

BOTCHKAREVA USES A BAYONET ON GERMAN AND HAND GRENADE SAVES HER LIFE

Later Her Foot Is Frozen While She Is on Duty at Listening Post and She Fights to Prevent Amputation

Contact With the Dead in the Most Terrible Offensive She Had Ever Known Causes Her Temporarily to Lose Her Nerve



Russian artillery

THIS STARTS THE STORY When in 1917 Maria Botchkareva formed the Battalion of Death, a woman's fighting unit, the world was thrilled and a peasant girl stepped into the international hall of fame.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES IT WAS snowing when we returned to the front line. Our position was now at Ferdinandov Nos, between Lake Narotch and Baranovitchi.

We started out in single file, moving forward stealthily and as noiselessly as possible. We passed by some woods, in which an enemy patrol, upon hearing the crackling of the snow beneath the feet of our soldiers' boots, had hidden.

We picked up our ears, but scarcely had we time to look around when we found ourselves surrounded by an enemy force larger than our own.

I found myself confronted by a German, who towered far above me. There was not an instant to lose. Life and death hung in the balance.

avoid the shock of the explosion, and afterward reached our trenches. The year of our Lord 1918 was ushered in while I lay in the hospital. Almost immediately upon my release our company was sent to the rear for a month's rest in Belona, a village some distance back of the fighting line.

At Belona many of the soldiers and officers were visited by their wives. I made many acquaintances there and some fast friendships. One of the latter was the wife of a stretcher-bearer with whom I had worked.

"Holy Mother, what's to be done? My right foot is gone. The feet of the other three men are freezing, too. They just whispered that to me. If only the commander would relieve us now! But the two hours are not yet up!" I thought.

Suddenly we perceived two figures in white crawling toward us. Germans provided with appropriate costumes for a stealthy mission. We tired, and they replied. A bullet pierced my coat, just scratching the skin.

I saved my right limb. The doctors soon had it under control, and by persistent application succeeded in restoring it to its normal state. The year of our Lord 1918 was ushered in while I lay in the hospital. Almost immediately upon my release our company was sent to the rear for a month's rest in Belona, a village some distance back of the fighting line.

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"But, Lieutenant," I tried to argue, well knowing that protestations are of no avail at such a moment. "It is no use. It will be so. Premonitions are deceiving."

The signal to advance was given, and we started, knee-deep in mud, for the enemy. In places the pools reached above our waists. Shells and bullets played havoc with us. Of those that fell without making one in the mud and drowned.

Then we started for the front. The slush and mud were unmanageable. We walked deep in water, mixed with ice. On the road we met many wounded being carried to the hospital.

On March 6 we began an unprecedented bombardment. The Germans replied intensively, and the earth fairly shook. The cannonade lasted several hours. Then an order came for us to form ranks and march into the trenches.

"Yashka, take this and deliver it to my wife after the attack. I have had a premonition for three days that I would not survive this battle." He handed me a letter and a ring.

Other arm of warfare, and so they gave way and took to their heels. We pursued them into their trenches, and there followed a hot struggle. Many of the Germans raised their hands in sign of surrender.

Our regiment captured in that attack 2500 Germans and thirty machine guns. I escaped only with a slight bruise in the right leg and did not leave the ranks. Elated by our victory over the strong defenses of the first line, we swept on toward the enemy's second line.

Our advance line was within seventy feet of the enemy's trenches when an order came from General Walter to halt and return to our positions. Men and officers alike were terribly shocked. Our colonel talked to the general on the field telephone, explaining to him the situation.

The conversation between the colonel and general ended in a quarrel. The general had not apparently expected us to break through the first German line. So many waves of Russian soldiers had beaten in vain against the line, and with such terrible losses.

All day the artillery boomed again, as violently as the previous day. At night, our ranks filled with great drafts, we climbed out again and rushed for the enemy. Again we suffered heavily, but our operation this time was more successful.

The Germans never did like the Russian bayonet. As a matter of fact, they dreaded them more than any other arm of warfare, and so they gave way and took to their heels.

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fresh crawled in the dreadful surroundings. I wanted to get up. My hand sought support. It fell on the face of a corpse, stuck against the wall. I screamed, slipped and fell. My fingers buried themselves in the torn abdomen of a body.

The entrance of the dugout was naturally facing the enemy now. He knew its exact position and concentrated a fire on it. Although a bomb-proof, it soon began to give way under a rain of shells.

The following day I discovered the body of Lieutenant Bobrov. His premonition was right, after all. A premonition was right, after all. A premonition was right, after all.

With bowed heads and bleeding hearts we paid last homage to our comrades. They had laid down their lives like true heroes, without suspecting that they were being sacrificed in vain by a monster-traffic.

On March 10 I still suffering from the effects of the dreadful contact with corpses, I was sent to the divisional hospital for a three days' rest. I was back in the trenches on the 14th, when another advance was ordered.

There was no count to the wounded. We were refilled four times with fresh corpses lay thick everywhere, and like mushrooms after a rain the corpses lay thick everywhere.

That was the most terrible offensive in which I participated. It went down into history as the Battle of Postovoy. We spent the first night in the German trenches we had captured. It was a night of unforgettable horrors.

There was another few days' respite, during which our ranks were reformed. Early in the morning of March 18, after an ineffective bombardment of the enemy's positions by our artillery, the signal to go over the top was given.

I was asked with horror such as I had never experienced, and shrieked hysterically. My cries were heard in the officers' dugout, and a man was sent to rescue Yashka, whom they had taken for wounded. It was warm and comfortable in the dugout, as it had previously been used by the enemy's regimental staff.

"I am a German prisoner!" I thought. Then the voices died out and again my throat tortured me. "Holy Mother, when will help come? Or am I doomed to lie here indefinitely till I lapse into unconsciousness and expire?"

The thought of the boys' discovery of my absence gave me new strength. The seconds seemed hours and the minutes days, but the shadows arrived at last, creeping toward the side where the sun had disappeared.

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