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At the Head of the Black Banner Army: Marusya Nikiforova in 1917–18

Abstract

The article presents the author's search for and systematization of miscellaneous materials on campaign record of the Marusya Nikiforova' unit on the territories of the Kherson and Yekateroslav gubernias and the Province of the Don Cossack Host. The name of Maria Grigorievna Nikiforova is inextricably linked with the history of Russian anarchism; her activities

still serve as an illustration of the events of the Civil War in Russia. The article uses information from memoirs of the participants in revolutionary events written in the 1920s. It establishes main points in detachment's movement through the cities and towns of the South of Russia from autumn 1917 to summer 1918. The collected materials show that the detachment size ranged from 100 to 500 people, fluctuating under the influence of military circumstances. The popularity of M. Nikiforova was served by her own actions aiming to make her name known. The anarchist deliberately brought about a bloody phase of social conflict, establishing the practice of requisitions and "unmotivated" executions. In September–October 1917, she contributed to radicalization of another anarchist, N. I. Makhno. Her detachment was formed in November 1917 in Aleksandrovsk, Yekaterinoslav gubernia. In December 1917, it took part in battles with the Haidamaks. In February 1918, during the demobilization of the old army, Marusya's detachment moved to strengthen the front. In Yelisavetgrad, Kherson gubernia, Nikiforova proceeded with requisitions, provoking street battles with the city's Red Guard and self-defense units. Her allies were reserve detachment of the army of the Ukrainian People's Republic of Soviets under the command of A. M. Belenkevich and the Red Guard detachment of Yekaterinoslav workers. She retreated under the Austro-German troops' pressure together with the Bolshevik—Left SRs—anarchist detachments following the railway line of Yelisavetgrad—Krivoy Rog (Dolgintsevo)—Melitopol—Taganrog—Novocherkassk. Clashes with enemy units were unfortunate for Nikiforova. Her detachment was losing numbers and military equipment. Combat successes were insignificant. Marusya's detachment arrived at Tsaritsyn, bleeding and exhausted. It did not participate in the robbery of the "golden" echelon of the Don Council of People's Commissars. Unlike commanders of other detachments, who retreated from the territory of Ukraine, Maria Nikiforova did not fight as part of the Red Army. Nikiforova's name became an element of mass consciousness in the days of the revolution. The legendary veil encourages exaggeration of her role in the military events. She had a direct, albeit short-term, impact on expanding of the boundaries of the "permissible" in an internal armed conflict in Russia.

Keywords

Civil War in Russia, 1917–18, Marusya Nikiforova, A. V. Mokrousov, anarchist detachments, Austro-German occupation.

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