BOTCHKAREVA GOES TO SEE KORNILOV DISGUISED AS A SISTER OF MERCY

Her Mission Is a Political One, Taken at the Request of Russian Officers Disgusted With and Disheartened by Trend of Events in Petrograd

Advance of the German Armies Arouses Distrust in Minds of Soldiers, Who Had Thought Peace Assured With Ascendancy of Bolshevism

The executive committee of the Soldiers and Workmen's deputies at a Bolshevist demonstration in Petrograd

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 thus a peasant girl stepped into the international hall of fame. This is her story. In earlier installments she told of her childhood, of 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 following the overthrow of the Czar. It was to shame the men into action that the battalion was formed, but it did not entirely succeed. It saw much action, suffered severe losses, and at last was forced to disband by the men it set out to aid. Botchkareva returns to her home, sick and disheartened.

AND HERE IT CONTINUES

TUTALSK had also been swept by the hurricane of Bolshevism. There were many soldiers who had returned from the front, imbued with Bolshevik teachings. Just before my arrival the newly made heretics even burned the village church, to the great horror of the older inhabitants. It was not an unusual case; it was typical of the time. Hundreds of thousands of blinded youths had returned from the trenches with the passion to destroy, to tear down everything that had existed before, the old system of government, the church, nay, God Himself, all in preparation for the new order of life they were going to erect.

But one institution—the scourge of the nation—they failed to wipe out. They did more. They resurrected it. The Czar had abolished vodka. The prohibition was continued in force by the new regime, but only on paper. Nearly every returned soldier took to distilling vodka at home, and the old plague of the country was in sway again, contributing to the building of the Bolsheviki's new world.

Every town and village had its committee or Soviet, which was supposed to carry out orders from the central government. An order was issued to confiscate all articles of gold and silver. Committees searched every house for such belongings. There was also, or was supposed to be, an order taxing furniture and clothes. When the arbitrarily demanded taxes were not paid the furniture and clothes were taken away.

In the towns it was the townsmen who suffered, in the villages the peasants, all under the pretext of confiscating the riches of the bourgeoisie. It was sufficient for a peasant to buy a new overcoat, perhaps with his last savings, to be marked an exploiter and lose his precious garment. The peculiar thing about such cases was the fact that the confiscated article would almost invariably appear on the back of one of the Bolshevik ringleaders. It was simple looting, and the methods were of unadulterated terror, practiced mostly by the returned soldiers.

I received some letters at Tutalsk. One was from my adjutant, Princess Tatuyeva, who had arrived safely in Tiflis, her home town.

One morning I went to the postoffice to ask for mail.

"There goes Botchkareva!" I heard a man cry out.

"Ah, Botchkareva! She is for the old regime!" another fellow replied, apparently one of the Bolshevik soldiers.

There were several of them and they flung threats and insults at me. I did not reply, but returned home with a heavy heart. Even in my own town I was not safe.

"My Lord," I prayed, "what has come over the Russian people? Is this my reward for the sacrifices I have made for my country?"

I resolved not to leave the house again. Surely this craze would not last long, I thought. I spent most of the day reading the Bible and praying to Heaven for the awakening and enlightenment of my people.

On the 7th of January, 1918, I received a telegram from Petrograd, signed by General X. It read:

"Come. You are needed."

The same day I bought a ticket for the capital, parted from my folks and started out. I removed the epaulets of my uniform, thus appearing in the garb of a private.

About this time the Germans, to the profound shock of the revolutionary masses, began their lightning-like advance into Russia. It had an almost miraculous effect on the Bolshevik followers. The train was as usual packed with soldiers, but there was a different air about their faces and conversation. All the braggadocio had been knocked out of them by the enemy's action. They had been lulled into the sweet belief that peace had come and that a golden age was about to open for them. They could not reconcile that with the swift movement of the Kaiser's soldiers toward Petrograd and Moscow.

It was refreshing, exhilarating to listen to some of the men.

"We have been sold out!" one heard here and there.

"We were told that the German soldiers would not advance if we left the front," was another frequent expression.

"It is not the common people, it is the German bourgeoisie that is fighting us now," was an argument ordinarily given in answer to the first opinions, "and there is nothing to be afraid of. There will soon be a revolution in Germany."

"Who knows," some would doubtfully remark, "but what Lenine and Trotsky have delivered us into the hands of the accursed Germans?"

