Not Just for Kids: Animation Grows Up During World War II

Senior Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Arts and Sciences
Brandeis University

Undergraduate Program in American Studies
Professor Thomas Doherty, Advisor

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts

By
Ilana Miriam Kruger

May 2016

Copyright by
Ilana Kruger
Acknowledgements

They say it takes a village to raise a child, but I think that the same phrase can be applied to writing a thesis. I need to sincerely thank everyone who has helped in one way or another in the past year. Life does not stop for a thesis, but my friends and family were patient and understanding when I needed to watch footage, finish a chapter, or edit something for the tenth time.

First, I need to thank my advisor and professor, Thomas Doherty, for encouraging this project even before I knew what I wanted to research and for providing guidance throughout this process.

I am especially indebted to my fellow thesis writers and other friends: Arielle Keller, Carolyn Michener, Elana Horowitz, Rebecca Schulz, Linda Maleh, Lianne Gross, Louise Cafiero, Tara Gordon, Wenli Bao, Rachel Dobkin and especially Noah Coolidge, for oddly-timed meals and snack runs, library sessions, late-night encouragement, and general support and camaraderie.

To my Student-Scholar Partner at the Brandeis Women’s Studies Research Center, Dr. Ruth Nemzoff, for all of her advice, guidance, friendship, and collaboration over the past three years.

To my housemates, Rebecca Sternberg, Polina Dolgopolskaia, Brittany Nachamie, and Eva Wildavsky, for dealing with me in my tired state and listening to my rants on everything from Donald Duck and the Army to gluten-free bread. To my long-distance support system, Raizy Mantell, Devorah Mahpour, Miriam Jacobson, Temima Furst, and Tova Kurlantzick for always being there for me, even when they’re back in Jersey.

To my family for supporting my obsession with animation. My mother, Jennifer, gets the credit for introducing me to Disney at the age of two with Robin Hood. My stepfather, Yosef, sparked my interest in history, especially with the stories of his father Norvin’s service during the war. To my father, Yaakov, stepmother, Chaya, and siblings Tziril and Avraham, as well as all of my aunts, uncles, and cousins for their endless hugs and caring. Last but certainly not least, to my Nana, Sandra Cate, for being way cooler than your nana will ever be.
# Not Just for Kids: Animation Grows Up During World War II

## Table of Contents

**Introduction** – The Versatility and Potential of Animation  
4

**Chapter One** – A Brief History of Animation  
7

**Chapter Two** – All Fouled Up? Appealing to GIs with *Private Snafu*  
15

**Chapter Three** – Donald Enlists: Disney’s Entertainment and Propaganda Cartoons  
37

**Chapter Four** – Beyond Shorts: Disney’s Feature-Length and Training Films  
62

**Chapter Five** – Capra Discovers Animation  
85

**Conclusion** – Postwar Legacy: Animation’s Newfound Maturity  
104

**Bibliography**  
117
Introduction: The Versatility and Potential of Animation

Some might refer to animation as “kids’ stuff.” However, a look at box office numbers today shows the draw that animation has in the overall film market. In the age of Pixar, it is hard to imagine a time when animation was not the full-fledged industry that it is today. Animated hits such as Disney’s Lion King or Frozen, the latter of which grossed around $400 million in 2013, bring in as much or more money than their live-action counterparts. This is true both in the United States and in the international film market. As I have found in my research, this was not always the case. Animation developed alongside traditional cinema, but was not always given the same stature as live-action film.

Animation can and has been used to educate, inform, and even indoctrinate audiences. Most of the time, however, popular animated films are intended for purely entertainment purposes. Even when this is the case, animation can often tell a story in ways that live-action film cannot. Special effects aside, animation can project different versions of our world or create new worlds entirely. This is perhaps why animation became pigeonholed as simply a way to entertain. While non-animation buffs may not appreciate the complex aesthetics of animation, the medium has become a respected art form. This was not so during the early days of animation, in the 1920s and 30s. How, then, has animation become as widely utilized as it is today, and when exactly did this change occur?

I have found that animation grew up during World War II. The transition was not instantaneous; rather, there are vast differences between the usage and content of animation pre- and post-war. When the war hit, animation was still widely regarded as a medium solely for entertainment. During the war, it became apparent that animation could be used for a wider range of purposes, from educating soldiers to teaching those on the home front about the war overseas.
The relatively new medium, formerly focused on family-friendly entertainment, could now be produced for adults. Animation truly hit its stride during the war, as its use expanded well beyond entertainment. This set the foundation for animation to become the respected medium that it is today.

I have always been an avid animation fan, and was familiar with some of the Disney Studio’s World War II-era work, but with this thesis I set out to study animation during the war in a more systematic way. My research goals were to find connections between the different uses of animation and determine how the medium was utilized to aid the United States’ war efforts. I tried to analyze as many examples of animation as possible, in order to obtain a broader view of how the medium was used during the war. I also examined film reviews and articles from the wartime period in order to trace the progression of animation during the war.

I have explored several forms of animation: short films, feature length films, and animated sequences in documentaries. This thesis will focus on prime examples of each type of film. First, I will present an analysis of the Private Snafu films (1943-1945), followed by two chapters on the Disney studio’s many wartime contributions. I will then report on Frank Capra’s usage of animation in his wartime documentaries and newsreel packages. Finally, I will explore the legacies of these films and how animation continued to evolve as an educational and informational medium after the war.

Animation provided a new way to communicate with audiences, both military and civilian. Live-action film was much more limited in what it could depict. With animation, artists had the freedom to draw the world the way they saw fit. Studio heads were faced with the immense task of transmitting vital information through film. Directors such as Capra found that an animated training film could be more effective than a live-action one. Animation was
therefore able to fill the gap left by dry training films and become a middle ground solution. Many animated shorts then followed in the vein of Capra’s films, combining entertainment with fact. The animated shorts weren’t dull like training films, yet they were not as silly as typical cartoon fair.

Through my research I realized that studios during the war found a solution to a problem that they didn’t necessarily know existed. They simply saw animation as a means to an end, without any intention of creating a legacy. The progress in animation during the war would have been much slower if the war hadn’t provided the impetus. Many of the films I have studied fall into a grey area between Hollywood popcorn films and training films or documentaries. These studios were creating new genres, even if they did not realize it at the time. They were simply finding viable solutions to wartime problems. A documentary that blends multiple types of footage like Capra did or a cartoon that utilizes popular characters to convey a message are both common today. The prevalence of these techniques is a testament to the effectiveness of the animation in the wartime films.

Animation has become a staple in both the entertainment and educational world. World War II provided an opportunity for animation studios to push the limits of what their medium could accomplish. Animation filled the unique need for a way to both engage audiences and educate them, whether they were typical citizens in a movie theater or soldiers on the front lines. Once the window was opened, animation only continued to evolve after the war.
Chapter One: A Brief History of Animation

In order to understand how animation was used during the war, it is important to look at how the medium developed. Early hand-drawn animation existed even before the development of cinema, as early as the 1880’s in France. This marked the beginning of animation as an industry, and it would take time for it to be truly considered a worthy art form. As Paul Wells writes in the introduction to his book *Understanding Animation*, the field held “an apparently less credible position as a second cousin to mainstream cinema.”¹ This began to change when future heavyweight Walt Disney released “Steamboat Willie” in 1928, and both film professionals and the public began paying attention.

Before this, as with the beginning of live-action film, artists experimented with test pictures, focusing more on the medium itself than what they were depicting. Early animation studio Laugh-O-Gram gave animators Disney and U.B. Iwerks the chance to utilize this new technology in entertaining ways, as early as 1922. These animation pioneers began incorporating jokes and gags into their animated shorts that were similar to those found in comic strips. The focus in these early shorts was still on entertaining rather than telling a story, but soon the drawings then became more intricate, and innovations in color and sound technologies helped give the shorts more life. Crude flip books and early experimental animation reels evolved into the full-bodied animated works of the late-1930s and early-1940s, which strongly resemble the animated films of today.

It is easy to gloss over the other studios when discussing early animation, but it is important to note that Disney was not the only studio bringing cartoons to life. Warner Brothers’ animation department, spearheaded by Leon Schlesinger, created iconic characters such as Porky

Pig and Daffy Duck while Disney was perfecting his Mickey Mouse. During this “Gold Age of Animation,” as it is called by scholars, other animation heavyweights came into play, such as Tex Avery, Hugh Harmon, Rudolf Ising, and Friz Freleng. Many of these big-name animators contributed to the wartime animation effort, as well. Several of the early animated cartoon series emulated each other, from Silly Symphonies at Disney to Merrie Melodies at Warner Brothers and Happy Harmonies at MGM. These shorts played with color and music, and began incorporating elements of storytelling as well.

Experimental and surrealist animation had long been popular in other countries such as France, but mainstream animation in pre-war United States stuck to traditional, linear, and narrative-based styles. Disney was at the forefront of American animation, creating a new medium for storytelling, first with shorts and then feature films, starting with Snow White. Other studios such as Warner Brothers produced cartoon shorts, but Disney dominated the market for animated feature films. The animation market opened up for other talents, but Disney became synonymous with family-friendly, fantastical animated features. Traditional animation remained the king for decades, although stop-motion animation and Claymation did gain some prominence. Recently, computer animation has changed the animation industry, but even as major studios crank out computer-generated blockbusters, audiences still respond enthusiastically to hand-drawn films.

Prior to the war, animation had developed into a robust entertainment form. Animation was utilized as part of the traditional cinematic package, either in short or feature-length form, and occasionally as part of a live-action film. As the world headed towards war in the late 1930s, the true potential of animation had yet to be utilized, at least in American cinema. World War II had a significant impact on the culture of the American people as a whole, which included major
shifts in the media. Film, animated and otherwise, took on war themes, and newspapers and magazines focused heavily on war-related news and information. Both informational and entertainment media became entrenched in wartime politics. Popular culture was now shaped by the war, and the animation studios were no exception. The war impacted all aspects of the Hollywood film industry. Films made both inside and outside the studio system dealt with complex wartime themes. The war marked the start of animation having a large presence in American media. After looking through film journals as well as mainstream newspapers from the wartime period, it is apparent that animation had an increasing presence in both mainstream culture and the film industry.

While animation existed during World War I, it was still in its primitive form and was not as widely utilized. I chose the time period of World War II since animation was at a turning point at the start of the war. By the end of the war, animation held a completely different position in both mainstream culture and the education sector. The wartime period falls within what is known as the “Golden Age” of American animation, which began around 1928 and ran until the 1960s. Many exemplary animated works were produced during the war, although some were never available to the public until recently. The rise of television and the Internet has allowed these works, notable for their historical content as well as their technical and aesthetic elements, to reach a new audience.

During the war, animation entered society in new ways. The war enabled animation to spread beyond its original purpose of entertainment in a much faster way than might have occurred if the war had not happened. It provided reasons beyond entertainment for the production of animation, which had not existed before the war. Studio executives, as well as government and military officials, needed a way to reach a wide audience during the war.
Animation provided an easily accessible and appealing format to instruct soldiers or convey propagandistic and patriotic messages to the public. The medium also allowed filmmakers to depict fantastical or mechanical sequences that they would have been unable to do with live-action filmmaking.

Animation’s versatility and potential became apparent during the war, and both studios and the military jumped on the opportunity. There had not been animated training films or a partially animated, feature-length propaganda film before, as the need had not been present. Film professionals, whether part of the army’s film branches or working at the major studios, did not have any templates to follow, but their films then became templates for future animated works. Animation already had a future, but it was sped up when the war hit. Now there was an urgency to make different types of films using animation, which set the precedents necessary for animation to continue as a viable medium beyond entertainment after the war. Animation was used in complex training films and other serious contexts, which were vastly different from the early animated cartoons that American audiences were used to prior to the war.

Of course, animation continued to provide entertainment during the war, but many studios created cartoons and short films with war themes. As Variety reported in November 1942 with the headline “War-Themed Pix Increase,” the war became a prime subject for film studios. This was true of live-action films as well as animated, and included both documentary and fictional films. Disney in particular made many wartime cartoons, some as overt propaganda and others simply related to the war. These films show what was happening inside the United States during the war, and reflect the cultural moment in which they were made. Animation, like other

---

2 “War-Themed Pix Increase,” Variety, November 25, 1942.
forms of artistic expression, reflects the cultural trends at the time, so it is fitting that the war inspired many animated works.

There is a vast catalogue of animated works from the wartime period. I have narrowed my focus down to four subsequent chapters, each dealing with a group of innovative animated works. Each chapter is also connected to the others in some way, indicating that while animation was utilized for a variety of purposes, the goal was the same. Whether explaining and negating Nazi ideology to a domestic audience or depicting a complex bombing arrangement to soldiers overseas, the studios and the military employed animation as a tool to win the war.

The Disney studio produced so much during the war that I had to split it into two chapters. The studio was responsible for entertainment, propaganda, and training films, as well as the animation in Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* series. Capra was involved with the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine*, within which the *Snafu* cartoons were shown. There were several other studios working on animation at this time, but I have chosen the landmark studios and films that helped define animation in the wartime era. All of these films had an impact during the war itself and a lasting legacy. These films were produced for educational or propaganda purposes, either aimed at the general public or specifically for soldiers. Certain films were given wide release, while some were shown to specific groups such as the navy or military forces.

While extensive research has been conducted on wartime animation, these works do not look at all of the types of animation together. There are books and articles that focus on one aspect of wartime animation, whether it is propaganda, entertainment or documentaries. Very few compare *Private Snafu* to the Disney cartoons, for example, since they were not created for public consumption. This thesis will explore all of the applications of animation during the war, and how the medium was suited for each specific purpose.
When war broke out in Europe, the themes of violence and unease made their way into the December 1939 cartoon *Peace On Earth*, released by Metro-Goldwin-Mayer. Ben Mankiewicz, film critic and host of Turner Classic Movies’ program *Cartoon Alley*, referred to the short as the first cartoon to tackle serious themes. The Christmas short tells the story of a world inhabited solely by animals, which have rebuilt society after the humans have killed themselves off in an endless cycle of violent warfare. The film is eerie and intense, and foreshadowed the destruction that would follow in the coming years. This set the tone for other animated works with dark themes, which became common during the war.

The war changed how animation was utilized, in terms of its target audience, content, and overall purpose. Entertainment cartoons were no longer only happy fairytales. This enabled filmmakers to create animated films that served the same purpose as traditional propaganda films. As Eric Smoodin writes in *Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons From the Sound Era*, “Perceived as harmless because of its association with children’s entertainment and whimsical and comical subjects, animation came to be used…as one of the central vehicles of wartime propaganda.”

Animation’s association with childish entertainment gave it an automatic disguise, concealing potentially strong political content. This allowed the propaganda to “seem as benign as possible.” In reality, many of the propaganda cartoons produced during the war contain violent, suggestive, and sometimes disturbing content.

As animation moved from light entertainment to containing more adult themes, it also became a viable medium for education. Many filmmakers and government officials only discovered how adaptable animation could be during the war. Animation enabled the films to

---

4 Ibid.
show intricate concepts in an easy to understand manner. Catering to a diverse armed services, with members from different economic and social backgrounds, was a difficult task. Animation was able to smooth the gaps in literacy or education in the Army, and provide an accessible medium that soldiers from all walks of life could understand. Frank Capra notably realized this and utilized animation in his *Why We Fight* series to present maps and diagrams. He also was part of the team responsible for creating the *Private Snafu* series as an animated alternative to training films.

Just as prominent Hollywood directors such as Capra, John Ford, and William Wyler made wartime films, several notable artists working on animation during the war had already made names for themselves in the industry or would go on to have prolific careers. These include Theodor Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss, who worked on the *Private Snafu* cartoons, as well as Walt Disney himself and his group of original animators, known as the “Nine Old Men.” Many popular characters from the time were “drafted” and used in wartime shorts, such as Donald Duck, Mickey Mouse, Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck. Others, such as Woody Woodpecker, emerged during the war and quickly gained popularity. Many characters and tropes from these shorts have remained part of popular culture.

One character in particular embodies the aesthetics of wartime animation, but is largely unknown today: Private Snafu. This is because he was created as the animated version of a simple soldier, in a series of cartoons intended for a strictly uniformed audience. It is here that I will begin my study. While Warner Brothers was creating their own character for the military audience, the Disney animators were working on many projects, from propaganda shorts to training films. Frank Capra joined the animation trend when he incorporated animated segments
in two of his major wartime projects, *Why We Fight* and the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine*, which included the *Private Snafu* shorts.
Chapter Two: All Fouled Up? Appealing to GIs with Private Snafu

One of the most iconic characters to emerge from wartime animation is Private Snafu, created during and for the war. He represented the average soldier, which added to his appeal. The Snafu films showed GIs what not to do, which is the opposite of a traditional training film. This is what makes the shorts entertaining. In theory, the cartoons could have shown a soldier doing everything correctly, presenting what would have essentially been an animated instructional video. Instead, by utilizing gags and making Snafu a clumsy fool, the shorts caught the attention of the soldiers. Even if they were better soldiers than Snafu, the audience would have found his antics comical, and every soldier could relate to feeling inadequate at some point in his military career.

The concept of the Private Snafu shorts was created and carried out by a dream team of some of the most talented people in Hollywood. Major Frank Capra, in the Special Film Branch of the Armed Forces Motion Picture Unit, was charged with the task of coming up with ideas for entertaining yet educational films for all branches of the Armed Services. Capra originally conceived a live-action series called Hey, Soldier!, but after seeing the positive response to animation in the Why We Fight series, he decided that the series should be animated. The overall popularity of cartoon shorts at the time, such as the Looney Tunes series, also indicates that producing informational animated short films with a sense of fun was a logical step.

These shorts only worked because they were animated. Theoretically, the team could have commissioned live-action fictional shorts that dealt with the same material, but it would not have had the same impact. Because Snafu is animated, he can be put in incredibly ridiculous

---

5 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
situations that add to the humor of the shorts. A snarky, animated mosquito is more entertaining than a real one. The soldiers needed to be entertained, but slapstick comedy or another live-action style might not have resonated as well as *Snafu* did. Animation provided the perfect middle ground between entertainment and education. The studio might have been more reluctant to include risqué or suggestive material if the shorts had been live-action. Animation gave the team the creative freedom to add that content.

Theodor Geisel, also known as Dr. Seuss, was in charge of the Animation Branch of the Armed Forces Motion Picture Unit. He wrote most of the *Snafu* shorts, along with Phil Eastman. Geisel’s signature rhymes are apparent in these installments, such as “The Home Front.” The *Snafu* shorts were not Geisel’s first contribution during the war. As Philip Nel writes in *Children’s Literature Goes to War: Dr. Seuss, P. D. Eastman, Munro Leaf and the Private SNAFU Films*, Geisel had written political cartoons for the New York newspaper *PM* from 1941 to 1943. The cartoons depicted political figures that Geisel disagreed with, both American and European, from Charles Lindbergh to Hitler. Geisel’s cartoons were often featured on the editorial page and even the cover of *PM*. The cartoons were reactions to wartime politics, both overseas and at home.

Richard M. Minear explores this period of Geisel’s life in his book *Dr. Seuss Goes to War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel*. As Minear writes, “Dr.

