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Movies at Sea: Silent Films and Soldier Leisure Time during the First World War

Introduction

As the *U.S.S. Agamemnon* journeyed across the Atlantic Ocean headed to France, hundreds of American soldiers sat idle throughout the journey. For hours, they waited patiently until the door opened to a viewing room fit with seats and a film projector. For a time-period of about two hours, the biggest movies stars of the time entertained them in the grey screen onboard of the battleship. Afterwards the soldiers discussed their thoughts on the films they just watched; for two hours, the films distracted the soldier of the reality of their mission in a world at war.

During the 1910s, Hollywood underwent a series of systematic changes to the format of their film production. In fact, they experienced a revolution within the film industry with unprecedented numbers of silent films produced ushering the development of what we know today as feature films. Public film viewing raised the popularity of films and increased demand for new and longer films. As the United States entered World War I in 1917, the film (colloquially known as the motion picture) became part of the entertainment experience for soldiers both on the frontlines as well as in all bases near the conflict. Soldiers greatly enjoyed films, often filling theaters for show times. Many soldiers wrote about their joyful experiences at the picture show, especially the positive ones. While we have the testimonies of some soldiers and their experiences, unfortunately, the destruction of silent films of that era has obscured the full content of the films soldiers watched.

This paper seeks to expand upon our understanding of the way troops experienced films during World War I by focusing on the content of films screened on the troopship *U.S.S. Agamemnon* during one of its many voyages from New York to France. Through newspaper clippings and army documents, this paper analyzes the storylines as well as themes of the silent films screened in the absence of viewable copies to understand the ways the army structured leisure time of the troops. The paper shows the different genres screened on board the ship: including westerns, crime thrillers, comedy, propaganda musicals, and espionage. This paper also shows that all films

screened remained within the army's policies, as well as falling in line with the censorship code of the time. These films promoted good American values such as good morals and happily ever after conclusions as ending of success where good triumphed over evil. For soldiers away from their loved ones, watching these films reminded them of home, and put them at ease prior to their engagement in one of the most brutal conflicts in human history: The Great War. While a few scholars have noted that soldiers enjoyed silent films in the same fashion as the general public, this paper argues in the Foucaultian sense of "the control of activity" that even during their leisure time, the armed forces not only structured the way military personnel enjoyed their free time, but also structured the nature of that free time.¹

Literature Review

There is a dearth of research on films consumed by American soldiers during the First World War. Recently, some articles have begun to investigate films from this historical period, but few have described the contents of the films. Using available literature on these films and research into similar topics, then it is possible construct a framework centered on WWI films to explore the content of the films shown to the soldiers.

There are some challenges the historian faces when analyzing old films, especially those produced in the silent film era (1894-1927). A major challenge stems from the lack of films from the era because the great majority of them no longer exist. One contributing factor for the loss of silent films pertains to the type of materials used to produce them. Over time, the film stock deteriorated making the library of silent films limited. Depending on the quality of the material, based on chemical composition and acetate conditions, the films range from mildly deteriorated to indecipherable.² As David Pierce has noted, industry practices of the time were to blame since production companies usually only kept a handful of screening copies to go with the master copy, usually destroying the rest within a few years of release.³ In addition, Pierce noted that to free up storage space many films were destroyed when they no longer brought revenues to the film companies.⁴ In addition, given the dismal storage conditions and the high flammability of film stock, many films were lost to warehouse fires.⁵ Finally, Pierce showed the life span of films produced

- 1 Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punishment: the Birth of the Prison*, trans., Alan Sheridan (New York: Second Vintage Books Edition, 1995), 140-155.
- 2 John B. Kuiper, "Silent Film for Contemporary Audiences," *Image* Vol. 25, No. 1 (Mar 1982), 1-6.
- 3 David Pierce, "The Legion of the Condemned - Why American Silent Films Perished," *Film History* Vol. 9, No. 1 (1997): 5-22.
- 4 *Ibid*, 6.
- 5 *Ibid*, 10-11.

pointing that it took between two to three years of release of any given film before taken out of circulation to be destroyed or stored away.⁶

