

The following are excerpts from the book *Superman* by Glen Weldon. He basically wrote about the development of the comic strip character Superman from his creation in 1938 to present-day. The parts you're going to read deal with WWII.

Superman in WWII

"Comics boomed during the war, selling more than 25 million copies every month, thanks to a hungry readership composed of kids and servicemen. Comics were suited for the "hurry up and wait" nature of military life – easily portable and tradable, with outlandish, whimsical stories that both cheered the spirit and could be devoured quickly. The *New York Times* reported at the time that one in four magazines shipped to GIs overseas every month was a comic – thirty-five thousand of those were *Superman* comics.

"On the covers of those comics, U.S. servicemen found stirring, patriotic imagery to rally around. *Superman* cover artists had begun to produce propagandistic depictions of the Man of Steel even before the United States entered the War; on the cover of *Superman* #12 (September/October 1941), he walks proudly, arm-in-arm, with a U.S. soldier and sailor.

"Now that the war was on, the artists didn't hold back. On the cover of *Superman* #14 (January/February 1942), Superman poses in front of a giant shield bearing the stars and stripes, while an American eagle alights on his muscular forearm. On *Superman* #17 (July/August 1942), he stands astride the Earth, lifting Hitler and Hirohito by the scruffs of their necks and looking as if he's about to bash their heads together. On the next issue's cover, he rides a bomb as it whistles toward some unseen enemy encampment ("War Savings Bonds and Stamps Do the Job on the Japanazis!" blares the copy). *Superman* #23 (July/August 1943) boasts one of the most famous images of wartime Superman: we are inside a German U-Boat, watching a pair of Nazi soldiers panic as the periscope reveals both the boat they've just sunk and Superman swimming toward them, a look of murderous rage on his face. In the next issue, he simply stands in his by-now-iconic pose, holding the American flag.

"Over on the covers of *Action Comics*, Superman tears through German tanks and gun placements, ties gun barrels and U-boat periscopes in knots, and cranks out enormous jingoistic war stamps on a printing press ("Superman Says . . . You Can Slap a Jap with War Bonds and Stamps!").

"On the covers of *World's Finest* comics – the New York World's Fair comic had become a quarterly ninety-six-page anthology of DC [comic's] ever-growing roster of superhero stories-Superman, Batman, and Robin plant a Victory garden, hawk savings bonds, glad-hand servicemen, and ride astride the barrels of a battleship's heavy caliber guns."

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Atomic Bomb and Superman??

“During the war, Superman radio scripts were submitted to the U.S. War Department for review. Discussion of radioactive elements was a sensitive issue, and the government let the show’s producers know it. Kryptonite wouldn’t make another appearance until September 1945.

“Censorship wasn’t an issue only for the radio show. In 1944, representatives from the War Department visited the DC [comic] office to discuss a scheduled Superman story that featured Luthor employing a fantastic device he called an “atomic bomb.” The DC [comic] editors agreed to scuttle the story, though it was published after the war was over, in *Superman* #38 (January/February 1946).

“A story for the newspaper strip that involved an imaginary device called an “atom-smasher” was also censored, and the War Department officially asked the McClure newspaper syndicate to avoid any mention of atomic energy.”

p.59-60

Weldon, Glen. *Superman*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. New Jersey, 2013.