

Строительство новых железнодорожных коммуникаций в период Великой Отечественной войны (на примере строительства железной дороги Кизляр-Астрахань в 1941—1942 гг.)

С.В. Виноградов, В.Б. Убушаев, Е.А. Иванова

Аннотация. Ярким и недооцененным в исторической науке эпизодом Великой Отечественной войны стало строительство железной дороги Кизляр-Астрахань (лето 1941 — лето 1942 гг.) Данный транспортный путь стал важным инструментом в снабжении советских войск боеприпасами, продовольствием, а также нефтью и нефтепродуктами из Баку. Помимо этого, дорога Кизляр-Астрахань стала важной частью южного коридора Ленд-Лиза, шедшего из Ирана через Каспийское море.

Ключевые слова: Вторая мировая война, Сталинградская битва, Астрахань, Калмыкия, железная дорога.

Abstract. A vivid episode of the Great Patriotic War was the construction of the Kizlyar-Astrakhan Railroad (summer 1941 — summer 1942). That transport road became an important tool for supplying Soviet troops with ammunition and rations as well as oil and oil products from Baku. Along with this, the Kizlyar-Astrakhan Railroad became an important part of the Southern Corridor Lend-Lease, going from Iran over the Caspian Sea.

Key words: World War II, Battle of Stalingrad, Astrakhan, Kalmykia, railroad.

Workers of railroad transportation contributed greatly to the victory of the USSR over Fascist Germany in the Great Patriotic War. During the war, railroads received the greater share of freight turnover in the country — over 83% of all shipments. Railroad transportation was an important link between the front and the rear, and the effectiveness of its operation had the most direct impact on the course of the war.

During the war, railroad workers transported military equipment, ammunition, and rations over long distances. Thanks to their thorough work they were able to transfer industrial enterprises over a short period in 1941 from the western regions entrenched in fighting over the Urals. They were also able to evacuate hundreds of thousands of qualified workers and managerial and engineering personnel. Soon, the newly opened plants started to produce military goods for the front.

After a radical change in the Great Patriotic War due to a change of circumstances, railroad workers faced other tasks no-less important than the previous: rehabilitation of the injured during fighting on the railroad, a steady supply of all the necessary goods for advancing Soviet troops, providing extraction of the wounded, and so on. Where by all of this had to be done quickly, often under artillery fire and bombings from the retreating enemy. The rate at which the Red Army advanced in 1943—1945 depended greatly on this.

The Red Army's disruption of Operation Barbarossa in the first months of the war, and later the major defeat of the Fascist troops at the Battle of Moscow in December 1941, forced Nazi command to change their plans of further warfare. Fascist Germany no longer had the strength to act with three groups at once, like they had previously done in 1941. They were forced to concentrate their main efforts on a major strike. In 1942, the object of this strike became the southern USSR: the Caucasus and Stalingrad. This region was at the top of the list in the plans of German command for 1942. This was due to its political and military strategic importance ¹.

The Caucasus, with its significant mineral reserves and large area of fertile farmland, acted as a major supply center for the Red Army. Despite the development of a "Second Baku" in the Ural-Volga region before the war, as of 1941, the majority of oil production (more than 85%) was still being carried out in Baku and Grozny. The Baku Region stood out especially for its power and capacity, being called "Big Baku", and whose contribution to the overall production of oil in the Union equaled 75%. Naturally, controlling this "gem of energy" was one of the main goals of the Fascist army in the Southern USSR during the summer campaign of 1942. German strategists sought to deliver one calculated blow to solve their own troubles with oil and oil products and at the same time deprive the USSR of their main energy base. If the plan had been successfully implemented in 1942—1943, the course of the war could have been different ².

