

Michale Stetz, Xinglin Wang, Ana Salas and Seraphim Arlievsky

Howard Besser

CINE-GT 1800:

Introduction to Moving Image Archiving and Preservation

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Report on MCLS-999 and MCLS-1000 “For this we Die”

Introduction

Germany’s invasion of Poland in 1939 started WWII and changed the world forever. It wasn’t until 1941 after the Pearl Harbor attack that the United States joined the battle abroad. Until the end of the war in 1945 allied and axis soldiers alike fought many battles on air, land, and sea; today we can learn about these battles, the lives of soldiers, and the effect of the war on civilians and society thanks to the tremendous amount of footage available to us. Most of the footage we see today was shot by soldiers themselves, armed with nothing more than a camera, and a great amount of it has yet to be recovered and identified. The films we will be looking at for this assignment are some of the many films in existence that help us form a more rounded narrative relating to the events of WWII and rendering the daily life of soldiers thousands of miles away from home.

We received a digitized copy of two films MCLS-999 and MCLS-1000 in one mp4 file. Both of these are home movie-esque depictions of soldiers’ lives during the war. While one is a narrative tale of a soldier living in India, another is a series of footage focusing mainly on aircraft. These clips raise a series of questions for identification regarding the time period, the group of people, and the purpose of photography. Except “For This We Die,” MCLS 999 and 1000 capture fragments of life in the army. At the early stage of research, we contextualized

these film clips through speculations based on plane tail numbers (also referred to as radio numbers), camera type, uniform, and vehicle. However, it was challenging to make certainties and absolute conclusions. According to the records provided by Lydia Pappas, who is Assistant Director and Curator of Moving Image Research Collections of the University of South Carolina, these amateur films were shot during WWII in Italy. These records with question marks only offer clues, which means more information is required for identification and preservation plan-making. Thus, to reach the goal of the research, we emailed Lydia Pappas for more detailed information. She replied that the films were shot around 1944 in six reels and donated by J.B. Doty in 1992, while we were conducting research on objects.

To conduct our research we divided the clip in two, MCLS-999 and MCLS-1000, and focused on finding objects that could give us any indication of the time and place where the films were shot. To identify MCLS-999 we relied mainly on aircraft numbers, and military registries for trucks, uniforms and badges. MCLS-1000 incorporated certain geographical markers that allowed us to place the film in India. We will be looking at individual objects and placing them within the context of the time the film was most likely shot. In our conclusion we offer theories regarding nature and purpose of the films.

A note about the organization of this paper: When identifying objects and locations, we provide a timecode which refers to the specific points in this video. They do not reflect the specific times in each film were it to be viewed on a projector.

MCLS-999: Content Description

File MCLS-999 is a diary of sorts, depicting the everyday life of a WWII soldier. It begins with a caravan of military trucks passing by some unamused onlookers. Then cuts to planes flying high in the sky, with another drastic cut almost as quickly we find ourselves indoors; where two soldiers study a map. In that same manner, the film continues to move outdoors and indoors depicting either the mighty U.S Air Force or the lives of soldiers in their off-hours. Some memorable moments feature a group of men happily getting ready to have their picture taken, and the collection of supplies previously air dropped on an open field. There are scenes targeting soldiers working intimately with aircraft, capturing tail numbers clearly on purpose. Despite the years, the film remains in good condition and allows its viewers to make out unique details. It is the often-overlooked details such as clothing, badges, and radio numbers, among others, that give us great insight into the lives of the men being depicted.

Object Descriptions

0:29 Military Vehicles

The vehicles seen in the opening of the film are most likely Dodge WCs. Introduced by Dodge in 1941 the Dodge WC series included weapon carriers, ambulances, and reconnaissance vehicles, among other types of vehicles. The boxy tarps we see in the film resemble those used on the ½ -ton 4x4 weapons carrier (United States War Department).

5:12-5:50 Camera

The camera held by one of the mechanics is most likely a Bell and Howell Eyemo. The Eyemo cameras started to be manufactured in 1925 for 35mm film with a 100ft film capacity. It became a popular camera during WWII because of its small size and robustness. The Eyemo camera was hugely on demand during WWII and was used particularly by the US military (7 Cameras Used To Film War).

