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THE **FOUR** COLORS



# COMIC BOOK HISTORY OF COMICS

USA 1942-1947



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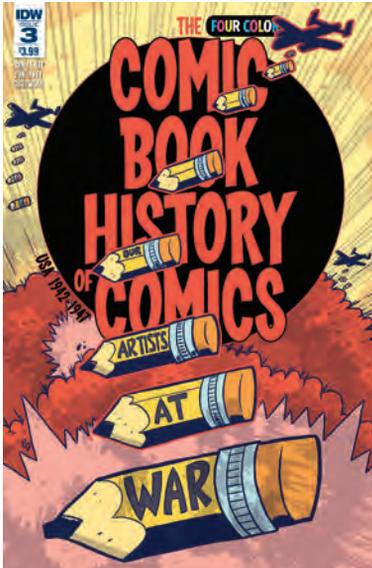
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# Our ARTISTS at WAR!

PERHAPS UNSURPRISINGLY, THE NAZIS WERE NOT BIG FANS OF AMERICAN COMICS.

IN 1940, THE SS NEWSPAPER DAS SCHWARZE KORPS DENOUNCED "THE INVENTIVE ISRAELITE" JERRY SIEGEL, DECLARING "THE DARING DEEDS OF SUPERMAN ARE THOSE OF A COLORADO BEETLE"...

...THEREBY COMPARING THE MAN OF STEEL TO AN INSIDIOUS CROP-DESTROYING PEST THAT THIRD REICH PROPAGANDA CLAIMED THE ALLIES HAD AIREDROPPED ONTO GERMAN FIELDS.



AFTER PEARL HARBOR, DC EDITORS CHOSE NOT TO HAVE SUPERMAN FIGHT THE WAR IN COMICS STORIES SO AS TO NOT CHEAPEN AMERICAN TROOPS' REAL-LIFE HEROICS.

COMIC CREATORS DIDN'T HAVE THE SAME RECOURSE. THEY WERE THE IDEAL DRAFTABLE AGE. FORTUNATELY FOR MANY, THE ARMED FORCES REALIZED THAT THEIR ARTISTIC SKILLS COULD BE PUT TO BETTER USE STATESIDE.



JOE SIMON SPENT THE WAR IN THE "COMBAT ART CORPS" DOWN THE STREET FROM THE U.S. CAPITOL, WHERE PAINTINGS, COMMERCIAL ART, AND, LATER, COMICS WERE PRODUCED FOR PR AND RECRUITMENT PURPOSES.



STAN LEE FOUND HIMSELF ASSIGNED TO THE ARMY'S TRAINING FILM DIVISION, WHERE HE SERVED WITH SUCH LUMINARIES AS DIRECTOR FRANK CAPRA AND GREAT NEW YORKER CARTOONIST CHARLES ADDAMS.

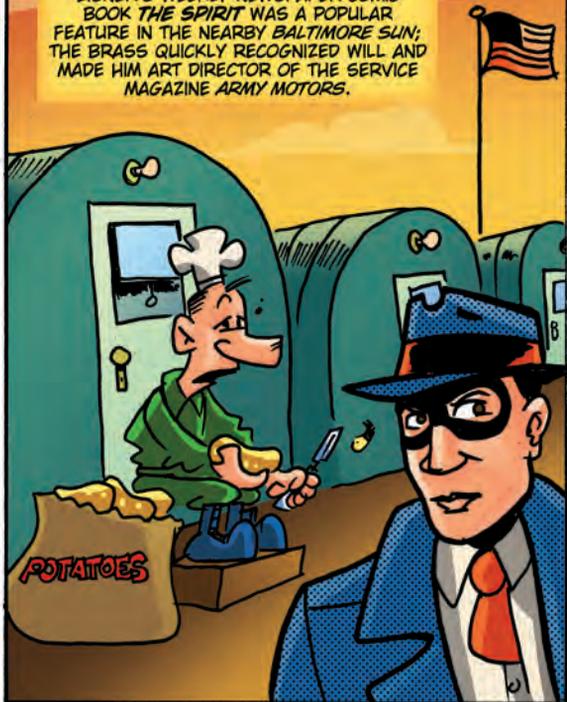
LEE WROTE SHORT FILMS, POSTERS AND PAMPHLETS ON SUCH THRILLING TOPICS AS ARMY FINANCE AND VENEREAL DISEASE.



"VD? Not me!"

WILL EISNER WOUND UP AT THE ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT'S ABERDEEN PROVING GROUND IN MARYLAND.