In her article "Film, Cultural Policy, and World War I Training Camps: Send Your Soldier to the Show with Smileage," Sue Collins assessed entertainment practices within the army. She claimed that learning from past conflicts the army sought to prevent soldiers from performing "unsavory acts" and to "promote good morals" within the ranks. The army attempted to achieve this by providing organized entertainment programs meant to keep idle soldiers distracted. The most important and popular of these programs was silent films screenings. They kept soldiers who attended screenings content by implementing measures ensuring that the films screened were enjoyable. She underscored the film policy of the War Department (WD) and the film industry, including the heavy censorship that troubled filmmakers.⁷ In addition, she discussed the reasons films did not meet the standards set by the WD, "[i]n terms of content, reviewers rejected films that were considered "uninteresting," "unconvincing," "poorly done," "worthless," "cheap," "salacious," "not funny," "unpleasant," or "without entertaining value."" Finally, she discussed the unwavering restriction of any sexual related content as well as any film that included gambling and drinking. Films including such content faced exclusion or heavy editing.⁸

In his article, "George Creel: Freedom of Speech, the Film Industry, and Censorship during World War I," Donald Fishman supported most of the arguments presented in Collins's work. Yet, unlike Collins, he showcased the role of the Committee of Public Information (CPI) and the struggle for free speech within the film industry. The efforts of Creel for suppression over free artistic expression paralleled the wishes of the state, which sought to control ideas within the film industry, thereby leading to restriction on the content of the motion pictures.⁹

In spite of increasing war-related propaganda reels shown in civilian theaters, films depicting war themes were not dominant in the narrative film genre. In her book, *Reel Patriotism*, Leslie Midkiff DeBauche found that the number of war related films and serials (episodic shorts) were miniscule among the overall narrative films produced in the United States.¹⁰ Production studios predominately chose to make "cheerful" films while eliminating

6 Ibid, 5.

7 Sue Collins, "Film, Cultural Policy, and World War I Training Camps: Send Your Soldier to the Show with Smileage," *Film History* Vol. 26, No. 1 (Mar 2014): 1-49.

8 Ibid, 25.

9 Donald Fishman, "George Creel: Freedom of Speech, the Film Industry, and Censorship during World War I," *Free Speech Yearbook* Vol. 39, No. 11 (Jan 2001): 34-56.

10 Leslie Midkiff DeBauche, "The Films of World War I," in *Reel Patriotism* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 35-74.

“depressing stories”.¹¹ DeBauche concluded that this practice was due in part because people went to the movies to relax and escape from their everyday troubles. However, upon analyzing distribution lists, she found that around half of big budget and prestigious movies produced by large studios were in fact war related in theme.¹² However, this did not necessarily mean that this genre of films was the norm since big budget films were proportionally few. In “Star Testimonials and Trailers: Mobilizing during World War I,” Sue Collins added that, production studios protected themselves financially, as an industry, by assisting in the production of propaganda films promoting the sale of liberty bonds as a way to promote assistance to the war effort by general audiences. This resulted in an increase in nationalistic themes present in Hollywood films.¹³ This included films that directly portrayed the defeat of Germany, and as noted in her previous article, the promotion of American values.¹⁴

There are few notable studies examining the leisure experience between soldiers and the motion picture. In her article, “Forgetting Their Troubles for A While: Australian Soldiers’ Experiences of Cinema during the First World War,” Amanda Laugesen examined this relationship in the Australian Army.¹⁵ She claimed that there was an almost universal relationship between soldiers and films in all English-speaking countries.¹⁶ She concluded that soldiers regularly enjoyed the cinema since there were numerous cinemas set up near the frontlines and on troopships that regularly played films for idle troops.¹⁷ She determined that films provided a morale boost to soldiers based on reports detailing how soldiers enjoyed themselves during film screenings. In addition, she pointed out the similarities between the way soldiers and general audiences engaged with films in terms discussing and critiquing just about every aspect of the film from plotlines to shot composition.¹⁸ In his article “‘He Sees Now What He Looked Like’: Soldier Spectators, Topical Films, and the Problem of Onscreen Representation during World War I,” Chris Grosvenor argued that soldiers did not enjoy all genres of film. The appearance of “topical” films (films relating to real war events such as a specific battle) was

11 Ibid, 41.

12 Ibid, 38.

13 Sue Collins, “Star Testimonials and Trailers: Mobilizing during World War I,” *Cinema Journal* Vol. 7, No. 1 (Oct 2017): 46-70.

14 Ibid, 57-59.

15 Amanda Laugesen, “Forgetting Their Troubles for A While: Australian Soldiers’ Experiences of Cinema during the First World War,” *Historical Journal of Film Radio & Television* Vol. 35, No. 4, (Dec 2015): 596-614.

