

“UFA Dabei”: Passport Control (1972)

Abstract

In 1972, this weekly West German newsreel show introduced viewers to computer-aided searches and demonstrated how useful they were in accelerating the verification of personal data. The film presented computer-aided searches as advantageous from a security standpoint, since crimes could be investigated more quickly and wanted persons could be prevented from entering the Federal Republic of Germany at airports.

Source

The search for wanted persons at traffic checkpoints and along the German border – an everyday event in the Federal Republic of Germany, where two and a half million criminals are wanted every year.

The tools: a wanted book and criminal records.

The clearance or success rate: less than 50%.

Time needed to find the wanted person: at least three weeks.

Now, finally, the approach to searches has been thoroughly overhauled. Today, only six computer data boxes store paper files from the Federal Criminal Police Office. The central computer is constantly saving and updating information, which it sends on request in seconds to the 500 field offices. The Federal Criminal Police Office is home to the programming center. Information from conventional searches is stored here in the central computer. We dared to undertake an experiment that is actually forbidden: a *Wochenschau* staff member submitted his own personal data to check the effectiveness of computer-aided searches. The purported offence: failure to pay alimony.

Frankfurt Airport, the gateway to the world and thus also the entry point for gangsters and crooks – threats to the security of the Federal Republic of Germany. For us, stage two of the computer test.

Passport control – a government official checks to see whether the passport is valid and then holds it in front of a television camera. In the next room, a border guard enters the personal data from the monitor into the computer, effectively asking Wiesbaden [the city where the Federal Criminal Police Office is headquartered] whether there are any charges against B. The result is astonishing. In seconds, the answer comes from Wiesbaden.

Translation: GHI staff

Source: UFA-Dabei 854/1972. Quelle: BArch Bestand Film F 009506.

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