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Intro to MIAP, Group Research Paper
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<u>Orphan from the Rhineland</u>

In the world of moving image archiving, archivists are steadily beginning to advocate for the identification of orphan films. "*Orphan films make up the overwhelming majority of our cinematic heritage, and are a vital part of the culture and cultural record of the twentieth century. Indeed, the Library of Congress declared that it is in the task of restoring these orphan films that 'the urgency may be greatest'.*"[1] The identification of orphan films is instrumental to our cinematic heritage, and helps ensure the preservation and presentation of vital moving image material that would otherwise have no prospect of accessibility.

When presented with an unidentified film from the Feltner Collection at the University of South Carolina, identification through research was the primary course of action. The film, labeled "*early Hitler - Disruption threatens German Republic/mass graves*", featured a seven second clip of a mass grave, a five second clip of (what looked like) teeth being poured out of a box and a thirty-three second clip of a parade or demonstration at an unknown place and time. The clips of the mass grave and teeth suggested the film originated around the time of Nazi influence in Europe. The latter section of the film contained a wider variety of entities that could serve as a starting point for researching the material. Army uniforms, an unknown male principal figure wearing a beret, light-colored armbands and a section of a building where the event was taking place were the main elements of focus.

Attire was the easiest form of identification to get research underway. Internet searches for terms such as "*white armbands*", "*WWII Austrian and German uniforms*" and "*Nazi berets*" all lead to dead ends. With the absence of any Nazi insignia, there was also no clear indication

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[1]Levin, Garrett, and Megan Ristau. *Access to Orphan Films: Submission to the Copyright Office.* Center for the Study of the Public Domain, Duke Law School, n.d. Web. 6 Oct. 2013. <http://www.law.duke.edu/cspd>.

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that the parade or demonstration could even be associated with the Nazi party. At one point in the film, a group of men wearing white armbands wave their hats in the air out of celebration. Research of the "*Heil Hitler*" salute uncovered that members of the Nazi party began a transition to exclusively utilizing the "*Heil Hitler*" salute between 1923 and 1926. This lead to the estimated date of the footage to be narrowed down between the years 1920 and 1923, and research was redirected at identifying the main architectural structure that was present and/or the unknown male principle figure featured during the event.

An event the size of the one portrayed in the film most likely attracted the attention of at least a few newspaper publications. However, it was not feasible to start searching periodicals for an event that did not yet have a more specific date range. So, a much closer look was taken at the architectural structure and its pillars and design were well noted. A Google Image search of notable German buildings was employed in order to cast a wide net across similar architectural structures that might stem from the search results. The same method was utilized in multiple Google Image searches of Nazi terminology, groups and authority figures. This method eventually proved to be effective when a search for the Nazi term "*Sturmabteilung*" resulted in a photo of a parade at the *Königlicher Palast von Brüssel* (The Royal Palace of Brussels); which in turn generated, within the same Google web crawl results, a photo of a group of Rhenish Separatists outside of the Kurfürstliches Schloss (The Electoral Palace) in Koblenz, Germany. The photo, titled "*Separatisten der Rheinischen Republik vor dem Kurfürstlichen Schloss in Koblenz, 22 November 1923*" [2], provided a specific date, name of the principal male figure, and location that would serve as the primary information for all future scholarly based research on the history and origin of the film.

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[2] *Matthes - Separatists at Coblenz*. 1923. Photograph. Bain News Service, Library of Congress.

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The identification of the central figure in this film was the key to unlocking the remarkable historical events at the heart of this sequence. The subject of this segment is Josef Friedrich Matthes, a German journalist who became a political activist and separatist in the 1920s. While he was born in Würzburg in Bavaria in 1886, Matthes, a member of the German Social Democratic Party, became deeply involved with the separatist movement in the Rhineland in the early 1920s.

During these years the Rhineland was a demilitarized zone following Germany's defeat in WWI and the Treaty of Versailles, but the French were intent on keeping Germany a wounded power in Europe, backing a series of revolts in the region from 1919 onwards[3]. In early 1923 the French and Belgian militaries began a two-year occupation of the Ruhr region in northern Rhineland in response to Germany's failure to pay reparations for the war. Coinciding with the hyperinflation of the Deutschmark that plagued Weimar Germany, localized nationalist sentiment in the Rhineland began to rise and a dormant separatist movement came to the fore.

With funding[4] and political support from the French administration in the Rhineland[5], separatists from the United Rhenish Movement, led by Hans Adam Dorten, Josef Matthes and Joseph Smeets, launched a series of putsches in towns and cities throughout the Rhineland beginning on October 19th, 1923. On October 23rd, separatists under Matthes seized the Electoral Palace (Kurfürstliches Schloss) in Koblenz. They were expelled by police the following day, but retook the palace on October 26th, when they raised their tricolor from the roof and declared

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[3] Osmond, Jonathan, *Rural Protest in the Weimar Republic: The Free Peasantry in the Rhineland and Bavaria*, London, 1993, p. 94

[4] Ibid, p. 94

[5] Soukup, Jaromír, 'The Smeets Case: A Contribution to the Analysis of the Separatist Movement in the British Zone of Occupation in Rhineland and Problems in British-French Relations (1919-1923), in *Dvacáté století. = The Twentieth Century*, ed. Martin Kovář, Prague, 2009, p. 77.

