Foreign medical personnel and formations in the Russian army during World War I

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Abstract

Using materials from the archives of the Russian Red Cross Society (RRCS) and the official Vedomosti Krasnogo Kresta (Red Cross Gazette) periodical for 1914–1917, it is shown that international charity activity provided important assistance in the work of the RRCS in providing medical assistance to the wounded and sick Russian soldiers. The support received by the RRCS from the international community was not limited to monetary donations and the supply of medicines and medical equipment: the provision of medical personnel was no less important. An analysis of foreign experts' contribution to the organization of the medical and sanitary service of the Russian army allows us to conclude that the desire to provide all possible assistance in the treatment of Russian soldiers was inherent in both individual specialists and whole medical detachments. The foreigners worked in the local RRCS medical and sanitary institutions; citizens from allied and neutral states took part in courses and joined the Russian sisters of mercy communities. The work of foreign medical units in the Russian army was examined by studying the example of the activities of the Anglo-Russian hospital and the infirmary of the Japanese Red Cross in Petrograd, the American hospital in Kiev, the mobile hospital of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Danish and Bulgarian sanitary detachments. A conclusion is drawn that they were subject to double subordination – from international benefactors and the RRCS. Decisions concerning the organization, selection of personnel and payment of salaries, medical support and activities of these formations were regulated by foreign founders, RRCS took them under its patronage in Russia and provided the necessary work conditions, i.e. provided for all their financial needs. A Russian leader was appointed in all foreign medical formations and the staff was complemented with local personnel - doctors, nurses, orderlies, and others.

Keywords

Russian Red Cross Society, International Relief, Sisters of Mercy, Anglo-Russian Hospital, American Hospital, Japanese Red Cross Infirmary, Dutch Mobile Infirmary, Danish Sanitary Detachment, Slavic Charity Association

Introduction

The work of the Russian Red Cross Society (RRCS) and the development of the national charity movement during World War I have been examined in relatively great detail in local historiography. Alongside private citizens, the state was involved in charity work and regularly allocated significant grants from the budget for these purposes. State funding of the RRCS enabled to utilise its resources to solve tasks which official institutions could not cope with, particularly the provision of medical support to the army. The RRCS was involved in recruiting medical professionals, providing medicines, medical instruments, equipment, clothes and food to all medical and sanitary institutions within its jurisdiction. Under its auspices were nursing societies, whose members formed the core of mid-level medical staff in institutions of the RRCS itself and the military department. Fast-track courses for training nursing staff opened at its initiative. All non-governmental medical services (infirmaries, hospitals, sanitary trains, mobile detachments, etc), which were created by both public and charitable organisations – the All-Russian Zemstvo Union, the All-Russian Union of Cities, nobility assemblies and others – were brought under the remit of the RRC during World War I. RRCS institu-

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tions were better equipped, had much more comfortable working conditions for medical staff and offered better care for the sick and wounded compared to similar institutions in the military department (Makarov 1951, p. 354–355).

Another vital source of funding for the RRCS was international charity work. Matters relating to the RRCS receiving aid from foreign states are virtually not reflected in local research studies. However, funding and supplies from abroad provided invaluable assistance in ensuring proper operation of medical, evacuation and sanitary departments of the RRCS. Under the patronage of Empress Dowager Maria Fedorovna, the RRCS was actively involved in international work, providing and receiving aid from foreign states. The aid essentially amounted to a collection of monetary donations; purchase and shipment of scarce medicines, medical equipment, transport, clothes and food to Russia; the creation of medical detachments and the organisation of various medical institutions in Russian army units (hospitals, infirmaries, mobile detachments) for operations in the rear and at the front. Information about the work of the RRCS was regularly published in periodical press. In particular, the International Activities section of the monthly magazine Vedomosti Krasnogo Kresta (Red Cross Gazette) for 1914-1917 published reports on all types of charitable aid received by RRCS from abroad. Some reports were duplicated in various editions and numerous events were published in several editions of the magazine. For instance, information on foreign hospitals or detachments was published throughout their stay in Russia, which enables to reconstruct the features of the organisation and activities of these institutions. The work of some foreign specialists and medical formations (the Anglo-Russian hospital in Petrograd, the American hospital in Kiev, the infirmary of the Japanese Red Cross in Petrograd, etc) was used as an example in attempting to demonstrate the assistance provided by the foreign medical community and private individuals to the RRCS during World War I.