EISNER'S WEEKLY NEWSPAPER COMIC BOOK *THE SPIRIT* WAS A POPULAR FEATURE IN THE NEARBY BALTIMORE SUN; THE BRASS QUICKLY RECOGNIZED WILL AND MADE HIM ART DIRECTOR OF THE SERVICE MAGAZINE *ARMY MOTORS*.



*ARMY MOTORS* WAS A KEY PART OF ORDNANCE'S ON-GOING EFFORTS TO INURE THE CONCEPT OF PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE INTO THE GI -- THE IDEA THAT KEEPING ONE'S WEAPONS AND EQUIPMENT IN GOOD CONDITION BEFORE THEY BROKE WAS MOST EFFICIENT AND SAFEST.



BUT, PRE-EISNER, IT WAS, LIKE MOST ARMY PUBLICATIONS, ANTISEPTIC, JARGON-RIDDEN AND BORING.

EISNER CONVINCED HIS SUPERIORS TO LET HIM USE COMICS TO TEACH PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE WITH HUMOR AND PLAIN LANGUAGE, THUS IMPROVING SOLDIERS' COMPREHENSION AND RETENTION OF THE MATERIAL.

UP UNTIL THIS POINT, THE MILITARY HAD DEEMED COMICS FIT ONLY FOR PROPAGANDA-- SUCH AS "HOW TO SPOT A JAP," WHICH THE ARMY COMMISSIONED FROM TERRY AND THE PIRATES CARTOONIST MILTON CANIFF.

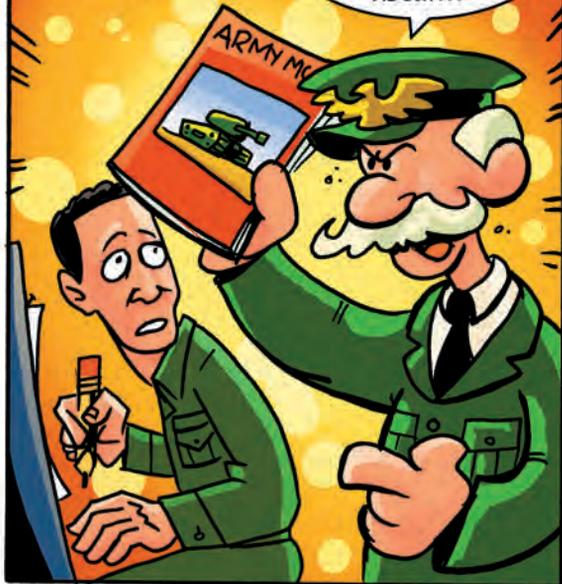
"How to Spot a Jap"



PREDICTABLY, EISNER RAN UP AGAINST THE HIGHER-UPS' RESISTANCE TO ANYTHING THAT DEVIATED FROM PREVIOUSLY ESTABLISHED PROCEDURE.

WHAT IS THIS POPPYCOCK? ACCIDENT PREVENTION IS SERIOUS BUSINESS! YOU CAN'T USE SILLY DRAWINGS TO PROMOTE IT!

AND EVEN WORSE -- IN YOUR STRIPS YOU MOCK SUPERIOR OFFICERS BY INSINUATING WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT!!!



THE ARMY DEMANDED AN *EFFICIENCY TEST* BETWEEN THE STANDARD MANUALS AND EISNER'S. THEY SOON DISCOVERED THAT SOLDIERS UNDERSTOOD AND, MORE IMPORTANTLY, *RETAINED* THE INFORMATION PRESENTED IN THE *COMICS* FAR, FAR BETTER.

with comics



without comics



AS BIOGRAPHER BOB ANDELMAN WRITES, "THE RESULTS REINFORCED WHAT EISNER BELIEVED TO BE CHARACTERISTIC OF THE COMIC STRIP:

"THE *EASE* WITH WHICH *IMAGES* DEMONSTRATED *PROCESS*."

(THIS IS THE MAN, AFTER ALL, WHO, NEARLY FOUR DECADES LATER, WOULD COIN THE PHRASE "*SEQUENTIAL ART*.")

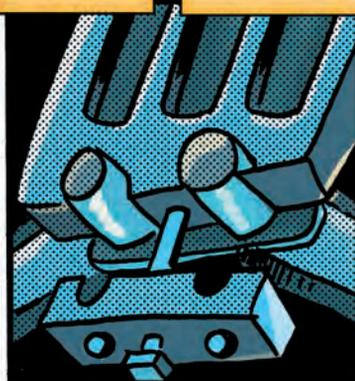


ALSO, UNLIKE EVEN *PHOTOS*, WHICH ARE CONSTRAINED BY WHAT IS *PHYSICALLY PHOTOGRAPHABLE*, THE FLEXIBILITY OF COMICS' *DRAWN* IMAGES ALLOWED EISNER TO DEMONSTRATE A TECHNICALLY *COMPLEX TASK* --LIKE REMOVING *VOLUTE SPRINGS* FROM A *TANK* -- FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE *REPAIRMAN*.