Another important goal of attack for the German Army in the South was Stalingrad, the large economic hub of the Volga region. By capturing it, the Fascists would first of all be severing the USSR's important transportation communication in the Volga area which was used for delivering supplies to the front and to the main industrial areas of the country ³. Secondly, ideologists of Fascist Germany understood perfectly well that capturing the city which was named after the leader and was associated with his victories during the civil war would break the fighting spirit of the Soviet people and their determination

Виноградов Сергей Вадимович — доктор исторических наук, профессор Астраханского государственного университета. E-mail: vinogradov-7@yandex.ru; *Убушаев Владимир Бадахевич* — доктор исторических наук, профессор Калмыцкого государственного университета имени Б.Б. Городовикова. E-mail: ubushaev_vb@mail.ru; *Иванова Екатерина Аркадьевна* — кандидат педагогических наук, доцент Санкт-Петербургского политехнического университета Петра Великого. E-mail: ekaterinai@inbox.ru

Vinogradov Sergey V. — Doctor of Historical Sciences, professor of Astrakhan State University. E-mail: vinogradov-7@yandex.ru; *Ubushaev Vladimir B.* — Doctor of Historical Sciences, professor of Kalmyk State University named after B.B. Gorodovikov. E-mail: ubushaev_vb@mail.ru; *Ivanova Ekaterina A.* — PhD (Education), associate professor of Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University. E-mail: ekaterinai@inbox.ru

to resist. In addition, Fascist command focused their further strategic actions on intensifying hostilities against England and the USA in North Africa and in the Middle East as a result of their attack on the southern USSR⁴.

In the resulting conditions, defense in the Caucasus and in Stalingrad became of paramount importance for the Soviet command. The burden lay completely on the armies on the North Caucasian, Transcaucasian, and Southern fronts. By the beginning of the summer campaign of 1942, after the defeat of the Red Army troops at Kharkov, psychological superiority and strength in numbers was with the *Wehrmacht*. In addition, Soviet troops continued to experience difficulties with supplying ammunition. As mentioned above, industry which was relocated to the eastern areas of the country in 1942 only revealed its capacity and was unable to fully satisfy the demand of the front.

By the middle of July 1942, fighting had made it directly to the Stalingrad region. On July 14, martial law was announced there by decree of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet of the USSR. Like never before in the battle there was a transportation problem and the closely related tasks of supplying the armies with everything necessary for battle. In the Volga region, unlike in the western part of the Soviet Union, there were few railroads; other transportation communications capable of supplying the front were practically non-existent⁵. While the frequency of railroad coverage in the western areas of the country under Fascist control made up approximately 70 kilometers for every 1000 square kilometers, the amount was greatly reduced in the Volga region, all the way down to 20 kilometers. The situation was aggravated by the weak management of transportation in terms of the command of military units and local party and state authorities and partially by the pure panic which took over the retreating forces after the defeat at Kharkov. Being fully aware of the importance of railroad transportation, the German command used their dominance of the air to carry out constant airstrikes on the transportation communications which were still under the control of the Red Army. By the middle of July, as a result of the intense bombing, work on railroad transportation in the area southwest of Stalingrad, around the Tikhoretskaya and Likhaya stations, was disrupted. In the end of July, German troops were able to capture the Remontnaya Railway Station of the same line. Thus, the railroad route Stalingrad-Tikhoretskaya was blocked⁶.

In the end of summer-autumn 1942, in a continuation of their focused attack on communications, primarily railroads, around Stalingrad, the Germans began an intense bombing of the Stalingrad-Astrakhan and Astrakhan-Saratov railroad lines, which had been given a significant load of supplying the city and army after the loss of the southwestern lines. As a result of the German airstrikes, a section of the Stalingrad-Povorino railroad, located north of the city, lay in damaged condition: in some places the railroad track was destroyed, the repair base suffered, and a number of depots and cargo-handling stations were incapacitated⁷.