16 Ibid, 596.

17 Ibid, 597.

18 Ibid, 602.

rare and controversial. This did not prevent all warring states, engaged in the war, to commission films intending to depict realistic images of warfare for the consumption of the general public. This genre of films, for example *The Battle of The Somme* (1916), received very poor reviews by soldiers because they saw flaws that differed immensely from their experiences in the trenches and in battle.¹⁹ In response, the governments prevented topical films from reaching the viewing pleasure of soldiers.

In sum, the lack of scholarship about the soldier viewing experience during the First World War leaves much to be understood on the topic. Through a methodology combining different areas of research, it is possible to reconstruct a general framework that allows the historian to reconfigure the general plot elements and themes of the films screened to American World War I soldiers. This paper seeks to expand on that knowledge base by connecting the available literature to evaluate if the *U.S.S. Agamemnon* indeed followed army film policy, at the time, while describing the films shown on board during one of its many journeys. This is to reassemble the trends common in films screened at the picture shows to understand why films were popular and highly sought after by soldiers; and the role of the government (WD) in structuring the leisure time of soldiers.

Background

When the United States declared war on Germany in 1917, movies, or motion pictures, were gaining domestic popularity. Beginning in the early 1910s, films obtained respect in American society as an art form; however, critics of the industry felt that films challenged national values in its content, a contradiction to American core values.²⁰ The emergence of feature films dominated productions within the film industry. The combining elements of film availability, the rise in popularity, and new format of feature films increased the number of Americans who frequented movie theaters. As a result, there was an increase in revenue, which fueled an increase in film productions and large profits for film studios. It is no surprise that the medium found its way into the hands of the U.S. Army. Motion picture shows became one of the leading types of entertainment for soldiers at U.S. camps, near the front lines and on troopships carrying soldiers to Europe. The U.S. War Department (WD), according to moral and entertainment standards, carefully selected films for screening across the branches of the military. The films screened on the *U.S.S. Agamemnon* consisted of many different subject

19 Chris Grosvenor, "‘He Sees Now What He Looked Like’: Soldier Spectators, Topical Films, and the Problem of Onscreen Representation during World War I," *Film History* Vol. 30, No.4 (Winter 2018): 84-106.

20 Collins, "Film, Cultural Policy," 18.

matters, ranging from action to comedy, subjected to the standards put in place by the WD.

The process by which the WD selected the motion pictures was straightforward in terms of the contents of the films. The WD rejected or approved motion pictures based on their internal standards, banning films with any sexual content, alcohol, and gambling because these actions violated the ethics of good morals among the military. Films with such content on occasion appeared in a heavily edited form. In addition, motion pictures underwent scrutiny based on other criteria including entertainment and comedic value, craftsmanship, and a film's realistic portrayal of events.²¹ The CPI, an arm of the WD, reviewed all films to decide if a film needed to be edited or simply banned before screening them for soldiers. This included any anti-war material or any other content that painted the U.S. or any of its allies in a negative manner.²²

While the U.S. Government attempted to influence Hollywood productions, and most narrative films did not contain any war related materials, this was not always the case as Hollywood did produce a handful of war films. Nevertheless, studios focused on producing films with positive subject matter, many of which were comedies. This was due, in part, because happy films provided an escape for the masses from their everyday troubles.²³ As a result, filmmakers opted to minimize the amount of war related content in their films. Soldiers were no the exception: as their civilian counterparts, soldiers enjoyed watching and discussing motion pictures. However, the WD was reluctant to show soldiers war-related films to avoid conflict or stress to soldiers since they potentially could call into question what they saw on screen. Films selected by the WD shied away from the truth, as it sought to keep morale on the home front as high as possible.²⁴ Therefore, war related films were not shown to the troops crossing the Atlantic.

Most films produced during the period under review no longer exist. Either film companies destroyed them or films themselves succumbed to the passage of time in inadequate storage and conditions. On occasion, films were lost to storehouse fires.²⁵ As a result, the ability to watch the films, too, was lost in the destruction. It was common practice for motion pictures to have a distribution cycle of about two or three years. This suggests that any films shown to soldiers, in 1918, premiered within three years of their screening on the *U.S.S. Agamemnon*. Given the scarcity of surviving silent films, one way to attain an understanding of the contents of these motion pictures is through

21 Ibid, 21.

22 Fishman, "George Creel", 45.

23 Midkiff-DeBauche, "The Films of World War I", 41-43.

24 Grosvenor, "He Sees Now What He Looked Like," 94.

25 Pierce, "The Legion of the Condemned," 5.

a close reading of newspaper clippings of the time. Many papers had weekly or daily sections dedicated to the description of films playing at local theaters. Certain dailies contained brief summaries of the stories, while others had much more in-depth ones.