COMIC ART *DRAW*S THE *READER* *INTO* THE *SEQUENCE*, *MAKES* HER A *PART* OF IT, *STEP* BY *STEP*!

*ARMY MOTORS* (AND ITS SUCCESSOR, *PS: THE PREVENTIVE MAINTENANCE MONTHLY*) PROVED SUCH A SUCCESS WITH OFFICER AND GRUNT ALIKE THAT EISNER CONTINUED TO BE INVOLVED IN ITS ART DIRECTION WELL AFTER THE WAR -- UNTIL 1971, IN FACT!

SO IF *WILL EISNER* WAS THE *CARTOONIST* WHO MOST HELPED THE *PENTAGON*...



...THE CARTOONIST MOST HELPED BY THE PENTAGON WAS UNDOUBTEDLY WALT DISNEY.

WAIT-!

AFTER THE TRIUMPH OF SNOW WHITE, DISNEY HAD PRODUCED MOSTLY FLOPS, INCLUDING PINOCCHIO (1940) AND BAMBI (1942).

IN 1941, THE STUDIO HAD SUFFERED THROUGH A DEBILITATING LABOR STRIKE EVEN MORE RANCOROUS THAN THE ONE AT FLEISCHER IN '37.

WALT DENOUNCED ORGANIZERS AS COMMUNISTS AND TRIED TO HAVE THE FBI ARREST THEM.

AS WITH FLEISCHER, THE GOVERNMENT HAD TO MEDIATE A RESOLUTION. LAYOFFS FOLLOWED, AND THE STUDIO SHUT DOWN, SAVE FOR PRODUCTION ON ITS NEXT FEATURE (CUMBO) AND THE SYNDICATED MICKEY MOUSE COMIC STRIP.

"THERE HE IS--"

ARE WE MEN OR MICE?

NO STRIKES ON ME!

NO WISE GUYS

"--THE MAN WHO BELIEVES IN BROTHERHOOD FOR EVERYBODY BUT HIMSELF!"

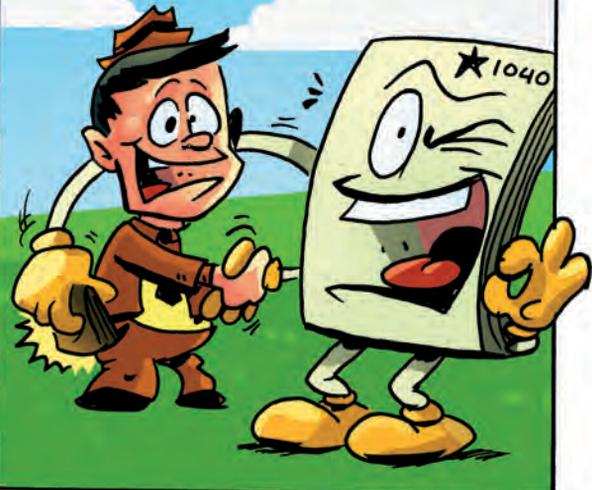
MANY ANIMATORS, TURNED OFF BY THE POST-STRIKE ATMOSPHERE, LEFT VOLUNTARILY, INCLUDING ARTIST WALT KELLY.

DISNEY HIMSELF RECOMMENDED KELLY TO DELL COMICS; THERE WALT CREATED A TRUE RARITY -- AN ORIGINAL COMIC BOOK FEATURE THAT BECAME A MORE POPULAR NEWSPAPER STRIP -- POGO THE POSSUM, WHICH FIRST APPEARED IN DELL'S ANIMAL COMICS.

DESPERATE TO TURN A PROFIT BY THE TIME THE U.S. ENTERED WWII, WALT SECURED CONTRACTS FOR A VARIETY OF ANIMATED INDUSTRIAL, TRAINING AND PROPAGANDA FILMS FROM THE ARMED SERVICES AND THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.