6:58 Badges

The badges on the soldier's left arm appear to be the traditional upside chevron historically used by the military to easily display rank among soldiers. In this case, even though we cannot see the number of lines, the thickness of the badge indicates this soldier was either a corporal or a sergeant. Corporals serve as leaders of the smallest Army units and are in charge of individual training, personal appearance, and cleanliness of those in their unit. Sergeants lead and are in charge of the daily operations of a team or section, they typically have the most impact on the soldiers. It's safe to assume the soldier depicted on minute 6:58 of the film is one who had some sort of leadership responsibilities and was higher in rank than Privates and Specialists (US Army Ranks).

7:13 Military Truck

The truck driving by during 07:13 looks similar to most GMC trucks produced during the time. It is the rear part of the truck that indicates the purpose of the truck. The truck on the film appears to be an oil servicing 2 ½ - ton 6x6 GMC truck. Service trucks such as the one seen in the film were introduced during the Second World War to aid the US Army Air Corps. These

trucks were essential in bringing fuel from the airfield's depots to the aircrafts, before trucks like GMC oil servicing trucks, fuel had to be transferred to planes using 5-gallon cans and hand pumps (Jones).

7:55-8:25 Uniforms

Throughout the film, we see many different types of uniforms. Even though many of the allies' uniforms looked similar, the uniforms we see help us confirm that these were, in fact, American Troops. Among the uniforms we noticed are the mechanic uniform, the classic khaki shirt and trouser summer service uniform, and a few of the regular field uniforms (Reuschner). It is important to note that many soldiers are seen wearing no jackets or their jackets unbuttoned, this prompted us to make the assumption many of the clips take place during a warming or cooling season.

11:02, 11:08, 11:52 Tail Numbers (Radio Numbers)

There are several shots capturing details on the body of the aircraft. We probably can identify those aircraft with the help of numbers appearing at the tails. In 5th BOMB Wing History of Aircraft Assigned, two series of numbers appearing at these moments are listed. Y 46537 was "Assigned 9 Oct 44. To Kingman 21 Dec 45" (Drain 56). It was an aircraft assigned to the 97th bomb group under the command of the 5th Bomb Wing, stationed in Italy during WWII. The 97th bomb group was assigned to places over Europe and Africa. In terms of the mission summary, the 97th bomb group performed tasks in France, Holland, Tunisia, Sicily, and several places in Italy. According to the records provided by Lydia Pappas, these films were shot around 1944. We checked on the bomb missions performed in 1944, especially those performed

in Italy. We found missions were handled all over Italy, so it is hard to pinpoint one location where MCLS 999 was shot. In addition, the 5th Bomb Wing was headquartered at Foggia, Italy (“5th Bomb Wing”).



Another number, Y 48800 (above, right), was found on page 169. This tail number was assigned to the 483rd bomb group. The 483rd Bombardment group fought with the 15th Air Force in Italy from 1944 to 1945. They were moved to Italy in April 1944 and operated missions against enemy targets all over Europe. Their last attack was in April 1945, supporting the Allied armies in the Po Valley. The 483rd group was inactivated on 24 September 1945 immediately after the end of WWII. The 483rd group is a B-17 group and holds a combat record that “most enemy aircraft destroyed by a B-17 on one mission by one crew (483rd Bombardment Group (H) Association). The two pictures below visualize the B-17 plane. The top one is a screenshot of MCLS 999, and the color picture shows a vintage WWII B-17 at the San Bernardino International Airport.



(Image from

<https://www.sbsun.com/2017/04/18/rare-world-war-ii-aircraft-tour-comes-to-san-bernardino-international-airport/>)

10:54 “KWITURBITCHIN”

“KWITURBITCHIN” appears on the body of an aircraft (below). “Kwiturbitchin II” is a name listed in 5th BOMB WING History of Aircraft Assigned. The airplanes under this name were assigned to the 414th bomb squadron within the 97th bomb group. The production block number is B-17G-55-DL, and the manufacturer is Douglas. The webpage of the American Air

Museum in Britain presents a list of events involving the “Kwiturbitchin II” airplanes. We found one record for an airplane under this name, B-17 446544. It was assigned to the 414th bomb squadron at Amendola, Italy, on 11 October 1944 (“44-6544 B-17 Flying Fortress”). The 97th bomb group contributed to the invasion of Sicily and Southern Italy in the summer and fall of 1943. Their targets were all over Italy, France, Germany, Austria, Hungary, and so on (Maurer 167).