There were always delegates from local committees going somewhere, and they talked to the soldiers, answering questions and explaining things. They could not very well explain away the German treachery, but they held out the promise of a revolution in Germany due almost any day. The men listened, but were not swept off their feet by the assurances of the agitators. One felt that they were still groping in the dark, although the light was dawning on their minds. The awakening could not be long postponed.

I had a safe and comfortable journey to Petrograd. Nobody molested me, nobody threatened my life. I arrived at the capital on the 18th of January. The station was not as beleaguered as two months previous. Red Guards were not in such evidence in the streets, which appeared more normal. I went to one of my former patronesses and learned of the terror in which the capital lived.

The following day I called on General X, who greeted me cordially. Kiev, he told me, had just been captured by the Germans. They were threatening Petrograd and the opposition of the Red Guards would not prevent or even halt for a day its capture if the Germans were bent upon it.

Red terror was rampant in the city. The river was full of corpses of slain and lynched officers. Those who were alive were in an awful condition, in fear of showing themselves in public because of the mob spirit, and therefore on the verge of death from starvation. Even more harrowing was the situation of the country. It was falling into the hands of the enemy so rapidly that some kind of immediate action was imperative.

A secret meeting of officers and sympathizers had been held, at which it was decided to get in touch with General Kornilov, who was reported as operating in the Don region. There were so many conflicting reports concerning Kornilov that it had been suggested that a courier be sent to him to find out definitely his plans and condition. After a thorough canvass, General X proposed that I, as a woman, was the only person that could possibly get through the Bolshevik lines and reach Kornilov. Would I go?

"I would not join the officers here or Kornilov in the south to wage warfare against my own people," I replied. "I can't do it because every Russian is dear to my heart, whether he be a Bolshevik a Menshevik or Red Guard. But I will take it upon myself to get to Kornilov, for your as well as for my own information."

It was agreed that I dress as a Sister of Mercy. A costume was obtained for me, and I put it on over my uniform. My soldier's cap I tucked away in a back pocket and put on the sister's regulation headpiece, which showed only my eyes, nose, mouth and cheeks, and made me look like a matron of about forty-five.

A passport, bearing the name of Alexandra Leontievna Smirnovna, was furnished to me and this was to be my name on the way. As I wore army boots there was no danger of my trousers showing under the skirt. I took with me a letter from Princess Tatuyeva, in which she invited me to visit her in her Caucasus home. A direct ticket from Petrograd to Kislovodsk a Caucasian resort within several hundred versts of Kornilov's whereabouts, was given me to be used only in an emergency. It was agreed that in case of danger I should discard my garb of a Sister of Mercy, appear as my real self and claim, with the aid of the emergency ticket to Kislovodsk and the letter from Princess Tatuyeva, that I was on my way to take a cure at the resort. In addition, I was, of course, provided with money for expenses.

It was great fun suddenly to lose one's identity and appear as a complete stranger. I was no longer Maria Botchkareva, but Alexandra Smirnova. And as I glanced at myself in the mirror it seemed even to my own eyes that I had been reincarnated from a soldier into a Sister of Mercy.

Upon leaving Petrograd my destination was Nikitino, a station which one would ordinarily pass on the way to Kislovodsk. Nobody recognized me on the train. Sometimes a soldier asked:

"Where are you going, little sister?"

"Home to Kislovodsk," was my usual answer.

The next question would be about the service I had seen at the front and the sectors at which I worked. I would reply with facts from my actual experience as a soldier. There was nothing strange about a Sister of Mercy returning home, and as I preferred silence and seclusion to conversation I reached Nikitino, at the end of several days without any trouble.

The first problem confronting me was how to get to Zverevo. I went to the commandant of the station, complained that I was penniless, that I could not wait indefinitely for the end of the fighting to return home to Kislovodsk and urgently begged him to advise me what to do. I made such an appeal to him that he finally said:

"A munition train is just about to leave for Zverevo. Come board it and go there. Perhaps they will pass you through the lines at the front. There is a second-class coach attached to the train."

He led me to the car, in which were only five soldiers, those in charge of the train. He introduced me to one of them, the chief, as a stranded Sister of Mercy and asked for their indulgence. I thanked the obliging commandant profusely and from the bottom of my heart.

(CONTINUED TOMORROW)