Contents of the Feature Length Motion Pictures

During the voyage of any given troopship such the *U.S.S. Agamemnon*, traveling from New York to France, the crew enjoyed a variety of feature films amounting to 16 in total.²⁶ Programs handed out included both the film's titles, and the name of the biggest star involved with each respective film's production. All films discussed appear on said programs. The motion pictures shown to the soldiers fell under multiple and different genres. Generally, troopship command tended to favor action films to entertain the troops. For example, they selected films such as *Six Shooter Andy*, among many others, to occupy the leisure time of everyone onboard. In that film, Andy Crawford, the main character, and his father headed west in search of wealth and fortune at the time of the Gold Rush. In their journey, they came across the small mining town of Bannack, Nevada. As Andy approached the town, he found a wagon on the side of the road. Inside, he found eight children of varying ages along the lifeless body of their murdered father. Andy learned that the corrupt sheriff of Bannack had killed the father of the youngsters.²⁷ In time, Andy discovered that he ran a group of criminals who not only stole the hard-earned gold from the miners of that Bannack, but also constantly harassed the townsfolk, especially targeting the women. As Andy observed the town and the relationships of the town people and the band of bandits, he concluded that the town was indeed "reeking" of gold and criminals. Andy had seen enough! He took matters into his own hands and confronted the sheriff and his band of thieves. A conclusion trope of good always wins. As the title implies, he had one method to combat the thieves of the town: his trusty six-shooter gun. The *Cairo Bulletin*, a local Southern Illinois newspaper described the action film as "thrilling."²⁸ Andy engaged the criminals, defeated them, and slowly but surely restored order to the town. His victory was not without sacrifice, as the sheriff's men killed both his father and the eldest boy he encounter in his journey. Though Andy found love in the family's eldest daughter, with whom he presumably lived a happy life.²⁹ *Six Shooter Andy* strongly upheld the moral code of the WD as it clearly promoted good American values.

26 Morris Library Special Collections. Southern Illinois University Carbondale; Carbondale, IL. "Lester Lincoln Correspondence 1918": Program List, Box 1, Folder 2.

27 "At the Lyric," *The Daily Illini*, May 11, 1918, 6.

28 "At the Gem," *The Cairo Bulletin*, March 1918, 3.

29 *Ibid*, 3.

A different action film titled, *Headin' South*, centered on an outlaw, strangely named "Headin' South." The film pit this central character against a bandit named "Spanish Joe" and his gang of "Mexicans," who had been terrorizing the southern border.³⁰ After years of avoiding law enforcement, the responsibility of catching these bad guys fell upon Headin' South. In an action adventure spanned across the distance between Mexico and Canada, Headin' South managed to infiltrate into Spanish Joe's band of marauders to Joe and bringing him to justice. In the process of plotting and fighting to capture the band, Headin' South saved a woman from Joe's gang named Donna Valdether. The two grew close together eventually falling in love with each other. However, this affair did not distract Headin's plan from taking down Joe. Similar to *Six Shooter Andy*, this film again upheld good American values in the face of those who undermined them. Good moral and justice afforded these heroes a happy conclusion with the women they saved and fell in love with.³¹ Finally, *The Disciple* followed the same format plot of the aforementioned films. From the available source, the film took place in the American frontier. In line with the other action films, it contained shootouts and other tense action scenes concluding with the victory of the hero of the film.³² Many elements of these action films show similar plotlines falling in line with the War Department's films policy.

Unlike the typical adult hero featured in most action film of the time, the film *Kidnapped* centered on David, a young boy, who grew up in what must have been a wealthy family. One day his life unraveled when his uncle connived a plot to kidnap David. The lack of historical sources to understand fully the entire plot of this film obscured the motivations that drove the uncle to kidnap David. Regardless, David escaped his "redcoat" and "Jacobite" captors, likely referencing the period enacted in the film and the types of criminal behavior assigned to those individuals hired by his uncle to perpetrate the crime: treason to his own family.³³ At the end, the escape of David foiled whatever plans his uncle conjured. The uncle appeared to have been taken under custody as justice was served. As for David, he simply returned to his normal life. Again good prevailed and the "bad guy" was soundly defeated and taken into the hand of the law.