Foreign medical personnel

The medical service of the Russian army was experiencing a shortage of both medical staff and medical and sanitary institutions during World War I. In order to mitigate the shortage of medical staff at the front, fourth-year students at the Military Medical Academy were drafted as acting physicians, foreign doctors and nurses were enlisted, and cooperation was established with medical institutions of allied and neutral states that were willing to provide medical assistance to wounded soldiers (Chizh et al. 2018, p. 82).

The RRCS headquarters regularly received letters from foreign professionals offering help. The letters came from doctors, nurses and representatives of exis-

ting medical detachments asking to serve in the Russian army, as well as private individuals seeking to take nursing courses in Russia. Danish surgeon F. Hansen, who had worked in South America and Abyssinia, offered his services to the Russian army (Predlozhenie datskogo hirurga 1915). An american citizen, doctor of medicine from New York University, Nevon Mezropa Boyadjan, applied to be assigned to the Caucasus front (Pribytie amerikanskogo sanitarnogo otryada 1915). Dutch surgeon Tienhoven, who had worked in the Dutch detachment of the Red Cross during the Balkan Wars, was willing to come to Russia with a detachment (consisting of a doctor and three or four nurses), fully equipped with surgical instruments in order to provide assistance to the RRCS (Predlozhenie Niderlandskogo hirurgicheskogo otryada 1783). The Czech community in Chicago dispatched a medical detachment consisting of doctors and nurses to Russia (Cheshskij otryad iz Chikago 1915). The Chinese government assembled and sent a Red Cross detachment to the eastern theatre of operations (Pribytie anglijskogo i amerikanskogo otryada... 1914).

The shortage of medical staff was so high that even foreigners who had not certified their qualifications at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were allowed to work in the RRCS. One war-time announcement stated: "Persons with medical degrees from foreign universities may be accepted to serve in the Red Cross regardless of whether they are permitted for trials in Russia" (Priem vrachej... 1914). All professionals who could prove their qualifications were accepted for work. Four English nurses (Ada Wilkenson, Agenssa Grey, Maria Nicolson and Violetta Terston), who had presented their certificates of the "Order of Saint John of Jerusalem", obtained permits from the headquarters to work in Red Cross hospitals (Spisok sester miloserdiya... 195, p. 923; Pozhertvovanie russkogo posol'stva 1914).

Furthermore, foreigners were able to take a special nursing course during World War I. The Odessa committee of the Union of French Women opened French Red Cross courses for 60 people on 5 October 1914. After completing a theoretical course for providing care to the wounded, the graduates were able to join Russian or French hospitals to provide assistance (Kursy frantsuzskogo... 1914). Chinese subject Fu Tan Zhi (Sestra miloserdiya-kitayanka 1915), German subject M.A. Wehmeyer (Otkaz v prieme... 1915), French citizens Louisa, Theresa and Elimilia Herme, a swiss citizen Henrieta Lidia Sineder (Inostranki – russkie sestry miloserdiya 1915) and others completed war-time Russian nursing courses. In rare cases, "owing to excellence in both theoretical and practical work", subjects of allied states could be enrolled as war-time nurses in one of the Russian nursing societies (Inostranki - russkie sestry miloserdiya 1915) and assigned to military hospitals. The Gerbovetskaya nursing society enrolled Italian subject Glikeria Kochi, who had passed examinations and impeccably discharged her duties (Italianka – russkaya sestra miloserdiya 1915). After completing courses, French citizens Valentina Antonovna Shav and Josephine Stepanovna Anteres, joined the Ekaterinoslavskaya nursing society and were assigned to the Red Cross hospital ship "Portugal" (Frantsuzhenki – russkie sestry miloserdiya 1915). However, after completing the course, and despite being born and raised in the Russian Empire, German subject Wehmeyer was categorically denied both rank and assignment to the theatre of operations (Otkaz v prieme... 1915). Her nationality could be one of the reasons behind this decision.

Representatives of the international medical community strived to provide the Russian army and the RRCS all possible assistance in treating and caring for the wounded and sick. Private doctors and entire medical detachments from foreign states were willing to work in medical and sanitary institutions of the RRCS, and women were willing to join nursing societies to provide care to wounded Russians at the rear and at the front.