---

7 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
10 Harris, “Wartoons,” 36.
Seuss incorporated rhymes and puns into his cartoons.”  

The drawings resemble many of Geisel’s later children’s books, with birds, cats, and other whimsically drawn animals, as well as depictions of Hitler and other figures. The difference, of course, is the tone and content of these drawings. Geisel was not afraid to address sensitive issues in his cartoons. Minear points out that “Dr. Seuss saved some of his most biting cartoons for issues of anti-black racism and anti-Semitism.”

Geisel was the ideal candidate for the Snafu series, as he did not shy away from drawing potentially controversial topics in his cartoons.

While the Snafu shorts did not contain overt political statements, they did feature adult themes that were unusual for an animated short, and Geisel’s aesthetic and writing style were designed to appeal to adults rather than children. His children’s books became popular later. Geisel was a political cartoonist first, so his transition to the Snafu team was a logical one. These cartoons, which drew both laughs and criticism, put Geisel on Capra’s radar. He was a fitting artist to contribute to the project, which would produce simple, no-frills animation. As Minear writes, “Dr. Seuss was a genius at ridiculing pomposity and pretensions.” He did not accept any false or fake pretenses from politicians, and this was reflected in the simplicity and bluntness of his cartoons.

After receiving backlash for his cartoons, including letters calling him “a dirty old man that helped get us into the war,” he decided to enlist in the army. Geisel had a large role in the creation of the Snafu shorts, if possibly not the original concept. “Exactly who came up with the idea of Private Snafu is not clear,” as well as exactly who wrote each episode. Other than the

---

12 Ibid., 23.
13 Ibid., 185.
14 Nel, “Children’s Literature Goes to War,” 468.
15 Ibid., 469.
director of each episode, there are not comprehensive credits.\textsuperscript{16} The shorts were not created for a commercial audience, which is why they lack traditional credits and attribution. The team was not creating the shorts for public recognition or to further their careers. Instead, the shorts were created for a greater purpose: to educate the soldiers.

The shorts were produced by Leon Schlesinger and his team of animators at Warner Brothers, but this was almost not the case. According to\textit{ The Complete Uncensored Private Snafu Cartoons From World War II}, Disney had the first bid for the cartoons, “but Leon Schlesinger’s bid came in at about a third of Disney’s. Disney also wanted exclusive ownership of the character and exclusive merchandising rights.”\textsuperscript{17} The fact that Warner Brothers’ animation department was much smaller than Disney’s was actually an advantage in winning the \textit{Snafu} bid. This is fitting, as Private Snafu was never meant to be a Disney character. If Disney had produced the films, they probably would have been more like the other Disney war shorts, which were not as soldier-oriented and not risqué in the least. Snafu was not a children’s cartoon character. He was created specifically for the soldiers and belonged to them. The Disney version of Snafu would have most likely been franchised and overused. Keeping Snafu as solely a World War II character saved his integrity as a soldier from that era without exploiting him. This was a large victory for Warner Brothers, even though it was not a commercial project.

Disney was the king of the animation world, but there were other great animators at the smaller studios, and many of them worked on the \textit{Snafu} shorts. As Michael Barrier writes in \textit{Hollywood Cartoons: American Animation in the Golden Age}, “By the early forties, the Schlesinger animators had at last achieved a rough parity with the Disney animators in basic

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
techniques.”18 It is perhaps for this reason that the look of the *Snafu* shorts is rougher and less polished than Disney cartoons at the time. This fits with the overall aesthetic of the shorts. They were created to serve a purpose, and could educate and entertain the soldiers in a creative way without necessarily utilizing any over-the-top techniques.

Schlesinger had been involved with the early *Bosko* films at Warner Brothers, as well as the *Looney Tunes* and *Merrie Melodies* series.19 He was the most successful producer, making the most annual shorts in the business at the time.20 He created the team that made the *Snafu* films, which included “some of the most talented men in the business,” according to Michael S. Shull and David E. Wilt in *Doing Their Bit: Wartime American Animated Short Films*.21 *Snafu* was based on a character model sheet by Art Heinemann and developed by Chuck Jones (Figure 1).22 *Snafu* is not a cute, juvenile mouse or rabbit; he is an average soldier. His character design is similar to Elmer Fudd’s, as Snafu’s look was drawn from Fudd’s early design.23

---

21 Ibid.
22 *Complete Uncensored Private Snafu*
The shorts were directed by Jones, along with Friz Freleng, Frank Tashlin and Bob Clampett. The team had worked on many previous shorts for Warner Brothers, including Looney Tunes, and was responsible for classic characters from Porky Pig to Daffy Duck. Each director led one of five units working on the Snafu films, producing twenty-six complete installments in two years. The black and white animated films were produced with a strict budget. Each team’s cartoons had their own distinct style. In order to cut costs, sometimes “cells from cartoons were reused in later episodes regardless of who animated the original,” is Michael Birdwell writes in his essay on the Snafu cartoons, “Technical Fairy First Class? Is This Any Way to Run an Army?” This lends a sense of continuity to the series, even though the shorts were not all made by the same team of animators. Not all of the Snafu shorts were made at Warner Brothers, either. MGM used Snafu occasionally in the “A Few Quick Facts” series.

---

24 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid.
28 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
These shorts, which didn’t have a distinct plot and were, as the title would suggest, primarily about conveying facts, were made at the UPA studio, which was later responsible for the *Mr. Magoo* series.\(^{29}\)

Mel Blanc, a longtime collaborator with Schlesinger, lent his distinctive voice to the character of Snafu. He was the original voice actor for Porky Pig, as well as many other iconic Warner Brothers characters, from Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck to Tweety Bird and Sylvester the Cat.\(^{30}\) Snafu’s voice is high-pitched and shrill at times, with a distinctive and humorous Brooklyn accent. He sounds like an everyday, working class soldier, someone that one would run into on the street. Whether he is complaining or singing, Blanc’s voice work gives Snafu his personality. Snafu rarely does anything right, but there is something automatically likeable about him, and his voice is a big reason.

The first *Snafu* short debuted in 1943, which is a landmark year for wartime animation as many cartoons dealing with war-related subjects debuted during the course of the year. While many of those cartoons, such as Disney’s *Der Fuehrer’s Face* and *Education For Death*, as well as Warner Brothers’ *Confessions of a Nutzy Spy*, were given theatrical releases, the *Snafu* films were only shown in Army settings. The shorts were included in the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine*, the bi-weekly newsreel produced just for the military. The *Snafu* segments were placed at the end of the magazines, which were collections of shorts. This meant that the *Snafu* cartoons related to the content of the rest of the screen magazine and were able to emphasize the messages conveyed in the other segments.\(^{31}\)

\(^{29}\) *Ibid.*  
\(^{30}\) Solomon, *Enchanted Drawings*.  
Unlike traditional cartoons that played as part of the typical cinema package to mainstream America, the soldiers that viewed the screen magazine were from every background imaginable. The shorts, therefore, had to deal with these differences in educational and economic levels. The shorts do not directly address these discrepancies. Instead, the shorts, along with magazine as a whole, attempted to convey general messages about the war that were intended to band everyone together. In this way the cartoons evened the field between the soldiers by positioning Snafu as an “everyman” that could be found in any unit.

When the shorts were being developed, the team received advice on how to keep the soldiers interested. Children’s author Munro Leaf, who co-wrote some of the shorts, advised the team that the series should be “racy.” This ensured that the soldiers would pay attention, giving the shorts an advantage over the typical, dry training films that the soldiers were used to seeing. Because the Snafu series was created exclusively for soldiers, the shorts were not subject to censorship and did not have to follow the Motion Picture Production Code that was in place at this time. Unlike the Disney animators, the Snafu team was able to include raunchy and suggestive content that would appeal to the soldiers, which was unheard of in film of any kind in this era.

Schlesinger’s studio created the shorts “knowing [that] the general public would never see the cartoons.” Therefore, team could take Leaf’s advice and make risqué shorts that appealed to the soldiers and that would later have a lasting effect on the film industry. Birdwell points out that the shorts would “play a role in the eventual destruction of the production code.”

---

32 Ibid., 4.
33 Ibid.
34 Harris, “Wartoons,” 39.
36 Ibid.
Not only were these films groundbreaking in that they could convey information to the soldiers by utilizing animation, they also set the groundwork for later films since these were uncensored. The shorts pushed the boundaries of what films, animated or not, could include.

The shorts draw on GI humor and slang. Even Snafu’s name is a kind of inside joke with the soldiers, as are the names of his brothers, introduced in the 1945 short “Three Brothers.” “SNAFU” stands for Situation Normal All Fouled Up, and his brothers are “TARFU,” “Things Are Really Fouled Up,” and “FUBAR,” “Fouled Up Beyond All Repair.” The soldiers would have instantly known that the “F” really stood for (Figure 2). To have a cartoon character with a name that suggests a curse word was a huge leap for a medium that was considered childish. Snafu’s name not only successfully combated the production code, but also is a word that the soldiers would have understood and related to.

![Figure 2: Still from “Coming!! Snafu” (1943)](image-url)
In Lieutenant Jeffery Fleece’s 1946 essay “Words in –FU,” he writes about the army slang that he observed during the war, including origins of SNAFU and similar acronyms.37 “One of the few words which became a definite addition to the military vocabulary was SNAFU, which gives indications of lasting as long as the American Army.”38 TARFU and FUBAR, the words used to name Snafu’s brothers, are also named, but they weren’t as widely used or lasting as SNAFU. Fleece insists that the word SNAFU gained popularity in 1942 and “was in the active vocabulary of every soldier.”39 This is then a fitting name for Snafu, who represents the everyday soldier. Fleece mentions that the Snafu cartoons, as well as a song used in the Army-Navy Screen Magazine, which asked, “What’s the meaning of SNAFU?”40 While the actual meaning may be vulgar, Fleece writes based on his personal experience that the word spoke to the deeper feelings of the soldiers. “SNAFU was an outcry of the individual’s inadequacy to express itself against the collective chaos of today’s war.”41 Many of the shorts expressed Snafu’s discontent in the Army, which spoke to the soldiers who were familiar with the term SNAFU and its origins.

The word remained in popular culture throughout, appearing as the title of a stage play, which opened at the Hudson Theatre in New York City in 1944. “Snafu” is referred to as a comedy in the New York Times’ “News of the Stage” section on opening night, written by Sam Zolotow. Zolotow makes sure to fill his readers in on the inside meaning behind the title. “In case anyone is mystified by the title, it means ‘situation normal; all fouled up’ in military

38 Ibid., 71.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid., 72.
41 Ibid.
slang.” The play would have been attended by a primarily civilian audience, unlike the screenings of *Private Snafu*. The shorts did not need to explain the meaning of the term to its military audience. This is a further indicator that the creators chose an appropriate name for the character, creating an instant bond with soldiers in the know.

The films include some innuendo and vulgar content, such as images of female nudity as well as male backsides, and lines such as “It’s so cold it would freeze the nuts off a Jeep.” The films went beyond what would have been allowed by the Production Code, but were still relatively tame in hindsight. As Charles Solomon points out in *Enchanted Drawings: The History of Animation*, the *Snafu* cartoons were “considered risqué during the 1940s,” but they would “barely qualify for a PG rating today.” The directors had to have the storyboards approved by officials at the Pentagon, but they were allowed to include questionable content, with some nudity and mild language, such as “damn” and “hell.”

From the first short, “Coming!! Snafu,” the series established itself as different from other cartoons in that it was aimed at an older audience. The narrator opening the cartoon spells out SNAFU and pauses on the F before saying “fouled,” but audience would know what it really meant. Snafu is introduced as “the goofiest soldier in the U.S. Army,” who can be found in each branch. True to form, the first Snafu short features Snafu driving a tractor and singing about a stripper. He does not pay attention to his surroundings and manages to smash the plane his tractor was hauling. The cartoon nudity in this short is mainly just suggested, with “restricted”

---

43 *Complete Uncensored Private Snafu*
45 Ibid.
signs on the imaginary stripper’s chest. This is a good introduction to the character, who is often seen daydreaming about women and whose desires get him into trouble.

Since Snafu is a human male, he is a sexual being and is presented as such. A prime example of Snafu’s sexual desires getting the best of him is in “Booby Traps,” directed by Clampett in 1944. The short is chock-full of puns and suggestive images. The narrator warns of the dangers of hidden traps, proclaiming, “If you are a boob, you will be trapped.” Snafu responds with a defiant attitude, “I wish to hell that you’d shut up. I ain’t no boob and I won’t be trapped.” Snafu is, of course, the definition of a “boob” who does in fact fall for the tricks set up by the enemy. He sees harem of women and gets really excited but resists the women and then plays the piano before returning to them. The women are in fact dummies, which Snafu does not realize. Their chests are literally booby traps, rigged with bombs. Snafu smokes from a hookah pipe, and then tries to feel one of women’s behinds before realizes there are bombs there as well. In the end, he escapes but a tiny Hitler urges him to go back and finish his song on the piano, which of course detonates a major explosion. The moral of the short, like all of the Snafu cartoons, is obvious, but this one in particular focuses on how Snafu is motivated by his basic desires. He is lured by the women and the chance to rest and smoke, and is portrayed as a lazy soldier instead of an active, alert member of the army. The nudity here is of fake animated women, but it is still nudity, which would have not been allowed by the Production Code had the shorts been subject to censorship.

A soldier as oblivious as Snafu is needs someone to keep him in line. This task falls to the character of Technical Fairy First Class (Figure 3). Introduced in the second Snafu short,

---

46 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
47 Ibid.
“Gripes,” Technical Fairy speaks with the same Brooklyn accent as Snafu, but with a much rougher voice, which according to Birdwell “sounds like a frog in a blender.” Snafu is generally unaware of the consequences of his actions. He very rarely thinks for himself, and Technical Fairy often thinks for him. He tries to help Snafu and teach him lessons, but ultimately can’t stop Snafu from getting into trouble. In this way, Technical Fairy is Snafu’s conscience, like “a grizzled parody of Disney’s Jiminy Cricket.” He appears when Snafu complains and usually shows him that his situation is not all that bad.

Figure 3: Technical Fairy’s First Appearance in “Gripes” (1943)

In “Gripes,” directed by Freleng in 1943, Snafu complains about the army in Geisel’s signature rhyming fashion. Technical Fairy promotes Snafu so that he is now in charge of the camp, but when it comes time to fight the Germans, Snafu and his untrained soldiers are useless. Snafu then dutifully goes back to cleaning the camp and doing his job. Technical Fairy has some

---

49 Ibid.
of the best one-liners in the series, and at the end of the short he announces, “The moral, Snafu, is the harder you work, the sooner we’re gonna beat Hitler, that jerk.” Technical Fairy teaches Snafu a similar lesson in “The Infantry Blues,” directed by Jones in 1943. Snafu complains about being part of the infantry, and Technical Fairy shows him what it would be like in each of the different branches. Snafu tries out being in a tank, in the Navy and in the Air Force, all of which end in disaster. Both of these cartoons emphasize “the illogic of challenging military authority” and “the military job-as-fulfillment-of-destiny.” Snafu learns that he should be content with the placement given to him and not question the higher-ups.

Snafu isn’t always happy with Technical Fairy’s help. In “Snafuperman,” directed by Friz Freleng in 1944, Technical Fairy gives Snafu superpowers so that he won’t have to study. Being Snafu, he does not know how to use his powers and ultimately ends up injured by delayed-action bombs. Lying in bed, he yells at Technical Fairy that he should have just given him a field manual. Unlike most of the Snafu shorts, he does not end up dead in this one, but lives and recognizes what he did wrong. Instead of facing death as a result of his behavior, Snafu is able to learn from his mistakes, and, hopefully, improve.

The simple concept of working hard, following orders and staying in line is taught in a way that soldiers could instantly understand. Even though the situations that the shorts deal with are dangerous, the use of humor helps lighten the mood and keep the shorts from being too heavy handed. As Birdwell writes, “Sometimes humor is the best device for dealing with unpleasant facts.” This is the tactic employed in most of the Snafu shorts, including several of the shorts that deal with the issue of malaria. In “Private VS Malaria Mike,” a malaria-infested mosquito

50 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu.
52 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu.
sees Snafu “swimming at sundown, and naked all over.” The camera focuses on Snafu’s behind, and Mike recognizes him right away, exclaiming, “I never forget a face.” This mild nudity, as well as the pseudo-sexual nature of Mike’s desire to inject Snafu with the disease, follows the series’ tendency to add innuendo to subjects that seem far removed from sexuality.

Snafu rejects all of the precautions given to him that are intended to prevent malaria and gets infected in the end. The cartoon ends with Snafu speaking directly to the audience, listing the methods of prevention that he could have used, from repellent and tablets to mosquito nets, before lamenting “I wish to hell I’d used them.” The short is not simply an instructional video on how to avoid getting bitten and prevent malaria. Instead, it shows what not to do in an entertaining way, like most of the Snafu films.

Similarly, the later Snafu shorts “Target Snafu” and “It’s Murder She Says” feature mosquitos attempting to infect Snafu. In both, sexual innuendo is utilized. “Target” shows an army of mosquitos training, in a parody of the United States’ Army, before one targets Snafu, who is sleeping naked in his bed. “Murder” takes the theme even further by presenting a female mosquito, Anopheles Annie, as a has-been former bombshell, informing the audience of how the army has reduced malaria cases by studying mosquitos and educating soldiers. Snafu is still the one soldier not taking precautions, so she is able to infect him, calling it a “one night stand.” Again, the act of infecting a soldier with malaria is presented as sexual, and like any sexual temptation, Snafu falls prey to it.

Snafu is so inept that he sometimes actually does something right, but is not aware of it at all. In “Outpost,” directed by Jones in 1944, Snafu is stationed at an outpost in the Pacific

---

54 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
55 Ibid.
Theater with only a bird for company. In one humorous sequence, Snafu dreams of a sultry dancer, while his bird friend dreams of a dancing female bird. The bird helps Snafu report a washed-up tin can that indicates the nearby location of the Japanese Navy. For once, Snafu is able to help the Army by informing officials of the enemy whereabouts, enabling them to sink the Japanese ships. He still does not realize what he did and asks in his signature Brooklyn accent, “Wouldn’t you think they could find something important for me to do in this here army?” Snafu is still incompetent, as he is unable to recognize a success and still thinks that he is sitting around doing nothing. The bird is the intelligent one, as he realizes the importance of the can and locates it for Snafu. This indicates just how much of a “bird-brain” Snafu actually is, which adds to the humor of the cartoon.

The later cartoons are less about Snafu messing up and more about conveying information. In these shorts, Snafu is more of a loveable character, since the soldiers are familiar with him at this point. Snafu is still inept, but his primary purpose shifts as the United States’ role in the war intensifies. “In the Aleutians” and “Hotspot,” for example, both from 1945, show Snafu in the exotic locations of the Arctic and Iran, showing the different conditions in each location. Much like the “A Few Quick Facts” installments that feature Snafu, he is more of a placeholder showing the experience that any soldier would have under those circumstances. These shorts don’t have a storyline or many outright jokes; instead, in as lighthearted a manner as possible, the facts are presented with Snafu along for the ride.

Eric Smoodin points out in his landmark book on the subject, Animating Culture: Hollywood Cartoons From the Sound Era, that the shorts address the soldiers as “youngsters.”

