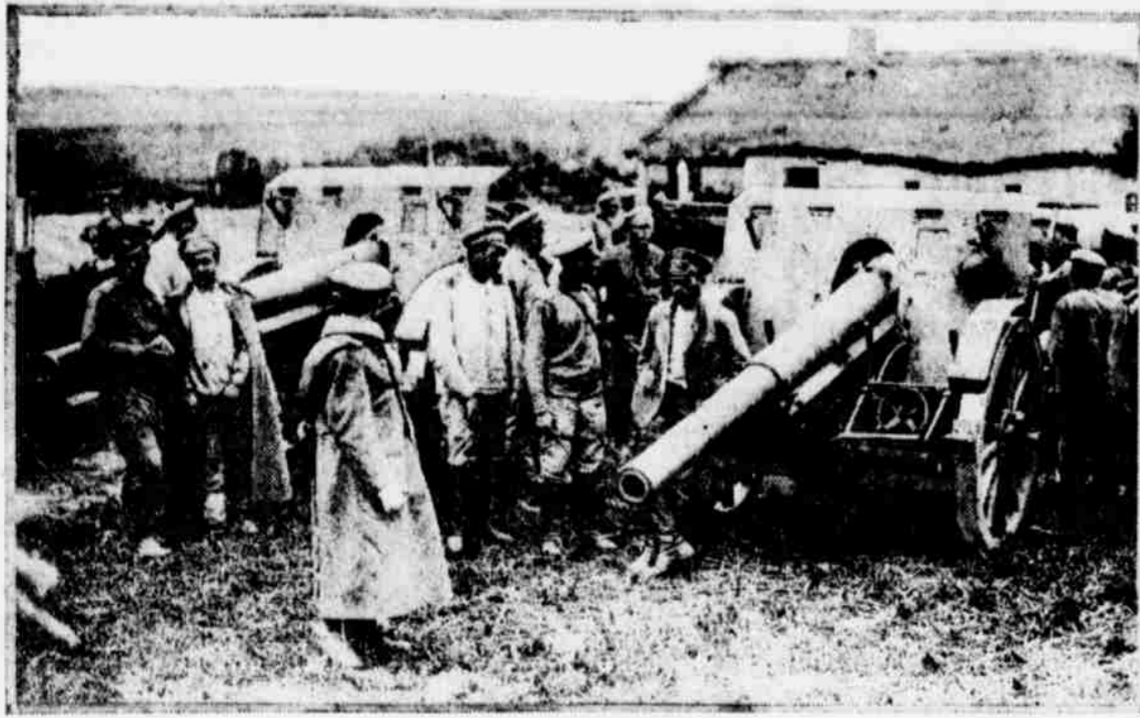


YASHKA NARRATES TALE OF TREACHERY ON PART OF RUSSIAN GENERAL AT FRONT

Blood and Wiped His Face With a Handkerchief Where Barbed Wire Was Weak and Never Was Shot at by Germans

Maria Botchkareva, Russian Joan of Arc, Tells of Mischiefous Prank She Played on Woman Deceived by Uniform



Russian artillery when the war was young

THIS STARTS THE STORY

When in 1917 Maria Botchkareva formed the Battalion of Death, a woman's fighting unit in the Russian army, the world was thrilled and an obscure peasant girl entered the international hall of fame. This is her story by herself. The first installments told of her childhood and marriage. Forced to leave her husband because of his drunkenness, she joined an infantry regiment, saw some fighting and wins a decoration for saving wounded comrades under fire.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

Our kitchen had been destroyed the previous night by the enemy's fire and we were hungry. Our ranks were refilled by fresh drafts and our artillery again boomed all day, playing havoc with the enemy's wire fences. We knew that it meant our turn to attack the following night, and our expectations proved correct. At about the same hour as the previous morning we climbed out and jumped into the trench for the enemy's position. Again a rain of shells and bullets, again scores of wounded and killed, again smoke and blood and mud. But we were not to be stopped by the wire parapet and it was down and torn to pieces this time. We waited for an instant, emitting an inhuman "Hurrah!" when the attack struck into those Germans that were still alive in their half-demolished trenches, and with fixed bayonets rushed forward and jumped into them. As I was about to descend into the trench I suddenly observed a huge German aiming at me. Hardly did I have time to fire when something struck my right leg and I had a sensation of a warm liquid trickling down my flesh. I fell. The boys had put the enemy to flight and were pursuing him. There were many cries, and the words "Save me, Holy Jesus!" came from every direction.

I suffered little pain and made several efforts to get up and reach our trenches. But every time I fell down I was too weak. Then I lay in the park of the night, within fifty feet of what was, twenty-four hours before, the enemy's position, waiting for dawn and relief. To be sure, I was not alone. Hundreds, thousands of brilliant comrades were scattered on the field for versts.

