

It is unlikely that a large number of World War I aviation enthusiasts collect copies of documentary film footage held in various archives -- right now, that is. But with rapid technological advances that situation could change when archives determine that revenue can be generated by making available reasonably-priced, digitized copies of unedited footage.

Affordable, Do-It-Yourself documentaries could become a serious leisure time and/or scholarly interest. An example (if it is still available on-line when you read this) is the clip:

<http://www.realmilitaryflix.com/public/522.cfm>

This footage is very nicely described in the narrative for Reel No. 1 (Activities of the 94th Aero Squadron) on page 68 of **WAR WINGS: Films of the First Air War**. Indeed, over more than 20 years the author viewed and catalogued the 2,553 motion picture scenes of World War I aviation activities held by the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). That footage is now held at the new Archives II facility in College Park, MD and, in addition to U.S. Army and Navy films, also includes British, French and German footage.

Almost 50 years ago, the late Colonel G.B. Jarrett, USA (Ret.), who established the U.S. Army Ordnance Museum in Aberdeen, MD, offered 8mm copies of various World War I and World War II films held by the NARA, which were snapped up by history buffs at the time. Now, thanks to Phillip Stewart's landmark book pertaining to World War I films, with scene-by-scene descriptions of the action shown, those old films have taken on a new meaning. Going beyond the original NARA narratives, Stewart has indentified people, aircraft and other points not noted in the original film captions.

Just as Col. Jarrett "liberated" these NARA film treasures and made them publicly available at affordable prices in the late 1950's, the footage may well enjoy renewed life in the digital age. In addition to being an outstanding guide, the new book **WAR WINGS: Films of the First Air War** reinforces the historical value of these early films and is highly recommended.

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Over the Front Magazine