---

56 Ibid.
57 Smoodin, Animating Culture, 1993, 72.
Capra chose a medium that was usually directed at children in order to convey complex messages in a simplified, entertaining format. The *Snafu* series, on a basic level, showed the soldiers the consequences of not performing up to Army standards. The goal of the shorts was to “create a national identity during a time of crisis.” This identity had to include everyone, regardless of educational level. It is therefore appropriate that several of those writing the cartoons later made names for themselves as children’s authors, including Geisel and Leaf. As Nel writes in *Children’s Literature Goes to War*, “While the *Snafu* cartoons did not teach the troops to read, they did teach the troops using simple language.” The necessity of making the shorts as simple as possible was due to the diversity of the soldiers in the American Army. Not everyone was fully educated, and the shorts had to play to every level.

The character of Private Snafu was featured on the cover of *Yank, The Army Weekly* magazine in December 1943, several months after his debut. The magazine had featured a preview of the cartoon in its July 2nd issue that year. The spread announces to the soldiers that Snafu “will come to your post theater or overseas movie soon as part of the Army’s own screen magazine.” The magazine also features stills and sketches from some of the early *Snafu* shorts. The 1945 book *From Movie Lot to Beachhead: The Motion Picture Goes to War and Prepares for the Future* further introduced Snafu to the public. The book, compiled by the editors of *Look* magazine, is about the movie industry during the war, including the army training films, and features a two-page spread with stills from “Booby Traps.”

58 Ibid., 73.
59 Ibid., 74.
60 Ibid., 72.
61 Nel, “Children’s Literature Goes to War,” 472.
Private Snafu’s success can’t be measured by box office numbers, or even formal reviews. The soldiers weren’t paying to see the shorts, and most of the general public, including major film critics, was not even aware of their existence until the end of the war. On July 25, 1943, the New York Times published a preview of the Snafu project. Above several early sketches of Snafu short “Gripes,” the article proclaims that Snafu is “the Army’s latest celebrity.” Snafu is referred to as “a positive genius at doing things the wrong way,” with “the brains of a half-wit mosquito.” This is an accurate introduction to Snafu, since readers would not have had access to the shorts themselves at the time. The article translates the “F” in Snafu’s name as “Finagled,” since the New York Times couldn’t actually say its implied meaning.

Other than the occasional “preview,” mentions of the Snafu films are rare in the trade publications. While Disney actively promoted the various propaganda films produced during the war, securing many reviews and mentions in the prominent film journals, the Snafu cartoons went under the radar for the most part. They were not created to get recognition or win awards; they were created to serve the specific purpose of educating and entertaining the armed forces.

Several cartoon characters, from Bugs Bunny to Mickey Mouse, had existed prior to the war and were “enlisted” to the war effort. Snafu, however, was created during the war for the sole purpose of educating and entertaining during the war. The last Snafu cartoon was released in 1945 and he did not go on to become a franchise. That cartoon, “Private Snafu Presents Seaman Tarfu - In the Navy,” was directed by George Gordon at the Harman-Ising studio in 1946. Since this was made at a different studio, the short looks different from the typical Snafu cartoons.

Tarfu is Snafu’s brother, however, so the two of them have many similar personality traits. Like

---

66 Ibid.
67 Ibid.
68 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
Snafu, Tarfu is easily distracted by women. Unlike Snafu, Tarfu gets the girl at the end of the short, cheekily telling his comrade, “What’d you expect sailor, the Army made this picture!”

The character is not fully developed, as this short was created to serve as an introduction to Tarfu, much like “Coming!!” did with Snafu in 1943. The character of Tarfu was initially intended to be introduced in a cancelled short, “The Tuscarora,” in 1944. It is unclear why that project was scrapped, but after the first “Seaman Tarfu” short, the plan was for Tarfu to star in his own series. As any further Snafu-related projects were canceled when the war ended, the Tarfu series was never developed. In fact, Tex Avery, the creator of iconic characters such as Bugs Bunny and Daffy Duck, had been working on a Snafu cartoon at Hanna-Barbera Productions. The short, entitled “Mop Up,” went through the animation process but the war ended before filming began and the cartoon was never produced.

Several other Snafu cartoons never reached an audience. Michael Lah, an animator at MGM in 1945, was working on “How To Get a Fat Jap Out of a Cave,” a Snafu short featuring a Sumo wrestler that was scrapped due to unfortunate timing. “Just as we were ready to go to camera, the Bomb was dropped,” Lah tells Charles Solomon in Enchanted Drawings. “We got a call from headquarters to stop all military production. They came a week later and took all the cels, all the animation.” One canceled cartoon that was fully animated and filmed and that survived for viewing purposes today is “Going Home,” directed by Jones in May 1944. The short shows Snafu returning from the war and telling his friends war secrets, including the existence of

---

69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
71 Harris, “Wartoons,” 40.
72 Ibid.
73 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
74 Solomon, Enchanted Drawings, 123.
75 Ibid.
a secret weapon. His blabbing eventually leads to his unit getting killed because of him. While many of the Snafu films end with his own death, this one’s message is even more chilling as it shows how deadly one person’s slipup can be. This short was ill timed and bore too many similarities to actual army occurrences, however, and was never shown to the soldiers.

According to the notes in The Complete Uncensored Private Snafu, “It was shelved because of the portrayal of a super-bomb in it. It was thought to be too close a hint at the top secret atom bomb we were developing at the time.”76 The rest of the Snafu scenarios were purely theoretical and therefore allowed to be shown. While “Going Home” is one of the surviving Snafu shorts even though it never actually reached an audience, another short, entitled, “Secrets of the Caribbean” was completed in 1945 but never shown.77 It cost $9,199.17 to produce.78 Each Private Snafu short cost about $2,500 to produce, on average.79 The total cost for all of the Snafu cartoons, including those that were shelved, was $294,235.35.80

The character of Snafu doesn’t have crossover appeal, as he was created solely for the soldiers. Other characters do, such as an early Bugs Bunny, who makes a brief but comical appearance in the 1944 Snafu short “Gas,” saying his signature “What’s up, Doc?”81 Bugs Bunny is a familiar character that the soldiers would have known from the Looney Tunes shorts. These characters could appear in other Army films successfully, but Snafu would not have had a place in the Looney Tunes or Merrie Melodies shorts. Once the war ended, so did Snafu’s purpose. He is not a commercial character like his other Warner or Disney counterparts.

---

76 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
79 Harris, “Wartoons,” 40.
80 Complete Uncensored Private Snafu
81 Ibid.
Snafu existed solely in the wartime era, but created a lasting cultural legacy nonetheless. Birdwell’s summary of Snafu’s legacy is particularly appropriate: “Snafu died – again, and again and again – so that many GIs might live.”82 Snafu showed soldiers countless situations that they should avoid at all cost, and how they could do so by following Army protocol. Instead of listing instructions in a dry manner, the cartoons accomplished this “[t]hrough the use of humor and outrageous situations afforded by animation.”83 In this respect, Capra, Schlesinger, and the rest of the team working on the Private Snafu shorts found the right balance between education and entertainment.

Animation is an accessible medium that when used properly can convey complex information in a manner that is easy to process. The Private Snafu series is a prime example of films created to keep the soldiers’ attention. It capitalized on the zany antics of typical animated character and the effects that animation allowed. For these reasons, along with an extremely

82 Birdwell, “Technical Fairy First Class?,” 203.
83 Ibid.
capable team and the ability to include more raunchy fare ensured *Snafu*’s success as educational Army propaganda.
Chapter Three: Donald Enlists: Disney’s Entertainment and Propaganda Cartoons

Any discussion of American animation is not complete without the Disney studio. Walt Disney and his team were actively involved during the war in many different aspects. The studio’s contributions include war-themed entertainment shorts, propaganda films, educational films, training films and hand-drawn insignias. The diversity of the catalogue of work that Disney produced during the war highlights the capabilities of animation at the time and how it can be adapted for many purposes. This chapter will focus on the animated shorts produced for entertainment and propaganda purposes.

Disney helped cartoons earn their place in popular culture, first with animated shorts and then with feature-length films. The success of the wartime shorts from both Disney as well as from other studios would not have been possible if Disney had not already laid the groundwork. Walt developed many of the techniques used in animation, starting with synchronous sound in 1928 with “Steamboat Willie,” the studio’s first cartoon.84 That short introduced the world to Mickey Mouse, the first cartoon character to become a real Hollywood celebrity and household name.

Even before the war, Disney asserted that he was making something bigger than children’s fare. “We’re not making cartoons here,” he said during a story session at the studio, drawing a line between his early experimental cartoons and his work with Mickey Mouse.85 He believed that he was making art, and held his animation and the animators to a high standard. Disney wanted his work to elicit an emotional response, which he accomplished with the groundbreaking, feature-length animated film Snow White in 1937. The film created an entirely

---

84 Ben Sharpsteen et al., Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines (Walt Disney Video, 2004).
85 American Experience: Walt Disney (PBS (DIRECT), 2015).
new genre. Now a feature-length animated film could contain all of the romance, excitement, adventure, and intrigue of any other Hollywood film.

Adults as well as children were taken with *Snow White*, proving that an animated film could elicit strong emotional responses. Disney created characters that his audience identified with, even though they were simply drawings on a page. He was able to breathe life into those drawings and convince an audience that they were in fact people, with needs and wants. When Snow White bites into the apple and falls dead, many in the audience had visceral responses. The emotional impact of the scene was no less powerful because it was animated. The success of *Snow White* carried over into the work that the studio produced during the war, with pictures designed to affect the viewer and make them understand what was happening overseas, take action into their own hands, or reject the Nazi ideology.

The studio felt the effects of the war even before the United States entered. When *Pinocchio* was released in February 1940, the war prevented the film, which was already drawing in slow ticket revenues, from entering the European market. Disney still needed a way to raise revenue to produce further animated features, which led the company to go public that April. Disney then produced *Fantasia*, which divided critics and did not sell well with audiences. Around this time, the Disney team moved into its new studio in Burbank, California. This is where the wartime projects would eventually be carried out. The setup was vastly different from the previous space, with workers separated into departments and a much more obvious hierarchical structure. The studio had many more employees than when it had first began, and

---

was the largest studio in the industry. At this point, the nearly 600 employees represented more than half of the people working in animation.87

In 1941, the United States was heading towards war. Disney, meanwhile, was dealing with conflict within his own studio, which resulted in an animators’ strike in May of that year. Disney had seen himself as the father of the company, but his employees felt that they were being treated unfairly.88 Not only were lower-level workers striking, but some of Disney’s top animators as well. Nearly half of the entire art department went on strike, which rocked the once-idyllic studio.89 Disney, now greatly discouraged by the strike, embarked on a ten-week tour of South America. This trip would result in two feature-length animated films, Saludos Amigos and The Three Caballeros, as part of the United States’ Good Neighbor Policy during the war.90

Just a few months after the strike, the attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941 marked the United States’ entry to the war. The Disney studio saw major changes, as much of the campus was turned into a military base for aircraft troops. As the New York Times reported in February 1942, “shortly after Pearl Harbor some 500 men were billeted in the studios and 4,000,000 rounds of ammunition stored there.”91 The presence of men in uniforms caused a further shift in the atmosphere at the studio, as John Hench, the longest-term Disney employee who was working as a story artist in 1941 recalls in an interview with film critic and historian Leonard Maltin. “The day after the Pearl Harbor attack, things changed at Disney. It was novel to come to work in the morning and have to pass a military guard with bayonets drawn. They

87 *American Experience.*  
88 Ibid.  
89 Ibid.  
90 While these were animated films produced during the war and are important additions to the Disney canon, they are not directly related to the war itself for my purposes.  
91 “Donald Duck’s Disney,” *New York Times*, February 7, 1943
kept military procedure.” This completely changed the environment at the studio, rendering it more serious.

Even after the soldiers left, the studio remained heavily involved in wartime activities. With employees gone due to the prior strike as well as the draft, the smaller staff had more work than ever. The studio produced around 300,000 feet of film that year, as opposed to a mere 30,000 the year before. Ninety percent of that output was government-commissioned. A Variety headline from October 1942 proclaims, “Disney Schedule Calls for 90% Output of War Films.” The article reports that “Production of entertainment shorts for the next 12 months has been rushed out of the way at Walt Disney Studio in move to clear the animation rooms for heavy schedule of government films and other subjects that will command virtually 90% of studio output.” The government contracts were the primary source of the studio’s revenue in late 1942.

Disney needed a big box office hit, which he thought would be Bambi in August of that year. As one of the Big Five, the first five features produced by the studio, each one more ambitious than the next, Bambi was artistically and thematically groundbreaking, but it didn’t settle well with wartime audiences. Parts of the film are bleak and traumatic, such as when Bambi’s mother is shot and killed. Bambi missed the mark during its initial run, but the studio was working on war-related projects that met with better audience and critical reaction. Disney’s early films resonated with audiences, containing social themes that many related to. Films such as Bambi and Pinocchio dealt with “outsiders struggling for acceptance, coming of age” and

---

92 Sharpsteen et al., Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.
93 Ibid.
94 “Disney Schedule Calls for 90% Output of War Films,” Daily Variety, October 26, 1942.
dealing with tough subjects such as “temptation, loss, redemption, and survival.”

Even so, these films still struggled financially, causing the studio to rely increasingly on government contracts for revenue.

Disney put out many short films during the war, some for propaganda purposes and others that were mostly for entertainment. The studio had already put cartoons on the map as a source of entertainment as well as an art form. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences created the award for Best Animated Short Subject in 1932, for the Disney’s Silly Symphony cartoon “Flowers and Trees,” which utilized the then brand-new Technicolor process. Many animated Disney shorts were nominated for and received the award in later years, including “Der Fuehrer’s Face,” which won in 1943. While some training films were commissioned for the army, most of the cartoons were created for the general public. Unlike the Private Snafu shorts, these were much tamer and were subject to censorship rules. This does not mean, however, that they did not present complex issues or sophisticated ideas.

As Maltin, who provides commentary on the Disney DVD collection Walt Disney on the Front Lines: The War Years, puts it, “No studio devoted more of its time and resources to wartime activity than Walt Disney.”

At this time, going to the movies had become an extremely popular pastime that allowed audiences to escape from the harsh reality outside of the theater. Disney made films that could make them laugh and still send home a message, since he knew how to communicate effectively with audiences. Many of the entertainment shorts were created for morale-building purposes. Even when the war overseas wasn’t going well, Disney wanted to keep people’s spirits up back home. Many popular Disney characters, including Mickey, Minnie,

---

95 American Experience.
96 Sharpsteen et al., Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.
Goofy, Pluto and especially Donald Duck, were either “drafted” for the cartoons or shown serving their country in other ways.

Richard Leskosky, in his essay “Cartoons Will Win the War: World War II Propaganda Shorts,” classifies these shorts as “service comedies,” along with the live-action comedies that also became popular during the war.97 Variety reported on this trend in October 1943 with the headline “Shorts Grow Up Tall: Clowns of the Screen Turn Serious in New Mission.”98 The article reads, “The short subject put on battle dress and played a big part in doing the government’s other chores for the most important season in the history of one- and two-reelers.”99 This refers to both the animated efforts of the Disney studio, as well as live-action shorts, all with some war-related purpose. In addition to the content, the overall quality of these shorts reached new levels, led by Disney.100 As Leskosky points out, like the later psychological shorts, these entertainment shorts utilize “voices of authority” as narrators, as opposed to the earlier shorts, which “relied most heavily on images and music.”101 When the studio started making the training and instructional films, voiceover became a necessary component, and that carried over into the cartoons. These voiceover narrations continued past the war, becoming a signature part of both Disney entertainment cartoons and educational films.

Many of the shorts have simple but effective messages. Maltin explains that America had done everything it could to stay out of war, so it was especially important the average citizens understood why we were fighting, whom we were fighting, and how they could help.” Disney

97 Van Riper, Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt.
99 Ibid.
100 Ibid.
101 Van Riper, Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt, 42.
did this by using the cartoon format that had been proven so successful with audiences. Unlike the *Private Snafu* shorts, the Disney cartoons have a slick, professional finish and utilize the latest animation techniques that Disney had been perfecting, although some of the more technical films are in black and white instead of Technicolor. The exact looks of the shorts vary, but most fall into three distinct styles: cartoon, primarily in the entertainment shorts, realistic for more serious content, and schematic, including animated maps and charts. All of the styles had been employed to some extent in previous Disney works, but were more fully developed in the wartime efforts.

Many of the shorts portray the enemy in humorous fashion, in ways that would be considered racist today but that audiences at the time would’ve responded well to. In the 1943 short “Victory Vehicles,” starring the character Goofy, Disney mentions the enemy in solid terms for the first time. The short features several silly solutions to the gasoline and rubber shortage. A billboard that Goofy passes proclaims, “Beat the Jap with Scrap” (*Figure 5*). The narrator suggests dropping extra concrete on the Germans or Japanese. The cartoon is addressing real problems; it just does not provide useful solutions. Later shorts would present shortages with a sense of urgency rather than humor.

---

102 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.*
103 Van Riper, *Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt,* 44.
The representation of the enemy is explicit in “Commando Duck,” made later in the war in 1944. The short shows Donald in the Pacific Theater, on a dangerous mission. This is the first time in the shorts that enemy soldiers are shown with faces and are heard speaking. The Japanese soldiers are portrayed as overly polite, bowing profusely to each other and speaking in incorrect English and garbled Japanese. Once Donald is spotted, one hidden soldier exclaims, “All right, here he coming. Time to shooting please, I hope,” to which his comrade responds, “No, wait please. Japanese custom say always shooting a man in the back, please.” Many of these shorts were later banned for this kind of questionable content, including the later four shorts created to explain the dangers of the Nazi ideology, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Some of the material that the studio was dealing with was heavy or very dry, and the skilled Disney staff knew how to craft the films so that the information could be presented in a clear manner that was still entertaining. Several government agencies approached Disney to commission animated films for educational purposes. In Richard Allen Shale’s 1976 University

104 Sharpsteen et al., Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.
of Michigan dissertation, *Donald Duck Joins Up: The Walt Disney Studio During World War II*, he clarifies the distinction between the government films sponsored by the military and films sponsored by government agencies other than the military.\(^{105}\) The films sponsored by the Treasury Department or the Department of Agriculture, for example, were non-military government films. Unlike the training films, these were created for a wider audience and therefore feature some humor in order to lighten up dull material.

Before the United States entered the war, the National Film Board of Canada approached Disney to make shorts encouraging Canadians to buy war bonds. This resulted in “The Thrifty Pig” and “Seven Wise Dwarves” in 1941.\(^{106}\) Both shorts reuse footage from previous Disney efforts, the short “The Three Little Pigs” and *Snow White*, respectively. The footage is altered to promote the war bonds, with the Big Bad Wolf wearing a Nazi uniform and the dwarves selling the jewels from their mine to buy war bonds (Figure 6).

