

This Day in History... July 27, 1940

Bugs Bunny Makes His Cartoon Debut

On July 27, 1940, the world first met Bugs Bunny and heard him utter his now famous phrase, "Eh, what's up, Doc?"

Earlier versions of an animated rabbit had been used in cartoons during the late 1930s that were directed by Ben "Bugs" Hardaway and Cal Dalton. One day, designer Charlie Thorson labeled one of the drawings "Bugs' bunny" (after the cartoon's director) and the name stuck.

With the new name and some tweaks to his appearance, the new Bugs Bunny first appeared in the 1940 Tex Avery Short, *A Wild Hare*. In it, Bugs and his rival, hunter Elmer Fudd, have their first of many similar exchanges, beginning with Bugs' famous line. The cartoon also gave Bugs his signature voice, thanks to the acting talents of Mel Blanc, who'd go on to voice most of Warner Brothers' most famous characters.

During World War II, several Bugs Bunny cartoons were released that made fun of enemy countries or promoted our own troops. Some of the most famous were *Super-Rabbit* (1943), *Bugs Bunny Nips the Nips* (1944), and *Herr Meets Hare* (1945). The latter two are rather controversial today, but, at the time, they were well-received by Americans.

Super-Rabbit has stood the test of time. At first, it simply features Bugs gaining super powers and going after an evil rabbit hunter in Texas. However, at the end, he dons a special disguise to outwit them. He enters a phone booth and declares to the audience, "This looks like a job for a *REAL* Superman!" When he reappears, he is wearing a blue Marine Corps uniform and singing the "Marines' Hymn." Bugs' enemies snap to attention and salute him. The disguise works, and Bugs marches off to "Berlin, Tokyo, and points East."

The United States Marine Corps was ecstatic to see Bugs Bunny become a Marine. In fact, they made him an honorary private and issued official dog tags in his name. While the story could easily end there, Bugs continued to rise through the ranks during World War II. Perhaps this was because of his sound defeat of German and Japanese enemies in several cartoons. By the end of the war, Bugs had been promoted all the way to master sergeant, a great honor indeed.

In 1994, a group of 1,000 animation experts created a list of the 50 Greatest Cartoons of All Time. Bugs Bunny episodes made the list several times – including the very top spot. The cartoon was titled *What's Opera, Doc?* and was released in 1957. It was directed by Chuck Jones and written by Michael Maltese. This was the very last Elmer Fudd cartoon Jones directed.

Bugs has become one of the most recognizable cartoon characters in the world. He's appeared in comics, video games, amusement park rides, and music records. Bugs has also appeared in more movies than any other cartoon character. Bugs went on to become an ambassador for Stampers to spread the joy of collecting to children with this stamp sheet in 1997.



The first US stamp to picture a cartoon character.



Set of 10 Stamps celebrating Bugs' 80th Anniversary

Mystic Stamp Company • Camden, NY 13316

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