A different genre circulated by the WD to entertain the troops was the thriller films. These movies focused on more intense personal situations than full-scale battles. The film *A Small Town Girl* was one such film. It was the story of a young woman from a rural area named Jane. Jane moved to New York,

30 "At the Colonial," *The Daily Illini*, April 26, 1918, 6.

31 "Feature Film Reports: 'Headin' South,'" *New York Clipper*, March 6, 1918, 35.

32 "Sixth Triangle Program: Colonial Today and Sat.," *The Daily Illini*, January 21 1916, 6.

33 "'Kidnapped' Film Shown For Relief Yesterday," *The Daily Illini*, December 2, 1917, 3.

into a tenement on First Avenue referred to as “squalid” to take care of her little cousin.³⁴ Unbeknownst to Jane, she reunites with her former sweetheart Frank, a young man from her hometown that had come to the city before her arrival. One day, Jane and her little cousin found a large jewel plausibly attached to the sole of one of her shoes.³⁵ As result of this unexpected discovery, they found themselves mixed up in a criminal plot involving a group of men who lived in the same tenement she did. The crooks tried and failed to capture her because she called for Frank to assist her. Frank showed up with the police who in turned arrested the criminals. Now safe, she fell into the arms of Frank, reigniting the romance that started years before.³⁶

The film, *Widow's Might*, told the story of a college man, Dick Taush, who lost his fortune to the criminal tactics of his crooked landlord. To recover his fortune and to expose his landlord, Taush went undercover cross-dressed as a widow named Princess Martini.³⁷ While undercover, he secured evidence of crooked dealings involving the landlord and presented them to the police. The evidence exposed the landowner for who he truly was: a thief. At the end of this film he regained his fortune and like most other heroes in films, he won the heart of a girl signaling the ended his story on a high note.³⁸ These films in a similar fashion reflects to those of the action films which sought to tell stories that uphold the good moral values that the army instilled in its soldiers.

Romance films, also, entertained the troops. Films such *Love Me*, told the story of a woman named Maida. Maida fell in love with Gordon Appleby, a hardworking man. The family of Gordon, however, opposed the marriage between the two. In a turn of events, Eunice, the younger sister of Gordon planned to elope against the wishes of her family. Here, Maida convinced her to stay and to obey their family moral code. In return for her assistance in discouraging Eunice, from running away, the family of Gordon realized that Maida was a moral woman and therefore allowed to pursue a relationship with Gordon.³⁹ Among these films, the film *Stella Maris* powerfully signaled its viewers the dangers of alcohol consumption and low morals as contrast of the values held high by the WD. The film told the story of two women, Stella, an orphan living with her aunt and uncle, and Unity, an orphan who alone in the world. They are on complete opposite sides of the social and economic spectrum, as Stella belonged to the “extremely rich,” class. Unity, on the other hand, “live[d] on scraps and wears rags.”⁴⁰ However, they both fell in love

34 “June Caprice at Lyric,” *The Daily Illini*, July 10, 1917, 4.

35 “At The Princess Tonight,” *Urbana Daily Courier*, August 1917, 4.

36 *Ibid.*, 4.

37 “Rialto Has Eltinge Film,” *New York Clipper*, January 23, 1918, 36.

38 “Feature Film Reports: ‘Widow’s Might,’” *New York Clipper*, January 31, 1918, 33.

39 “Feature Film Reports: ‘Love Me,’” *New York Clipper*, March 20, 1918, 34.

40 “At Colonial,” *The Daily Illini*, March 22, 1918, 6.

with the same man, John Risen. Risen was already married to a woman who described as a “drunkard.” Risen began to fall in love with Stella, but his vows prevented him from perusing any physical relation with any other women. Unity decided to give up everything, including her own life, to make John happy. This meant the assassination of his “useless” wife and her suicide. The death of both women, in turn, allowed John to pursue a relationship with Stella, who, now, understood the suffering world beyond her social class.⁴¹ Romance films continued the pattern of previous films adhering to guidelines of the War Department, and even took it to the next level with the defeat of the social practices rendered immoral by the army, namely alcohol consumption.

