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“In the Lines in the Days of Peace Negotiations.” History of Studying the 1917 Skobelev Committee Film

Abstract

The article reviews the history of studying the Skobelev Committee film “In the Lines in the Days of Peace Negotiations,” which was created in 1917. Description and analysis of the film began in 1930s and still continues today. Many scenes were described by the Soviet film archivists quite broadly or not at all. As they did not possess the full information about the particularities of the filming, the first archivists made many mistakes in annotating. Moreover, for several descriptions no thematic cards were filed. The study recounts how the archivists interpreted the events on film, identified individuals, ascertained the names of the cameramen, found positive

copies of various length and negative scenes from the film in the archival fonds, conducted supportive research and film interpretation. The study has established that the film “In the Lines in the Days Peace Negotiations” meant to coincide with the German-Soviet peace negotiations which began in December 1917 and resulted in signing of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk in March 1918. The film is titled and has a closing caption with the name of its producer. There are 12 other captions; the scenes are assembled in the following sequence: a group of railroadmen, soldiers and citizens of Dvina near a 8 inch Howitzer shell; Illukst with its destroyed railroad tracks, ruined buildings and barbed-wire entanglement (in front there are Russian and German soldiers); Russian trenches and the view of the Russian defense lines and the Red Cross post; fraternization of Russian and German soldiers who are holding a placard with “Workers of all lands, unite! All hail the International” written in Russian and German; M. E. Koltsov talks to a German officer; the burial of the Russian general V. E. Skalon in Brest-Litovsk (procession goes to the train, the body is born to the Russian side, officers of the German Western Front stuff at the burial, Russian soldiers and officers by the coffin which is set on a gun carriage); a scene filmed in Dvinsk (the 5th Army commissar N. D. Sobakin with the stuff, Russian soldiers near the building of the Army Military Revolutionary Executive Committee, members of the Dvinsk Military Revolutionary Committee in a car, delegates from the Okhta gun powder factory at the Committee entrance). The research has refuted the claim that the Field Marshal Prince Leopold of Bavaria, commander-in-chief of the German Armies on the Western front, was present at the funeral of V. E. Skalon: at the time he was a 71-year-old man with a recognizable white beard and yet he is nowhere on the film. If there are found new sources of information, the archivists are going to identify the people on the film, study their biographies, and attempt to reassemble the original version of the film using new technologies.

Keywords

Russian State Archive of Film and Photo Documents (RGAKFD), film “In the Lines in the Days Peace Negotiations,” World War I, shot lists, reconstruction, cameramen, Skobelev Committee, Brest-Litovsk, V. E. Skalon, N. D. Sobakin, M. E. Koltsov.

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