It was four hours after I was wounded before day arrived and with it our stretcher-bearers. I was picked up and carried to a first-aid station in the immediate rear. My leg was bandaged, and I was sent on to the Division Hospital. There I was placed on a hospital train and taken to Kiev.

It was about Easter of 1915 when I arrived in Kiev. The station there was so crowded with wounded from the front that hundreds of stretchers could not be accommodated inside and were lined up in rows on the platform outside. I was picked up by an ambulance and taken to the Eugene Lazaret, where I was kept in a ward with other wounded. Of course, it was a military hospital, and there was no women's ward.

I spent the spring of 1915 there. The nurses and physicians took good care of all the patients in the hospital. My swollen leg was restored to its normal condition, and it was a restful two months. I felt better and at the end of that period I was taken before a military medical commission, examined, pronounced in good health, provided with a ticket, money and a certificate and sent to the front again. My route now lay through Melnochno, an important railway terminal. When I arrived there in the early part of July I was sent to the corps headquarters by wagon, and thence I proceeded on foot to my regiment.

My heart throbbled with joy as I drew nearer to the front. I had been anxious to get back to the boys. They had endeared themselves to me so much that my company was as beloved to me as my own mother. I thought of the comrades whose lives I had saved and wondered how many of them had returned to the fighting line. I thought of the soldiers whom I had left alive and wondered if they were still among the living. Many familiar scenes came up in my imagination as I walked along under the brilliant rays of the sun.

As I approached the regimental headquarters a soldier saw me in the distance and, turning to his comrade, he pointed toward me. "Who could that be?" he asked, reminiscently. The partner scratched his neck and said: "Why, he looks familiar." "That's Yashka!" exclaimed the first as I moved nearer. "Yashka! Yashka!" they shouted at the top of their voices, running toward me as fast as they could.

"Yashka is back! Yashka is back!" went out the word to men and officers alike. There was such spontaneous joy that I was overwhelmed. Our regiment was then in the reserves, and soon I was surrounded by hundreds of old friends. There was triumphant kissing, embracing, hand-shaking. The boys pranced about like kids, shouting, "Look who's here! Yashka!" They had been under the impression that I was disabled and would never return. They congratulated me upon my recovery. Even the officers came out to shake hands with me, some even kissing me, and all expressing their gratification at my recovery.

Our positions were in a swampy region, full of mudholes and marshes. It was impossible to construct and maintain regular trenches there. We therefore built a barrier of sandbags, behind which we crouched, knee-deep in water. One could not endure long in such circumstances. One was compelled to snatch bits of sleep standing, and even the strongest constitutions broke down quickly. We were relieved at the end of six days and sent to the rear for recuperation. Then we had to relieve the men who had taken our places.

Thus we continued to hold the line. At the summer season it had not yet increased, the water would rise and at times reach our waists. It was important to maintain our front intact, although for several miles the boys were virtually immobile. The Germans, however, made an attempt in August to outflank the marshes, but failed.

Later we were shifted to another position, some distance away. There was comparative quiet at our front. Our main work consisted of sending out sending parties and keeping a keen watch over the enemy's movements from our advanced listening posts. We slept in the morning and stayed wide awake all night. I participated in numerous observation parties. Usually four of us would be detailed to a listening post, located sometimes in a bush, another time in a hole in the ground, behind the stump of a tree or some similar obstacle. We crawled to our post so noiselessly that not only the enemy but even our own ranks would not know our hiding places, which were on an average of fifty feet apart. Once at the post, our safety and duty demanded absolute immobility. Every effort to catch any unusual sound and communicate it from post to post. Besides, there was always an enemy patrol or post being in close proximity without our knowing it. Every two hours the holders of the posts were relieved.

One foggy night, while on guard at a listening post, I caught a dull noise. It sounded like a ridding party, and I took it at first for a sharp query for the password. It was impossible to see in the mist. We opened fire and the Germans flattened themselves against the ground and hid. There they lay for almost two hours, until we had forgotten the incident. Then they crawled toward our post and suddenly appeared in front of us. There were eight of them. One threw a grenade, but missed our hole, and it exploded behind us. We fired, killing two and wounding four. The remainder escaped.

When the company commander received an order to send out a scouting party he would call for volunteers. Armed with hand grenades, about thirty of the best soldiers would go out into No Man's Land to test the enemy's strength by intensive bombing and shooting. Not infrequently scouting parties from both sides would meet. It has happened that one party would let an opposite party pass by and then attack it from the rear and capture it. The 15th of August, 1915, was a memorable day in our lives. The enemy opened a violent fire at us at 3 a. m. of that date, demolishing our barbed-wire defenses, destroying some of our trenches and burying many soldiers alive. Many others were killed by the shells. Altogether we lost fifteen killed and forty wounded out of 250. It was clear that the Germans contemplated an offensive. Our artillery replied vigorously, and the earth shook from the thunders of the cannon. We sought every protection available, our nerves strained in momentary anticipation of an attack. We crossed ourselves, prayed to God, made ready our rifles and awaited orders.