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independence for the Rhenish Republic, with Matthes named as Prime Minister. Attempting to

seek legitimacy for his new rogue state, he "turned to the League of Nations and unequivocally

expressed the view that he regarded himself as the de facto representative of his own ethnic

group, a national minority."[6]

It was not to last. Matthes's militia, the Rhineland Protection Force (Rheinland-

Schutztruppen), took to looting and brutality to keep the peace, leading to a collapse in public

support for the putsch. Fighting broke out between the Rhineland Protection Force and the very

people they were claiming to protect, leading to casualties on both sides. Matthes was forced to

dissolve the separatist government on November 28th, after which he fled to France.

The events in the Rhineland made international headlines, filling columns in *The New

York Times*. This film, apparently newsreel footage from the time of the putsch, can be dated to

November 22nd, 1923, according to photographic records, shortly before the Republic collapsed.

Matthes, the Prime Minister of the newly emerged state, takes pride of place as he greets military

dignitaries – perhaps members of the partially supportive French military. Martin Schlemmer

notes that "Matthes knew how to appeal to the workers"[7], and here he is seen interacting

cordially with what appear to be members of the working public. These encouraging photo ops

go some way to disguising the disorganization that plagued the Rhenish Republic from day one

and the lack of popular support it suffered, while also revealing to some degree how personable a

leader Matthes was.

After the collapse of the Rhenish Republic, Matthes lived in Paris for several years,

working once more as a journalist. When France fell to the Nazis in 1940, Matthes was arrested

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[6] Schlemmer, Martin, *Los von Berlin: die Rheinstaatbestregungen nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg*, Cologne, 2007, p. 174.
[7] Ibid, p. 409

and returned to Germany. As a political prisoner, he was sent in 1941 to the concentration camp

Dachau, in his homeland of Bavaria, where he would die in 1943. The fact that he was a victim

of one of the death camps of the Nazi regime seems to be the sole link that ties the footage of the

Rhenish Republic to portion of footage containing imagery from the Holocaust.

The footage just preceding the clip of the Koblenz putsch, of teeth being poured from a

wooden box, originally appeared in a War Department Information Film titled *The Death Mills*

("Die Todesmuehlen", 1945), produced by the United States Signal Corps[8]. The War Department

was reorganized in 1941 with the passing of the First War Powers Act on December 18th, 1941.

During this time various administrative, engineering and technical departments were

consolidated to form the Services of Supply (a.k.a. Army Service Forces)[9]. Within the Services

of Supply was the United States Signal Corps. The Signal Corps was responsible for technical

communications (codes, radio, and other services) within the War Department, including the

production of films for education and training of inductees[10].

Most production and processing occurred at Kaufman Astoria Studios in New York,

which was taken over during wartime and renamed the Signal Corps Photographic Center[11]. A

title card within *The Death Mills* states that the film was created with the intention of educating

the German public about the atrocities committed by the Nazis. The film documents in graphic

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[8] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *The Death Mills (1945)* digital record. Web. October, 2013. http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/fv160
[9] Cline, Ray S. *The War Department: Washington Command Post: Operations Division*, pp. 92-94. 1951. U.S. Government Printing Office. Web. October, 2013. http://archive.org/stream/washingtoncomman00clin#page/94/mode/2up
[10] Signal Corps Regimental History. Web. October, 2013. http://signal.army.mil/history/06_signal_motion_picture.html
[11] Raines, Rebecca Robbins. 1952. *Getting the message through: a branch history of the U.S. Army Signal Corps.* "Photography: Shooting the War," pp. 257. Web. http://www.history.army.mil/books/30-17/S_7.htm#p267a

detail the conditions of several concentration camps, including Auschwitz, Dachau, Majdanek, Treblinka, Belsen, and Buchenwald, and the release of their prisoners following German surrender to the allies[12].

A complete version of *The Death Mills* is housed in the Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. It was acquired from the National Archives and Records Administration in 1994, and is in the public domain[13]. It is uncertain why such a short clip would be separated from such a historic film, but perhaps it was reattached to the reel where it now remains after breakage or compiled with other footage as part of a teaching aid. Inquiries were made with archives in Germany and research institutes in the U.S. but no other similar or duplicate footage was found as of yet.

Several aspects of the origin and purpose of this small collection of footage remain unresolved. Notably, the origin of the very short footage of mass graves (perhaps footage of a still photograph), which was difficult to research because of the lack of unique detail in the image and the short length. Also still unclear is why the three clips (mass graves, *Death Mills*, and J.F.M./Koblenz putsch) are together. This may be a matter of tracing the accession records from when it was acquired (if they exist). In order to create a plan for preservation or future use of this footage, it is important to research further into the origins of the Matthes footage, and to determine if it is unique, orphaned footage. The Matthes clip is an important record with the history of early 20th century German separatist movements, and a preservation project for this portion seems to be a likely candidate for grant funding, either in the United States or perhaps

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[12] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *The Death Mills (1945)* digital record. Web. October, 2013. http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/fv160
[13] United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. *The Death Mills (1945)* digital record. Web. October, 2013. http://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/fv160

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from a German cultural organization. Although more information is needed before such a project

can be proposed, this research serves as an important step towards that goal.

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