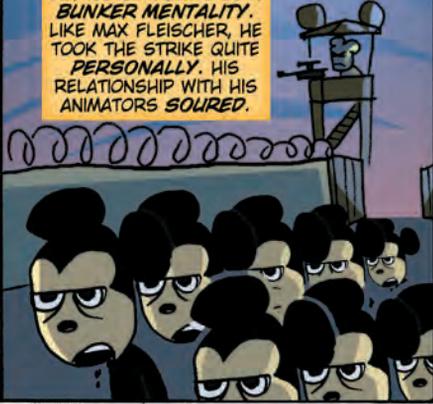
BY THE END OF 1942, SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE STUDIO'S OUTPUT WAS FOR THE FEDS! THE WAR WAS THE ONLY THING KEEPING DISNEY AFLOAT!

(HIS INAUGURAL GOVERNMENT EFFORT, "THE NEW SPIRIT," FEATURED ANIMATED DESK OBJECTS HELPING DONALD DUCK PAY HIS FEDERAL INCOME TAXES.)



THE WAR DEPARTMENT CLASSIFIED DISNEY STUDIOS A **STRATEGIC DEFENSE INDUSTRY**, REQUIRING ALL EMPLOYEES TO BE **FINGER-PRINTED** AND CARRY **ORANGE ID BADGES**.

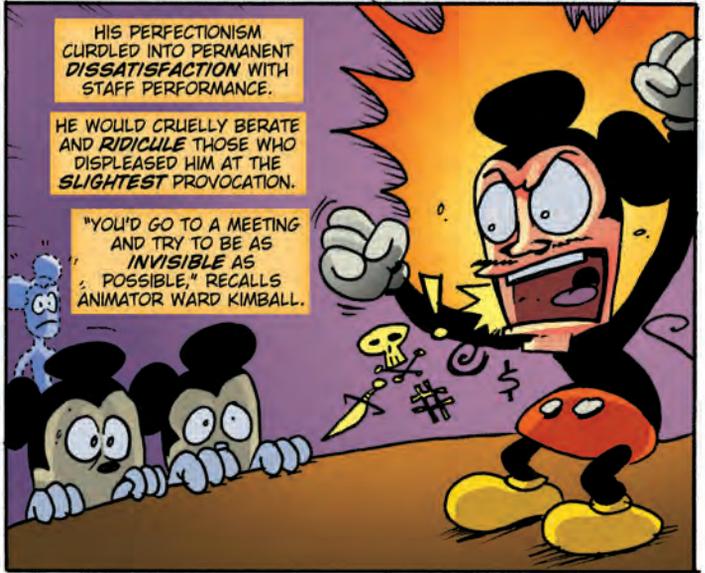
THE HEIGHTENED SECURITY INADVERTENTLY REFLECTED WALT'S OWN **BUNKER MENTALITY**. LIKE MAX FLEISCHER, HE TOOK THE STRIKE QUITE **PERSONALLY**. HIS RELATIONSHIP WITH HIS ANIMATORS **SOURD**.



HIS PERFECTIONISM CURDLED INTO PERMANENT **DISSATISFACTION** WITH STAFF PERFORMANCE.

HE WOULD CRUELLY BERATE AND **RIDICULE** THOSE WHO DISPLEASED HIM AT THE **SLIGHTEST** PROVOCATION.

"YOU'D GO TO A MEETING AND TRY TO BE AS **INVISIBLE** AS POSSIBLE," RECALLS ANIMATOR WARD KIMBALL.



ONE STUDIO WRITER WAS SO **TERRIFIED** OF WALT SHE WOULD **THROW UP** AFTER EVERY PRESENTATION SHE GAVE TO HIM!

EMPLOYEES **AVOIDED** CO-WORKERS KNOWN TO HAVE FALLEN OUT OF FAVOR WITH WALT AS IF THEY WERE **LEPERS**.

**BLEEEAAAUGGH!!**



DISNEY HAD A PENCHANT FOR CREEPING AROUND THE STUDIO AT **NIGHT**, EXAMINING ARTISTS' WORK AFTER HOURS.

WHEN AN ANIMATOR FOUND A **CHESTERFIELD** BUTT IN HIS ASHTRAY IN THE MORNING, HE KNEW THE BOSS HAD **INSPECTED** HIS WORK.



WALT GREW TO **DESPISE** THE PROPAGANDA THE GOVERNMENT HIRED HIM TO MAKE; IN FACT, HE WAS LOSING INTEREST IN **MOVIE** MAKING ALTOGETHER.

INCREASINGLY, HIS THOUGHTS WERE DOMINATED BY THE CREATION OF A **THREE-DIMENSIONAL** WORLD, NOT A FILM OR EVEN A STORY, BUT A **CARTOON** MADE **REAL**, IN CONCRETE AND STEEL...

...A **FANTASYLAND** OVER WHICH WALT DISNEY WOULD HAVE **TOTAL CONTROL**.