![Figure 6: The Nazi Big Bad Wolf from "The Thrifty Pig" (1941)](image)


\(^{106}\) Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines*.
The shorts feature familiar characters singing familiar songs, with new war-themed lyrics. Instead of singing about going to work, the dwarves sing “we’ll win the war with five-for-four, hi ho,” and the pigs sing “We’ll be safe from the big bad wolf if you do your saving.” The shorts both end with images of planes fighting, some with swastikas on them, with the end title proclaiming “Invest in Victory.”\(^\text{107}\) The images of Disney characters followed by the planes at war are jarring, but this gets the message across, which was the goal. These are less polished than the later propaganda cartoons commissioned by the United States government, but are Disney’s first attempts at conveying political messages through animation.

In 1942 the studio produced two more films for Canada: “Donald’s Decision” and “All Together Now.” The former utilized footage from the previous Donald Duck cartoons “Donald’s Better Self” and “Self Control” to depict Donald deciding whether or not he should invest in war bonds. He fights with an angel and demon version of himself, and the angel is victorious. The short ends with the Angel winning, and the screen flashes with the same “Invest in Victory” message. “All Together” is a very short clip of Disney characters, including Donald, Mickey, the Seven Dwarves and Pinocchio, marching in a parade with signs urging viewers to buy bonds.

After the success of the Canadian shorts, the Treasury Department of the United States approached Disney as well. As the New York Times reported on January 6, 1942, Disney met with U.S Secretary of the Treasury Henry Morgenthau about a film project that would “encourage Americans to pay taxes early and to buy war bonds.”\(^\text{108}\) The result of this meeting was “The New Spirit,” featuring, of course, Donald Duck. Unlike the typical Donald entertainment short or the earlier Canadian war bond shorts, which were two to three minutes in

\(^{107}\) Ibid.

length, “The New Spirit” is six minutes long. Leskosky classifies this film as one of the “home front calls to action,” combining humor and entertainment with an explicit purpose.  

The short opens with Donald listening to a song about the “Yankee Doodle spirit” on the radio, when the patriotic song is interrupted by a radio announcer, voice actor Cliff Edwards. The announcer appears to be addressing Donald directly, proclaiming that the country has a “new spirit,” of unity.” He continues, “Your whole country is mobilizing for total war,” the announcer tells Donald, “Your country needs you!” Donald says that he is ready to do his part and will do anything needed to help in the war effort. He is disappointed when the announcer informs him that all he needs to do is pay his income taxes, “taxes to beat the Axis.” The short then turns informational, showing Donald how to fill out the tax form. Some humor is added in, as he lists his occupation as “actor” and says that he has three dependents, his three nephews. Donald then mails it in early, as he is informed that “the sooner you get your taxes in, the sooner they’ll get to work.” The mood then shifts as animated war images fill the screen and the narrator lists the different types of guns, planes and ships that the taxes help to fund. The tagline becomes “Taxes to bury the Axis,” and “Taxes will keep democracy on the march,” as “Let Freedom Ring” plays. The cartoon is jam-packed with propaganda messages, conveyed with the familiar character Donald at first, but the message becomes more urgent and the tone becomes much more serious.

A full-page advertisement for “The New Spirit” in the February 4, 1942 issue of Variety touts the film as “The Donald Duck U.S. Treasury Department Picture, which every exhibitor in

---

109 Van Riper, Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt, 42.
110 Sharpsteen et al., Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines; Van Riper, Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt, 48.
111 Sharpsteen et al., Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.
112 Ibid.
America will be proud to play, and which will help gross billions of dollars for Uncle Sam.”

The short was met with some criticism in the Senate for its high production costs, but it was effective in getting Americans to pay their taxes, so the Treasury Department requested a follow-up, “The Spirit of ’43.” As reported in the January 1943 issue of *Variety*, the film cost “Uncle Sam less than the controversial 80,000 spent last year for ‘The New Spirit.’” The lower cost may be due to the fact that the film is shorter, and reuses footage from the first “Spirit.”

Like its predecessor, the short features Donald, and is in the same vein as both “The New Spirit” and the short made for Canada, “Donald’s Decision.” Donald receives his paycheck, and has to decide whether to listen to the “thrifty” voice in his head telling him to “save for taxes” or the “spendthrift” telling him to “Spend for the Axis.” The narrator urges Donald to save his money, since “thanks to Hitler and Hirohito, taxes are higher than ever before,” so he needs to make sure that he will be able to make his tax payments when the time comes. As he deliberates, the “spendthrift” persona now has the hair and mustache of Hitler (Figure 7). The strong imagery, as well as the heavy message that “every dollar you sock away for taxes is another dollar to sock the Axis.” The second half is the same footage from the “New Spirit,” informing viewers that their tax dollars will be spent to run the factories that make weapons to win the war.

---

113 “Salute to Walt Disney for ‘,’ ” *Variety*, February 4, 1942.
115 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines*.
116 Ibid.
Other government agencies approached the Disney studio during the war, including the Department of Agriculture, requesting a film highlighting the hard work of American farmers. Disney then created “Food Will win the War” in 1942.\footnote{Similarly, Disney produced “The Grain that Built a Hemisphere” in 1943, but it was commissioned by the Coordinator of Inter-American Affairs for Latin American audiences.} \footnote{Van Riper, \textit{Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt}, 46.} Leskosky refers to this as an “agricultural documentary,” although its purpose is primarily propaganda.\footnote{Sharpsteen et al., \textit{Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines}.} While animated, the film takes a realistic look at the grim situation caused by the war overseas, the destruction by the Axis. The narrator proclaims, “towns are ravaged, countrysides laid waste, farms, cattle and crops have been destroyed. Ruin, destitution, hunger stalk the helpless victims of cruel aggressors.”\footnote{Ibid.} The short assures that there is hope, in American agriculture and the farmers the produce it.

The farmers and their families are described as soldiers with “battalions of combines, regiments of trucks,” in divisions of “corn pickers and potato diggers.”\footnote{Ibid.} Their weapons are the
crops, which are listed in terms of immense proportions: enough wheat to cover Russia in flour “snow,” corn to stretch from London the Black Sea, vegetables to cover the Great Wall of China (Figure 8). The imagery is strange and fantastical, but the message is that the farmers are making just as much of a contribution and sacrifice as the soldiers overseas. The short ends with ships carrying the “food for freedom: Produced, fought through, and delivered to all who fight for the freedom of speech, freedom of worship, freedom from want, freedom from fear.” The short was shown to soldiers overseas as well as those on the home front. The focus is on conveying a specific message, so this is not an entertainment short and has a dark, intense feel to it.

![Figure 8: Corn stretching from London to the Black Sea in "Food Will Win the War" (1942)](image)

The Conservation Division of the War Production Board commissioned “Out of the Frying Pan, Into the Firing Line,” also in 1942. Starring Minnie Mouse and Pluto, the short conveys the importance of saving the seemingly insignificant cooking grease, which could be turned into glycerin to make explosives. The short urges Americans to save their drippings and bring them to a local meat dealer, where they will be compensated. This small act, the narrator 

---

121 Ibid.
insists, will make a large difference in the war. “A skillet of bacon grease is a little munitions factory. Meat drippings sink axis war ships. Waste frying fat speeds depth charges on their way to crush Axis submarines.” Images of sinking submarines and planes are shown, and then a picture of Mickey Mouse in a soldier’s uniform, showing that the grease saved will benefit those overseas. The short is a mix of the cartoon style, with some realistic images, such as of the war scenes and close-ups of the food and radio. Its short length is comparable to the entertainment cartoons, but it is explicitly a call to action like the “Spirit” shorts, although saving kitchen grease may be considered a less arduous tax than paying taxes.

Unlike Warner Brothers with the *Snafu* series, Disney was not creating characters for the wartime age, but putting existing ones in wartime situations. Donald Duck, the most popular Disney character at the time, even above Mickey Mouse, is the star of most of the studio’s entertainment and propaganda shorts at this time. Mickey is rarely seen in the wartime shorts, with many of them prominently featuring Donald. This may be due to tendency in Nazi propaganda to depict non-Aryans as rats and mice. The studio might very well have wanted to distance itself from these associations.

Starting with “Donald Gets Drafted” in 1942, the duck found himself in virtually every division of the army, urging Canadians to buy war bonds, and learning the important of paying his taxes. In that first short, Donald receives his draft papers and eagerly joins the army (*Figure 9*). The joke running through most of the Donald wartime shorts is that he is “from a family of aviators” and just wants to fly planes. When he actually gets the chance to fly, in 1942’s “Sky Troopers,” he is made a paratrooper but is terrified of jumping out of the plane. These gags add

---

122 Van Riper, *Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt*, 52.
124 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines*. 
humor to the overall serious topic of war, entertaining audiences but still being relevant and timely.

Figure 9: New Recruit Donald in "Donald Gets Drafted" (1942)

The familiar character, in his signature sailor outfit and then later his army uniform, became an unlikely wartime figure. The New York Times picked up on this, with an article in the February 7, 1943 issue, entitled “Donald Duck’s Disney.” In it, Theodore Strauss writes that “Donald, who used to be just another noisy neighbor, has by some odd token of fate become a sort of ambassador-at-large, a salesman of the American Way.” Donald’s World War II persona, referred to as “Private Duck,” is an updated version of the beloved, hard-to-understand character that audiences were familiar with. The 1943 short “Fall Out – Fall In,” featuring Donald, received positive reviews in the May 18, 1943 issue of Film Daily. The short features Donald as an army recruit, marching along through various extreme climates, when all he wants

126 “Donald Duck’s Disney.”
127 “Fall Out - Fall In’ (Walt Disney),” The Film Daily, May 18, 1943.
is a break. The magazine called the short “very funny,” and that “his efforts to get some rest will bring howls of laughter from the audience.”

Donald stars in what might be the studio’s most infamous short from the time, 1942’s “Der Fuehrer’s Face,” originally entitled “Donald in Nutzi Land.” As Joe Grant, who worked at the studio as an artist at the time, said in an interview, “Why would we do ‘Nutzi Land’ if we didn’t have the duck?” Donald was an integral component of the short, since he “was known all over the world, in every Allied country.” While many of the Disney cartoons at this time retain the lighthearted humor of its earlier shorts, several touch upon the dark ideology that America was fighting against overseas. The short was renamed when the song “Der Fuehrer’s Face,” which was written for the film but released before it, became a hit. The song makes fun of Nazi ideology, the German language and stereotypes, as it begins with “When Der Fuehrer says we is de master race, we heil, heil right in Der Fuehrer’s face.” After the Spike Jones recording was selected as radio host Martin Block’s song of the week on his hit show “Make Believe Ballroom,” Block offered free records of the song if people pledged to buy war bonds, raising $60,000. The renaming, then, became necessary.

The short opens with a Nazi army band comically singing the title song. The rest of the short is comprised of Donald’s nightmare, in which he finds himself in “Nutzi Land,” surrounded by Swastikas and both people and animals in Nazi uniforms (Figure 10). His morning consists of waking up to a giant rooster “heiling” Hitler, coffee from one secretly stored coffee bean that he dunks in water, a spray of “aroma of bacon and eggs” for breakfast, along with a piece of

128 Ibid.
129 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.*
130 Ibid.
131 “Hollywood Inside: Story behind Walt Disney’s Decision to Change the Title of His Short,” *Daily Variety*, October 12, 1942.
incredibly hard, stale bread. He is then given a copy of *Mein Kampf* “to improve his mind,” before heading to work at a weapons factory where he has to work “48 hours a day for der Fuehrer.” Donald has to repeatedly *heil* and listen to the bizarre commands from his officers, until he can’t take it anymore. The short then devolves into a surreal nightmare sequence with floating whistles, weapons and swastikas until Donald wakes up in his bed in American flag pajamas. He sees his miniature Statue of Liberty and exclaims, “Oh boy, am I glad to be a citizen of the United States of America!”

![Figure 10: Donald in "Der Fuehrer’s Face" (1942)](image)

The short was met with positive reviews, and garnered the studio an Academy Award. The other short subject nominees that year also had a “patriotic theme,” having to do with “defense, preparation, the will and means to fight,” according to the February 4, 1943 issue of *Daily Variety*. While the short was created for general propaganda purposes and was shown in theaters across the country, it was also shown to the troops stationed abroad. As reported in

---

132 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines*.
another February 1943 *Daily Variety* article, the “Army Overseas Service…requested 22 prints” of the short. The themes stressed in the film were appropriate for both a civilian and military audience.

The exact feel of the short “was in contention for a long time,” according to Grant, “until we decided to make it a very wild and irresponsible piece.” From the tongue-in-cheek lyrics of the song to the Nazi caricatures, the cartoon boldly defies convention to convey its message. As Maltin explains, the short reduces “the serious tenets of Hitler’s Nazism to slapstick absurdities. And it gives the audience a chance to think, as Donald does, about the freedoms they might have taken for granted.”

By this point, Disney is referred to in the *New York Times* as “one of this country’s No. 1 propagandists.” The studio was using the tried-and-true animated form to combat the dangerous Nazi ideology that the country was facing overseas, and released three other shorts with this purpose. The other “morale pictures,” as *Variety* refers to them in the October 7, 1942 issue are “Education for Death,” “Reason and Emotion” and “Chicken Little.” These “deal satirically with Nazi ideology and are designed to entertain as well as instruct.” These four shorts are again referenced in the October 26th issue of the same year, this time as “special subjects.” These are still referred to by the magazine as “entertainment films,” but with the specific purpose of “using war as a background for psychological effect.”

---

134 A Spanish-language version of the film was created for Central and South American viewing, and in 1943 the studio created a Russian version of the film with a new Russian score. “Disney Sending Russ ‘Der Fuehrer’s Face’,” *Daily Variety*, November 26, 1943.
135 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines*.
136 “Donald Duck’s Disney.”
138 Ibid.
139 “Disney Schedule Calls for 90% Output of War Films.”
140 Ibid.
The darkest and most serious of the four is “Education for Death,” released in January 1943, based on the book of the same name by Gregor Ziemer.\textsuperscript{141} Vastly different from the rest of the studio’s wartime propaganda shorts, the film is somber and matter-of-fact. It doesn’t sugarcoat the reality of Nazi Germany, but presents a look at the life and death of one of “Hitler’s children.” As the narrator, radio actor Art Smith informs the audience, “Nazi control over a German child starts as soon as it’s born.”\textsuperscript{142} A young married couple is shown presenting a birth certificate proving that their newborn son is of pure Aryan blood before being allowed to name him Hans, a name that isn’t on the “forbidden list.” The short then shows his childhood and schooling, as he is indoctrinated with the Nazi ideology even as a toddler. The one comical scene is an absurd version of the fairytale “Sleeping Beauty” told to Hans as a young boy, with prince representing Hitler, the wicked witch representing democracy and the princess representing Germany. When Hans falls ill, a Nazi official warns his mother that he must get better, with the implied threat that if he can’t serve as a soldier, he will be killed. Once he recovers, the rest of his schooling instills the messages of hatred, which he resists but eventually internalizes.

The short shows how the system slowly takes away any compassion, humor, and empathy from the boys until they become solders, who “only know to heil and march.”\textsuperscript{143} Hans is now fully a Nazi, and only says and does what the Nazi officials want him to do. The ending is especially grim and shocking, as the short shows the newly minted Nazi soldiers marching, “trampling on the rights of others,” until they fade to rows of graves with helmets and Swastikas.

\textsuperscript{141} The book also inspired the live-action RKO film \textit{Hitler’s Children} that same year.
\textsuperscript{142} Sharpsteen et al., \textit{Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines}.
\textsuperscript{143} Ibid.
(Figure 11). The narrator’s final line, “For now his education is complete. His education for death,” concludes the short, emphasizing to the audience that this is not for their entertainment.

![Figure 11: The Final Shot in "Education for Death" (1943)](image)

Maltin points out the exemplary work done by the Disney artists on this short film: “how well they stage each scene for dramatic impact, using shadows and silhouettes to emphasize the menace inherent in each phase of this saga.” Disney artist Joe Grant classifies the short as an “editorial” rather than a “cartoon.” Unlike some of the other propaganda shorts, this one is meant to have a jarring impact on the viewer. Aside from the fairytale scene, there are none of the signature Disney animated tricks. The ending especially drives home the message that the Nazi creed is embedded in young boys from birth, training them to hate, kill, and eventually be killed themselves.

“Reason and Emotion,” released in August 1943, was nominated for the Academy Award for Best Animated Short Subject. The short presents the dynamic between reason and emotion inside the human mind, with unique and inventive animation. As Maltin puts it, “Using ingenious visual ideas and humorous exaggeration, the filmmakers paint a vivid picture of how
our imagination can run away with us.”

The first part of the short is a fascinating look at how people work, even before any mention of Hitler or the war. First a toddler is shown, with only Emotion, until Reason develops. The cartoon is able to show the inside of the boy’s head, as he grows up and the two sides vie for control. When he is a grown man and encounters an attractive woman, Reason tries to stop Emotion from saying something rude to her, but fails and the woman slaps him. The short then switches to the inside of the woman’s head, as her Reason and Emotion debate about what food she should eat for lunch. Emotion wins, and she eventually becomes obese because she is only listening to her emotions. This section is overly dramatic and intentionally silly, but it gets the point across that humans need reason to guide them through life.

The second section of the short has a more explicit connection to the war. Newspaper headlines flash on screen, becoming more fantastical and contradictory: “Navy Sunk, Starving, Plenty of Food, Losing the War, Winning, Losing.” The narrator emphasizes the importance of being in control of both Reason and Emotion in order to sift through all of the information and not panic. The short shows how all of the conflicting information from the radio, newspapers, family and friends can take its toll if one is not in control. If Emotion pushes Reason away, then Hitler, who destroys reason “by preying upon the weakness of emotion with fear, sympathy, pride and hate just as he did in the minds of the German people,” has won.

The final, most powerful section of the short delves in the Nazi ideology and tactics used by Hitler, as seen through the eyes of a “Nazi superman.” Reason is not impacted by the threats of the concentration camps or the Gestapo, and does not believes his “phony racial theories about

---

144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
Aryan superiority.” Emotion takes control, however, and is shown putting Reason into a small concentration camp while he “heils” Hitler and internalizes the Nazi ideology. This creates “a mad Emotion, stripped of all Reason, leaving nothing but ruin in its wake.” If, instead, Reason is used to “think, plan and discriminate,” the Nazis can be defeated.

The short ends with the message that Reason needs to be the first defense, with Emotion in check. Patriotic music plays as American planes fly overhead. The powerful short uses cartoon antics to convey an explicit message, without including any Disney characters. In line with the three previous morale shorts, “Reason and Emotion” ridicules “the Hitlerian dream of conquest by war, politics and espionage,” as Daily Variety put it the year before.\textsuperscript{146} The film is ahead of its time in terms of its realistic grasp of Nazi ideology, explaining how Hitler was able to influence so many people. Complex concepts are presented in simple terms, but the short does not seem aimed at children, as most of it would go over their heads. This is an example of animated propaganda, utilizing what was once thought of as a medium solely for children to convey a strong, adult message to the audience.

The final of the four “morale films” is “Chicken Little,” released in December 1943. Unlike what its title might suggest, the cartoon is not a lighthearted depiction of the fable. Instead, it is a “wartime parable about listening to rumors and falling prey to persuasive leaders who have their own sinister agendas.” The short tells the classic story, which might make it seem that this is a children’s cartoon. As Maltin warns, however, this is a “Disney cartoon that parents might want to see for themselves before deciding if it’s appropriate for their kids.”\textsuperscript{147} Most of the story plays out the way one would expect, with Foxy Loxy convincing Chicken Little that the

\textsuperscript{146} “Disney’s Morale Cartoons,” Daily Variety, October 14, 1942.
\textsuperscript{147} Sharpsteen et al., Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.
sky is falling to get to the rest of the birds on the poultry farm. The difference is that the fox is using psychological manipulation to “influence the masses.”

