

BOTCHKAREVA THROWS HER EPAULETTES INTO THE FACE OF ALEXANDER KERENSKY

Head of Russian Government Insisted That a Committee of Soldiers Should Be Formed in Her Battalion, and That Was Her Answer—Premier, in Rage, Orders Her Shot, but Officers, Who Secretly Sympathize With Her, Remind Him Capital Punishment Has Been Abolished



Reviewing the Battalion of Death

THIS STARTS THE STORY
In the summer of 1917 Maria Botchkareva formed the Battalion of Death, a woman's fighting unit in the Russian army, and a peasant girl thus stepped into the international hall of fame. In the earlier installments she told of the hardships of her childhood, the brutalities of her married life, and the realization of her wish to become a soldier. She told of battles fought and won and of the demoralization of the army after the overthrow of the Czar. It was her desire to shame the men into action that prompted the formation of the battalion which leaves Petrograd amid the plaudits of the multitude. At Molodechno, however, where Bolshevism has laid its hands on the army the women of the battalion are badly treated. Botchkareva addresses the disorderly soldiers and asks them when she had earned their scorn and derision.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

"When you were a common soldier," answered a couple of voices, "you were like one of us. But now, being an officer, you are under the influence of the bourgeoisie."
"Who made me an officer if not you? Didn't your brethren, the common soldiers of the First and Tenth Armies send special delegates to honor me and present icons and standards to me, thus raising me to the grade of officer? I am of the people, blood of your blood, a tolling peasant girl."
"But we are tired of war. We want peace," they complained, unable to find fault with me personally.
"I want peace, too. But how will you have peace? Show me how!" I pounded vigorously, observing that my talk was softening the crowd's temper considerably.
"Why, simply leave the front and go home. That's how we can have peace."
"Leave the front?" I bawled, with all the noise I could command.
"What will happen then? Tell me! Will you have peace? Never! The Germans will just walk over our impregnable defenses and crush the people and the freedom. This is war. You are soldiers and you know what war is. You know that all is fair in war. To leave the trenches? Why not hand Russia over to the Kaiser? It's the same thing, and you know it as well as I. No, there is no other way to peace than through an offensive and the defeat of the enemy. Conquer the Germans and there will be peace! Shoot them, kill them, subvert them, but do not fraternize with the foes of our beloved Russia!"
"But they fraternize with us. They are tired of the war, too. They want peace as much as we," said a few men,

"They deceive. They fraternize here and send soldiers to fight our Allies." "What Allies are they to us if they want no peace?" some argued.
"They want no peace now because they know that the Germans are treacherous. You and I know it too. Haven't the Germans asphyxiated thousands of our brethren with their deadly gases? Haven't we all suffered from their dirty tricks? Aren't they now occupying a large part of our country? Let's drive them out and have peace!"
There was silence. Nobody had anything to say, greatly encouraged. I resumed, just as a happy idea dawned upon me.
"Yes, let us drive them out of Russia. Suppose I were to take you along to the front, to feed you well, to equip you with new uniforms and boots, would you go with me to attack the treacherous enemy?"
"Yes, yes! We will go! You are our comrade. You are not a bourgeois bloodsucker! With you we will go!" many voices rang from all sides.
"But if you go with me," I said, "I would keep you under the severest discipline. There can be no army without discipline. I am a peasant like you, and I would take your word of honor to stick it out. But should any one of you attempt to escape I would have him shot promptly."
"We agree! We are willing to follow you!" You are one of us! Hurrah for Yashka! Hurrah for Botchkareva!" the crowd roared almost unanimously.
It was a soul-stirring spectacle. But an hour ago these tattered men noted as if their hearts were constricted. Now they were beating warmly. A brief while ago they looked like the most depraved thugs; now their faces were lit with the spark of humanity. It seemed a miracle. But it was not. Such is the soul of the Russian; now it is hardened and brutal, now it is full of devotion and love.

I called on General Yaluyev and begged permission to take the body of deserters to the front, asking for equipment for them. The general refused. He was afraid that they would disintegrate the rest of the men. I assumed responsibility for their conduct, but the general could not see it the way I did.
So I had to return with empty hands, but I did not disclose the truth to the men. I told them that there was no equipment on hand and that

as soon as it arrived they would be dispatched to the battalion's sector. Meanwhile I invited them to escort us out of Molodechno as comrades.
We started out in full array, early the following week. Each of the girls carried her full equipment, a burden of about sixty-five pounds. There were thirty vests ahead of us to corps headquarters. The road was open, fields alternating with woods stretching on both sides of it.
I had telegraphed to headquarters