American hospital in Kiev

Among foreign medical institutions operating under the auspices of the RRCS were several hospitals from the United States of America. From 1914 to 1915, American detachments of the Red Cross regularly travelled to Russia. American hospitals worked on the South-Western (a surgical hospital in Kiev with 500 beds) (Amerikanskiy otryad 1914), Eastern (a hospital with a maxillary department with 40 beds and "an odontology laboratory") (Sokolova 2014, p. 190) and the Caucasus (a hospital in Khoy with 200 beds)¹ fronts.

A medical detachment of the Red Cross Society from the United North American States consisting of 6 surgeons and 25 nurses, equipped with considerable amounts of dressing and surgical materials and medicines, arrived in Petrograd at the outbreak of the war (August 1914) (Pribytie anglijskogo i amerikanskogo otryada... 1914; Druzheskaya pomosch... 1915). The RRCS headquarters complemented the staff of the detachment with Russian personnel (2 doctors, 7 nurses from the Mariinsky Convent and 76 orderlies) and provided additional equipment and 500 beds. Doctors from the American detachment of the Red Cross were allowed to wear "the battle dress uniform of Russian doctors - senior doctors - shoulder loops for the rank of State Counsellor, senior orderlies - Collegiate Counsellor, and junior doctors- Court Councillor" (Amerikanskiy otryad 1914). With this make-up, the American detachment arrived in Kiev on 16 October 1914, where in order to open a hospital, the detachment was allocated the building of the Kiev Polytechnical Institute, and the staff was accommodated in hotel Francois (Amerikanskiy otryad 1914). By June 1915, the hospital has treated more than 3500 wounded Russian soldiers. In September 1915, a detachment was assembled from the hospital staff and dispatched to Khoy (Persia) (Chizh et al. 2018, p. 83). According to reports from the RRCS "medical assistance in the hospital of the North American Red Cross Society is always accompanied by the most humane and warm-hearted treatment our wounded by the representatives of the American people working in the hospital" (Druzheskaya pomosch... 1915). The Russian imperial government petitioned the American Red Cross Society not to recall American doctors, nurses and medical institutions operating in the field forces (Amerikanskiy otryad Krasnogo Kresta 1916). The hospital staff was also thanked and received numerous awards for its dedicated service. In 1916, three senior nurses - Elena Hay, Charlotte Burjet and Lucia Munigerode - received gold medals, and thirty-three nurses received silver medals "For Diligence" to be worn on the breast on the ribbon of the Order of St. Anne (Nagrady 1916).

Anglo-Russian hospital in Saint Petersburg

An English detachment led by renowned surgeon Sir Frederick Travers was among the first to arrive in Russia in 1914 (Pribytie anglijskogo i amerikanskogo otryada... 1914). The English set up five hospitals in Saint Petersburg: the King George V city hospital at 55 Nevsky Prospect (Pozhertvovanie Anglijskogo Korolya 1915); the hospital of the Anglo-Russian assembly at 16 Palace Embankment; infirmaries for wounded Russian soldiers on Vasilyevsky Island and 77 Bolshoi Prospect. The largest Anglo-Russian hospital opened in the palace of Grand Duke Dmitry Pavlovich, at the corner of Nevsky and Fontanka Quay.²

At the end of July 1915, under the chairmanship of Lord Cheylesmore, "a special committee was assembled, whose objective was to establish, using funds raised in England, an Anglo-Russian hospital" in Russia for wounded and sick soldiers.³ Among its donors were members of the English royal family, foreign governments (the Canadian government donated 10 000 pounds sterling) (Telegramma Ego Vysochestva... 1915), private individuals, organisations and companies (the Russian and English Bank in Petrograd – 10 000 rubles, the Scottish branch of the Red

¹ Russian State Military Historical Archive (RGVIA). F. 12733 "Gospital ROKK Severo-Amerikanskikh Soedinennikh Shtatov pri Kavkazskoy armii" [The United North American States RRCS hospital of the Caucasus army]. Op. 1 D. 25 "Perepiska o personale gospitalya" [Correspondence on hospital staff] L. 24.