MCLS-1000/For This We Die: Content Description

MCLS-1000 stands out in a home movie collection, as it has a narrative. The order of clips in MCLS-999 is rather arbitrary; there is no intent to the order they are in. The clips in MCLS-1000 are successive, having been either edited together or shot chronologically; in either case, there is a progressing story. It consists of 900 feet of positive reversal color Kodak film, and is silent, according to metadata provided by Lydia Pappas, the Assistant Director and Curator of the Moving Image Research Collection of the University of South Carolina, who provided us with this footage.

Labeled “For This We Die,” the clip opens with establishing shots identifying the location as New Delhi in India. Nearly 2,000,000 U.S. troops were sent into India throughout WWII as part of the China India Burma Theater, intended to aid in the recovery of Burma from the Japanese (“India-Burma”). A young local woman is stuck on the side of the road; an American soldier fixes her bicycle, and they hit it off. The couple goes to a restaurant, they go shopping, they pet horses, all the while growing more intimate. After going to church and some osculation, the focus shifts to Indian and American troops sneaking around, hiding from each other, but eventually recognizing friendlies and coming out to cheerily greet each other, joking around as they wear each other’s headgear (Americans trying on the Indians’ turbans, the Indians measuring on the Americans’ helmets), and apparently exchanging strategic information. In the subsequent section, the Americans get word on their radio, which they write down on paper. While the lighting makes it hard to decipher, the most fitting possibility based on what is visible is “Japs Surrender.” This news makes the troops visibly happy, however, they continue in the following footage to maneuver stealthily. Our protagonist together with another soldier hides in the woods, pointing to some hidden enemy. The hero runs out into an open area and is shot down, falling dramatically into a brook. His friend runs out, crouching beside the body and aiming at the invisible enemy. He then pulls his friend out of the shallow water, giving him a flask to drink from as he dies. The camera pans up to the clouds, and a superimposed title reads “THE END,” followed by “A / MARS / THE END / PRODUCTION.” Following the title is a candid shot of American soldiers outdoors, focusing on two local women, one of them lounging on what appears to be a blanket on the ground, the other smiling into the camera as she fixes her hair. While this shot comes after “THE END,” and its inclusion with the narrative part is likely arbitrary and unintentional, it feels like an underscoring of the main theme of the film; almost

like a shot of the lonely women who are left alone after the man they loved is killed in battle, so familiar from your typical romantic war film. It appears that the title, “For this We Die,” is referring to love as that which soldiers die for; they sacrifice themselves in order to protect the people they care about, including romantic interests.

The clip is also labeled by the metadata as an “Unknown possible signal corps film.” The United States Army Signal Corps (USASC) is a branch of the U.S. Army that is concerned with communication and information within the U.S. Armed Forces. Founded in 1860 during the Civil War, the scope of Signal Corps activity greatly expanded in the throes of the Second World War, sextupling the number of personnel they had in the First World War. While much of this activity was focused around the development of practical technologies, such as radar (which had a significant impact on the outcome of several key battles) and backpack radios, the Signal Corps also ventured into more artistic endeavors (Army Pictorial Center). The Army bought Paramount’s Queens studio in 1942, turning it into the Signal Corps Photographic Center and subsequently the Army Pictorial Center, where photographers and filmmakers produced training films and coverage of the war. In short, WWII saw the signal corps, in addition to developing communications technologies, branched off into public relations oriented work and propaganda. Many creative professionals who had enlisted were involved in this work (Batchelor, 2017). While the content of MLS-1000 seems to mesh with the mission of the Signal Corps, indicators point towards the clip being amateur in nature. Various Signal Corps films available on the YouTube channels of museums and archives take on a documentary form, and appear to be non-narrative and nonfictional by nature (See *Carpentry*, 1943, from the San Diego Air and Space Museum Archives, and *Strictly Personal*, 1945, from the National Library of Medicine). Granted, film theorists will point out that documentary is often narrative and fictional, however

