THIS WEEK IN HISTORY

Behind the bangles lives the myth of Mata Hari

LOGO BY COLBI LORANGER, ASSOCIATE ARTIST EDITOR/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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How does one of Europe's most renowned performers become one of World War I's most infamous spies? Or rather, if she was indeed caught in the act, it's hard to believe she was such a skillful spy after all. This week in history, Mata Hari, a performer of Asian-inspired dance in the early 20th century, was executed Oct. 15, 1917, after being accused of espionage by the French government.

Born Margaretha Geertruida Zelle in Leeuwarden, Holland, Zelle came from a well-off family, and her father ran a thriving hat shop. However, at the age of 12, the family's luck turned, and her father had to declare bankruptcy and moved in with his brother in The Hague, while the rest of the family remained in Leeuwarden in a small, cramped apartment. This physical separation would eventually lead to the legal separation her parents obtained.

Despite this, Zelle remained confident and outgoing but struggled to follow the rules in certain aspects of school, facing suspensions and expulsions for her behavior. Ultimately, she chose one of the most common career paths for women during that time — being a wife.

According to an article from the Fries Museum, Zelle met her husband at 18 after responding to a contact ad from an officer in the Dutch East Indies who was on leave and seeking a bride. Rudolph MacLeod, also known as John, was a fierce 39-year-old soldier, and they became engaged six days after meeting. Zelle then moved to Malaysia with MacLeod, where she drew inspiration for the Mata Hari character. During this time, she had two children, one of whom passed away at the age of 2.5 years old. Meanwhile, her marriage was already strained, with her husband abusing her and being unfaithful. In fact, it is likely that her son passed away due to the syphilis MacLeod transmitted to Zelle, which in turn was passed on to her children during pregnancy.

At the time, the treatment for syphilis involved using toxic mercury, which is likely what led to the passing of their son. After the loss, the family traveled back to the Netherlands, where Zelle would seek a divorce from her husband due to the abuse she sustained over the years. She would retain custody of her daughter, but her ex-husband refused to pay alimony, leaving her penniless without a way to provide for her and her daughter. As a result, she had to give up her daughter to MacLeod and would never regain custody.

After losing her daughter, Zelle moved to Paris, where she hoped to earn a living honorably by giving piano lessons and working as a companion. Unable to sustain this, she returned to the Netherlands and resorted to prostitution before leaving for Paris again in 1904 for good.

This is when Mata Hari is born; her name in Malay meaning "eye of the day," and she tells the story of her birth in an Indian temple and of the priestess who taught her these dances. The Parisian audience is captivated, and she becomes an overnight hit.

Finally, Zelle is able to do more than provide for herself and makes large profits from her concert sales and gifts from her various lovers. She lives extravagantly, blowing most of the funds she makes, and continues to wow her audiences.

At the core of her performance, however, is a caricature of the cultures she had experienced during her time in Asia. It is clear she didn't take the time to become truly knowledgeable about the dances she chose for her act and fed on the era's orientalism.

Unfortunately for Zelle, WWI began in 1914, and she can no longer perform. Her beauty causes her to attract unwanted attention from the Germans who seek to hire her as a spy. At the same time, as she returns to Paris, the French government grows suspicious of Zelle's actions, and to prove her loyalty, she decides to work as a double agent for the French.

At this point, things truly become a mess, and it becomes clear that Zelle is not a very good spy, as the French discover her work with Germany and later arrest her in February 1917.

In reality, the idea that Mata Hari was "the greatest woman spy of the century" was an even bigger myth than the character itself. Despite this, her story has lived on in various movies and books. The tale of the femme fatale lives on, even though the reality of it was much less glamorous than Hollywood makes it out to be.



Mata Hari poses in costume. Her orientalist inspiration and extravagant performances captivated Parisian audiences.

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UCONN FALL CAMPUS VISIT DAY WELCOMES PROSPECTIVE STUDENTS



Students interested in attending UConn visit information tables inside of McHugh Hall on Saturday. The day-long event was one of two different Visit Days planned this fall.