At 6 o'clock the enemy observed climbing over the top and running in our direction. Closer and closer they came, and still we were kept inactive, while the enemy's artillery rained shells on them. When they approached within 100 feet of our line the order was

issued to us to open fire. It was such a concentrated hail of bullets that we let loose at the foe, demoralizing his ranks, that confusion resulted in his wading. We took advantage of the situation and rushed at the Germans, turning them back and pursuing them along the eighteen-vest front on which they started to advance. The enemy lost 10,000 that morning.

During the day we received reinforcements, also new equipment, including gas masks. Then word came that we would take the offensive the following night. Our guns began a terrific bombardment of the German positions at 6 in the evening. We were all in a state of suppressed excitement. Men and officers mixed, joking about death. Many expected not to return and wrote letters to their dear ones. Others prayed. Before an offensive the men's camaraderie reached a climax. There would be affectionate partings, sincere professions by some of their premonitions of death and the intrusting of messages to friends. Universal joy was displayed whenever a shell of ours tore a gap in the enemy's barrier of wire or fell into the midst of his trenches.

At 2 in the morning the order "Advance!" rang out. Buoyant in spirit, we started for the enemy's positions. Our casualties on the way were enormous. Several times we were ordered to lie down. Our first line was almost completely wiped out, but its ranks were filled up by men from the second row. On we went until we reached the Germans and overwhelmed them. Our own Polish Regiment alone captured 2,000 prisoners and our jubilation was boundless. We held the enemy's positions and No Man's Land, strewn with wounded and dead, was now ours. There were few stretcher-bearers available and a call went out for volunteers to gather in the wounded. I was among those who answered the call.

It was great satisfaction in aiding an agonized human being. There is great reward in the gratitude of some pain-conscious boy that one wins. It gave me immense joy to sustain life in numbed human bodies. As I was kneeling over one such wounded, who had suffered a great loss of blood, and was about to lift him, a sniper's bullet hit me between the thumb and forefinger and passed on and through the flesh of my left forearm. Fortunately I realized quickly the nature of the wound, bandaged them, and, in spite of his objections, carried the bleeding man out of danger.

I continued my work all night, and was recommended "for bravery in defensive and offensive fighting and for rendering, while wounded, first aid on the field of battle," to receive the Cross of St. George of the fourth degree. But I never received it. Instead, I was awarded a medal of the fourth degree and was informed that a woman could not obtain the Cross of St. George. I was disappointed and chagrined. Hadn't I heard of the cross being given to some Red Cross nurses? I protested to the commander. He fully sympathized with me and expressed his belief that I certainly deserved the cross.

"But," he added, disdainfully, shrugging his shoulders, "it is nationalistic officialdom."

My arm pained and I could not remain in the front line. The medical assistant of our regimental hospital had been severely wounded, and I was sent to act in his place, under the supervision of the physician. I stayed there two weeks, till my arm improved, and attained such proficiency under the doctor's instructions that he issued a certificate to me, stating that I could temporarily perform the duties of a medical assistant.

The autumn of 1915 passed, for us, uneventfully. Our life became one of routine. At night we kept watch, warming ourselves with hot tea, boiled on little stoves in the front trenches. With dawn we would go to sleep and at 2 in the morning the day would begin for some of us, as that was the hour for the distribution of bread and sugar. Every soldier received a ration of two and a half pounds of bread daily. It was often burned on the outside and not done on the inside. At 11 o'clock, when dinner arrived, everybody was awake, cleaning rifles and repairing things generally. The kitchen was always about a verst in the rear, and we sent messengers to bring the dinner pails to the trenches. The average dinner consisted of a hot cabbage soup, with some meat in it. The meat, frequently, was spoiled. The second dish was always kasha, Russia's popular gruel. Our daily ration of sugar was supposed to be three-sixteenths of a pound. By the time our dinner got to us it was cold, so that tea was resorted to again. After noon we received our assignments, and at 6 in the evening supper, the last meal, consisting only of one course, arrived. It was either cabbage soup or kasha or half a herring, with bread. Many ate all their bread before the supper hour, or if they were very hungry, with the first meal, and thus were forced to beg for morsels from their comrades or go hungry in the evening.