The short is clearly a metaphor for Hitler and his ideology, but the studio actually downplayed any obvious connections. According to Maltin, “originally, the studio planned to show Foxy Loxy reading Mein Kampf, to make sure no one missed the point.” Instead, the fox reads from a book entitled Psychology, but the passages are still from Hitler’s autobiography. By “aiming at the least intelligent” and using flattery to cause “insignificant people…to look upon themselves as born leaders,” Foxy Loxy lures all of the poultry out of the farm and into his cave. At this point, the narrator reassures the audience, “Don’t worry folks, this all turns out all right.”

The next image, however, is the fox licking chicken bones, with the rest of the bones in a row like graves. The narrator exclaims, “Hey wait a minute, that’s not how it ends in my book!” To this the fox replies, “Don’t believe everything you read, brother!” In this version, all of the birds end up dead, killed by the fox because he was able to manipulate them into following him. Although it might seem childish at first, the studio used a children’s tale to convey its message. Like the equally jarring “Education for Death,” the short aims to expose Hitler’s techniques, but from a different angle.

After this surplus of propaganda films in 1943, the studio continued with its war efforts, but primarily focused on training and educational films for the rest of the war. It also released its major propaganda effort in 1943, the feature-length Victory Through Airpower, which will be discussed at length in the next chapter, along with the more technical short films produced by Disney during the war.

148 Ibid.
Chapter Four: Beyond Shorts: Disney’s Feature-Length and Training Films

Disney’s wartime output was not solely focused on animated entertainment and propaganda shorts. In 1943, Disney produced its longest propaganda effort during the war, the feature-length film *Victory Through Airpower*. Unlike Disney’s previous theatrical releases, the goal of the film was not to entertain, but to send a message and educate. The film was not commissioned by the government, unlike many of Disney’s previous war films. As the New York Times reported, “The nearly ready Victory Through Airpower…was undertaken by Disney entirely on his own initiative.”149 This also meant that the film was not funded through the government, which was a large undertaking for a studio already suffering financially.150 Based on Major Alexander P. de Seversky’s book of the same name, *Victory Through Airpower* combines animated segments with live-action footage of Seversky himself lecturing, along with animated maps and narration to tell the story of airpower and its significance in the war. The film is an unusual example of propaganda, as it effectively tells the U.S. armed forces how to fight, and ultimately win, the war.

The animated segments showcase the skills of the Disney artists at adapting their visual storytelling techniques to convey a serious message. They still left room for some humor and creativity, as can be seen in the first section of the film, “The History of Aviation.” The artists built on the advanced animation techniques developed in their previous feature-length efforts.151 Even in the more somber parts of the film, the team’s use of visual metaphors and expert staging of battle scenes is innovative and in line with the Disney standard.

---

149 “Donald Duck’s Disney.”
150 Van Riper, *Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt*, 78.
The film opens with a dedication to General Billy Mitchell, an early advocate for the importance of airpower as early as 1919. This inclusion is notable because of Mitchell’s somewhat controversial history. In 1925, Mitchell was court-martialed for insubordination, after publicly denouncing the Army and Navy following the deadly crash of the Shenandoah airship. Mitchell was a vocal supporter of an independent United States Air Force, convinced that planes would be more effective than battleships. Largely derided for his views during his lifetime, Mitchell was awarded a posthumous Congressional Medal of Honor. Seversky was heavily influenced by Mitchell’s teachings, and the film’s dedication reflects the changed perception of Mitchell and his assertions, many of which were later proven true.

A clip of Mitchell proclaiming that an air force is the most powerful weapon is shown before the film transitions to the animated “History of Aviation” section. Starting with the Wright Brothers in 1903, the section traces man’s attempts at flight and the development of aviation in wartime use. The animation is less polished and cartoonish than Disney’s animated films or shorts. Drawn in a more realistic fashion, the focus is on the history being conveyed rather than the animation itself. The style is different from any of the previous films, due in part to the fact that many of Disney’s top animators had enlisted or were involved in other projects. Certain visual gags or small jokes are inserted, but the film is not intended to produce laughs. Instead, the opening section is lighthearted but informative.

Once the historical section reaches World War I, the tone begins to shift as airpower is shown as an increasingly powerful weapon. In World War I, the airplane was primarily used as a surveillance tool, and pilots from enemy countries are depicted as being polite and courteous to

---

153 Sharpsteen et al., Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.
each other in the air. This changed as weapons were added to the planes, from machine guns to bombing apparatuses, turning them into formidable killing machines. The transition from friendly skies to warfare in the air is especially striking when seen in animated form.

The film points out that the development of aviation technology that took place during the four years of World War I would have normally taken twenty years. A similar phenomenon was happening while *Victory Through Airpower* was being made. The innovations in animation that took place in order to allow a partially animated propaganda film of its kind were also heavily spurred by the urgency of war. The entire section is treated as recent history, since aviation only dates back about forty years at this point. Even so, the comprehensive history gives an in-depth look at how aviation developed from a new form of transportation to the backbone of the armies fighting in World War II. The final part of the animated history section fasts-forward to 1939, showing Britain and France entering the war. Stark flames appear on screen, announcing that the entertainment portion is over (*Figure 12*).

*Figure 12: The End of the History Section in *Victory Through Airpower* (1943)*
Before the film transitions to the live-action portion, Seversky’s background as an aviator and engineer for both Russia and the United States is explained. After losing his leg during a mission at 22 years old, Seversky continued fighting and was awarded the highest honors in flight service in Russia before serving as a test pilot and engineer for the United States government. During his service, Seversky invented many instruments and devices that greatly improved the efficiency of military aviation. He was involved in the entire process, designing and testing the planes himself, setting world records for both speed and range. In 1940, President Roosevelt presented Seversky with the Harman trophy for being the outstanding airman of the year.

Disney was a vocal supporter of Seversky’s theories. As he told the New York Times in 1943, “One thing is certain – airpower is going to be mighty important, not only in the war but in the world we’re going to live in after.”

The film was made at a time when the outcome of the war in both the Pacific and European theatres was uncertain. Disney believed that it was his studio’s responsibility to inform the public, even though the film had limited commercial potential. Disney hired director H.C. Potter, who was also a pilot and understood aviation, for the live-action lecture sequences. Potter had directed several successful commercial films, including the 1939 musical The Story of Vernon and Irene Castle, with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers. Potter’s goal was to stage Seversky so that the lectures did not come across as stiff and overly formal. Seversky is shown in a classroom-like setting, with chalkboards, maps and globes. The film utilizes animation within the live-action segments, such as an animated map with

---

154 “Donald Duck’s Disney.”
moving Swastikas to indicate Nazi territory. When Seversky gestures to a globe, animated arrows help guide the viewer to the exact locations he is describing. Used as a lecture aid, this type of animation is also found in other wartime films, such as Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* series, which will be discussed in a later chapter. These lecture scenes needed to be filmed at night, due to the noise from the nearby Lockheed Aircraft Corporation. Because of this, Seversky is seen standing in front of a window looking out at what looks like a daytime sky, which is actually a fake background.

Seversky’s message becomes increasingly urgent as the film progresses. His explanations and the accompanying diagrams paint a stark picture of what an unprepared air force could mean for the Allies. Images of burning aircraft carriers and planes are interspersed with his lectures. He sums up his main message with “As long as a nation controls its own skies, it cannot be invaded.” The old reliance on trench warfare or even warships is no longer relevant, and he gives examples of failed attempts that resulted in major casualties, such as the sinking of two British Navy ships. The film shows an animated sequence of the flaming ships sinking, allowing the viewer to visualize the devastation caused by a lack of understanding of airpower (*Figure 13*). The animation allows the film to create footage of the disaster, since there is no live-action record of the sinking. Instead of trenches or warships, Seversky stresses the importance of long-range aircrafts in the fight against Hitler and the Axis Powers.

---

The film utilizes animated maps and diagrams to show Nazi and Japanese air strategy and Allied defense attempts. The maps are very detailed, with arrows corresponding to Seversky’s and the narrator’s dialogue. In the lecture sequences, Seversky utilizes a map or globe, and these contain the same colors and arrows as the animated versions. This creates a sense of continuity, and places the animated maps into the lecture room with Seversky. Maps are utilized to depict recent history as well as the possible future, with Seversky predicting outcomes based on each country’s current and potential amount of air power.

The final section, when Seversky outlines the potential levels that bombing weapons could reach, features the most striking and bleak animation. The animation is the most frightening in this section, achieving the desired effect of showing just how powerful bombs can be when science is implemented. The final scenes are animated, showing large aircrafts taking off, bombing and destroying enemy supplies, factories and ships. The dark animation features mostly explosions and flames, accompanied by the sounds of bombs and sirens. Seversky announces that once the Allies “break the chains of habit and free themselves from the
earthbound past,” they can then “plan and carry out real air strategy, prevent further human lives
lost, forge real weapons of airpower that will carry total destruction to the enemy.”156 “America
the Beautiful” plays as the animated scene becomes symbolic, showing an eagle attacking an
cepopus, representing Japan, until it loosens its tentacles from the territories in its grip. An image
of the globe at peace fills the screen, followed by the eagle flying onto an American flag (Figure
14).

![Figure 14: The Final Sequence in Victory Through Airpower (1942)](image)

The animation in these final sequences is the most stylized and dramatic. The film is able
to drive its point home through the animation, in a way that live-action footage not have worked.
Ending the film with Seversky lecturing would not have had the same impact. The potentially
deadly consequences of a lacking air force, juxtaposed with the visually arresting metaphor of
the eagle and octopus, solidify the film’s political message and establish its status as a
propaganda instrument. The film transitions from history to education to propaganda, utilizing

---

156 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.*
animation to enhance and complement live-action footage in ways that Disney would later use in other commercial feature films, such as *Song of the South* or *Mary Poppins*.

During production, *Variety* reported on Disney’s lineup of productions for the war, including *Victory Through Airpower*, which the journal called an “outstanding contribution” to the war effort.\(^\text{157}\) The article emphasizes the “wholehearted cooperation of the entire Disney force” and dedication to “the undoing of Hitler, Hirohito and Mussolini.”\(^\text{158}\) Disney rushed production on the film, due to the “timeliness and importance” of its contents.\(^\text{159}\) *Victory Through Airpower* took less than a year to produce, as opposed to *Snow White*, which took over three years. The quality is still high, despite the reduced time. This is partially because the film is not fully animated, and live-action sequences take less time to shoot and edit, and partially because of the urgency of the war.

The Technicolor film cost Disney an estimated $788,000 to create and did not make it back at the box office during its six-week run. Instead, the studio lost around $500,000.\(^\text{160}\) Critical responses were mixed, and Disney’s usual distributor, RKO, did not want to release the film. Instead, Disney released it through United Artists.\(^\text{161}\) Advertising agent Albert Lasker tried to arrange for the film to be shown to President Roosevelt at the White House, to no avail.\(^\text{162}\) Roosevelt’s chief of staff, William Leahy, did not share Seversky’s views and resisted. Eventually, Winston Churchill, upon seeing the film in Quebec, ordered President Roosevelt to see it immediately. According to director Potter, Roosevelt committed to using long-range

\(^{157}\) “Disney Doing a Gigantic Job Aiding War Effort.”
\(^{158}\) Ibid.
\(^{159}\) Ibid.
\(^{162}\) “Disney’s Greatest Film.”
bombing after seeing it. At the very least, the film played in a role in influencing Roosevelt’s views on the use of aviation during the war. Although the film was not a commercial success, it still achieved its goal of teaching the importance of airpower.

Critical reception to the film ranged from applauding to cautiously accepting to unimpressed. In his July 19, 1943 review for the *New York Times*, Thomas M. Pryor refers to *Victory Through Airpower* as an “informational-educational film.” He emphasizes Disney’s efforts at adding “a brilliantly Technicolored array of maps and diagrams,” presenting “Seversky’s ideas with a clarity which could never be achieved simply through the spoken word.” Pryor praises the technological advances in the film as well as the ease through which complex information is conveyed through animation, that makes “aerial strategy understandable even to upper-grade elementary school pupils.” He acknowledges that the film is pure propaganda, but believes that it is effective in conveying Disney’s vision of Seversky’s teachings.

Not all film critics received the film so graciously. While *Life* magazine calls the film “good history and fine entertainment,” the magazine also cautions against taking all of Seversky’s messages to heart. “Seversky’s extreme ideas may do airpower a disservice by beguiling a fascinated public into the belief that this war can be won by dream ships which unfortunately are not yet a reality.” The review, along with stills from the film, takes up two

---

163 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines.*
165 Ibid.
166 Ibid.
167 Ibid.
168 Ibid.

70
and a half pages in the magazine nonetheless, but the realistic warning speaks to the uncertainty felt at this time.

Audiences were not as receptive as critics were to the film. According to Steven Watts in his book *The Magic Kingdom: Walt Disney and the American Way of Life*, “Victory Through Airpower attracted only meager audiences and ended up losing money for the studio.”¹⁶⁹ The film lacked what audiences had come to expect from a Disney animated feature: a concrete story, developed characters, beautiful artwork, emotional drama, and lively music. As Watts puts it, the film “prompted a reaction that was equal parts lukewarm patriotism, apathy, and bewilderment.”¹⁷⁰ This is not surprising, as it was unlike any previously released film, Disney or otherwise. Disney’s previous propaganda efforts had been animated shorts. There was no precedent for a film like this, nor any generic precedents for it to follow. Audiences were used to going to the movies for entertainment purposes, so the feature-length propaganda film was unexpected. The film was created for a broad audience. As Watts writes, “It contained many scenes designed to convert as many men and women (and even children) of all ages as possible into supporters of an independent air force and a wartime strategy based on long-range bombing.”¹⁷¹ The inclusion of children as a parenthetical afterthought is telling; while the film contains many animated sequences, it was not targeted at children. The film sought to convey complex ideas in as simple a manner as possible, but the didactic tone alienated audiences looking for a traditional Disney experience.

Carl Nater, a production coordinator at the Disney studio who oversaw many wartime training and educational films, gave a presentation at the 1943 Technical Conference in

⁷⁰ Ibid.
⁷¹ Ibid., 69.
Hollywood, on the studio’s transformation since the start of the war. The presentation, entitled “Walt Disney Studio – A War Plant,” was later printed in the March 1944 issue of the *Journal of the Society of Motion Picture Engineers*. Nater wrote about the striking change that the studio underwent, from “creating whimsical entertainment” to assisting in “the mass production of men and implement for war.”172 This transition was especially apparent in *Victory Through Airpower*, and audiences were unsure how to respond. The commercial release did not have the effect on the public that Disney had hoped it would achieve. The film did still have an influence on the perception of airpower, especially on Churchill and later Roosevelt.

Despite the poor audience reception, the film was a stepping-stone for Disney’s entrance into the realm of education. In the July 25, 1943 *New York Times* article, “Disney, The Teacher: ‘Victory Through Airpower’ and How Films Can Be Used in Education,” Pryor discusses how the war made animation a viable medium for conveying complex information. As he writes, “until the urgency of war made it imperative to find means by which unskilled persons could be trained quickly to grasp the intricacies of mechanics and military operation, cinematic audio-visual education was something which flourished more in theory than fact.”173 The war allowed animation to develop into a full-fledged educational tool, with Disney at the forefront of this innovation. Pryor writes that Disney “appears to have the makings of a great teacher,” since he can blend creative visuals, humor and instructional content.174

Written shortly after *Victory Through Airpower’s* release, the article cites the film as an example of “how instruction by film can be sugar-coated so as not to appear offensively

---

174 Ibid.
pedagogical for mass consumption.” Disney implemented many of the animation techniques from his previous films, but in a much more serious context than a film such as *Snow White*, and on a larger scale than the propaganda shorts. While the early animated feature-lengths did feature emotional and sometimes frightening content, they were not intended to convey a greater message. Here, Disney was not simply telling a story, as he was in *Snow White*. The film proved that animation could convey complex emotions, but with *Victory Through Airpower*, Disney was utilizing animation to educate and inform his audience, with a specific agenda.

Although primarily a commercial film, *Victory Through Airpower* was also shown overseas for training and educational purposes. As reported in *Daily Variety* on December 6, 1943, the film “is playing considerable part in the training and instruction of United Nations forces… Latest request for picture has been received by Disney from the Canadian staff.” The film was used for training by the United States in the Middle East, as well as British Air Ministry for screening at the Royal Air Force staff college. The U.S. Army Pictorial Service distributed the film for various “important military purposes,” so the film reached a wide audience of military personnel as well as ordinary civilians.

Since the film proved “of service to the fighting forces,” it served a dual purpose as both a military film and a commercial feature. In his essay “Cartoon Combat: World War II, Alexander de Seversky, and Victory Through Airpower,” John D. Thomas refers to the film as “the most widely seen, and possibly the most influential, wartime production released by the studio.” Thomas asserts that the film was still a box-office failure, but that its “propagandistic

---

175 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
179 Van Riper, *Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt*, 64.
value…far outweighed financial compensation.” Audiences were put off by the film’s lack of familiar Disney characters, as the film was so different from the studio’s previous releases. Even so, the film was successful in spreading its message.

The vast differences in reactions from both critics and other viewers can be attributed to the unusual nature of the film. The goal was not to tell a story or purely entertain, which no studio, let alone an animation studio, had attempted to do up until this point. Instead, Disney’s mission was to inform and educate the public about a complicated set of strategic theories. According to Thomas, Disney achieved its propagandistic objectives through the use of “a dynamic array of visual metamorphoses, artistic manipulations designed to enhance both the viewer’s visceral experience of the film as well as its persuasive potential.” The film played a role in the Army Air Forces’ decision to commission a two-part training film series from the studio, entitled “High Level Precision Bombing,” which is one example of the film’s immediate influence during the war.

The concept of animation as a method to convey educational material was novel when the studio produced its educational shorts as well as Victory Through Airpower. As Walt Disney told the New York Times, “the war has taught us that people who won’t read a book will look at a film. You can show that film to any audience and twenty minutes later it has learned something…and it at least has stimulated further interest in study.” Disney predicted the usefulness of animation in education after the war: “Mass education is coming because it’s a necessity. Democracy’s ability to survive depends on the ability of its individuals to appreciate their duties as citizens and to comprehend the complex problems of the changing world we live

180 Ibid., 68.
181 Ibid., 75.
182 Van Riper, Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt.
183 “Donald Duck’s Disney.”
He realized the power that animation, a medium that he had utilized primarily for entertainment, held for education.

Besides for entertainment and propaganda films, the studio also devoted its time and energy to producing numerous training and technical films. As Strauss writes in the *New York Times*, “Artists who had thought only of cute little deer or sarcastic owls, suddenly found themselves boning up like schoolboys on logarithms, meteorological data and the operation of secret weapons.”

