

# St. Mihiel Trip-Wire

## A Film Review by Andrew Melomet

### *The Log of the U-35*

The top-scoring U-boat ace of both world wars was Kapitän Leutnant Lothar von Arnauld de la Perière. How did an Imperial German Naval commander have a French name? I've read two different accounts as to his name's origin. The first is that he was the son of a French officer captured in the Franco-Prussian War who decided to stay in Germany. The second version I've read traces the family back to an 18th-century soldier of fortune great-grandfather who after a disagreement with the Duke of Bourbon offered his sword to Frederick the Great. The following generations would serve either in the Army or the Navy.

In 1903, when he was 17, Von Arnauld joined the German Navy. Before the war he served as torpedo officer aboard the cruiser *Emden*. Then he became aide-de-camp to Grand Admiral von Tirpitz and was serving on the Admiralty Staff when the war started. First, von Arnauld tried for a zeppelin command. But with no zeppelin commands available he eventually found himself taking command of *U-35*. From January 1916 to March 1918 he racked up a formidable record, sinking 194 ships totaling over 453,000 tons. Under his command, the *U-35* fired only four torpedoes, one of which missed the target. Von Arnauld's weapon of choice was his 88mm deck gun. He was awarded the "Blue Max," the Pour le Mérite, Germany's highest award and asked for and got an autographed photograph from the Kaiser. Later the Kaiser sent him a handwritten personal letter of commendation.



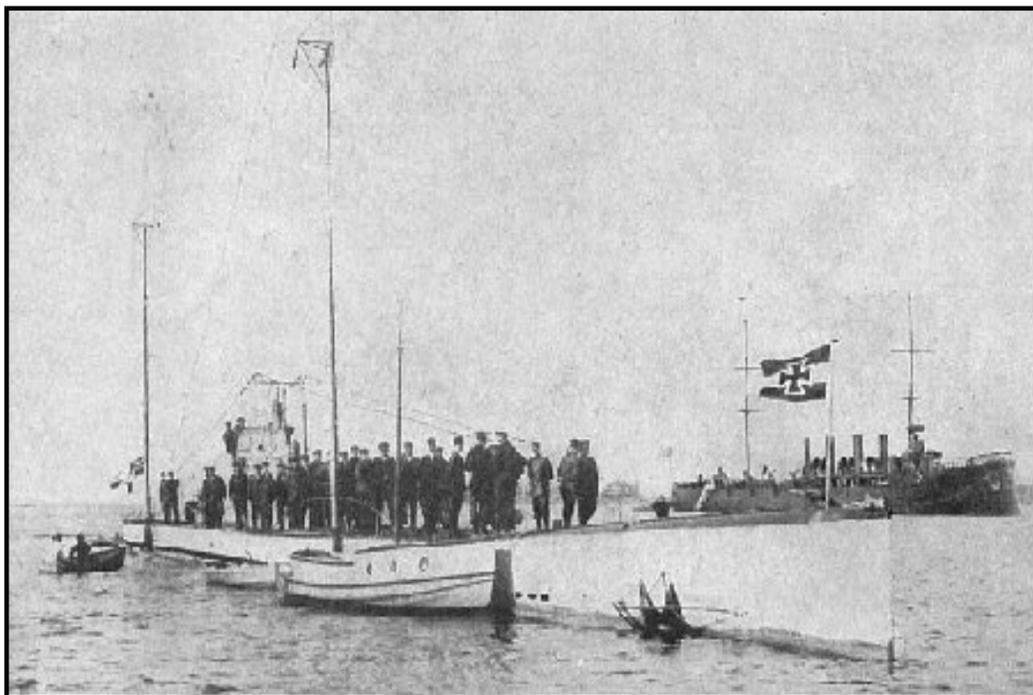
**Lothar von Arnauld de la Perière**

The German High Command realized they had a "star performer" in the Navy, and just as they had assigned a film crew to von Richthofen's squadron, they assigned a film crew of one to be the official cameraman on the March/May 1917 patrol of the *U-35* in the Mediterranean and eastern Atlantic.

After slipping past Gibraltar, the *U-35* began its hunt. In an interview after the war with Lowell Thomas for *Raiders of the Deep* (1928), von Arnauld described how the cameraman operated: "It was on this voyage that we had a movie man along. Poor devil! His face still haunts me. Pea green it was most of the time. You see, he had never before gone to sea on a submarine, and he was a sufferer from mal de mer in its most virulent form. Usually he stuck to his camera crank as a real film hero should. Shells and bullets and oncoming torpedoes could not drive him from it. But sea sickness did. There were times when he longed for a shell to come along with his name written on it, to end it all. Then, when Neptune waved his wand and stilled the rolling deep, that cinema man was a hero once more. If we got into a rough-and-tumble gunfight with an armed ship he would take his own sweet time and would coolly refocus his magic box and switch lenses as though it were a hocus-pocus battle on location instead of grim reality." This patrol saw the *U-35* sinking 23 ships, totaling 68,000 tons.