² RGVIA F. 12780 Op. 1 "Anglo-russky gospital ROKK" [Anglo-Russian Hospital of the RRCS]

RGVIA F. 12651 Op. 1 D. 1537 L. 1.

Cross – 5 000 pounds sterling) (Kuptsova 2011, p. 90). The English committee of the founders paid the wages of the hospital staff. The RRCS took over the setting up of the hospital, allocating 30 000 rubles for this purpose. The hospital had the high patronage of the ruling class, as a result of which it was named: "The Queen Alexandra Anglo-Russian Hospital Under the Most August Patronage of Her Majesties the Empresses" (Gospital' anglo-russkogo komiteta 1916).

The hospital, which could take up to 200 wounded individuals, was operational from 1 February 1916 to January 1918 (Kuptsova 2011, p. 89). It consisted of a mobile infirmary with 50 beds; horse-drawn transport consisting of 20 sanitary carts and a wagon train; a motor column consisting of 6 cars. The motor column was organised by Hilda Vin, who had bought the first cars using her own personal funds (two ambulances and one private car) and found English drivers for the vehicles. The committee⁴ paid for the rest of the cars and the car repair shop. In addition, the committee handed over 27 ambulances with personnel to the RRCS headquarters to cater for the needs of the Russian army (Podarok Komiteta... 1916).

Further, the "Anglo-Russian advance detachment named after Queen Alexandra of Great Britain and Ireland"5 was assembled from the hospital staff to work at the front (Anglo-russkij peredovoj otryad... 1916). Upon its arrival from Saint Petersburg, the leadership of the detachment was entrusted to the head of the detachment – Mozyrsky district marshal of nobility B.A. Ignatyev, his assistant – member of the State Duma A.F. Meiyendorf and the representative of the Anglo-Russian Committee - Lady Sybil Grey. The detachment comprised: senior surgeon V.D. Harmer, two junior doctors - M. Gardner and C.G. Grey, dentist H. Harison, medical assistant F.D. Magnelli (student) and senior nurse S.S. Robertson, five junior nurses -D. Cotton, S. Boycott, B. Carlin, N.R. Bricks and E. Anichkova, matron E.A. Istomina, superintendent, head of horse-drawn transport and a clerk, i.e., both English and Russian subjects. Owing to the "desire of the entire staff of the Anglo-Russian hospital in Petrograd to work in the advance detachment at the front",⁶ the composition of the detachment changed very frequently. Ambulances of the hospital also took part in the detachment's work in the theatre of operations. In his report on the activities of the advance detachment, B.A. Ignatyev noted that "Ms. Vin and her chauffeurs certainly demonstrated personal courage and the desire to work".7

At the front, the detachment operated as part of the 2nd Guard Division of the 27th Army Corps of the

Western Front. Initially, an infirmary with 50 beds was deployed in the small town of Molodechnoe, where the first 40 wounded people were treated. On 15 July 1916, the detachment was relocated to the South-Western front, where it was located in the village of Rozhishche. An infirmary, not with 50, but with 100 beds was deployed here, and the number of beds was subsequently increased to 166. Despite Red Cross insignia, the detachment came under aerial bombardment on numerous occasions. In one such occasion, orderly Fedorov was killed and two English subjects - motor mechanic Hans and orderly Peredera – were wounded. After three months, 667 wounded individuals had been treated in the infirmary and horse-drawn transport had evacuated 1100 people. A mobile detachment, which was a department operating independently in the area of the village of Sorosino, was soon created from the staff of the detachment. Four hundred and forty-two wounded individuals were delivered and 287 dressings were carried out. Official representatives of the Anglo-Russian Committee worked in the mobile detachment alongside medical staff. The head of the advance detachment B.A. Ignatyev noted the "special courage demonstrated by the secretary of the Anglo-Russian Committee Lady Muriel Pejet, who was voluntarily working in the mobile detachment when she was struck by shrapnel".8 For their courage and bravery, some nurses of the Anglo-Russian hospital received awards, and sister Louis was twice awarded the Georgian medal.9