PHOTO BY JAYLYN DAVIS, GRAB PHOTOGRAPHER/THE DAILY CAMPUS

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The University of Connecticut hosted the first of two Fall Campus Visit Days on Saturday.

Madison Stevenson, a student specialist at One Stop Student Services, said UConn hosts the event so prospective students and their families can visit UConn's campuses and learn about them.

The Fall Campus Visit Day was full of opportunities. Students and families went on 60-minute campus tours to familiarize themselves with the Storrs campus and learn where certain buildings were located. Tour groups visited the Student Recreation Center and saw what physical health services were offered. They could even stop by the UConn Dairy Bar Truck, the UConn Bookstore or both.

In addition to tours, multiple events took place. One was "Get Involved," where Trisha Hawthorne-Noble, the senior director of Student Activities, shared numerous ways to get involved on campus.

She mentioned some of UConn's major events, such as Late Night, Weekend of Welcome, Spring Weekend and Family Weekend. She also shared information about some student government organizations, leadership committees, fraternities, sororities and learning communities.

Hawthorne-Noble said getting involved is important because it promotes academic success and good mental health. She also said Student Activities hosted the Get Involved presentation because they wanted students to have a smooth transition to college, build connections and make UConn their second home.

Another event was "How to Apply and Finance Your UConn Education," where students learned about the application and financial aid process. They learned about the UConn application components, due dates, how applications are reviewed, types of financial aid and scholarships.

Other Fall Campus Visit Day events included "Living on Campus," "Career Readiness and the UConn Alumni Network," "Navigating Your First Year" and "How Major is Your Major."

Besides events, students could attend pre-law, pre-dental and pre-medical advising sessions and presentations for the Honors Program, transfer admissions and UConn's schools.

At Lawrence D. McHugh Hall, students and families had the opportunity to talk to representatives from different UConn majors and departments, one such major was the Individualized Major Program.

Kenneth Cormier, the director of the Individualized Major Program, said the Individualized Major Program participates in every Fall Campus Visit Day.

"We meet students and families who are considering UConn," Cormier said. "A lot of them will come to us, and they're really happy to discover that there are students who do a major that wasn't listed as a traditional major offered at UConn."

Cormier said most of the Individualized Major Program's visitors became interested in its crime and justice minor. He also said the program's global studies minor intrigued many visitors.

Anshul Patel, a fifth-semester individualized major in neurological pathophysiology and a molecular and cell biology student who was a student representative for the Individualized Major Program, liked being able to talk to families and students about it. He also said he had the opportunity to discuss his experience.

"I like it very much because I'm able to actually talk about how I was able to create my own major that's related to my research and my own interest in being able to connect different courses and different departments," Patel said.

In addition to academic departments, students and families could visit some of UConn's services. At the Student Union, students could chat with One Stop Student Services, Student Activities and UConn Dining Services.

From 12 to 2 p.m., UConn's cultural centers and programs showcased themselves at the Native American Cultural Programs office. The Rainbow Center served cookies and water while the Women's Center presented their sub-programs and events.

Emil Rodriguez, a fifth-semester psychology and anthropology student who is a student ambassador of the Puerto Rican and Latin American Cultural Center (PRLACC), explained how he and his colleagues wanted to represent the PRLACC at the Fall Open House because they wanted to broaden their outreach to the UConn student body.

"So many people on campus still don't know about the cultural centers in of themselves, so we are here to represent ourselves and offer a safe space for those who are Puerto Rican, Dominican, Guatemalan etc.," Rodriguez said. "We're not Latino-exclusive, so anyone can visit our center at any time."

There will be a second Fall Campus Visit Day on Sunday, Oct. 25, according to the UConn admissions website.



Prospective student visit the UConn, Storrs campus welcome tent on Saturday. This was one of two different Visit Days planned this fall.

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