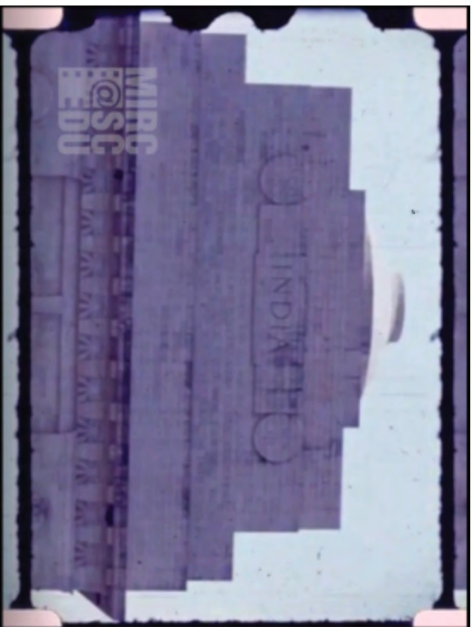
for the purposes of our research, a distinction must be made; the available films present themselves as factual and nonfictional, while “For This We Die” presents itself as a traditional dramatic narrative.

Worthy of note is the fact that the Signal Corps had considerable resources, on par with Hollywood industry standards, and had high profile professionals working with them (Batchelor 2017). Meanwhile, “For This We Die” appears to be an amateur work. A major indicator is the fact that it is silent; sound film had already taken over the industry, and the Signal Corps films were made with sound. While the argument could be made that there once was a soundtrack that is lost, the fact that the story is told very visually suggests it was always silent. The main characters talk to each other extremely minimally; the romantic relationship begins not with a conversation, but with an action; the repair of the bicycle. This relationship is further developed as we watch them walking in and out of a restaurant, petting a horse, walking into a methodist church, and most of all increasing physical intimacy; they do not talk, but get physically closer to each other as the footage progresses, culminating in kissing. Furthermore, when the radio message (“JAPS SURRENDER”) is received (which would have been heard by the audience if there was sound), it is written down and shown to the camera; the characters heard the transmission, therefore the act of writing is useful solely to the audience. This detail is handled rather ungracefully, much like a scene in which an Indian soldier is shown rising from his hiding spot twice, each time from a separate angle. These details point to an unprofessional, amateur production. Another detail worth noting is the fact that when the hero is shot, the enemies are pointed to, but they are never seen; a professional production would likely have hired extras to be “villains.”

An interesting detail that seems to go against the argument that this is a non-professional work is the fact that it is on color film; the Signal Corps films available to us are in black and white. However, it is not beyond the realm of possibility that soldiers would come into possession of color film stock. The famous color sequence at the end of Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible, Part II* was shot on color film stock, not widely available in Russia at the time, seized by soldiers from the Germans towards the end of the war (Rosenbaum, 2009). "For This We Die" could very well be a simple case of soldiers coming into possession of a camera, and making an amateur film to entertain themselves. "A Mars Production" throws a wrench into the scenario, and the meaning of this title proves elusive. While it could be referring to the Military Auxiliary Radio System, it appears that the army M.A.R.S. dealt solely with radio and not visual forms. It is possible that in this case "Mars" could be referring to an acronym or term that is like an inside joke, perhaps meaning something to the soldiers who made it. To decipher the actual meaning of "MARS" and determine whether the Signal Corps had produced films such as this, more amateur in nature, requires intensive research. This research may very well prove fruitless (especially as regards the meaning of "MARS"), and is unfortunately very difficult, if not impossible, to conduct under the current Covid-19 related restrictions. Nevertheless, MCLS-1000 provides an insight into the daily lives and creativity of common U.S. soldiers during the Second World War.

Object Descriptions

22:16 - India Gate



The opening shot establishes the location as New Delhi, India. India Gate officially called the Delhi Memorial, was raised in memory of Indian soldiers who had died in the First World War.

It was built by the British government in India, and reaches 138 feet in height (Lewis, 2017).



(Photograph: Encyclopedia Britannica).

22:24 - Road Sign; “To New Delhi”



Another establishing shot shows us a road sign, with the writing “TO NEW DELHI” with arrow, presumably pointing towards New Delhi. Adjacent is another sign, presumably pointing in the other direction; “TO D...,” its text mostly unreadable. Above is a smaller sign, “DELHI / MEERUT / AMBALA.” Meerut and Ambala are both cities near New Delhi.

