



## CALL for PAPERS

# The Birth of Military Cinemas (1914-1930)

Namur - Brussels

29 - 30 November and 1st December 2017

To mark the centenary of the First World War, this conference aims to analyse the birth of the military cinematographic services that emerged in the world at the turn of the years 1914-1918. This involves working more on the genesis and evolution of the structures specialised in the production of motion pictures for the armed forces and States rather than the productions and their content. Indeed, the particular geopolitical dimension of the war generated more or less speedy and committed responses from the governments involved in the conflict to carry out information, propaganda or instructional campaigns using cinematography. 1917, in particular, represented a gap in the development of these military theatres. This "impossible year"<sup>1</sup>, marked by major events such as the entry into the war of the United States and exit of Russia, was also a year of questioning after two years of a war that was getting bogged down. The military cinematographic services experienced a major reorganisation in most countries to increase their efficiency and revive national enthusiasm.

We propose developing the history of the Army Film and Press Units from two angles of approach: a first "institutional" section that will examine the military media project, its intentions and its limitations, and a second "chronological" section that proposes a study on a long-time basis, 1914-1930, to cross-reference wartime and peacetime. From these two approaches, which can be combined, we can focus on both the creation of services within or outside of the armed forces (what proportion of the initiatives were left to private companies?), but also on military propaganda and instructional conceptions using film in different countries. These questions could expand in the military photographic services, which, by their technical similarity, were often associated with the cinematographic services. Regarding the period of the war, we will focus on the life of the services, the chain of civil-military responsibility, the freedom of press issues and control of information, the role and functioning of propaganda, but also on relations between operators, newsreel companies, the illustrated press and ministries. The period of the 1920s is also interesting to analyse; once the conflict over, quickly raises the question of the usefulness of these services: what became of them and how were the conceptions on controlling information, propaganda and military instruction represented by the governments or military staff?

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<sup>1</sup> J-J. BECKER, *1917 en Europe. L'année impossible*, Bruxelles, 1997.

Proposals can be made regarding all the countries affected by the First World War but also neutral countries. This international and diachronic approach to the military cinematographic services aims to refine the study of their creation and their development. It will enable a better understanding of the impact of political and military situations, socio-economic structures and public opinions on the development of these military services, while reflecting disparities and tensions inherent to each State, as well as a better understanding of the history of the media coverage of the war efforts on film and photography.

Upstream of these issues, the conference also intends to open up to historiographical and archival approaches. The film (and photography) archives are now often called upon by historians, in this historiographical turning point what is the place of the armies' images? Are they confined to periods of conflict? Are they the left out of a historiography that only pays attention to the famous masterpieces of the seventh art? Or, on the contrary, do these military images offer us a different vision of society? Thus arises, in connection with this historiographical issue, the question of archiving these military documents during and after the war, their different media, their accessibility to researchers as well as their (re-)use. It seems interesting for us to make an inventory of these questions and reveal the historical nature of the armies' images.

Paper proposals (2,000 characters + short biographical presentation) are expected for 3 February 2017, at the following addresses: [xavier.sene@ecpad.fr](mailto:xavier.sene@ecpad.fr); [sebastien.denis@u-picardie.fr](mailto:sebastien.denis@u-picardie.fr); [benedicte.rochet@unamur.be](mailto:benedicte.rochet@unamur.be). Papers may be presented in French and English. They will be selected by the Scientific Committee, which will give its response on 28 April 2017.

#### SCIENTIFIC COMMITTEE

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