The film was released in Germany as *Der Magische Gürtel (The Enchanted Circle)*. The title was a reference to a statement by Churchill. The footage shot has been used and reused in numerous documentaries on submarine warfare and the naval war of World War One.

Eventually the British captured a copy and released their own version for propaganda purposes with new English intertitles under the title "*The Exploits of a German Submarine (U35) Operating in the Mediterranean*". This version and the original German release are currently available on VHS (PAL and NTSC) restored by the Imperial War Museum



**U-35 in Harbor**

And, later, the Americans got hold of copies, as well. Rowland V. Lee, a former actor at the Thomas Ince studio and later a director (*Son of Frankenstein*, etc.) served in the front lines and fought in the Battle of St. Mihiel. He worked on the "Smiles Films," professionally-shot movies of families at home shown to the troops in Europe. Lee saw a captured print of *Der Magische Gurtel* at Coblenz, American Occupation Headquarters. He wanted to get hold of the film and ship it back to the States as a historical record. After the projectionist left, Lee piled up the film cans in a corner and hid them under some newspapers. When he returned later the cans were gone. J.H. Mackzum, a German-born Knights of Columbus secretary found the hidden cache and got them off to Hearst News, which featured them in the newsreel *Hearst News No. 64*.

The *New York Times* reviewed this footage on November 11, 1919, stating that "these pictures were made by officers on German submarines and were obtained from the present German Government by J.H. Mackzum, a Knights of Columbus secretary, who brought them to America." On January 5, 1920 the *New York Times* printed another review possibly based on the British release. "The most unusual and most powerful picture on the program is one entitled, 'The Log of the U-35,' which, like a similar film brought here by J.H. Mackzum, a Knights of Columbus secretary, and shown at the Rialto seven weeks ago, is said to have been made on a German submarine during the war and to have been obtained by allied

representatives since the armistice. It shows cargo steamers and a picturesque schooner stopped by the submarine, wounded by its shells and bombs, and then sinking, each one slowly at first, with a different turn or roll of dumb helplessness before finally disappearing with a hurried plunge into its grave. For those to whom ships are something human, or magnificently triumphant human creations, these pictures of their assassination by forces controlled by men are overwhelmingly tragic--or, to the mood of despair, hellishly comic."

*World War I Films of the Silent Era*, released by Image Entertainment, includes a version of *The Log of the U-35* that is a combination of the 1919 British version and the 1920 American versions of *Der Magische Gürtel*. This collection also includes the documentary *Fighting the War* (1916), *The Secret Game* (1917) directed by William C. de Mille and starring Sessue Hayakawa, Florence Vidor, Jack Holt and Charles Ogle. The *Moving Picture Boys in the Great War* (1975) narrated by Lowell Thomas is included as a "Bonus Documentary." I highly recommend this collection.



**U-35 in the Mediterranean**

And what happened to the *U-35* and von Arnault? The *U-35* was transferred to England after the war and was docked in Blyth from 1919 to 1920 before being broken up. Von Arnault went on to command the third cruiser named *Emden* from September 1928 to October 1930. He taught at the Turkish Naval Academy from 1932 to 1938. Von Arnault served in the Kriegsmarine as a vice-admiral and held commands in occupied Europe before dying in a plane crash in France in February 1941.

Andrew Melomet, Proprietor of *Andy's Nickelodeon*, contributes monthly reviews at the *Trip-Wire* (<http://www.worldwar1.com/tripwire/smtw.htm>). The *Trip-Wire* is affiliated with *Trenches on the Web* but is popular with members of all the military history groups.

**Trivia Answers:** 1. Rupert Brooke, *The Soldier*, [Image A](#); 2. John McCrae, *In Flanders Fields*; 3. A.E. Housman, *Here Dead We Lie*; 4. Rudyard Kipling, *Gestemane (1914-1918)*; 5. Alan Seeger, *Rendezvous*, [Image D](#); 6. Edmund Blunden, *The Ancre at Hamel*; 7. Siegfried Sassoon, *Base Details*; 8. F.S. Flint, *Lament*; 9. Isaac Rosenberg, *Break of Day in the Trenches*, [Image C](#); 10. Wilfred Owen, *Dulce et Decorum Est*, [Image B](#); 11. Robert Graves, *Recalling War*; 12. Edward Thomas, *Roads*.