

## Module 03: 1917 — Did the War Cause a Revolution?

### Evidence 32: Oath of a Revolutionary Volunteer and a Female Volunteer's Letter to the Minister of War

# A

#### Introduction

Conceptions of citizenship and soldiering were closely connected in the modern Western tradition. In Russia, where the autocratic system approached its population as "subjects," the mass mobilization of the world war presented powerful opportunities for soldiers and other to assert claims of civil rights and political participation based in part on their armed defense of the nation. Among the most remarkable examples of the war's impact on traditional society was the formation of women's combat units after the February Revolution.

#### Document

[Letter of a woman-volunteer to the Minister of Defense]

Gracious Sovereign, Mister Minister of Defense!

I come to you obediently with a request that you allow me to meet with you personally to discuss the formation (if you allow me to do so) of a women's battalion of "Black Hussars of Death," for which I will be sincerely faithful to you unto death.

I, formerly a volunteer woman in the 21st Siberian artillery regiment, where I served as the company telephonist in the trenches on the front lines (the enemy was twenty steps away from us), returned from the front on May 15 of this year in light of the extreme disorder from soldiers' rebellions, etc...

I entered military service under the old regime, when discipline was much more strict than now. By the way, before I was sent to the front, I spent almost two months in one of the reserve Petrograd regiments in a training unit.

In turn, I also have the honor of informing you that on March 14 of this

year I received the St. George Medal 4th class for our successful breach of the Austrian forces. I have a certificate from the command of the 6th Siberian Infantry Division confirming my report.

In light of the fact that I am already an experienced soldier, that is I already have been on the front lines, I have the honor of petitioning you to let me speak with you personally about the organization of another women's battalion ? the battalion of the "Black Hussars of Death." Then we can show our enemies what real Hussars of Death are.

I hope to receive your positive answer quickly, and remain your deeply devoted woman volunteer.

Valentina Petrova

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[Oath of a revolutionary volunteer]

Before this red and black banner, the symbol of the revolution and the struggle for freedom, I give my honest word, as a revolutionary citizeness, that I voluntarily, unselfishly, and inspired exclusively by my love for the freedom of Russia, with the goal of defending her honor, freedom, equality, and brotherhood, and the return of our lost lands, enlist in the ranks of the revolutionary shock battalions, and take on the duties of a revolutionary soldier.

I promise:

1. To carry out all orders from my superiors meekly and without protest in service and in battle.
2. To defend every comrade who is threatened with the slightest danger or who asks for assistance.
3. To advance in front of all others, overtaking those at the front.
4. To defend myself unto injury, which is the only thing that might compel me to abandon a comrade in arms in battle or on the campaign.
5. Not to be captured alive by the enemy.
6. Not to drink spirits.
7. To guard all secrets entrusted to me and not to fraternize with the

enemy.

8. To be tolerant of the political convictions of my comrades in arms.
9. To never lose faith ? to believe that my death for the motherland and for the freedom of Russia is happiness and the justification of my oath.
10. To declare myself an enemy of the people and be expelled from the ranks of the revolutionary army if I do not fulfill this oath.

Source:

Tsentrarkhiv 1917 god v dokumentakh i materialakh. M. N. Pokrovskii and Ia. A. Iakovlev, eds., *Razlozhenie armii v 1917* (Moscow: Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1923), 69-70.