for supper, expecting to arrive there early in the evening. But clouds gathered overhead and showers impeded our progress to such an extent that the girls could scarcely keep up. Whenever we passed a village the temptation was great to let them take a rest in it, but I knew that I would never be able to collect them again that day if I once allowed them to spread out. So I was compelled to hold the battalion in the open and move ahead, regardless of the condition of the road or the weather.
It was 11 o'clock at night when we arrived at corps headquarters and were met by General Kostayev, chief of staff, who asked us to go to eat the meal prepared for us. The commanding general would review us tomorrow, he said. The girls were too tired to sup. They fell like dead in the barn assigned to the battalion and slept all night in their clothes.
The corps headquarters were situated at Redki. We breakfasted in the barracks, after which we proceeded to prepare for review by the commanding general. I had been invited to lunch with the staff after review.
It was then found that several of my girls were suffering from the effects of the acidulous march on the preceding day. Two of them, Skridlova, my adjutant, the daughter of an admiral who had commanded the Black Sea Fleet, and Dubrovskaya, the daughter of a general, were too ill to remain in the ranks and were sent to a hospital. I appointed Princess Tatuyeva, of a famous Cossack family in the Caucasus, to be my adjutant. She was a brave and loyal girl, of high education and spoke fluently three foreign languages.
At 12 o'clock I formed the battalion for review. Knowing how much the girls had gone through the twenty-four hours before, I abandoned for a moment my severe attitude and endeavored to coax my soldiers into an effort to make a striking impression on the general. The girls tried their best to appear in good shape and were ready to show the general what the battalion was worth. The corps commander arrived soon. He reviewed my soldiers, reserving once to some catch tests.
"Magnificent!" he said enthusiastically at conclusion of the quiz, congratulating me and shaking my hand. "I would not have believed it possible for men, let alone women, to master the game in six weeks so well. Why, we get recruits here who had undergone three months' drilling, and they could not compare with your girls!"
He then spoke a few words of praise

to the rank and file, and my soldiers were immensely pleased. I proceeded with the general and his suite to headquarters, where luncheon was awaiting us. He nearly kissed me when he learned that there were no committees in my battalion, so genuine was his joy over it.
"Since the committees were instituted in the army everything has changed," he said. "I love the soldiers and they always loved me. But now it is all gone. There is no end to trouble. Every day, almost every hour, there come some impossible demands from the ranks. The front has lost almost all of its former might. It is a comedy, not war."
We had not had time to begin the luncheon when a telegram arrived from Molodechno, notifying the staff of Kerensky's arrival there for luncheon and requesting the general's and my attendance. Losing no time the general ordered his car and we drove to Molodechno at top speed.
There were about twenty persons present at the luncheon at army headquarters. Kerensky sat at the head of the table. The commander of my corps was on my right and another general on the left. During the meal the conversation was about the condition at the front and the state of preparedness for a general offensive. I took virtually no part in the discussion. At the end of the meal, when all arose, Kerensky walked up to the commander of my corps and delivered himself unexpectedly of the following peremptory speech:
"You will see to it that a committee be formed immediately in the Death Battalion and that she," pointing at me, "cease punishing the girls!"
I was thunderstruck. All the officers in the room pricked up their ears. There was a tense instant. I felt my blood rush to my head, setting me ablaze. I was furious.
With two violent jerks I tore off my epaulettes and threw them into the face of the War Minister.
"I don't want to serve under you!" I exclaimed. "Today you are this way, tomorrow, the opposite. You allowed me once to run the battalion without a committee. I shall not form any committees! I am going home."
I flung these words at the reddened Kerensky before any one in the room had recovered from the shock, ran out of the house, threw myself into the corps commander's automobile and ordered his chauffeur to drive to Redki instantly.
There was a great commotion as soon as I left the room, a friend of

the chief of staff, Kostayev, told later. Kerensky raged at first.
"Shoot her!" he ordered in the flush of anger.
"Gospodin Minister," General Yaluyev, the commander of the Tenth Army, said in my defense. "I have known Botchkareva for three years. She first tasted war as a member of my corps. She suffered more than any other soldier at the front, because she suffered both as a woman and as a soldier. She was always in the lead of any enterprise, serving as an example. She is a plain soldier and a word is a pledge to her. If she had been promised the command of the battalion without the aid of a committee, then she could never understand a reversal of the pledge."
The commander of my corps and other officers also spoke up for me. Finally, some remembered that Kerensky had abolished capital punishment. "Capital punishment has been abolished," Gospodin Minister," they said. "If Botchkareva is to be shot, then why not let us shoot some of those 1500 deserters who are raising the devil here?"
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