The infirmary of the Japanese Red Cross in Petrograd

In 1914, as a token of its sincere and friendly relations with Russia, the Tokyo administration sent a detachment of the Japanese Red Cross, well equipped with staff and all the necessary materials and 200 beds for the needs of the Russian army (Pribytie anglijskogo i amerikanskogo otryada... 1914). The detachment consisted of four surgeons, a priest, two pharmacists and seven nurses. It was led by renowned Japanese surgeon, doctor of medicine, professor Ieno. Professor Ieno had worked at German universities for four years after graduating from a medical faculty in Tokyo. The other doctors were also "known in their homeland as experienced and good surgeons". Father Pavel Morita, who accompanied the detachment, was the senior priest of the Bogoyavlenskaya church in Tokyo and "and the close aide to the enlightener of Japan, bishop Nikolai" (Otryad yaponskogo Krasnogo Kresta... 1914). Led by head nurse Tomi Toshonari, the nurses (Mina Ioshida, Fuio Nagai, Natsu Orugi, Vika Okava, Fumi Shugiyama and Rip Fukuda) passed a special selection process

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⁴ RGVIA F. 12651 Op. 1 D. 1537 L. 4.

⁵ Ibid. L. 1.

⁶ Ibid. L. 7.

⁷ Ibid. L. 4.

⁸ RGVIA F.12651. Op. 1 D. 1537 L. 14.

Ibid. L. 15.

at the Japanese Red Cross (Spisok sester miloserdiya... 1915, p. 924). These nurses had vast medical experience and had participated in the Russo-Japanese War. The entire staff of the detachment was proficient in Russian language "so much that they could easily speak with the wounded". The detachment brought from Japan 1600 poods of medicines and different equipment, including "an excellent X-ray examination apparatus" (Otryad yaponskogo Krasnogo Kresta... 1914).

Russian personnel was assigned to the Japanese detachment during its stay in Petrograd: two doctors, nine nurses from the Kaufman society (Kraynyukov et al. 2017, p. 101), 10 caregivers and the same number of orderlies (Osvyashenie yaponskogo lazareta 1915). Following a request by the chairman of the medical committee of the RRCS B.M. Sharipov, the infirmary was allocated the entire top floor of the new building of the Noble Assembly for critically wounded lower rank officials (Otryad yaponskogo Krasnogo Kresta... 1914). The infirmary was lit up on 6 December 1914, with the Japanese ambassador baron Motono and his wife, representatives of the Japanese community in Petrograd and the medical and sanitary staff in attendance (Osvyashenie yaponskogo lazareta 1915). The staff of the Japanese Red Cross Society was initially expected to work in Russia for five months. However, it was only a year later, due to "exhaustion and need" for rest, that the staff was replaced by a new detachment of four doctors, two assistants and 20 nurses (Takahashi 2004, p. 108). The head of the hospital in Nagasaki Dr. Kino, who was tasked with assembling a new detachment of nurses, noted that the number of people wishing to go to Russia turned out much more than was needed (Yaponskiy Krasny Krest... 1915).

Medical formations of neutral states

Besides allied states (Skribnaya 2015, p. 34), many neutral states were also involved in setting up foreign medical units in the Russian army. In particular, four infirmaries were set up in Russia at the initiative of Dutch citizens. The first infirmary with 40 beds for wounded officers opened on 24 August 1914 at the home of the Dutch consul in Petrograd. The second infirmary for 20 wounded lower rank officials opened on 9 November 1914 "in the building of the Children's Sanatorium in Tsarskoe Selo".¹⁰ The decision to create a third infirmary was made on 7 April 1915 at a meeting of the council of the Dutch Reformed Church in Petrograd. Throughout the war, this infirmary operated as a separate unit of the field hospital of Empress Maria Fedorovna.¹¹ In March 1916, the wife of former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mrs. Heemskerk, handed over a fourth hospital with 100 beds to the RRCS (Niderlandskiy gospital... 1916).