Finally, comedy films were widely popular in military picture shows. Most of the shorts screened to the army were of a highly comedic nature. *The Book Agent* starred George Walsh in the role of a peddler. He was a man with many enemies, who used his charm to turn enemies into friends.⁴² While there were many shorts screened on the *Agamemnon* centered on comedy, newspapers of the time did not offered reviews for such short films. In additions, films with propaganda contended escaped reviewers in the press. For example, a film titled *They're Off* did not called the attention of those reviewing the films. However, while it was difficult to find anything about this particular film, the evidence suggested that it was a propaganda film. The film seems to be a musical of sorts, with many songs and the appearance from the 71st Regiment from an unspecified branch of the military. The central message of the film emerged when an officer pleaded to the audience for new recruits.⁴³ This film likely underwent editing since it was odd for any serving soldier to see a call for new recruits to an audience of people already in the service.

Given the contents of the motion pictures, there was a formula for the screening of films to the soldiers, during their transatlantic voyage, in adherence to the policies and practices implemented by military authorities during the WWI. The films shown on the *U.S.S Agamemnon* all pressed “American values” onto the viewing soldiers—just what the War Department wanted. In all genres of films, there was the defeat of corrupt people and unlawful or immoral actions, especially in the action and thriller films. The crooked sheriff of a mining town, an elusive bandit, a scheming uncle, and a band of robbers succumbed to defeat by honorable heroes. The films, also, showed a challenge to bad morals symbolized by the murder of an alcoholic woman and the prevention of on an eloping couple. None of the narrative

41 “At the Princess,” *DeKalb Daily Chronicle*, July 13, 1918, 4.

42 “George Walsh at Lyric,” *Daily Illini*, July 17, 1917, 3.

43 “Vaudeville Reviews,” *New York Clipper*, August 29, 1917, 21.

films were war related and the one film that was, was shown for the use of its musical numbers. Perhaps most importantly, most of the films had a positive tone or at least a happy ending. This in turn, at least for a short time, these films provided a period of enjoyment for the soldiers who watched them. As the films fit all the appropriated codes adopted by the WD, the entertainment life on the *U.S.S. Agamemnon* still maintained the structure that dominated the rest of life in the armed forces.

Finally, given that films were a form of escapism, it was not surprising that all films concluded with happy endings. A pattern that emerged across the films was romantic subplots that involved two characters falling in love at the end of the film. While the depiction of marriage was not always the climax in the films, it is clear that the characters started a relationship out of whatever situation they were dealing with. Love sprouted between people of all backgrounds, two small towners living in a city, a gruff cowboy, and a young woman on the frontier, a college man, and a captive woman, all shared this pattern of joy and happiness in their love relationships. All actors seemed to be relatively young, as well as female actors well known for playing the role of the innocent young woman. In all but a select few films screened on the ship, finding true love was the ultimate reward for the characters at the ends of their stories.

In stark contrast to the fictional world of the films, the reality the soldiers faced had a distinct lack of romantic love. After their departure to Europe, soldiers were away from their loved ones for an extended period of time. Other than their letters, there was no contact between them and their families. For the soldier on their way to Europe, it very well may have been the first time away from home; for many more, it was the first time separated from their spouses. Then, as they reached the battlefield, this lack of love was further accentuated by the acts of war.

It comes as no surprise then that the motion picture was so common and popular. Clearly films reminded soldiers of their loved ones and reminded them of the good times and comforts of home. Given the evidence that the army knew very well what content soldiers enjoyed the most, the WD intentionally selected the films filling the leisure time of its armed forces. They were certainly trying to keep soldiers comfortable and distracted during their idle time, yet always structuring their lives.

Conclusion

Films screened on the *U.S.S. Agamemnon* fell in line with what scholars have identified as the army's entertainment policy. The films screened always made for an enjoyable experience, whether that meant watching a gruff hero saving a town, foiling a criminal plot, watching dance routines, and without

exception watching a blossoming romance. Given the information, it is clear that the films offered a way for soldiers to escape from their immediate troubles and distract themselves while off duty at sea. With a war around them, soldiers watched films to remind themselves of better times ahead upon their returned home. With the strictly adhered to parameters set by the War Department, it was clear that while the soldiers did enjoy watching films during the supposed leisure time, their “free” time was still heavily structured and controlled like the rest of the aspects of military life by the state represented by the officials at the War Department.

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