MARIA BOTCHKAREVA SAVES 50 LIVES AND WINS ORDER OF THE FOURTH DEGREE

Climbs Out of Her Trench, Goes Into No Man's Land and Carries Her Comrades to Safety While Under Fire

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(This story, told by Maria Botchkareva and translated and transcribed by Isaac Don Levine, is published in book form by Frederick A. Stokes Company under the title of "Yashka.")

Maria Botchkareva wearing some of the many decorations she has earned

THIS STARTS THE STORY

In 1917 the announcement of the formation by Maria Botchkareva of the Battalion of Death, a woman's fighting unit in the Russian army, thrilled the world, and an obscure Russian peasant girl entered the international hall of fame. The earlier installments told of her early life. Forced to leave her husband on account of his jealousy, she resolves to join the army and by special permission of the Czar enlists in an infantry regiment.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

I WAS an apt student and learned almost to anticipate the orders of the instructor. When the day's labors would be completed and the soldiers gathered into knots to while away an hour or two in games or story-telling, I was always sought after to participate. I came to like the soldiers, who were good-natured boys, and to enjoy their sports. The group which Yashka joined would usually prove the most popular in the barracks, and it was sufficient to secure my co-operation in some enterprise to make it a success.

"There wasn't much time for relaxation, though, as we went through an intensive training course of only three months before we were sent to the front. Once a week, every Sunday, I would leave the barracks and spend the day at home, my mother having reconciled herself to my soldiering. On holidays I would be visited by friends or relatives. On one such occasion my sister and her husband called. I had been detailed for guard duty in the barracks that day. While on such duty a soldier is forbidden to sit down or to engage in conversation. I was entertaining my visitors when the company commander passed.

"Do you know the rules, Botchkareva?" he asked.

"Yes, Your Excellency," I answered.

"What are they?"

"A soldier on guard duty is not allowed to sit down or engage in conversation," I replied. He ordered me to stand for two hours at attention at the completion of my guard duty, which took twenty-four hours. Standing at attention, in full military equipment, for two hours is a severe task, as one has to remain absolutely motionless under the eyes of a guard, and yet it was a common punishment. During my training I was punished in this manner three times. The second time it was really not my fault. One night I recognized my squad commander in a soldier who annoyed me, and I dealt him as hard a blow as I would have given to any other man. In the morning he placed me at attention for two hours, claiming that he had accidentally brushed against me.

At first there was some difficulty in arranging for my bathing. The bathhouse was used by the men, and so I was allowed one day to visit a public bathhouse. I found it a splendid opportunity for some fun. I came into the women's room, fully dressed, and there was a tremendous outbreak as soon as I appeared. I was taken for a man. However, the fun did not last long. In an instant I was under a bombardment from every corner, and only narrowly escaped serious injury by crying out that I was a woman.

In the last month of our training we engaged in almost continuous rifle practice. I applied myself zealously to the acquisition of skill in handling a rifle and won a mention of excellence for good marksmanship. This considerably enhanced my standing with the soldiers and strengthened our relations of comradeship.

The date of our departure was set. We received complete new outfits. I was permitted to go home to spend the last night, and it was a night of tears and sobs and yearnings. The three months I had spent in Tomsk as a soldier were, after all, remote from war. But now I felt so near to that great experience, and it awed me. I prayed to God to give me courage for the new trials that were before me, courage to live and die like a man.

There was great excitement in the barracks the following morning. It was the last that we were to spend there. In full martial equipment we marched to the Cathedral, where we were sworn in again. There was a solemn service. The church was filled with people, and there was an enormous crowd outside. The Bishop addressed us. He spoke of how the country was attacked by an enemy who sought to destroy Russia, and appealed to us to defend gloriously the Czar and the motherland. He prayed for victory for our arms and blessed us.

There was a spiritual upheaval among the men. We were all so buoyant, so happy, so forgetful of our own lives and interests. The whole city poured out to accompany us to the station, and we were cheered and greeted all along the route. I had never yet seen a body of men in such high spirits as we were that February morning. Woe to the Germans that might have encountered us that day! Such was Russia going to war in those first months of the struggle. Hundreds of regiments like our own were streaming from east, north and south to the battlefields. It was an inspiring, elevating, imperishable spectacle.

My mother felt none of the exaltations that moved me. She walked along the street, beside my line, weeping and appealing to the Holy Mother and all the saints of the Church to save her daughter.

