

War Reports from a *Messter-Woche* Newsreel (August 1915)

Abstract

The invention of film changed the nature of news reporting. Newsreels first appeared in France at the beginning of the twentieth century, and these weekly film reports covering the latest events in politics, society, culture, and sports were shown in movie theaters before the main program. The first German newsreel, *Messter-Woche*, was created in October 1914 during the First World War. Optician and film pioneer Oskar Messter (1866–1943) had founded his film company in 1913. During the First World War, he was responsible for editing film footage documenting the war for the press department of the General Staff. Messter then compiled his newsreels from this footage. Most of the scenes showing soldiers at the front lines were staged for this officially- approved form of war reporting.

Featured here is a clip from a Messter newsreel from August 1915, which opens with war reports from the Eastern Front. It begins with a report from Poland dated August 13, 1915. The Central Powers had launched a major offensive there in July, capturing Warsaw, Brest-Litovsk, Grodno, and Vilnius, among other places. As the intertitle indicates, the Polish civilian population was forced to flee the fighting between Russian and German troops.

The next segment shows the siege of the strategically important Russian fortress of Novogeorgievsk, located north of Warsaw. In one of the most significant German victories of the war, German forces laid siege and captured it on August 19, 1915, taking 90,000 Russian prisoners. In the newsreel, a German Landsturm battalion (with a brass band) is seen marching into the fortress while Russian prisoners of war watch and are forced to clear away the rubble.

Next is a brief report on Dumitru (Take) Ionescu (1858-1922), an influential Romanian politician who vehemently advocated that Romania, initially neutral, enter the war on the side of the Entente, as it eventually did. (The intertitle incorrectly describes Ionescu as a “former minister president”, but Ionescu had actually been Romanian Minister of the Interior from 1912 to 1913).

The newsreel then moves on to reports from the Western Front. First, we see German frontline soldiers (most likely in France) receiving their food rations and setting up defensive positions, constructing trenches and bunkers. This is followed by clips from French and Russian war reports whose source is not identified, but which were probably taken from foreign newsreels.

Source

Source: *Messter-Woche* compilation (clip), 1914. Bundesarchiv Filmarchiv Filmwerk ID: 24846.
<https://digitaler-lesesaal.bundesarchiv.de/video/24846/667359>

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