26:06 - Davico’s Restaurant

We see our two protagonists enter an establishment with a sign reading “Davico’s Restaurant and Ballroom.”



Davico's was a restaurant located in the area known as Connaught Place in New Delhi. This was considered a well to do part of town with posh markets and fine restaurants (Prakash, 2020). Davico's seems to have closed since we have been unable to find any current record or mention of it.

30:19 Hari Ram and Sons



There is a Hari Ram and Sons selling street food and snacks in Allahabad that's supposedly est. 1890, however that is a 10 hour drive from New Delhi. Perhaps there is some kind of connection. It would be extremely difficult to track the information down.

See:

https://www.tripadvisor.com/Restaurant_Review-g1162488-d8087114-Reviews-Hari_Ram_Sons-Allahabad_Allahabad_District_Uttar_Pradesh.html

There is also a Hari Ram and Sons garment shop in New Delhi, BUT it was est. 1990 and any connection to a previous establishment is not apparent in available information.

See:

https://www.justdial.com/Delhi/Hari-Ram-Sons-Garment-Opposite-Punjab-Spectacles-Chandni-Chowk/011PXX11-XX11-110115150915-Q4T7_BZDET

33:15 -



It is difficult to track down methodist churches in India; it seems that there were few of them, but more intensive research would be required to identify this particular church.

34:14-



39:38 - Camera

During their encounter with the allied Indian troops, we see one of the US soldiers exhibiting his camera, which appears to be a Graflex Anniversary Speed Graphic.