"Wake up, Marusia!" she cried. "What are you doing?" But it was too late. The arms of war held me securely in its embrace. Somewhere deep in my heart my beloved mother's wails found an echo, but my eyes were dimmed with tears of joy. And only when I bade my mother good-by, hugging and kissing her for what she felt was the last time, and boarded the train, leaving her on the platform in a heap frantic with grief, did my heart quiver in my breast and a tremor shake me from head to foot. My resoluteness was on the point of melting as the train pulled out of the station.

I was going to war.

Introduced to No Man's Land

Our train was composed of a number of box cars and one passenger car. A box car, having two bunks on each side, in which the soldiers sleep, is called teplushka. There are no windows in a teplushka, as it is really only a converted freight car. The passenger car was occupied by the four officers of our regiment, including our new company commander, Grishaninov. He was a short, jolly fellow and soon won his men's love and loyalty.

There was much empty space in the passenger car and the officers bethought themselves to invite me to share it with them. When the invitation came the soldiers all shook their heads in disapproval. They suspected the motives of the officers and thought that Yashka could fare as well among them as among their superiors.

"Botchkareva," said Commander Grishaninov, when I entered his car, "would you prefer to be stationed in this carriage? There is plenty of room."

"No, Your Excellency," I replied, saluting. "I am a plain soldier and it is my duty to travel as a soldier."

"Very well," declared the commander, chagrined. And I returned to my teplushka.

"Yashka is back! Good fellow, Yashka!" the boys welcomed me enthusiastically, flinging some strong epithets at the officers. They were immensely pleased at the idea that Yashka preferred their company in a teplushka to that of the officers in a spacious passenger coach, and made a comfortable place for me in a corner.

We were assigned to the Second Army, then commanded by General Gurko, with headquarters at Polotsk. It took us two weeks to get there from Tomsk. General Gurko reviewed us at army headquarters and complimented the officers upon the regiment's fitness. We were then assigned to the Fifth Corps. Before we started the word went out that there was a woman in our regiment. There was no lack of curiosity seekers. Knots of soldiers gathered about my teplushka, peeped through the door and cracks in the sides to verify with their own eyes the incredible news. Then they would swear, emphasizing by spitting the inexplicable phenomenon of a baba going to the trenches. The attention of some officers was attracted by the crowd and they came up to find out what the excitement was about. They reported me to the commandant of the station, who immediately sent for Colonel Grishaninov, demanding an explanation. But the colonel could not satisfy the commandant's doubts and was instructed not to send me along with the men to the fighting line.

"You can't go to the trenches, Botchkareva," my commander addressed me upon his return from the commandant. "The general won't allow it. He was much wrought up over you and could not understand how a woman could be a soldier."

For a moment I was shocked. Then the happy thought occurred to me that no general had the authority to overrule an order of the Czar.

"Your Excellency," I exclaimed to Colonel Grishaninov. "I was enlisted by the grace of the Czar as a regular soldier. You can look up His Majesty's telegram in my record."

This settled the matter and the commandant withdrew his objections. There were about twenty versts to corps headquarters to be walked. The road was in a frightful condition, sticky and full of mudholes. We were so tired at the end of ten versts' walking that a rest was ordered. The soldiers, although fatigued, made a dry seat for me with their overcoats. We then resumed our journey, arriving for supper at headquarters, and were billeted for the night in a stable. We slept like dead on the straw over the floor.

General Valuyev was then commander of the Fifth Corps. He reviewed us in the morning and was evidently satisfied, assigning us to the Seventh Division, which was situated several versts distant. The commander of the division, by the name of Walter, was of German blood and a rascal of first rank. We were placed during the night in the woods back of the fighting line.

In command of the reserves was a colonel named Stubendorf, also of German blood, but a decent and popular officer. When informed that a woman was in the ranks of the newly arrived regiment he was amazed.

"A woman!" he cried out, "she can't be permitted to remain. This regiment is going into battle soon, and women were not made for war."

There was a heated discussion between him and Commander Grishaninov, which ended in an order for my appearance before them. I received a thorough test and passed it well. Asked if I wanted to take part in the fight, I replied affirmatively. Muttering his wonderment, Colonel Stubendorf allowed me to remain till he looked into the matter further.