Every twelve days we were relieved and sent to the rear for a six days' recuperation. There the baths of the Union of Zemstvos, which had already extended its activities in 1915 through the front, awaited us. Every

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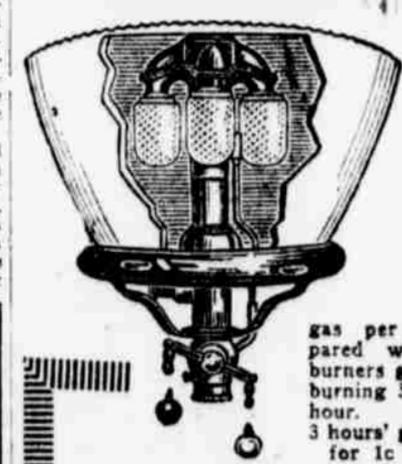
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divisional bath was in charge of a physician and a hundred volunteer workers. Every bathroom was also a laundry, and the men, upon entering it, left their dirty underwear there, receiving in exchange clean linen. When a company was about to leave the trenches for the rear, word was sent to the bathhouse of its coming. There was nothing at the bathhouse, so vermin-ridden were the trenches, and so great was their suffering on this account.

WOUNDED AND PARALYZED

Towards winter we were moved to a place called Zeleneye Polje. There I was placed in charge of twelve stretcher bearers and served in the capacity of medical assistant for six weeks, exercising the authority of granting a few days' rest from duty to the indisposed. Our positions ran through an abandoned country estate. The manor lay between the lines. We were on the top of the hill, while the Germans occupied the bottom. We were to observe their movements and they, in turn, watch us. If any one on either side raised his head he became the mark of some of the soldiers who were in the trenches, and so great was their suffering on this account.

The general attacked the barbed wire was torn open or where the fortifications were weak and wipe his face with his kerchief. There was a general murmur among the men. The word "treason!" was uttered by many lips in suppressed tones. The officers were indignant and called the general's attention to the unnecessary danger to which he exposed himself. But the general ignored their warnings, remarking, "nitchevo!" (it's nothing).

The discipline was so rigorous that no one dared to argue the matter with the general. The officers cursed when he left. The men muttered: "He is selling us out to the enemy!" Half an hour after his departure the Germans opened a tremendous fire, which the enemy intended to launch an offensive, but our expectations did not materialize. He merely continued his violent bombardment, wounding and burying alive hundreds. The cries of the men were such that rescue work could not be postponed. While the shelling continued, I was ordered to bury a soldier who had been wounded from the trenches under violent fire. Usually a medical assistant received a medal of the fourth degree, but I was given one of the second degree because of the special conditions attending my work.

We were then relieved for the month and sent fifteen versts to the rear, to the village of Senky, on a stream called Uzianka. An artillery

base was located there, and once we got to the place our life was eased. But getting there was no easy task; the road was frightful. We were fatigued and exhausted, and most of us fell asleep without even eating the supper that had been prepared for us. There was no work for a medical assistant in the rear, and besides my arm had fully recovered, so I applied to the commander for permission to return to the ranks. He granted it, which placed me in charge of eleven men.

Here I received two letters, one from Yasha, in reply to mine, written from Yakutsk, in which he spoke of returning to him at the conclusion of the war. I had an answer sent to him reiterating my promise, on condition that he change his behavior toward me and treat me with consideration and love. The other letter was from home. Mother wanted me to come back, telling of her hardships and sufferings.

It was October. This month, spent at the artillery base, was one of joy. We were billeted in the village cabins, and engaged almost daily in sports and games. It was here that I was first taught how to sign my name and copy the alphabet. I had learned to read previously, Yasha having been my first instructor. The literature that was allowed to circulate at the front was largely made up of lurid detective stories, and the name of "Nick Carter" was not unfamiliar even to me.

There were other pastimes, also. I remember one day during a downpour I sought shelter in a barn, where I found about forty officers and men, who had also sought protection there from the rain. The owner of the barn, a babu of middle age, was there with her cow. I was in a mischievous mood and began to flirt with her, to the general amusement of the men. I paid her some flattering compliments and declared that she had captivated me. The woman did not recognize my sex and professed to be ignorant. Encouraged by the approval of the men, I persisted in my advances, and finally made an attempt to kiss her. The babu, mad with rage, seized a big stick of stove wood, and with curses threatened me and the men.

"Get out of here, you tormentors of a poor babu!" she cried. I did not seek to provoke a fight and exclaimed to her: "Why, you foolish woman, I am a peasant girl myself!" This only further inflamed our

hostess. She took it for more ridicule and became more menacing. The officers and soldiers interfered, trying to persuade her of the truth of my words, as none of us wanted to be put out into the rain. However, it required more than words to convince her, so I was compelled to unbuckle my coat.

"Holy Jesus!" the woman crossed herself. "A babu, indeed." And immediately her heart softened, and her

tone changed into one of tenderness. She broke out into tears. Her husband and son were in the army, she told me, and she hadn't heard from them for a long time. She gathered me into her arms, gave me food and treated me to some milk, inquiring about my mother and mourning over her lot. We parted affectionately, her blessings following me.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)

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