

RUSSIAN SOLDIERS READY FOR DEATH

Russia's Feminine Fighters Sworn to Suicide Rather Than Be Prisoners

FOUNDED INTERVIEWED

Poignant Girl Thrusts Teuton Through With Bayonet, Shooting Him at Same Time

By WILLIAM G. SHEPHERD

PETROGRAD, July 30.—Russia's women soldiers have pledged themselves to take their own lives rather than become German war prisoners. Each woman soldier carries a ration of cyanide of potassium, to be swallowed in event of capture. The members of the women regiment, now constantly increasing, agreed that death was to be preferred to the fate they would probably meet at the hands of the Germans.

The Legion of Death fighters are "good girls," I learned this today when I talked with five of them, now in a hospital near here, suffering from shell shock. From a German man's lips I heard how she had run a German through with her bayonet, firing a rifle at the same time. From others I heard how these women and girls, fresh from comfortable homes and universities, went leaping over barbed wire, dodging the charge with enemy shells bursting about them.

But these harrowing experiences of the women fighters have steeled them and hundreds of other girls to a new determination as it is through. Girl soldiers drilling in the streets are now a common sight in Petrograd. Huge crowds gather daily about the engineers' school, where 5000 girls are drilling and practicing. Many of them are now more or less training, while Kiev and Odessa have smaller bands. Premier Kerensky has also authorized the formation of women marine detachments and has authorized the formation of women command units. Their heads are shaved and they wear the regulation uniform, including the heavy, ugly army boots.

PARALYZED BY SHELL SHOCK

The five women fighters I visited at the hospital were partially paralyzed by shell shock. One of them, a peasant girl, smiled happily as she pointed to a German helmet on the bed beside her. It was the first war trophy of a Russian woman.

"I saw a German in front of me as I ran toward the others in the charge," she told me. "It was his life or mine. I raised my rifle. I plunged with all my strength. I stabbed him. The bayonet went deep into his body. At the same moment I fired the trigger. He dropped—dead. Then I took his hat as a souvenir."

The girl soldier smiled with delight. "What was the battle like?" I asked another of the legionaries.

"I was very nervous just before the charge," she replied. "We knew the order was coming and naturally we were just a little scared. But as soon as the orders to go forward came we forgot everything else in the advance."

"I could hear our girls yelling and shouting throughout the march forward. Some of us were afraid once we got started. We were in the midst of a great fusillade of shots. Then terrific big shells began breaking all around us."

JUMPED OVER CORPSES

"We were again frightened a little when we first saw dead men about. But before long we were jumping over bloody corpses and quickly forgot all about them."

"We couldn't tell what was going on anywhere," said a third girl in describing the last stages of the battle.

Commander Bochkoreva was everywhere here, his arms outstretched to fight and die like the Russian soldiers."

Then the girl told how the Legion took its first prisoners.

"As we ran forward we suddenly came upon a bunch of Germans immediately ahead of us. It was only a second until they were right in our midst or, rather, until we were all around them. They saw they were caught and they threw their rifles, holding up their hands. They were terribly frightened."

"Good God, women!" they exclaimed. "We saw wounded soldiers raising their hands and shouting. We just expected another wounded girl. 'We just forgot ourselves entirely. We were simply Russia fighting for her life.'"

"The loss of Lena, the most popular member of our company, was keenly felt by all of us," she added soberly. "During the battle Lena heard that Commander Bochkoreva had been killed. She hurried forward into the shell and fire, saying she was going to find her. We saw her go through the space literally strewn with the exploding shells. Then, through the smoke and flames, we saw her blown to fragments. Lena was also lost before she had time to be a musician with the Romanoff concert organization. She was killed by machine gun fire."

Petrograd has not yet seen the full casualty list of the Legion of Death. None has been published. From what the girls say, however, it appears that at least a dozen girls perhaps twelve girls and wounding twice as many more.

Five of the German prisoners the girls captured were women, wearing the German soldier's uniform.

The number of women in all armies on the eastern front is believed to be growing steadily.

Mrs. Pankhurst, the British suffragist, thinks it only natural that this should occur.

"The Russian women," she said today, "are stepping into the breach as women always do when men need them."

"Russia's women are taking the menace of what remains of civilization," declared Professor Ross, of the University of Wisconsin.

As I returned from the hospital where I saw the paralyzed girls, I saw a new group of women marching briskly through the street. They were ready for the firing line, ready to give their lives in battle and to risk their little ration of cyanide, ready to take their own lives to avoid worse than death at the hands of the enemy.

IMAGINARY SWEETHEART GETS PROWLER FIVE DAYS

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