On 2 July 1915, the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs notified the RRCS headquarters that the Danish committee of auxiliary sanitary detachments "is able to provide Her Majesty Empress Maria Fedorovna a detachment of 3 doctors and 10 nurses for the RRCS"12 (Datskiy otryad v Rossii 1915). The detachment was equipped in Copenhagen using private donations and was meant for operation in the hinterland (Pomosch Datskogo Krasnogo Kresta... 1915). The equipment and recruitment of personnel was led by professor Eilers (Datskiy medicinskiy otryad 1915). Dr. Anton Pederson was appointed head of the detachment and Dr. Hans Graude¹³ was appointed his assistant. The Danish Committee took care of travelling expenses, as well as wages of doctors and nurses. The RRCS handled food and accommodation expenses of the detachment. The detachment departed from Denmark in October 1915 and by January 1916 it was already at the disposal of the chief representative of the RRCS in the Northern District (Saint Petersburg, 19 Liteyniy Prospect). This is confirmed by correspondence between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the RRCS headquarters on 14 January 1916, which contains information on letters received from Denmark addressed to the nurses of the detachment.14

Through private donations, the Slavic Charity Association in Bulgaria equipped a sanitary mission consisting of three doctors, five nurses, two medical students and two orderlies, led by experienced surgeon Morfov. As in the case with the Danish medical detachment, the mission was provided with surgical instruments, dressing materials and medicines, but it had no "facilities for itself or for the wounded" (Bolgarskiy sanitarny otryad 1914). The Russian side had to provide facilities, clothes, food supplies, etc. In other words it was tasked with dealing with domestic matters. The Headquarters of the Red Cross, "recognising the assistance offered as desirable", on 1 November 1914 dispatched the "Bulgarian sanitary detachment named after the Slavic Charity Association" to Caucasus under the Chief Representative of the RRCS, baron Knoring (Bolgarskiy sanitarny otryad 1914). Even the severance

¹⁰ RGVIA F. 12799 Op. 1 D. 6 "Perepiska russko-gollandskogo otdeleniya lazareta s administratsiei ROKK" [Correspondence between the Russian-Dutch department of the infirmary with the RRCS administration] L. 3.

¹¹ RGVIA F. 12799 Op. 1 "Podvizhny lazaret Imperatritsi Marii Fedorovna ROKK Kievskoy gubernii" [The RRCS mobile hospital of Empress Maria Fedorovna in Kiev Province] Description: L. 1.

¹² RGVIA F. 12651 Op. 1 D. 1537 "Delo Kantselyarii Glavnogo Upravlenia ROKK po Datskomu otryadu Krasnogo Kresta" [File from the RRCS Headquarters on the Danish detachment of the Red Cross] Description: L.1

¹³ RGVIA F. 12651 Op. 1 D. 1537 L. 7.

¹⁴ Ibid. L. 13.

of diplomatic ties with Bulgaria did not interfere with the work of the detachment. Until June 1916, the staff of the sanitary mission continued to provide care to the wounded on the Caucasus Front, after which "due to exhaustion", it safely returned home via Sweden (Vozvrashenie v Bolgariyu... 1916).

Several servicemen from the Belgian army operating in Russia assembled a sanitary detachment with 40-50beds for accompanying one military unit. The RRCS headquarters supported its initiative by providing assistance by "handing out clothes, instruments and a small number of other items" (Sanitarny otryad bel'giytsev 1916).

Conclusion

Many foreign medical professionals, doctors and nurses, as well as medical formations set up by civic organisations and private individuals from allied and neutral states worked in Russia during World War I. The work of the Anglo-Russian hospital and the infirmary of the Japanese Red Cross in Petrograd, the American hospital in Kiev, the mobile hospital of the Dutch Reformed Church and the Danish and

Bulgarian sanitary detachments had common features/traits. First of all, they were subject to double subordination from international benefactors and the RRCS, under whose patronage they were on Russian territory. Secondly, commitments on facilitating their work were spread among foreign institutions and the RRCS. The organisation of detachments, recruitment of staff, payment of wages and provision of medicines, medical accessories, equipment and transport was carried out by benefactors. The RRCS was tasked with creating the necessary working conditions: finding facilities, providing clothes, food and resolving other domestic issues. Thirdly, all foreign medical formations were staffed with Russian personnel: a Russian leader was appointed (head of detachment, infirmary, hospital), and the staff included Russian doctors, nurses, orderlies and others.

The work of the representatives of the international medical community became an example of implementing a public initiative. Under the auspices of the RRC, these representatives were involved in providing medical assistance to the wounded in the rear and at the front, saved thousands of wounded Russians and earned "profound heartfelt gratitude" (Druzheskaya pomosch... 1915).

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