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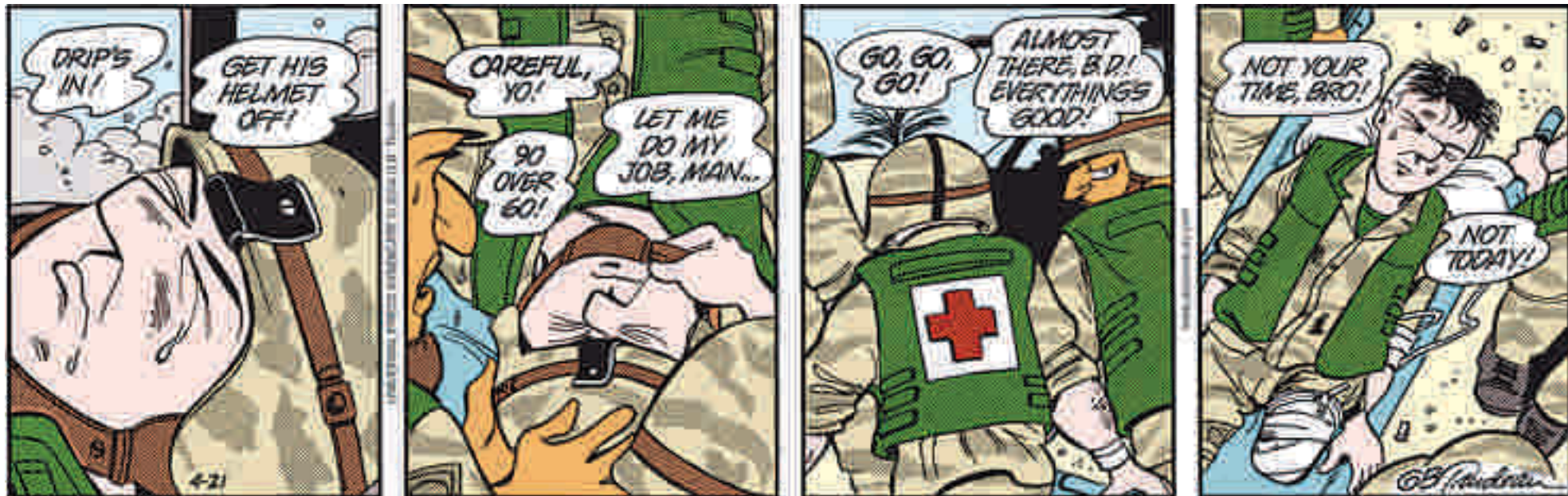
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HE'S A WRESTLING
MONK IN THE GOOFY
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Sketches of humanity

'Doonesbury' creator Garry Trudeau illustrates troops' hearts and souls

By Kelly Kennedy
TIMES STAFF WRITER

When Garry Trudeau's "Doonesbury" debuted in 1970, it featured girls, football and a sprinkling of war protesters.

Since then, the strip has emerged into a political force that has mocked every administration and president from Nixon to Clinton to Bush.

The targets of Trudeau's scorn have been rendered as inanimate objects — President Bush as a bumbling cowboy hat, President Clinton as a floating waffle and California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger as a giant hand — "der gropenführer."

Trudeau's detractors have branded him as an unreconstructed liberal with a political agenda. But although Trudeau may turn political figures into caricatures, the troops he portrays stay human.

From the time "B.D." first made the scene in strip No. 1 as a college quarterback, he never removed his football helmet,

saying his ears stuck out.

In 2004, B.D. went to war as a National Guardsman wearing a Kevlar helmet — and lost a leg in combat. Then, the helmet came off and he began baring his thoughts about the things he had seen and what he was feeling. The strips are filled with dark humor, emotional meetings with former platoon buddies and the new camaraderie that evolves among troops facing the same hurdles.

Last year, Trudeau gathered the B.D. material into a book, "The Long Road Home: One Step at a Time." All proceeds went to Fisher House, which provides housing for families while service members receive treatment at Walter Reed Army Medical Center in Washington, D.C., and other major military medical centers.

A sequel, "The War Within: One More Step at a Time," will be published in August, with proceeds going to Fisher House.

The troops who have met him or read his book say he captures the way they feel — that he "gets it" — even if they don't always agree

with his politics. In a wide-ranging e-mail interview with *Army Times*, Trudeau discussed his experiences at Walter Reed, his decision to send B.D. to war, his recommended reading for troops and more:

Q How much time did you spend at Walter Reed?

A I've been there a half-dozen or so times. Initially, I went in under USO [United Service Organizations] auspices, presumably because no one could decide whether I was an entertainer or a journalist. The advantage, of course, is that visits are pre-screened and you're not imposing on anyone who'd prefer not to see you.

But now my occasional visits are unstructured and low-key. I spend roughly half the time talking to doctors and therapists, the rest with wounded soldiers. I also try to visit families at Fisher House and go to the Friday night dinners that Fran O'Brien's Steak house hosts gratis for outpatient amputees. [Note: Fran O'Brien's is closed until the owners find a new location after leaving The Capitol Hilton.]

Q Do you still visit Walter Reed?

A Yes. Not as often as I'd like, as the story arc has shifted to vet

GARRY TRUDEAU



COURTESY OF GARRY TRUDEAU

Age: 57.
Home: New York City.
Education: Yale, bachelor's degree and master's degree in graphic design. Attended with George W. Bush, Howard Dean and Charlie Pillsbury, a former Green Party congressional candidate and inspiration for "Mike Doonesbury."

Awards: Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning, 1975; Emmy for "Tanner '88" HBO series; named a fellow at the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, 1993; and Ben & Jerry's "Doonesbury" ice cream (a sorbet made with raspberries and blueberries) named for his strip.
Personal: Married to Jane Pauley, three children

centers, so that's my priority at the moment. I'm thinking that eventually B.D. may go back to Walter Reed as a peer visitor, which will allow me to tell stories about soldiers with traumatic brain injuries and other sorts of wounds. I took the peer-visitor training course at the hospital just to see what was involved. There were role-playing exercises involved, and I'm sure the other participants found my performance as an amputee ludicrous, but everyone was kind. And I passed the test. Or so they told me.

Q Why did you go the first time? Did somebody suggest it, or did you see a news story, or was it something you just wondered about?

A [Defense Department] public affairs contacted me shortly after the story line began and asked if there was any way the Pentagon could assist. I think they were so concerned I'd screw it up that they concluded it might go better if they offered me complete access. It reminded me

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