



**RUSSIAN WOMEN IN "THE BATTALION OF DEATH."**

These sturdy fighters, all women, are being reviewed by General Polovtzev, wearing the Cossack uniform; next to him stands Madame Botchkareva, their leader, whose prowess is indicated by the numerous decorations for valor which she wears.

## **RUSSIA'S WOMEN SOLDIERS**

**T**HE BATTALION OF DEATH" presents a new aspect of feminism which, while the wisdom and economy of its extension are consistently questioned the press, is none the less serving the purpose of arousing, its burning patriotic faith, something like shame in the calcitrant men soldiers of Russia. The movement had its beginning in individual enlistments, according to *The Westminster Gazette*, which says:

"The women warriors of the Battalion of Death are by no means the first Russian women who have joined the ranks of the combatants. Tho at the beginning of the war the Russian military regulations forbade their enlistment, the rule was often honored in the breach. The pioneer was Apollovna Isoltsov, who was accepted as a volunteer in a regiment commanded by her father, and was awarded the Cross of St. George of the third class for discovering a telephone which the enemy had hidden in a loft and was using for the purpose of his intelligence department."

The story of the formation of the now famous battalion is given in *L'Illustration* (Paris) as follows:

"Reports had come in repeatedly that there were women soldiers on the Russian and Servian fronts, but up to the present time it was merely a matter of isolated enlistments. To be sure, these dauntless innovators incorporated in the regiments showed true courage and did their duty like their brothers in arms, but it seemed that the formation of women troops in great organized units would remain, for a long time yet, in the realm of fantasy. But such is not the case; and from Russia comes the news, supported by photographs, that a first battalion of women, which has not hesitated to take the title 'Battalion of Death,' has just been organized and is at this moment *en route* to the front."

Madame Vera Botchkareva, to whose initiative was due the formation of the battalion, is the widow of a colonel, says the Paris organ. No sooner had the war broken out than she enlisted and went to the front as a private. Of surprising physical endurance, she took part in numerous engagements, was six times wounded, and gave such proof of courage that she received several decorations and attained the rank of second lieutenant. *L'Illustration* goes on to say:

"After the revolution, when the anarchistic and socialistic propagandists were striving to disorganize the front and demoralize the troops, Madame Botchkareva declared: 'Since our men are hesitating to fight, the women must show them how to die for their country and for liberty.' She went to Mr. Kerensky, who had just been made Minister of War, and asked for authorization to form a first women's battalion. He consented, and forthwith thousands of women and young girls belonging to the best Russian families presented themselves for enlistment. Many Polish, Jewish, and Georgian women followed their example."

The recruiting organization which Madame Botchkareva founded is called "The Women's League for National Defense at the Front," and the volunteers, who have been accepted after a summary examination, take an oath "to conquer or to die." Each woman carries a ration of cyanid of potassium to be taken in the event of capture, says *L'Illustration*, which continues:

"They know that they will be sent to the front and will be exposed in the first line after three weeks of intensive military training, which is given them by instructors appointed by the Minister of War. The regulations to which they are bound are extremely severe; the least insubordination is punishable by imprisonment."

The courage of the Battalion of Death when the actual test came is the subject of many enthusiastic Petrograd dispatches. They behaved splendidly, we are told, under fire, penetrated into a first-line trench of the Germans, and brought back prisoners. But the Russian men soldiers retreated, leaving the women unsupported, and they were forced to retire. Their bravery and success aroused much interest, and other women's battalions are now being formed under official approval. Of the efficiency of the women recruits, one of their instructors is quoted as saying:

"I have drilled hundreds of men soldiers, but I do not hesitate to declare that these women learn with double the speed. This is true not only of the educated girls, but also of the peasant girls, some of whom are entirely illiterate. The overmastering motive is the patriotic desire to save Russia from ruin. Many of them display a zeal and ardor worthy of Joan of Arc."

However, the attitude of the public in general toward the institution is summed up by *L'Illustration* thus:

"When, early in June, the news of the creation of this women's battalion spread in Petrograd, some people, quite naturally, could not suppress their smiles. But it must be acknowledged that they smile no longer when once they have seen, marching through the streets of the capital, with music at their head, these noble and proud young women who are deliberately sacrificing their lives for their country. The women's battalions seem called to play an important rôle, but it will, doubtless, be less as a fighting mass than as an example and an inspiration for the whole Russian Army."