A big battle was raging at the time on that section of the front. We were told to be ready for an order to move at any moment to the front line. Meanwhile we were sheltered in dugouts. My company occupied ten of these, all bombproof, though not in first-class condition. They were cold and had no windows. As soon as the day broke we busied ourselves with cutting windows, building fireplaces, repairing the caved-in ceilings of timber and sand and general housecleaning. The dugouts were constructed in rows, the companies of odd numbers being assigned to the row on the right, while those of even numbers went to the left. Signs were posted on the streets and each company had a sentinel on duty.

Our position was eight versts behind the first line of trenches. The booming of the guns could be heard in the distance. Streams of wounded, some on vehicles and others trekking along on foot, flowed along the road. We drilled most of the time, the second day watched by Colonel Stubendorf. He must have kept a close eye on me, for at the end of the drilling he called me, praised my efficiency and granted me permission to stay in the ranks.

On the third day came the order to move to the trench lines. Through mud and under shells we marched forward. It was still light when we arrived at the firing line. We had two killed and five wounded. As the German positions were on a hill, they were enabled to observe all our movements. We were, therefore, instructed by field telephone not to occupy the trenches till after dark.

"So this is war," I thought. My pulse quickened and I caught the spirit of excitement that pervaded the regiment. We were all expectant, as if in the presence of a solemn revelation. We were eager to get into the fray to show the Germans what we, the boys of the Fifth Regiment, could do. Were we nervous? Undoubtedly. But it was not the nervousness of cowardice, rather was it the restlessness of young blood. Our hands were steady, our bayonets fixed. We exulted in our adventure.

Night came. The Germans were releasing a gas wave at us. Perhaps they noticed an unusual movement behind the lines and wished to annihilate us before we entered the battle. But they failed. Over the wire came the order to put on our masks. Thus were we baptized in this most inhuman of all German war inventions. Our masks were not perfect. The deadly gas penetrated some and made our eyes smart and water. But we were soldiers of Mother Russia, whose sons are not unaccustomed to half-suffocating air, and so we withstood the irritating fumes.

The midnight hour passed. The commander went through our ranks to inform us that the hour had come to move into the trenches and that before dawn we would take the offensive. He addressed us with words of encouragement and was heartily cheered. The artillery had been thundering all night, the fire growing more and more intense every hour. In single file we moved along a communication trench to the front line. Some of us were wounded, but we remained dauntless. All our fatigue seemed to have vanished.

The front trench was a plain ditch, and as we lined up along it our shoulders touched. The positions of the enemy were less than one verst away, and the space between was filled with groans and swept by bullets. It was a scene full of horrors. Sometimes an enemy shell would land in the midst of our men, killing several and wounding many. Then we would be sprinkled with the blood of our comrades and spattered by the mud.

At 2 in the morning the commander appeared in our midst. He was seemingly nervous. The other officers came with him and took their positions at the head of the men. With drawn sabers they prepared to lead the charge. The commander had a rifle.

Soldiers See Evidences of German Treachery Among Their Own Officers in an Advance Where Barbed Wires Are Uncut

"Villezai!" (climb out) his voice rang out.

I crossed myself. My heart was filled with pain for the bleeding men around me and stirred by an impulse of savage revenge toward the Germans. My mind was a kaleidoscope of many thoughts and pictures. My mother, death, mutilation, various petty incidents of my life filled it. But there was no time for thinking.

I climbed out with the rest of the boys, to be met by a hail of machine-gun bullets. For a moment there was confusion. So many dropped around us, like ripe wheat cut down by a gigantic scythe wielded by the invisible arm of Satan himself. Fresh blood was dripping on the cold corpses that had lain there for hours or days. And the moans, they were so heartrending, so piercing!

Amid the confusion the voice of our company commander was raised:

"Forward!"

And forward we went. The enemy had perceived us go over the top and he let loose hell. As we ran ahead we fired. Then the order came to lie down. The bombardment grew even more concentrated. Alternately running for some distance and then lying down for a while, we reached the enemy's barbed wire entanglements. We had expected to find them demolished by our artillery, but, alas! they were untouched. There were only about seventy of our company of 250 left.

Whose fault was it? This was an offensive on a twenty-verst line, carried out by three army corps. And the barbed wire was uncut! Perhaps our artillery was defective! Perhaps it was the fault of some one higher up! Anyhow, there we were, seventy out of 250. And every fraction of a second was precious. Were we doomed to die here in a heap without even coming to grips with the enemy? Were our bodies to dangle on this wire tomorrow, and the day after, to provide food for the crows and strike terror into the hearts of the fresh soldiers who would take our places in a few hours?