Due to the sensitive nature of many of these films, they were classified as restricted and not shown to the general public. These training films were Disney’s biggest contribution to the war in terms of quantity. The studio produced over 200 training films during the course of the war. These films may seem dry and dull, but they were not created for entertainment. Instead, they served a serious purpose, educating soldiers and military personnel on specific wartime tasks. Many of the films were produced under high security conditions, as the subject matter had to be kept secret. As Nater noted in “The Walt Disney Studio – A War Plant” in 1943, “As the majority of the films are of a confidential nature, any detailed discussion of them is curtailed by certain security restrictions.”

These films have only recently been declassified, and until 2004 had not been accessible by the general public.

The Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, located near the Disney studio in Burbank, California, commissioned “Four Methods of Flush Riveting” in 1942. The short is classified as a “Walt Disney Industrial Training Film,” and became the first of many. The film opens with an explanation of its goal: to use “simplified technique developed by the Walt Disney studio to demonstrate the quickest and cheapest method whereby the animation medium can be applied to

---

184 Ibid.
185 Ibid.
national defense training.”\textsuperscript{187} The film itself is simple, with animated diagrams and no-nonsense narration showing how a flushed rivet, parallel with the surface of the plane, will help that plane fly with reduced turbulence and higher speeds. The animation is simple and straightforward, used purely for instructional purposes.

“For Methods of Flush Riveting” is devoid of any animated gimmicks or signature Disney humor. Instead, the film uses highly technical language that assumes the viewer has some level of knowledge about its subject material. At the same time, the animation gives the viewer a visual to go along with the instruction, aiding those with little aviation background. The film does not try to sugarcoat or make the mechanics amusing, since its goal is simply to instruct in a way that live-action footage would not be able to accomplish. The animation allows the viewer to see all possible angles, which would be impossible with live-action. The film proved that animation could be an educational tool, and the studio continued to produce training films on a larger scale. The National Film Board of Canada, which had also commissioned propaganda shorts about war bonds, distributed the film. After its success, the Film Board commissioned Disney to animate a short sequence called “Stop That Tank!” as part of the longer training film “Boys Anti Tank Rifle.”

This short was specifically designed to lighten the tone of the heavier training film, so it does contain some humor and Disneysque material that continues on a smaller scale throughout the rest of the film. After a brief description of the Boys MK-I Anti-Tank Rifle, the sequence shows animated tanks fighting. A cartoon version of Hitler, similar to the depiction in “Der Fuehrer’s Face” and “Reason & Emotion,” pops out of one of the tanks, along with Nazi soldiers (\textbf{Figure 15}). He speaks in rapid German, translated with subtitles, snorting and shouting. After

\textsuperscript{187} Sharpsteen et al., \textit{Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines}. 
his tanks are defeated by anti-tank rifles, Hitler falls down a hole and encounters the Devil, who translates Hitler’s raging from German to English. His tantrum is because of the anti-tank rifles, which he says are an “outrage” and “unfair.” The Devil informs the viewing soldiers that “against your anti-tank rifles he simply can’t win.” This sequence is deliberately over-the-top and ridiculous, but it sets up the rest of the film, piquing the soldiers’ interest in learning more about these rifles. The short is clearly addressing a military audience, and adding some humor before delving in the mechanics of how the rifle works.

Figure 15: The Hitler Caricature in "Stop That Tank!" (1942)

The rest of the training film is, for the most part, strictly serious and instructional, but animated sequences are interspersed in order to show different angles of the rifle. First the importance of safety is emphasized, and then the narrator points out each part of the rifle and its purpose. The narrator is directly addressing the soldiers who will be using it, who are the film’s specified audience. A live-action sequence shows a soldier loading and firing the weapon, before an animated sequence allows the viewer to see the interior of the rifle. The narrator proclaims,

\[188\] Ibid.
“Through the magic of X-ray animation, let us see what takes place inside the rifle when operated.” The film is able to show all of the mechanics of the rifle in a very technical way that would not be possible without animation.

The film is an example of the varied uses of animation, and how it can be used to entertain one minute and to instruct the next. There are some small jokes inserted into the animation in the training film, but they are brief and not intended to distract from the overall instruction. One such instance is an animated sequence showing a rifle being shot. An animated cow runs from the direction in which the rifle was shot, with its tail on fire, exclaiming, “Why don’t you shoot where you’re looking!” The scene seems a little out of place, but since the film started with the animated tank sequence, it makes sense to continue to have a thread of humor throughout the film.

The film then goes into the mechanics of cleaning the different parts of the rifle, with both live-action and animated instruction sequences, before ending on a light note. The narrator explains that a “There is an old army saying: ‘a rifle is like a woman.’ If you treat her right, she’ll never let you down.” Then an animated soldier is shown sleeping in bed with the rifle and kissing it good night, to which the narrator responds, “Say, now that’s going a little too far” (Figure 16). The tongue-in-cheek humor closes the training film in the same way it opened, keeping the soldiers entertained while educating them. This scene is in line with the humor in the Private Snafu films, and was clearly included to appeal to the soldiers. The animated soldier even bears a resemblance to the character of Snafu, even though he was primarily a Warner Brothers creation. The scene highlights how even the Disney studio knew that a little suggestive humor would go a long way with the soldiers. The joke of comparing a gun to a woman is, of
course, based on dated humor that would not be accepted today, but that the soldiers would have chuckled at during the war.

Figure 16: The Snafu-Like Soldier in "Boys Anti Tank Rifle" (1942)

Various branches of the United States Army commissioned training films from the Disney studio. The majority of these films were produced for the Navy, with a smaller percentage going to the Army and the Air Forces. This is due to the fact that the Navy “lacked a robust internal filmmaking capability of its own,” according to Douglas A. Cunningham in his essay “Desiring the Disney Technique: Chronicle of a Contracted Military Training Film.”\(^{189}\) The Army Air Forces, on the other hand, had the First Motion Picture Unit (FMPU), which had the “largest training film production capability in the U.S. Armed Forces.”\(^{190}\) The larger branches did not need Disney as much as the Navy did.

As Variety reported in December 1942, “Walt Disney established a new studio footage record by shipping out more than 30,000 feet of film, chiefly produced for the Navy, during the

---

\(^{189}\) Van Riper, *Learning from Mickey, Donald and Walt*, 27.

\(^{190}\) Ibid.
last 30 days.”¹⁹¹ That amount of footage produced in one month equaled the amount produced by Disney during the entirety of 1941, and was an even higher output than the month before. As the article states, “Most of the product was strictly technical and not for public exhibition.”¹⁹² Most of the footage contained training and instructional films, on subjects including “landings on aircraft carriers and icing conditions at high altitudes.”¹⁹³ The article also reports that Disney was producing these record-breaking amounts of footage despite a reduction in studio staff caused by the war, making its contribution to the war effort even more impressive.

An example of a film produced for the Navy is “The Occluded Fronts,” commissioned by the Bureau of Aeronautics, to train Navy pilots in dealing with weather conditions. The film utilizes simple animation techniques to animate maps showing weather fronts and the varied conditions that the pilots might experience. Another similar film, “Thunder,” utilizes a specialized rain effect that the Disney staff developed for Bambi, reusing the dramatic rain footage from that film. Many of the training films were shot in black-and-white to save money, so the film is not in the same Technicolor glory as Bambi, but the rain effect makes the scenes of pilots flying through and around thunderstorms more vivid. “The Warm Front,” on the other hand, reuses footage from Victory Through Airpower, but keeps the original Technicolor. The film borrows from the “History of Aviation” section of Victory, giving a historical background before delving into the mechanics of dealing with turbulent weather.

The training films utilize complex filming techniques. “The Evasive Action” combines real combat footage with animated diagrams in order to simplify its complicated subject, how bombardiers can avoid bombs. Similarly, a film on the “Three Point System of Identifying U.S.

¹⁹¹ “Disney’s 30,000 Ft. of Film for Navy Equals ’41 Output,” Variety, December 12, 1942, 6.
¹⁹² Ibid.
¹⁹³ Ibid.
“Cruisers” combines animation and live action footage, along with black-and-white stills to convey the information in a more understandable way than live-action alone would allow. “Wings Engines Fuselage Tail,” another Navy training film, utilized simple animation to emphasize the differences between different aircrafts, allowing soldiers to easily identify and distinguish between aircrafts.

Notably, “Rules of the Nautical Road” utilizes animation as well as the techniques used in traditional filmmaking, from editing to dramatic staging. The film tells the story of a naval disaster in Halifax, Nova Scotia. The story is used as an example of what can happen when naval crews don’t follow the rules and explains how collisions can be avoided. The animation is key for this film, as the incident was not captured on newsreel cameras. Since there is no existing footage of the actual collision, the studio had the ability to create an animated version. The visuals add a visceral component to the suspenseful story, allowing the message to hit home more effectively than if a narrator had just explained what had happened.

Many of the films were given “Restricted” classifications, or put in the “hush-hush category,” as Variety called it, but not always for the reasons that one would expect.194 “Aircraft Wood Repair” simply explained how to mix the right kind of glue for weatherproofing wooden airplanes. This information was precious, however, as the United States was not as prepared for the war as it could have been. This glue meant that a plane could be repaired instead of scrapped, which was viewed as a major advantage. The 1943 Army Air Force training film “Theory of the C-1 Autopilot Part 1: Basic Principle” was also given the “Restricted” classification, as it contained information on new advances in autopilot devices. This was viewed as a “giant leap forward for American weaponry,” as it allowed the pilot to have better and more accurate control.

194 “Disney Doing a Gigantic Job Aiding War Effort.”
over the aircraft. This film also contains some footage from *Victory Through Airpower*, as well as a brief risqué moment in which a pin-up girl appears and takes her shirt off, but the word “Censored” appears across her chest (Figure 17). The girl is supposed to be what the pilot is imagining while his plane is on autopilot, which is a somewhat questionable message to send. This is a surprising moment for Disney, since most of its war films are clean and family-friendly. As Maltin points out, this “saucy pin-up girl” was most likely “designed by animator Fred Moore, who was famous for his sexy sketches around the studio.”195 This inclusion of adult humor, which could have been lifted from an episode of *Private Snafu*, was most likely permitted since the film was only intended for military viewing. The training film blends both old and new animation, instructional diagrams as well as some humor, keeping its intended audience in mind.

![Figure 17: The Pilot's Daydream in “Theory of the C-1 Autopilot” (1943)](image)

As Disney story artist John Hench recalls in his interview with Maltin, the team dealt with top-secret material, including “bombing patterns that were established by floating lights.”196 Hench explains, “The bombing areas were specified by a particular arrangement of color and

---

195 Sharpsteen et al., *Walt Disney Treasures - On the Front Lines*.  
196 Ibid.
lights for night bombers.” In order to animate these accurately, several were shot off the roof of the Disney studio, occasionally causing a grass fire. These patterns were shown “to the pilots of bombers that were sent to Germany,” in order to instruct them on “how to find their targets.” These restricted patterns were created rapidly, since the colors and sequences were constantly changing.

Hench says in the interview that he believes that the studio’s wartime work was “necessary,” and that Disney was able to produce films faster than the official animation unit in Washington, D.C. Several of the artists that had enlisted before the military takeover of the Disney studio worked at that unit during the war. As Walt Disney’s nephew, Roy Edward Disney, who was a young teenager during the war remembers, “A lot of the guys who were the fun characters when we were making entertainment films were gone in the army, so there were a lot of younger guys and older guys who were basically trainees in animation and filmmaking.”

This changed the overall mood at the studio, making it more somber and serious. *Variety* reported on the changes at the studio in 1942, saying “In the nation’s switchover from the industrial pursuits of peace to a 100% war basis, it has been a strange spectacle to watch the transformation of a plant devoted so completely to the entertainment of the masses of all ages and in all countries.” The transitions at the studio were reflective of the overall changes in every industry in the country.

The Disney contribution to the war was immense, from propaganda and entertainment films to training and instructional films and even military insignias. There was serious work going on, even though the studio was still working on entertainment films, both war-related short

---

197 Ibid.
198 “Disney Doing a Gigantic Job Aiding War Effort.”
films, as well as feature lengths such as *Dumbo*. The sheer amount of footage produced for the war, especially the training films, emphasizes the studio’s dedication to the war. Disney continued to use the techniques developed at the studio during the war that allowed animation to become a tool of education after the war ended. As Thomas M. Pryor realized in 1943, “the cartoon has grown up. And it appears to be well suited for educational purposes because through it the varied complex formulae of science can be made crystal clear.”

After World War II, animation was used as a tool to instruct students in “geography, economics, or arithmetic,” and those are just the subjects predicted by Pryor. The studio also produced educational films related to health, history, technology and driving safety, as well as a successful series of nature documentaries. The war allowed the Disney studio to step away from its newly minted status as producer of entertaining animation, and branch out into other areas of filmmaking, both in animation and beyond.

---

199 Pryor, “Disney the Teacher.”
Chapter Five: Capra Discovers Animation

Frank Capra is one of the Hollywood heavyweights who enlisted after Pearl Harbor. His major contributions to the war are the *Why We Fight* series and the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine*, both of which have ties with animation. The latter, created under Capra’s suggestion, was a film program shown to soldiers regularly that consisted of newsreels and the *Private Snafu* cartoons. He had a much larger role in the *Why We Fight* series, which consisted of seven documentary films between 1942 and 1945.

In 1942, Capra was a Major for the Army Signal Corps, under the Office of War Information’s Bureau of Motion Pictures. The director, originally from Sicily, was ordered to produce a documentary series directly by General George C. Marshall, of Marshall Plan fame. Marshall went directly to Capra, as opposed to working through the Army Signal Corps, which were usually responsible for producing documentaries. As Capra wrote in his autobiography, *The Name Above the Title*, “Marshall didn’t think Signal Corps…capable of producing sensitive and objective troop information films.” Even though all of Capra’s prior films had been fiction, as opposed to documentaries, Marshall believed that Capra would be able to create films that would appeal to the troops. As Capra himself wrote, “I hadn’t the foggiest idea of how to make a documentary film.” Despite his doubts, Capra was able to spearhead the project, despite bureaucratic issues with the army and government.

Unlike the typically dry training films that the soldiers were used to, the series was more dramatic and attention grabbing. Capra had the natural talent for telling stories through film, which had been prevalent in his commercial features, and this carried over into the

---

201 Ibid., 327.
documentaries. Capra’s title during the project was “Commanding Officer of the 834th Signal Corps Photographic Detachment, on special assignment to the army’s Special Services Division.”202 He was reassigned from the Signal Corps to the Morale Branch (synonymous with the Special Services Division), which was created to “deal with the building of both civilian and military morale.”203 The resulting Why We Fight films would come to serve both purposes. The 834th Signal Service Photographic Detachment, with Capra as its commanding officer, was created expressly for these films.204

Capra’s role on the films was not all that different from his role as a traditional Hollywood director and producer. The films employ traditional filmmaking techniques, telling the story of the war through Capra’s expert vision. The films were created “both as learning tools and propaganda – or counter-propaganda.”205 The goal was to educate troops about the Axis Powers and why the war was necessary. Capra made the films as a sort of response to propaganda films from the other side, including Leni Riefenstahl’s Triumph of the Will, which glorifies Nazi ideology. Like that film, the Why We Fight utilizes footage from multiple sources. Capra’s films even borrow footage from Riefenstahl’s work, but for the opposite effect. After seeing Triumph of the Will, Capra had a better sense of “how formidable the Nazi threat was,” as well as how he could “use enemy propaganda films as some of the visual material” in his documentaries.206

203 Ibid., 119.
204 Ibid., 121.
205 Michael Wilmington, “’Why We Fight’ Was Capra’s Best War Effort,” Tribunedigital-Chicagotribune, November 18, 2001.
Capra produced all of the films in the series and directed most of them, in several cases co-directing with Anatole Litvak, who had directed *Confessions of a Nazi Spy*. His unit grew to include forty-three men, split between members of the civil service and film professionals. He was able to get other big-name Hollywood names to join the team, but none of them are credited in the films, including Capra himself. Capra lists his team of “professional Hollywood knights,” from Litvak to “the personal talents of Walt Disney and his best animators.” Capra includes Theodor Geisel, whom he refers to as “Ted,” in his list, although Geisel primarily worked on the Snafu films for the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine*. Despite not being credited in the finished product, the *Why We Fight* series was Capra’s major wartime project, and he earned recognition for it. Capra was awarded the Distinguished Service Medal for his contributions to the war effort, as *Business Screen Magazine* reported in 1944. In addition to the “highest noncombat award the army could give,” Capra also received film industry accolades for his work. The first film in the series, *Prelude to War*, won the 1942 Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature.

While the series was originally commissioned as an alternative to training films for soldiers and new recruits, the films were later used as propaganda to elicit support for the war from the general public. *Business Screen* calls the series “the most significant films of World War II” and “the films that contributed most to Americans’ general understanding” of the war. The series was able to hold the attentions of everyone “from schoolchildren to battle-hardened G.I.’s at overseas bases.” The true measure of the series’ success, whether or not is changed Americans’ overall opinion of the war is hard to gage. The magazine cites studies by the Army

---

207 Capra, Basinger, and Ford, *The Name above the Title*, 340.
210 “Why We Fight: The Films That Brought America Real Understanding of the Issues Behind the War.”
211 Ibid.
Service Force that “have proven conclusively that the films contributed directly to significant changes of erroneous opinion.”\footnote{Ibid.} The article does not give specifics about the studies, however. Whether or not the results can be confirmed, the films were innovative in their usage of film techniques, including animation, as well as reused footage.

The Why We Fight films were also some of the films and newsreels shown to those working in war-related factories and warehouses. As a 1943 \textit{New York Times} sub-headline reads, “Army and Navy Make Use of Lunch-Hour Films to Stimulate Workers.”\footnote{Theodore Strauss, “Pictures for the Assembly Lines: Army and Navy Make Us of Lunch-Hour Films to Stimulate Workers,” \textit{New York Times}, October 17, 1943.} These films, described by \textit{Times} writer Theodore Strauss as examples of the “War Communiqué” genre, replaced the traditional Hollywood shorts and features that would have been shown to the workers on their lunch breaks.\footnote{Ibid.} Instead, the films that Capra had created for the soldiers reached those back home serving their country in a different way. This decision enforced the notion that each worker was “no less important than that of the soldier in the line.”\footnote{Ibid.}

The films range in length from 40-80 minutes, which are mostly feature-length, although many of the film journals, such as \textit{Motion Picture Herald}, refer to the series as shorts. The series was a collaborative effort, with animation from Disney and music by the Army Air Force Orchestra. As Capra himself wrote, the Disney team was “of utmost importance…in making our animated maps artistic as well as informative.”\footnote{Capra, Basinger, and Ford, \textit{The Name above the Title}, 340.} The series, as Charles J. Maland writes in his biography of Capra, consisted of “composition films made up almost completely of footage
taken from other films or from stock shots in other libraries.” Despite this fact, the films are still regarded as expertly crafted propaganda. Capra was able to piece together the different types of footage, in addition to some original content, including the Disney animations as well as new live-action sequences filmed exclusively for Why We Fight. These new sequences, whether animated or not, comprise some of the films’ most potent moments. It is these sections that truly accomplish the series’ main goal, which is presented at the beginning of each film: “The purpose of these films is to give factual information as to the causes, the events leading up to our entry into the war and the principles for which we are fighting.” The animation in particular helps illustrate, literally, the events leading up to America’s involvement in the war.