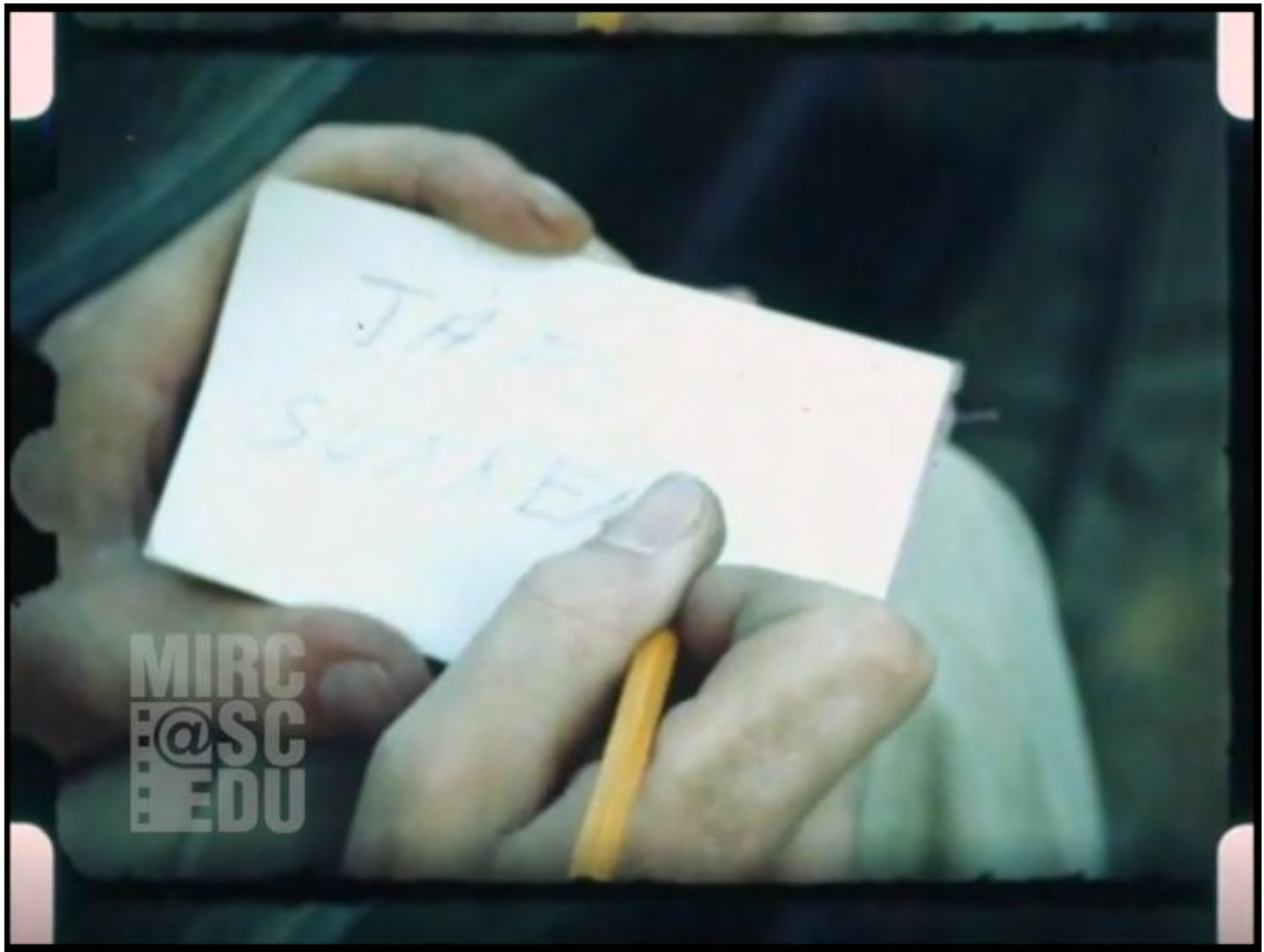


(Photo Credit: Graflex.org)

This camera was produced between 1940 and 1947, and an “Anniversary” model was produced for and used by the US combat forces. Once again, while it does not narrow many specifics about the film, it does cement the time period in which this film was produced. An interesting note regarding this model of camera is that it was used to take the image of the raising of the US flag on Iwo Jima (Past Image, 2020).

43:10 - Note “Japanese Surrender”

Prior to this note being written, we see a US soldier receive a message via radio and his companion writes it down. While the note itself appears very blown out, we are fairly certain that it reads “Japanese Surrender.”



The Japanese surrendered from WWII on August 15, 1945, which could possibly help date this film being shot post war. It could be wishful thinking on the part of the film makers, but looking at the content of the film, our “hero” dies right after the cease fire, making his story all the more tragic. That being said, this is still conjecture.

46:10 - Gun Used by US Soldier

Upon close inspection of the gun held by the prone soldier, it appears to be an M1 Carbine.



(Photo Credit: Fernwood Armory)

A standard issue firearm for many US troops, including the Signal Corps, during WWII, the M1 Carbine solidifies a time period starting at 1942 (when it was first introduced) in which this film was shot (Meche, 2013).

48:51 - “A MARS PRODUCTION”

Certainly one of the most compelling, yet perplexing identifiers would have to be the end credits stating “A Mars Production”. Unfortunately, we have been unable to locate any records directly linking this film to a documented production company, but we do have a few ideas. It was noted in the provided metadata that this is possibly a Signal Corp film, a branch of the military, so it could possibly be related to the Military Auxiliary Radio System, which was formed in 1925. Under section 4 paragraph D of the Department of Defenses MARS mission statement, they state “MARS shall provide health, morale, and welfare radio communications support to military members, civilian employees and contractors of DoD Components, and civil agency employees and contractors, when in remote or isolated areas, in contingencies or whenever appropriate.” (Roby, 2009). Given the nature of the content in this film, one could assume that it could be used to boost morale of troops. Upon looking further into MARS, however, we have been unable to find a record of this or any film production.

49:22 - Lion Beer Bag

After the end credit of “A Mars Production”, we see what seems to be non-diegetic material of some men and women lounging on the grass, having what looks like a picnic. It seems to be an outtake of production, with possible cast or crew relaxing, since some are in street clothes and others in uniform. In the background we can see a bag with the text “Lion Beer” on it. Producing one of Asia’s oldest beers, Lion Brewery is a predominantly Sri Lanken owned brewery which was established in 1849, which was known for providing beer for British administrators and troops stationed in India since 1855 (e-malt, 2008)(Daily News, 2002). This is yet another example which places the location of this film in India.

Preservation Plan

While we are unable to get a fully up to date status of both films' condition, Lydia Pappas from the University of South Carolina provided us a letter that accompanied the films when they were donated to the University of South Carolina in 1992. The stock is 16mm B&W, Motion Picture Film, Silent, on Safety Base, which according to the letter, "There is moderate shrinkage to the base and moderate emulsion deterioration on each reel. The image contrast, however, is not consistent. It varies greatly from scene to scene within each reel." The documentation provided by Lydia Pappas leads us to a preservation plan, considering the daily storage of 16mm black-and-white motion picture film on safety base, solutions to shrinkage, and digital preservation.

