

Excerpts from *With the Armies of the Tsar: A Nurse at the Russian Front in War and Revolution*

Source: Farmborough, Florence. *Nurse at the Russian Front: A Diary, 1914-1918*. London: Constable, 1974. First U.S. edition: Farmborough, Florence. *With the Armies of the Tsar: A Nurse at the Russian Front in War and Revolution, 1914-1918*. Briarcliff Manor, NY: Stein and Day, 1974; Cooper Square Press, 2000.

[pp.302-303]

*Wednesday, 9th August*

We housed fifteen wounded in our improvised *Lazaret*. Last Monday, an ambulance-van drove up with three wounded women soldiers. We were told that they belonged to the Bachkarova Women's Death Battalion. We had not heard the full name before, but we instantly guessed that it was the small army of women recruited in Russia by the Siberian woman soldier, Pasha Bachkarova. Naturally, we were all very impatient to have news of this remarkable battalion, but the women were sadly shocked and we refrained from questioning them until they had rested. The van-driver was not very helpful, but he did know that the battalion had been cut up by the enemy and had retreated.

[pp.304-305]

*Sunday, 13th August*

There was much work in the hospital. Each of us Sisters had her own ward. At dinner we heard more of the Women's Death Battalion. It was true; Bachkarova had brought her small battalion down south to the Austrian Front, and they had manned part of the trenches which had been abandoned by the Russian Infantry. The size of the Battalion had considerably decreased since the first weeks of recruitment, when some 2,000 women and girls had rallied to the call of their Leader. Many of them, painted and powdered, had joined the Battalion as an exciting and romantic adventure; she loudly condemned their behaviour and demanded iron discipline. Gradually the patriotic enthusiasm had spent itself; the 2,000 slowly dwindled to 250. In honour to those women volunteers, it was recorded that they *did* go into the attack; they *did* go 'over the top'. But not all of them. Some remained in the trenches, fainting and hysterical; others ran or crawled back to the rear. Bachkarova retreated with her decimated battalion; she was wrathful, heartbroken, but she had learnt a great truth: women were quite unfit to be soldiers.