Four of the seven Why We Fight films were made during 1943, the biggest year for both wartime animation and film production. This was the year that Disney produced Victory Through Airpower, but the studio also played a role in Capra’s series. Capra had Disney create animated sequences for the documentaries, but he did not commission any fantastical animated scenes. Instead, the animated sequences consist primarily of maps and charts. The films utilize animation to educate and inform its audience, rather than entertain. The animated diagrams tie together the films’ hodgepodge of newsreels, battle footage, recreations, and reused film footage. As Business Screen wrote, “Every trick of cinematic technique, animated maps, dubbed in voices, stirring film music and captured enemy footage was skillfully employed throughout the series.” The series blends aspects of documentaries, dramas and animation to create a complete package of information for the armed services recruits.

---

218 Frank Capra, Frank Capra’s Why We Fight, DVD, Why We Fight (Topics Entertainment, 2013).
219 “Why We Fight: The Films That Brought America Real Understanding of the Issues Behind the War.”
Animation had become a trusted component of training films, utilized by Disney as well as other studios. It was used for mainly maps and other informational sequences. As Lou Lumenick, film critic for the *New York Post*, said in an interview, “It’s tough to make propaganda entertaining. Capra realized the power that animation has and insisted on using animation in his *Why We Fight* series.”

While the sequences of animation in the *Why We Fight* films are sporadic, Capra uses the medium in specific places to convey complex information. As Birdwell writes, “Animated maps graphically depicted cartographic terms, and helped recruits visualize terrain, troop movements, and reconnaissance.”

While the animation is primarily utilized for seemingly simple maps and diagrams, these sequences are still creatively rendered.

The first installment, *Prelude to War*, was released in 1942, primarily for soldiers. A private screening was held for General Marshall prior to its release. The film would come to be seen by approximately nine million soldiers by the war’s end.

Francis Harmon, executive vice-chairman of the War Activities Committee, told *Motion Picture Herald* in 1943, that *Prelude to War* received an “enthusiastic reception” from its military audiences.

“Undoubtedly many service men already have written home about this motion picture,” Harmon said.

Harmon was speaking to the universality of the films, how they were useful viewing for both civilians and soldiers.

In addition to the required military viewing, several special screenings for other groups were ordered. These included journalists, film executives, congressmen, and even, in one unusual case, a synagogue film club. *Motion Picture Herald* reported on these screenings,
indicating the film’s widespread influence, despite its original intended audience. “Special permission” for these screenings “was obtained from the war department since the film was produced exclusively for the armed forces.”225 Later that year, Motion Picture Herald reported that the film would see a theatrical release. “‘Prelude to War,’ first of a series of orientation films made by the War Department to instruct U.S. troops, will be released to theatres on May 27th.”226 Once Prelude to War was given a wide release, Capra’s film was able to reach an audience beyond the military. The film was now more than a military orientation film; it was now propaganda, educating America about the reasons why fighting the war was vital for the survival of modern society.

The film contains an animated sequence showing a globe split in two (Figure 18). The Western Hemisphere is lit up, while the rest of the world is darkened. A quote from then-Vice President Henry Wallace appears on the screen: “This is a fight between a free world and a slave world.”227 In this case, animation is used to show a metaphorical map as opposed to actual logistics. The film then uses this device to teach its lesson, starting with the “free world” first, zooming in on the light half of the globe. After outlining the history of America as a free country, the film returns to the animated globes and this time zeroes in on the darkened globe. Animation is also used to show the Nazi and Japanese takeover of territory, in the form of a black wave spreading over the taken lands. The visualization is more powerful than if the narrator had just stated the Axis threat to the “free world.” Instead, the film shows once free lands becoming blighted by the metaphorical miasma.

225 “B’nai B’rith Holds Meeting,” Motion Picture Herald, January 2, 1943.
226 “‘Prelude to War’ To Be Released to Theatres,” Motion Picture Herald, May 1, 1943, 20.
227 Capra, Frank Capra’s Why We Fight.
The film shows all of the territories that the Nazis wanted to take over, as these countries turn black and a Swastika appears over them, and moving arrows connect this would-be Nazi network. This might be the film’s most powerful image: the United States in the middle of a Nazi-controlled world, positioned as the final target. This manipulated map evokes a visceral representation of the threat to democracy posed by Hitler and Nazism. Another animated propagandistic image appears later in the film, of radio towers in Germany, Italy, and Japan emanating frequencies that say the word “Lies,” representing the propaganda utilized to indoctrinate and mobilize the citizens of those countries. This is an effective way to create an animated representation of the propaganda machine created by the Axis Powers.

The end of the film returns to the images of the globes, which “stand against each other.” The darkened globe then fades into the background as the light globe takes the forefront, showing that democracy and freedom must defeat the Axis. A quote from General Marshall appears over the globe, stating, “victory of the democracies can only be complete with

\[228\] Ibid.
the utter defeat of the war machines of Germany and Japan.” The animated globe sequences are used as bookends in the film to convey the urgency of the war, showing as well as telling the new recruits that they are fighting for the values that their country was built on.

After the second installment, The Nazis Strike, was released to military audiences in 1943, Motion Picture Herald reported that “both industry executives and Washington officials” were still debating whether or not the films would be shown to the general public. Before the films were deemed “suitable for a theatrical release,” they were distributed to troops stationed in the United States as well as overseas. The films were also shown to the public in Britain, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, before any public release in the United States.

The Nazis Strike takes a more in-depth look at the Nazi campaigns to take over Austria, Czechoslovakia, and Poland. Like Prelude to War, The Nazis Strike features footage from varied sources, including the Disney animations. There is another extended sequence featuring a globe, again outlining the Western and Southern Hemispheres. This time, the globe depicts the total land area on Earth. The film shows the “super continent” or “world island,” comprised of Europe, Asia, and Africa, or two-thirds of the land area and seven-eighths of the total world population. This map of the world, which seems simple at first, actually indicates the scope of the Nazi “plan for world conquest.” As the narrator mentions each region that Hitler plans to conquer, the map zooms to that area and a Swastika appears. Finally, after the “world island” is shown as conquered, a giant Swastika covers the entire globe (Figure 19). The globe then fades as an image of Hitler fills the screen, which is a jarring transition back to the live-action footage.

---

229 Ibid.
230 “New Capra Film Goes to Army,” Motion Picture Herald, March 13, 1943, 30.
231 Ibid.
233 Capra, Frank Capra’s Why We Fight.
This stark version of what could happen is a visual wake-up call to the soldiers, that this is a dangerous force that must be stopped.

Figure 19: The Symbolic Representation of Nazi World Takeover in *The Nazis Strike* (1943)

In the third installment, *Divide and Conquer*, also released in 1943, an animated map is used to demonstrate how the Germans attacked Belgium.²³⁴ The battle strategy is complex, so an expert is brought in to clarify what the moving arrows on the map mean. The narrator instructs viewers to “watch the map as one of our intelligence officers explains the details of the German breakthrough.”²³⁵ The unnamed and uncredited officer stands in front of the map with a pointer, much like Seversky in *Victory Through Airpower*, as he explains the movement of French and German troops. The arrows and symbols representing troops, weapons and supply trucks form an animated depiction of the German Blitzkrieg strategy. This outlines to the intended military audience, as well as any civilians who would later see the film, exactly how the Germans orchestrated their attack. This is perhaps the most complex map of the series, which is why the officer is necessary. Without him, all of the arrows showing troop movement would be hard to

²³⁴ Ibid.
²³⁵ Ibid.
follow. This sequence successfully combines animation with live action, as well as the traditional educational model with a new medium.

_The Battle of Britain_, released in late 1943, focuses on Hitler’s attempt to conquer Britain. A map early in the film sets the tone, showing the territories that Hitler has conquered thus far. As each country is mentioned, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Denmark, Norway, Holland, Belgium and France turn black, with animated planes dropping flames. This portion of the map, which reviews what has been detailed in the previous installments of the series, remains black and a Swastika appears. Then the map focuses on Britain, which is lit up and as yet unharmed. The film then takes an in-depth look at the Nazi attacks on Britain and the British resistance. A later sequence returns to this map, but this time the blackened Nazi-occupied land mass morphs into the shape of a whale, poised to bite Britain. When this sequence occurs, the narrator proclaims, “the jaws of the Nazi whale were set to swallow Jonah.” The animation is used in conjunction with the metaphor to describe the precarious position that Britain was in at this time. The rest of the film contains little animation, focusing instead on the narrative of Britain’s fight against Germany.

The fifth _Why We Fight_ film, _The Battle of Russia_, the last of the series’ films to be released in 1943, is the longest running of the seven. At eighty minutes, the film was shown in two parts. Co-directed by Litvak, the film is also the most ambitious of the series. In addition to borrowed footage from over one hundred other films, _The Battle of Russia_ contains animated sequences. In this installment, the animation mostly consists of maps. The first animated sequence shows just how big the USSR was at that time, inserting three outlines of the United States onto the area of Russia on a globe. A later sequence outlines which countries Hitler had his eye on and which resources or advantages each country had. Unlike _Prelude to War, The_
*Battle of Russia* is less about ideology and more about military strategy, which is why the animation is for less creative purposes.

The informational maps and diagrams are interspersed with the history of Hitler’s attacks on the USSR and the brutal battles fought. There is no room in the bleak narrative for animated gimmicks, and the team realized this. The footage is striking and often graphic, showing death and destruction. Many of the maps do not move much, barring the occasional arrow or Swastika to mark Nazi territory. Towards the end of the film, an animated map features moving airplanes, flags and arrows in order to emphasize the size of the Russian defensive attack, from all fronts. The film emphasizes Russia’s victory, as well as the toll the attacks had and the need to prevent Hitler from advancing against other countries. The maps complement the tone of the film without detracting from it, as other animated sequences might have.

*Motion Picture Herald* reported on screenings of *The Battle of Russia* to “industry leaders and representatives of War Activities Committee,” as well as to the press.236 Later that year, the *New York Times* announced that the film would be shown to the public. “In order to get the picture to the public as rapidly as possible several hundred additional prints have been ordered and are now in work.”237 The film was later nominated for the Academy Award for Best Documentary Feature in 1944.

*The Battle of China*, the sixth film in the series, takes a break from the European Theatre to depict the Japanese aggressions against China. The maps in this film are more stylized, showing the borders of China, with raised mountains and Chinese letters. The film also compares the sizes of Japan and China, showing a much larger Chinese man looking down at a small

---

236 “Executives See ‘Battle of Russia,’” *Motion Picture Herald*, October 23, 1943, 54.
Japanese man (Figure 20). When the narrative reaches the Battle of Manchuria, the area is shown on the animated map and then a gunshot splits area, before the film transitions to live-action footage representing the battle. The animation in this installment is used more for effect than instruction. The maps are shown very briefly, as the film is less detailed in its description of the military strategies used. Even so, many of the maps themselves are much more detailed. Most of the maps in the previous installments just showed the outlines of each country, but the maps in this episode are much clearer and show locations of cities and towns.

Figure 20: Japan Compared to China in The Battle of China (1944)

The final installment of the series, War Comes to America, begins with a summary of America history and the events leading up to the United States’ involvement in the war, ending with Pearl Harbor. An animated map outlining the United States is a recurring segment in the film. As the story of the United States is told and the country gains new states, those states appear on the map with a star in the middle of each one until the map is filled up. The map is then placed on an American Flag, evoking a patriotic sense of pride for the growth of the country. The animation in this installment is, like in The Battle of China, more for visual effect.
than information. When the narrator tells of the Neutrality Act, the United States is shown on a globe, with factory smokestacks billowing and a giant sign proclaiming “No Arms For Sale.” Other maps show the Nazis’ movement in Europe as the war progressed, with Swastikas marking Nazi territory. A creative twist is added when the film reaches the fight with France, as an animated hand hammers down on the map of France, stamping the Swastika violently (Figure 21).

![Figure 21: The Nazi Takeover of France in War Comes to America (1945)](image)

The end of the film features an animated sequence similar to the one found in *Prelude to War*. It is fitting that the series would begin and end with a metaphorical animated globe. This time, the globe is shown with the United States filled with stars and stripes, and the Chinese and Nazi flags sticking out on either side of the globe. A question mark appears on the United States as the narrator asks, “What would have been our defensive position if the aggressors had succeeded in conquering Britain, Russia, and China?” The animated hand reappears to stamp each of these countries, and then a map shows what could have happened to “the free world” if

---

238 Capra, *Frank Capra’s Why We Fight.*
239 Ibid.
this had in fact taken place. The resources of each country are depicted, with little symbols appearing on the map to represent weaponry, textiles, and mines. Figures are then shown on screen to represent the portion of the population that would be ruled by Hitler and the Nazis. These figures are then pushed by tanks into a large factory with a Swastika on it, representing the labor that these people would be forced to perform for the Nazi regime.

A similar sequence is repeated, depicting what would happen if the Japanese were victorious in the Pacific. The maps then show what would be left, with North and South America against the Nazi and Japanese armies. The film then pans out, showing the globe with a soldier in front of it and pistols pointing at it from all sides. This entire sequence is the longest animated section in the series, perhaps because it is entirely hypothetical. There is no footage to include that would indicate the consequences of an Axis victory. Instead, the film utilizes animation to methodically lay out exactly what this would mean for the United States. This sequence is entirely propaganda. The information that it imparts is theoretical, and the goal is to show exactly how devastating the war could be, and why the United States’ involvement is so vital.

The animation in the *Why We Fight* films is far from the main attraction, but each animated segment serves a specific purpose. These documentaries prove that beyond entertainment or even art, animation can be used for instructional purposes. The Disney studio had the capability and insight to create animations that fit Capra’s vision and conveyed specific information. The animation may seem less polished than in many of the Disney films from this time, but the goal was not to be flashy. The black and white animated sequences are, for the most part, purely informational. There are few animated gimmicks, since the topics become increasingly serious as the war progresses and the films depict more of the devastation caused by the Axis Powers. In his article, “Frank Capra’s *Why We Fight* Film Series and Our American
Dream,” Peter C. Rollins calls the complete series “Capra’s most important artistic contribution to his adopted country, a paean to democracy and a powerful indictment of oppression.”²⁴⁰ The films are remembered both for their generic excellence as documentaries and their historical significance as records of World War II through an American lens.

In addition to the seven official Why We Fight films, Capra was also involved with four other wartime documentaries that were not produced under the series’ title. These films were also created for a military audience. Capra’s last wartime film, Two Down, One to Go!, came about after his unit was reorganized and made part of the Army Pictorial Service.²⁴¹ The short film was created in 1945, after Germany and Italy had been defeated, and focuses on the one Axis Power left – Japan. Like the Why We Fight films, the short contains animated sequences. The animation is in color this time, as is the entire short. The animated maps and globes are similar to those created by Disney in the Why We Fight series, although it is unclear if the studio produced these sequences or not. Regardless of where the animation came from, it serves the same purpose: to give informative visualizations to the facts being imparted in the rest of the film.

At Capra’s suggestion, the Army Signal Corps produced the Army-Navy Screen Magazine, with the first issue released in 1943. The “infotainment variety show,” as Michael Birdwell refers to the magazine, was created specifically for the armed forces.²⁴² The twice monthly, twenty-minute issues combined newsreels and entertainment. According to Motion Picture Herald, the purpose of the films was to “keep the troops of the U.S. Army informed.”²⁴³

²⁴³ “Service Morale Films Shown,” Motion Picture Herald, January 26, 1944, 33.
The different sections are listed, including the Snafu cartoons, which are referred to as “pertinent” and “amusing.” The cartoons and newsreels were created to appeal to soldiers, no matter what their social status had been before the war. Smoodin writes in *Animating Culture* about how the *Screen Magazine* differed from traditional theatrical packages. “[T]he films in the *Army-Navy Screen* magazine played to Americans from different class backgrounds, different levels of educational attainment, and differing tolerance to military authority.” It is for this reason that a special screen magazine was created for the military, as opposed to just showing the soldiers the same newsreels that were being shown on the home front. While the public did see installments of the *Why We Fight* series, the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine* was only shown to a military audience.

The magazine was specifically tailored to its audience. The Army and Navy editions differed slightly in order to cater to the different skill sets and interests of the two groups. As Thomas M. Pryor reports in a 1944 *New York Times* article, the magazine even included a “‘special request’ section, in which any sequence desired by a GI may be included.” The first example of such a request “came from a homesick soldier who wanted to see what the main street of his hometown looked like,” so the magazine included shots of his town. This further exemplifies the work that Capra and his team did for the “soldiers and sailors,” using the film medium to educate, entertain, and even comfort them.

Although, as Smoodin points out, the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine* is “far less well known than the *Why We Fight* series,” it is an important addition to the propaganda and training

---

244 Ibid.
247 Ibid.
films created for soldiers during the war. Capra oversaw the production of the newsreel packages. The Screen Magazine was usually shown along with a Hollywood film, so even though it was not required viewing like the Why We Fight films, it was still seen by a wide audience. Soldiers came to the theater for entertainment, and received both a laugh and education with the Screen Magazine. Although one might think that the main information would be located within the newsreel portions of the magazine, sometimes the Snafu cartoons contained valuable lessons. As Smoodin writes, “with so much instruction coming from the cartoon segment of the magazines,” Capra seems to have realized that he would teach soldiers more effectively “through a medium that…was certainly believed to be ideally suited to their intellectual level.” With the addition of the cartoons, the magazine mimics a traditional theatrical bill, especially when paired with a feature-length. As going to the movies was such a popular pastime, the government realized that this format could also successfully transmit information and propaganda.

The films continued to be useful even after the end of the war. A 1946 letter from the editor in the New York Times, entitled “Why Did We Fight?”, responds to a high school teacher, who was worried “that neither the returning soldier nor the average American has a sufficient appreciation of either the causes of the war or the problems of the peace.” The teacher wisely realized that the “excellent orientation and morale films made by the Army’s Signal Corps during the war” could be used to remedy this. The Times informed her that the films “have been released and are still available on request in 16-mm size, for showing by schools, clubs,” or any other group, as long as the showings were free. The letter points to Capra’s Why We Fight series as “the most impressive” of these films, and mentions Private Snafu as well. Both the

249 Ibid., 72.
251 Ibid.
teacher’s inquiry and the response it received were accurate in noting the effectiveness of film as an educational tool. “The impact of an idea in a motion picture often is greater and more lasting than one imparted by other means.”\footnote{Ibid.} This is true of any type of film, whether it is live-action, animated, or, in the case of \textit{Why We Fight}, a combination of the two. Capra’s name is attached to many of the training and educational films produced during the war. These films would remain important texts for historians and students alike.
Conclusion: Postwar Legacy - Animation’s Newfound Maturity

The changes in how animation was utilized and viewed did not reverse themselves once the war ended in 1945. Animation has continued to be a medium for education, as well as entertainment. It is necessary to conclude a discussion of wartime animation with a look at how it impacted animation after the war. The legacy can be seen in the use of animation in everything from educational films to documentaries, as well as the widespread appeal of animated features that extend beyond children’s fare.

