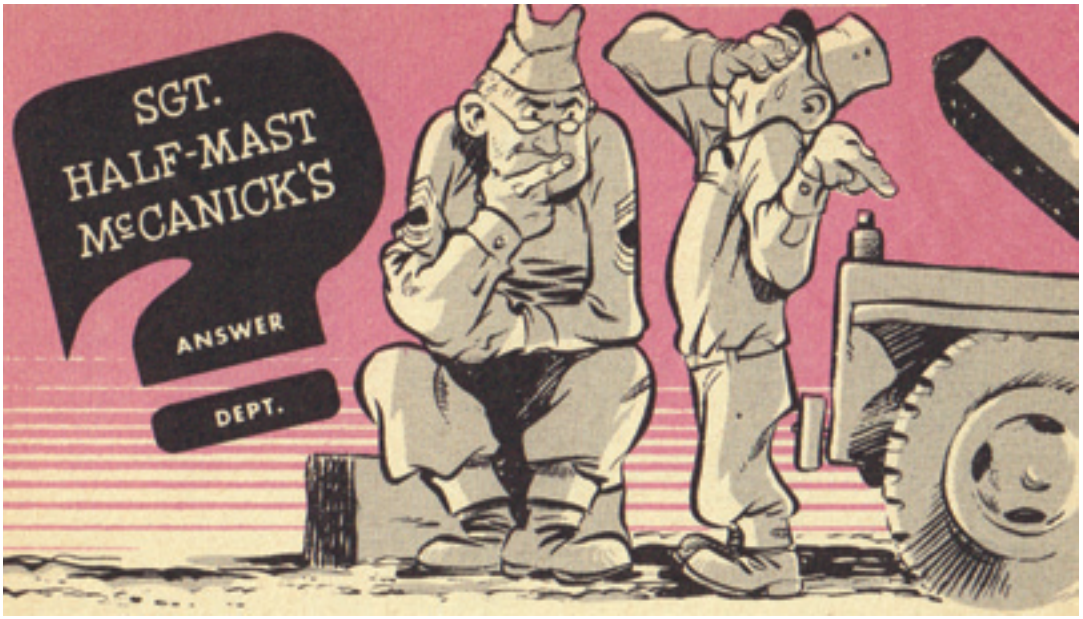
Half-Mast is also easily approachable. Each year he receives 2,000 to 3,000 questions about maintenance and supply issues from Soldiers and DA civilians and tries to answer each one. He and the staff consult technical manuals and other official Army publications, as well as subject-matter experts at Army headquarters, Army Materiel Command and its subordinate commands, other Army commands, and the Defense Logistics Agency to provide the best answers possible.

Like any good leader, Half-Mast is also open to hearing Soldier suggestions for improving equipment and maintenance. Those that pass the muster of the equipment or procedure proponent are published in the magazine.

PS Magazine is a comic book, but it is also an official Army technical bulletin. Although it applies the techniques of sequential art using characters like Half-Mast and animated talking equipment, it also uses technical art to illustrate the articles. Illustrations and the article content are reviewed and approved by subject-matter experts at the appropriate proponent command or activity. Because of this approval process, unit commanders can have Soldiers implement what is printed in *PS Magazine* on the same basis as any other technical manual or bulletin.

And yes, Half-Mast has often heard the question, "Why is it *PS Magazine* and not *PM Magazine*?" When the magazine was being named in early 1951, *PM* was the name of a New York City daily newspaper, and the Army wanted to avoid the appearance of any connection. Because one of the purposes of the new magazine was to act as a "postscript" to information published in technical manuals and regulations, *PS* seemed an obvious choice. However, Half-Mast notes that even that is only partly right, because the "magazine" isn't really a magazine at all. It's officially Army Technical Bulletin 43-PS-series: *PS, The Preventive Maintenance Monthly*.





Regardless of its name or its comics-style art, Soldiers shouldn't be ignorant of what this little comic book offers. It's packed with timely, up-to-date information that will help units maintain high equipment-readiness rates and, in the process, help protect Soldiers from equipment defects and outdated maintenance procedures.

Jonathan W. Pierce, a retired master sergeant, is the acting editor of PS Magazine, *a part of the Logistics Support Activity at U.S. Army Materiel Command, Redstone Arsenal, Ala.*