As these thoughts flashed through our minds an order came to retreat. The enemy let a barrage down in front of us. The retreat was even worse than the advance. By the time we got back to our trenches there were only forty-eight of our company left alive. About a third of the 250 were dead. The larger part of the wounded were in No Man's Land, and their cries of pain and prayers for help or death gave us no peace.

The remnant of our company crouched in the trench, exhausted, dazed, incredulous of their escape from injury. We were hungry and thirsty and would have welcomed a dry and safe place to recover our poise. But there we were, smarting under the defeat by the enemy's barbed wire barrier, with the heart-tearing appeals for succor coming from our comrades. Deeper and deeper they cut into my soul. They were so plaintive, like the voices of hurt children.

In the dark it seemed to me that I saw their faces, the familiar faces of Ivan and Peter and Sergei and Mitia, the good fellows who had taken such tender care of me, making a comfortable place for me in that crowded teplushka or taking off their overcoats in cold weather and spreading them on the muddy road to provide a dry seat for Yashka. They called me. I could see their hands outstretched in my direction, their wide-open eyes straining in the night in expectation of rescue, the deathly pallor of their countenances. Could I remain indifferent to their pleas? Wasn't it my bounden duty as a soldier, as important as that of fighting the enemy, to render aid to stricken comrades?

I climbed out of the trench and crawled under our wire entanglements. There was a comparative calm, interrupted only by occasional rifle shots, when I would lie down and remain motionless, imitating a corpse. Within a few feet of our line there were wounded. I carried them one by one to the edge of our trench, where they were picked up and carried to the rear. The saving of one man stimulated me to continue my labors till I reached into the far side of the field. Here I had several narrow escapes. A sound, made involuntarily, was sufficient to attract several bullets, and only my anticipating that by flattening myself against the ground saved me. When dawn broke in the east, putting an end to my expeditions through No Man's Land, I had accounted for about fifty lives.

I had no idea at the time of what I had accomplished. But when the soldiers whom I had picked up were brought to the relief station and asked who rescued them, about fifty replied, "Yashka." This was communicated to the commander, who recommended me for an Order of the Fourth Degree "for distinguished valor shown in the saving of many lives under fire."

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

NONA McADOO'S HUSBAND DIES

F. de Mohrenschildt, Russian, Succumbs—Widow in Hospital

New York, March 5.—Ferdinand de Mohrenschildt, who was for some time second secretary of the Russian embassy in Washington, until the Bolsheviki revolution in November, 1917, died of pneumonia yesterday at his home here, at the age of thirty-three years. In 1917 he married Mis Nona McAdoo, daughter of the then Secretary of the Treasury, and she is ill in a hospital in this city.

Mr. Mohrenschildt was born in Reval, Russia, and was educated at Alexander Lyceum, a law school in Petrograd, and in 1907 he took a position in the Russian Foreign Office, rising to the post of secretary of the Russian embassy at Constantinople in 1911. Three years later he was transferred to the Russian legation at Athens, and in 1915 he went to Washington. Upon his resignation in 1917 Mr. Mohrenschildt entered the service of the United States shipping board, having charge of the Russian bureau in Washington. Soon after the signing of the armistice he came to New York to live.

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Miss Perry, of New York, Fell in love and got engaged

That was all right. But the Perrys were of a very exclusive set. Old family, and all that. And Schuyler's father was "in rope"—out West. That jolted the Perrys terribly, to have "Daughter marry into trade." And the young people would insist on getting married. Then things began to happen, and Josephine Daskam Bacon shows us the effete East and the red-blooded West in full tilt, and you get a story that certainly moves!

The wall by his bed opened There stood a beautiful girl

Take that, with a drugged dinner, a flight down a secret passage with the girl and a dark lantern, a wild horseback ride, a night in the woods, a duel in the morning, and you are carried breathlessly with knaves and knights and silks and swords through the golden book of romance that leaves you wish it would go on and on and on.

It's a hot chase for a man When a woman wants him

That's what Doughboy Whittaker experienced when he came back home from France. The town made him its hero: so did the town's most prominent girl. And when she let him look into her heart, well, it beat the trenches! And he beat it on the midnight express, only to meet Girl and Adventure Number 2. She didn't let him look into her heart. In the glare of a shop window she lifted her dark glasses and bade him "Look at my eyes," and what he saw he could hardly believe. "He stood point-blank."

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