In analyzing the previously discussed films, I have noticed common themes and traits. The propaganda films, specifically, all bear similarities to one another. In Creators of Life: A History of Animation, Donald Heraldson writes, “The extent that a medium like this can influence the public, for bad or for good, is readily seen in the propaganda films made during the second World War.” Propaganda films were produced en masse during the war, and animation was employed to, in part, soften the blow of some of the harsher or harder to process messages.

As with most propaganda, many of the shorts contain patriotic overtones, and even a sense of American exceptionalism, or the belief that American culture is superior to all others. This can be seen in many of the educational films that Disney created for Central and South American audiences as part of the Good Neighbor Policy during the war, such as “Cleanliness Brings Health.” I did not have room for a full analysis of these films in the Disney chapters, but they present the American way of life as the ideal that other cultures should aspire to replicate, in order to have healthy, successful lives.

Heraldson proposes that “no such patriotic fervor live or on film has gripped the country” since the war.\textsuperscript{254} Even so, the animated propaganda films laid the groundwork for later works with political messages. There are many examples of modern animated propaganda, as well as films with underlying political themes, from the 1953 adaption of George Orwell’s \textit{Animal Farm} to the film version of the graphic novel \textit{Persepolis} in 2007. Both of these films, while fully animated, were created for an adult audience. Films like these today all have their own agenda, with diverse messages that address different social problems. What sets the wartime era apart is the unified political message behind the films, which has yet to be repeated since.

Many of the wartime films contain language and images that would be seen as racist and offensive today, including the Disney and \textit{Snafu} shorts. References to the “Japs” or “yellow men,” images of ranting Germans, and garbled versions of both the German and Japanese languages are commonplace in wartime animation, but would not be acceptable today. Many of the films contain caricatures of Hitler, Hirohito, Mussolini, and other enemy figures. Disney especially did not shy away from including images of Hitler in many of its propaganda films, and even in the “Stop that Tank!” sequence, which was included in a training film. Cartoons, whether printed or animated, are a prime way to convey stereotypes. The Nazis themselves utilized caricatures and stereotypes in their propaganda cartoons and films. The stereotypes from both the Nazi and American films seem offensive today, but would have been instantly recognizable to wartime audiences, as exaggerated and distorted versions of the real world. The depictions of the enemy in Disney and other films serve to highlight the mentality of Americans towards the other side during the war, and are useful lessons in how the media represented the cultures of the Axis Powers. When viewed today, the films are jarring and uncomfortable at times to watch. This is

\textsuperscript{254} Ibid., 62.
why it is important that they continue to be preserved and viewed, as they serve as vital historical and cultural documents.

One way that the films depict the enemy is through the use of animals. This is a trend that has continued today, where different species represent different races or ethnic groups. In his essay “Speciesism, Part 1: Translating Races into Animals in Wartime Animation,” Thomas LaMarre refers to this process as “speciesism.” As LaMarre writes, “speciesism entails the displacement of problems associated with race relations onto species relations, and vice versa.”

This is seen in many of the Disney shorts, since anthropomorphic animals are the studio’s specialty. “Chicken Little,” one of the “morale pictures,” especially embodies this, with the fox representing Hitler. A prime non-Disney example is the 1942 Warner Brothers cartoon “The Ducktators,” a black-and-white Looney Tunes short. The film features avian versions of the Axis leaders, with ducks that resemble both Hitler and Hirohito, and a goose that represents Mussolini. These caricatures are tongue-in-cheek depictions of violent, brutal dictators. The film applies racial stereotypes and jokes, such as when the Japanese duck flashes a sign that reads “I am Chinese” in order to proclaim his innocence.

While outright racism is not commonplace in mainstream animation today, speciesism is still a commonplace mechanism through which racial and cultural tensions are represented. Disney’s latest feature-length film, the computer-animated Zootopia, depicts a world inhabited solely by animals. The film uses LaMarre’s concept of “speciesism” to reflect modern social tensions, grouping the animals into “predators” and “prey,” living in harmony but with the underlying anxiety from past violence. Certain characters try to break out of the stereotypes

256 Ibid., 76.
257 Since this is a standalone short, it did not fit in with any of my previous chapters.
associated with their species, with mixed results. As Todd Martens writes in the *Los Angeles Times*, “Disney's *Zootopia* has some very real and topical messages about race and prejudice delivered in the form of a cuddly cartoon caper.”\textsuperscript{258} While the themes may seem hidden at first, the film’s attempts to connect the story to today’s culture quickly become apparent. *Zootopia* keeps “its more serious aspects bouncing under the surface rather than presenting the audience with a lecture.”\textsuperscript{259} This is not the first time that Disney has tried to strike the difficult balance between entertaining and informing its audience, such as in *Victory Through Airpower* during the war, or *The Fox and the Hound* in 1981. The latter is an allegory on the consequences of bias and prejudice. *Zootopia* is the most recent direct descendant of the World War II cartoons, with animals representing races and a strong political message.

The wartime films introduced violence and war into American animation. Many of the Disney propaganda films, particularly those encouraging viewers to buy war bonds, contain sequences of fighter planes, shooting at each other and bursting into flames. These jarring images are in stark contrast to the fantasy world of Mickey Mouse, where the most violence involves a comical punch or object dropped on a character’s head. Even so, these films often contain an oversimplification of the violence of the war. They do not show bloodshed, but do hint at it, as in the endings of both “Chicken Little” and “Education for Death.” The rows of graves in both of those shorts reflect the grim outlook of the war, but the films do not give statistics or present a complete view of the destruction caused by the fighting. This might be attributed to the fact that there were no concrete figures on the amount of casualties in the war at that point. There are also

\textsuperscript{259} Ibid.
no overt references to Jews or the Holocaust, but this is probably due to the lack of public knowledge at the time about the horrors taking place in Europe.

While it may seem that these films do not present an accurate depiction of the true devastation of the war, they still signify progress in how war in general was represented in animation. Since many of the films were made for a broad audience, including children, limited violence makes sense. The studios were no longer solely targeting children with their animated films, but that did not mean that they were ready to alienate the family segment of film audiences. Later animated films would include overt and often graphic violence, but the wartime films stuck to vague references, images of graves, and non-bloody conflicts.

The themes found in animated works have continued to evolve, and many animated films since the war have been created for an adult audience. The strictly family-friendly animated cinema of the pre-war era was drastically changed after the war. Animated films could now contain mature content, as Hollywood embraced grittier, more violent, and more sexualized films on a larger scale. The possibilities had been extended during the war, and films such as the *Snafu* series cracked the door open on what could be included in an animated film.

The work that animators produced during the war had a direct influence on their post-war films. As Lou Lumenick observed in my interview with him, “Some of the honesty and freedom that they had making these government shorts found its way into films made after World War II.” 

This extended to commercial films, as the Motion Picture Production Code was followed more loosely after the war. “You see more violence, more adult themes. You see a world that not

---

260 Lumenick, Interview with Lou Lumenick.
anywhere as idealized as it is in pre-war films,” Lumenick said.\textsuperscript{261} This was true of American cinema as a whole, including both live-action and animated.

Disney had utilized animation to present family-friendly fairytales in the pre-war era, but the medium’s true potential was realized during and after the war. Many of the animated works I have discussed have dark and psychological themes. Some, such as “Der Fuehrer’s Face,” have a surrealist feel that inspired later animated works. As Lumenick put it, “Once the genie was out of the bottle, it didn’t totally disappear when the war was over.”\textsuperscript{262} Animation had already been used to convey alternate views of the world, without a child-friendly complacency. Instead, animated films could now reflect their contemporary culture, which is why films created during the war contained a grimmer portrait of the world.

The war changed how film in general was utilized, as seen by the legacy of the Capra films, especially the \textit{Why We Fight} series. This was especially true of animation, which became an integral component of documentary filmmaking after the war. Capra had created a usable template for documentaries, both wartime and otherwise. His use of found footage, newsreels, film clips, animation, and narration to tell a compelling historical narrative has become the standard technique for documentaries today. This can be seen in the work of documentary filmmakers Ken and Ric Burns.

Capra’s usage of the Disney-animated segments in the \textit{Why We Fight} films may seem obvious and primitive today. The maps and diagrams are not flashy or slickly animated, but they serve the simple purpose of conveying complex information in a visual manner. These sequences

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{261} Ibid.} \textsuperscript{262} Ibid.
are part of why the films received such a favorable response from both military and civilian audiences. The films are still shown today as tools for educating about the war.

After the war, Capra would continue to direct films, including his 1946 masterpiece *It’s a Wonderful Life*. Capra’s foray into instructional films did not end with the war, however. He produced four television specials in the late 1950s for *The Bell Laboratory Science Series*, each on a different scientific concept, from the circulatory system to the weather. Like the *Why We Fight* films, these specials contained many animated sequences. After airing, the specials became prime material for science classrooms across the country. Cartoons were no longer only shown in a traditional theatrical setting. Classrooms, especially, saw an increase of films as educational tools after the war. This included animated films, which were used to demonstrate concepts in a variety of disciplines, from science and mathematics to geography and history. Some of these films were produced by major studios, including Disney. Educational films became a viable sub-industry, helping studios generate extra income.

As mentioned above, Capra produced educational films after the war, but these were created for television and not solely for educational purposes. Disney, on the other hand, began producing educational content intended specifically for classroom viewing. Thus, Disney Educational Productions was born. Its website proclaims that Disney was “the first studio to bring educational films into schools.” The studio still makes educational films today, for all grade levels from elementary to high school.

Many of Disney’s educational films have been fully animated or contained animated sequences. A notable example is 1951’s “Duck and Cover,” featuring the animated Bert the Turtle. The short, a Civil Defense Film, instructs viewers on what to do in case of a nuclear

---

attack. Animated sequences show the turtle ducking into his shell in case of danger, and live-action footage shows schoolchildren ducking under their desks. The film addresses the real threat of nuclear warfare that was felt during the Cold War.

The studio produced many films that became standard classroom fare, including health films such as “The Story of Menstruation” in 1946. The films were able to tackle tricky subjects in a way that would be easy for students to understand. These short films circulated in classrooms for years, and the studio continues to produce more. Disney was the first studio to utilize the mediums of film and animation for education, and the studio has continued to use the latest technologies in its educational films. The concept of “multimedia education” evolved during and after the war, and Disney has been one of the biggest producers of these films.

While Disney continued to utilize animation for education after the war, Warner Brothers did not produce any further Private Snafu shorts. The character could have theoretically been utilized for soldiers in later wars, but he remains a relic of World War II. Since Snafu dies at the end of most of the films, it is even more fitting that he never made a reappearance after the war. Snafu was not the only character created for the wartime military audience, but he is perhaps the most well known and most successful. The fact that most of the Private Snafu shorts were well-preserved and are available today is fortuitous, as they provide an inside look at the mindset of the American soldier. Snafu was created to appeal to the military, and the shorts deal with real-life problems that typical soldiers would have encountered. Due to the sensitive nature of some of these topics, there are shorts featuring Snafu that were either never produced or given a release.

Other films produced for military or governmental purposes did not survive. This includes the films of the First Motion Picture Unit (FMPU), which created the character Trigger
Joe. This character, introduced in the 1944 short “Position Firing,” was similar to Snafu. He represented the average gunman, “appealing enough, but not too bright.” Interestingly, Trigger Joe resembled a more overweight Snafu and even shared the same voice actor, Mel Blanc. The short was a successful attempt at teaching soldiers complex aiming concepts, but it is not available today for analysis.

There were other shorts with characters created for the armed services, such as MGM’s anthropomorphic plane, Bertie the Bomber, that no longer exist today. As Charles Solomon writes in *Enchanted Drawings: The History of Animation*, “Like the films of the FMPU, the military films made by the various Hollywood studios were apparently destroyed at the end of the war.” Snafu, then, is the prime surviving example of a character created specifically to appeal to a military audience. Warner Brothers created a similar character for the Navy, Mr. Hook. There are some surviving *Mr. Hook* shorts, but they were created to encourage soldiers to buy war bonds, rather than as educational films. Snafu, on the other hand, represents a breakthrough in educational training films.

Although he may not be as famous today as Donald Duck, Snafu played an important role in wartime communications. The idea of an animated short as a stand-in for a training film was radical at the time. After the *Snafu* films, it was clear that dry, technical films were not the only way to educate soldiers. By adding an entertainment component to the *Army-Navy Screen Magazine*, Capra and his team were able to hold their audience’s attention while educating them at the same time.

---

265 Ibid.
266 Ibid., 122.
The legacy of the *Private Snafu* films is twofold, and somewhat contradictory. The animators were able to include material that would normally not have been allowed under the Production Code. As Solomon writes, “Although considered risqué during the 1940s, these cartoons would barely qualify for a PG rating today.”\(^{267}\) Since the shorts were intended for military viewing only, they contain suggestive content and mild language that would not have been allowed even in live-action films at the time. With “sexual innuendo, bare posteriors, and an occasional ‘damn’ or ‘hell,’” the films expanded what was allowed in cartoons.\(^{268}\) After the war, mainstream audiences were gradually exposed to cartoons with increasingly adult content. Snafu, arguably the first cartoon character with an obvious sexual drive, paved the way for films such as 1988’s *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, which features the overtly sexualized Jessica Rabbit.

At the same time, the series also had an impact on children’s literature. Since most of the shorts were written by Theodor Geisel, they echo the language of rhyming books written for children. As Smoodin writes, “the Snafu cartoons’ mode of address (many of the shorts employ simple but ingenious rhymes) shifted easily to children’s literature during the postwar period.”\(^{269}\) Geisel would continue penning these rhymes, becoming “perhaps the most famous author of children’s books in the 1950s and 1960s, working under the pen name Dr. Seuss.”\(^{270}\) Later authors would try to embody Geisel’s mode of writing, which led to a proliferation of whimsical, rhyming children’s books. It is ironic that the films, which were groundbreaking in their inclusion of animated partial nudity and other suggestive material, inspired some of the most successful children’s literature.

\(^{267}\) Ibid.
\(^{268}\) Ibid.
\(^{270}\) Ibid.
Animated films have gained a solid cultural following, which began before the war and only increased after. Major film awards, such as the Academy Awards, began recognizing the contributions of animators to the film industry. The Academy created special categories for animated films, including Best Short Subject, which was added to recognize Disney’s “Flowers and Trees,” as mentioned in Chapter One.\(^{271}\) It wasn’t until 2001 that full-length animated films were given their own category, with Best Animated Feature. The Academy has given out “Special” awards to animated feature-length, such as in 1938, when Walt Disney was presented with seven small Oscar statues for *Snow White*.\(^{272}\) Animated films have been nominated for the coveted Best Picture award, starting with Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* in 1991, but have yet to overtake the live-action competition and win the award.

Of course, Academy recognition is not the only way to measure a film’s success and contribution to cinema and culture. Films such as the *Private Snafu* series were never given a wide release, and therefore not nominated for any official awards. While the home front cartoons released by Disney, as well as the *Why We Fight* films, were reported on in newspapers and film journals, *Snafu* only received a few mentions. The shorts were popular among the soldiers, and never intended for a public audience. They might not have been commercially successful had they been given a general release.

Wartime filmmakers stretched the boundaries of animation, allowing the medium to extend beyond the realm of entertainment. This took place both in the commercial and government-sponsored realms. Since animation requires such a detailed process, especially traditional, hand-drawn animation, these films took a lot of time and dedication to produce. Each

\(^{271}\) Heraldson, *Creators of Life*, 294.  
\(^{272}\) Ibid.
hand-drawn and painted frame was created for the purpose of advancing the war in the Allies’
favor.

Even the most simplistic animation sequence in a wartime film took time to create, and
automatically possesses a unique style. No two animators draw the exact same way, and even
films by the same studio vary in appearance. The Disney shorts share similar characteristics, but
the animation styles differ between the more “cartoony” Donald Duck shorts and the more
realistic “Education for Death.” Each animated film is a work of art, and the wartime animated
films were art that was designed to convey specific, important messages. Animation had started
to become part of the cultural conversation before the war, but the war gave further reasons for
the animated films to be talked about.

As the film industry recovered from the war, mainstream films began to confront social
issues. The same is true of animated films, which could now depict conflict, suffering, violence,
and even sexuality at times. The war loosened the hold that the Production Code had on the film
industry. Without the war, the Code might have held on for longer. These looser restrictions
allowed filmmakers to follow in the footsteps of the Snafu films and create animated characters
and worlds that appealed to a broader audience, beyond children. Animation can now be seen on
television as well as the big screen, in programming geared specifically towards adults. The war
played a large role in changing how both critics and the general public perceived animation.

If animation could teach soldiers how to fire or clean a weapon, and entertain them while
doing so, then post-war adults could learn to appreciate animated films. Perhaps the popularity of
animated works can be attributed to the early associations with childhood that animation has still
in some way held on to. Viewers know that they can enter an animated world, whether or not it
reflects the live-action one that they live in, and immerse themselves in that world for the
duration of the film, before returning to reality. This can be said of any fictional film, but animation provides a unique escape. The animated world may resemble the real world, but it is a depiction of how we view that world. The animators translate the world around them into cartoon versions. This creates a powerful cultural tool, which can be utilized for many purposes. This is what animators discovered during World War II: the potential that animation had to become a dominant cultural presence, influencing as well as entertaining.
Bibliography


American Experience: Walt Disney. PBS (DIRECT), 2015.


“B’nai B’rith Holds Meeting.” Motion Picture Herald, January 2, 1943.


“CAMACHO HONORS DISNEY; Alstock Fitzpatrick and Mayer Also Receive Aztec Eagles.” New York Times, August 16, 1943.

Capra, Frank. Frank Capra’s Why We Fight. DVD. Why We Fight. Topics Entertainment, 2013.


Cooper, Timothy PA. “Walt at War – Animation, Transformation and Indoctrination: The Hypothetical Image of Disney’s Animal Soldiers.” Animation 9, no. 3 (November 1, 2014): 333–51.


“Disney’s 30,000 Ft. of Film for Navy Equals ’41 Output.” Variety, December 12, 1942, 6.
“Disney’s ‘Airpower’ Used By Allies to Aid Training.” *Daily Variety*, December 6, 1943, 6.

“Disney Schedule Calls for 90% Output of War Films.” *Daily Variety*, October 26, 1942.


*Duck and Cover*. Disney, 1951.


“‘Fall Out - Fall In’ (Walt Disney).” *The Film Daily*, May 18, 1943.


“Hollywood Inside: Story behind Walt Disney’s Decision to Change the Title of His Short.” *Daily Variety*, October 12, 1942.

118


“MR. CAPRA COMES TO TOWN; Having Stored His Army Uniform in Moth Balls, the Director Discusses Pictures and His Return to Hollywood Citations Happy Compromise. Looking Ahead.” New York Times, November 18, 1945.


“New Capra Film Goes to Army.” *Motion Picture Herald*, March 13, 1943, 30.


“Overseas Army to See ‘Der Fuehrer’s Face’.” *Daily Variety*, February 18, 1943.


“‘Prelude to War’ to Be Released To Theatres.” *Motion Picture Herald*, May 1, 1943, 20.


“Salute to Walt Disney for ’The New Spirit’.” *Variety*, February 4, 1942.


Wilmington, Michael. “‘Why We Fight’ Was Capra’s Best War Effort.” *Tribunedigital-Chicagotribune*, November 18, 2001.