Most 16mm amateur film is acetate, which is also called safety film. Compared with a cellulose nitrate base used for filmmaking in earlier times, acetate does not have combustible qualities. So does polyester, which was first produced in the 1950s ("Film Specifies: Stocks and Soundtracks"). MCSL 999 and 1000 are reels produced on acetate base around 1944. For long-term preservation, archivists need to be cautious when storing and handling films. Mishandling may cause scratches, dirt, and dust left on the film surface. The projection may cause perforation damage, tears, and scratches. Therefore, we suggest that archivists prepare a clean tabletop for the cleaning process and close inspection once a while. As these materials are already decades old, it is proper to check on them once a couple of years. Rewinding reels with gloves will help generate significant problems, such as scratches, tears, color fading, or any biological severe or chemical deterioration. The black-and-white motion picture film of MCSL 999 and 1000 has a generally accepted condition, but there are still visible black spots on the screen. Except for the common problems met by all acetate film stocks, "For This We Die" is

otherwise threatened by color fading. Only constant inspection slows down further deterioration and helps maintain the current condition of these films.

Shrinkage could be early signs of vinegar syndrome, which is a frequently seen phenomenon on the acetate film. Luckily, in the letter it is stated that each reel was inspected and cleaned. If resources allow, we would recommend storing the films in a temperature and humidity controlled environment to prevent any further deterioration. Occasional pH tests would be helpful as well, to make sure any acetate deterioration is dealt with appropriately. Due to the circumstances of this project, these films have already been digitized, another helpful step in the preservation of these works. Incorporating some of the identifiers found in this paper into the films' digital metadata would help in terms of cataloging and access to those interested in the history of WWII.

Conclusion

Despite MCLS-999 depicting mostly scenes of aircraft, on the ground and the sky, it is the images in between that tell the story behind the film. These are the stories of the men who fought for our freedom, while they were not fighting. MCLS-999 does not give us enough information to find the soldiers who appear in the film, but it does give us enough of a story to know the year was most likely towards the end of 1943. Both the 5th bomb group and 97th bomb group were identified using radio numbers. Both the 5th and 97th bomb groups were assigned to the 15th Air Force which was at the time stationed in Italy. In the summer and fall of 1943 the 15th Air Force assisted in the invasion of Sicily and Southern Italy. The purpose of this film was most likely for training purposes or providing footage to be utilized by the press. The U.S Government encouraged and provided film to troops in an effort to document the war. The

records of the Field Photographic Branch report 72 reels from combat operations from China, Burma and India between the years of 1942 and 1945, and 34 reels from North Africa, Sicily and Italy between the years of 1943 and 1944 (Records of the Office of Strategic Services). The Government's desire to document the war would sometimes go as far as hiring Hollywood directors to capture footage. We can look to an interview the director John Ford gave to Peter Martin in the American Legion Magazine in 1964, detailing his part in the invasion of Normandy. Ford and a crew were tasked with filming the invasion as it happened, unfaltering capturing the horrors of the war. Despite their successful efforts in capturing the events, Ford recounts that "very little was released to the public then — apparently the Government was afraid to show so many American casualties on the screen" (Martin, 1964). This is interesting with relation to MCLS-1000.

While our group was able to identify many objects and locales within this film, we are unfortunately left wondering who exactly produced it, and more importantly why. When compared to clip 999, a narrative film seems out of place compared to the home movie-esque slice-of-life clips seen in the other. However, this uncertainty should not be considered a detriment to this film's importance with relation to its context. We noted that this was possibly a Military Auxiliary Radio System production, who was tasked with boosting troop morale, which sounds like a tall order given that the true to life footage that the government was receiving was deemed unfit. It would explain why a narrative like this was created, depicting beautiful scenery of a distant land, love, and comradery with fellow soldiers, making the war effort more palatable. It is not unlike the US government to whitewash a hard to digest topic. They could have been giving these troops a reason to fight, hence the title, "For This We Die."

Intentions aside, this film portrays many accurate representations of military clothing, equipment, and locales in which US troops were stationed, with the benefit of being documented in color. This could be very useful for historians looking to study the US presence in the China Burma India Theater.

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