



## **Donald C. Thompson and *Fighting the War*** **By David Shepard**

1915 and 1916 issues of the pioneer trade magazine *The Moving Picture World* provide the sparse information we have about Donald C. Thompson who photographed the remarkable *Fighting the War*. We are told that he is 26 years old, from Topeka, Kansas, five feet four and one-half inches tall, and that his first film reported the Democratic Convention of 1912. "He is of a kind we sometimes read about but rarely collide with in flesh."

"I met him first when paying a flying visit to Ostend. Thompson is a little man, hard as nails, tough as rawhide, his skin tanned to the color of a well-smoked meerschaum, and his face perpetually wreathed in what he calls his 'sunflower smile.' He blew into the consulate there wearing an American army shirt, a pair of British officers' riding breeches, French puttees and a highlander's forage-cap, and carrying a camera the size of a phonograph. No one but an American could have accomplished what he has...He has more chilled-steel nerve than any man I know, and before he had been in Belgium a month his name had become a synonym throughout the army for coolness and daring. He has seen war as it falls to few men to observe it.

"Mr. Thomson was in Antwerp during the siege. On the bridge of his nose are powder burns, on his forehead is a scar, and he says on his back there are sundry marks, all made by a shrapnel shell which unkindly exploded in the house where he was living. He said he was all right, however, in three weeks.

"Mr. Thomson took some of the most remarkable pictures of the entire war," continues the *World*. "For seven days and nights he under steady fire at the retreat from Mons. When asked whether or not filming the battle was as dangerous as fighting, he stopped, shrugged his shoulders, and said 'Yes, I suppose it is, but if you're going to be killed, you will be, so why worry?' His one idea is to get the pictures just as the born reporter thinks of nothing but his 'story.' He is quiet and matter-of-fact in speech and manner, yet he has done things few men have more than dreamed of.

"One of the gems Mr. Thompson brought back with him and which is contained in the film is of an aeroplane battle between British and German machines. The American had ascended as a photographer to do some work for the British. When he and his companions were 12,000 feet up they discovered the battle between the two machines below them. Mr. Thompson 'took' the scrap which ended with the German landing on the British side lines. Later over Belgrade he was the object of attack in which he estimates 180 shells were fired at the machine in which he was taking pictures. He says when the shells break too close to the machine the suction will cause it to loop the loop."

The *World* reports that "Mr. Thompson went into Russia and was through the campaign in Carpathia and along the Russian front generally. He has photographed some of the crack Bulgarian and Roumanian regiments. This summer he was with the Turkish troops [Turkey was a German ally] and later photographed battles in Serbia. His many passports, with their seals, stamps and hieroglyphics, tell a story in themselves. He said it was his intention to return to the war zone shortly after the first of the year, and that he thought it likely he would go to the Eastern front – in any event, wherever there seemed the likelihood of getting the most action."



Historian David Mould tracing Thompson's subsequent career finds that he indeed went to Russia where he filmed the February revolution of 1917 and events of the Kerensky regime; by 1919 he was in Vladivostok and the Russian far east; he wrote a book, *Donald Thompson in Russia*. During the 1920s Thompson filmed travelogues and worked as a cameraman for expeditions in China, Turkey and the Pacific; he filmed Japan's war in China beginning in 1931-32 and can last be traced photographing Italy's war against Ethiopia in 1936.

### **Lothar Arnauld de la Perrière and *The Log of the U-35* By David Shepard**

Von Arnauld joined the German navy in 1903 at the age of 17. The U-35 was his first command, from January of 1916 until March of 1918 when he transferred to the larger U-139 for the duration of the war. His record as captain consisted of 194 sinkings, totalling 453,716 tons of shipping cargo. During the single voyage of April-May 1917 depicted in this film, he sank 23 ships totalling 68,000 tons but in his July-August cruise he surpassed even this by sinking 54 ships totalling 91,150 tons. Much of his success was said to be due to his ability in several languages to interrogate prisoners, interpret wireless messages and understand captured ships' papers. For his success he was awarded Germany's highest decoration along with an autographed photo and a handwritten expression of personal recognition and gratitude from the Kaiser. Commander Von Arnauld remained in the navy, rising in World War II to the rank of vice-admiral and commander of all German naval forces in the Balkans and Black Sea. He died in an airplane crash February 24, 1941.

In 1928 in his momento-filled home at Wilhelmshaven, Lothar von Arnauld de la Perrière was interviewed at length in English by Lowell Thomas for his book *Raiders of the Deep* (1929). Here is a brief excerpt:

Slipping through Gibraltar was always a ticklish piece of business. The British had the straits protected with nets, mines and patrols of destroyers. I always preferred to go through on the surface at night, rather than take a chance with nets and submerged bombs. The searchlights played across the entire width of the neck of water, but it was possible to sneak through by hugging the African coast. One trip, though, brought us to the point where we were ready to say hello to Davy Jones. We had been on a three weeks' cruise in the Atlantic. Incidentally, I had on board five skippers from British ships we had sunk, taking them back to Cattaro [Austria] as prisoners of war...All of these were typical British captains, rather taciturn, now very unkempt, of course, and secretly, no doubt, tremendously interested in the working and maneuverings of our under-sea raider. When we got them to Cattaro and turned them over to the authorities, one of the captains voluntarily did a very decent thing in writing me a letter of appreciation.

I saw a destroyer bearing down on us at a speed of twenty-five knots. I judged she was trying to ram us. Seemingly she had not seen us, not venturing to show a light with a U-boat around, but was guided merely by the sound of our motors, for she missed us by a hundred yards...She was so near that I could hear the commands of the officers on her deck. We were hidden in impenetrable shadows and she caught no glimpse of us.

"The best policy was for us to press on at our top-surface speed so we stayed above water...And now ensued a weird hunt. The destroyer charged around on the black water in hopes of ramming us...The U-35 kept on her way through the infernal net of charging



destroyer and darting beams. The destroyer's blind lunges missed us and the searchlights did not pick us out.

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.

Probably you have had a look at his films. The final finished product had an adventurous history. A copy was sent up to German headquarters on the Western front in April of 1917 so the Kaiser and his generals and even large numbers of the combat troops might see what we were doing at sea. But the British somehow captured that copy. They in turn had a duplicate negative made of it and then, I understand, had positives shown in cinema theatres all over the world.

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