Thus, by the start of the Battle of Stalingrad, the Soviet command faced the serious task of supplying troops fighting in the Stalingrad region. The remaining railroad lines, which were given the main loads, were clearly insufficient and were under constant attack by the Fascist air force. The situation showed the need for new railroad routes to be constructed. The most significant of the projects designed to ease the task of supplying troops was the construction of

the Kizlyar-Astrakhan railroad which would allow port cities on the Caspian Sea to be actively engaged ⁸.

The decision to build the Kizlyar-Astrakhan railroad was made by the Council of People's Commissars of the USSR in August 1941 ⁹. The proposed length of the new line was to equal 360 km ¹⁰. Work on construction began immediately in the first weeks of October 1941 when Soviet troops fought their way out of Kiev, and the Battle of Moscow began.

The majority of the builders were inhabitants of the Astrakhan district, Kalmyk ASSR, and Stavropol territory. In their memoirs, those who took part in the construction recalled the difficult conditions they worked in. It rained frequently and got cold fast, which led to a large amount of colds among the workers and eventually to frostbite. There was an insufficient amount of tools as well as food supplies ¹¹. Work was mostly done by hand. The main tools they had were shovels, picks, crowbars, wheelbarrows, and the like.

Local authorities were of significant help to the workers by delivering food and providing horse-drawn transport for the construction. Each region which the railroad crossed was responsible for supplying inventory and transport for the construction and provided teams of utility workers. Many of these units worked very well and greatly exceeded the estimated result. With each day, the rate of the construction work grew. Due to the mobilization of a significant number of men to the front, many women, elders, and teenagers were among the construction workers. In hopes of quickly finishing construction in certain areas of Kalmykia, local authorities were forced to send high school students and teachers of the surrounding schools to the construction site due to a lack of workers ¹².

By 1 January 1942, 9,500 people and 3,030 carts were working on the railroad. At the same time in January railway ties and rails began to be laid ¹³. Workers faced serious difficulties when ferrying across the Volga River. This presented a serious challenge. The work was unique in many ways. Much of the work on the railroad construction was done for the first time in that spring of 1942. The following describes the technology of the ferry crossings. Rails were laid on two wide barges. Such a ferry could hold up to fifty cars. At the beginning only two ferries were in operation ¹⁴. This, however, was clearly not enough and they could not cope with the increased freight load. There were constant lines of cars with necessary cargo for the front waiting to cross. Such congestion had been the goal of the enemy air force. In August 1942, the fleet of barge ferries was expanded, thanks to which the carrying capacity of the ferries increased. The carrying capacity reached up to five hundred freight cars a day ¹⁵.

In the summer of 1942, fighting drew close to the construction site. Work was continuously interrupted due to raids by the Fascist air force. Lost time had to be made up during the night. In the spring of 1942, the supply of rails dramatically dropped. In order to not reduce the rate of construction, it was decided to remove the side tracks from other lines. In particular, 70 km of the second track of the Minvody-Kislovodsk railroad were dismantled and sent for the construction of the new railroad. Side and secondary tracks of railroads north of Astrakhan were also removed ¹⁶.

Construction of the Kizlyar-Astrakhan railroad was completed on 4 August 4 1942. It was used right away to send trains with cargo to the front.

At the same time the railroad line was being laid, telephone communications were being set up along the track. By June-July 1942, end-to-end communication from the Kizlyar Station to the city of Astrakhan had already gone into operation, and in August 1942, communications between Moscow and Elista were put in place ¹⁷.

Another poorly studied moment in the history of the Battle of Stalingrad was the fight against attempts by the German intelligence and motorized army intelligence groups to disrupt railroad work in the Soviet rear and interfere with the construction of the new tracks. Intelligence agents on the radio had to relay to their command about the movement of especially important trains and had to place mines on the railroads as a means of sabotage ¹⁸.

One important target for the enemy diversion intelligence groups during the Battle of Stalingrad was the Baskunchak-Urbakh railroad line. Part of the agents who were sent to the Soviet rear were former military personnel who had been captured by the Germans. In many cases the recruited prisoners, once arriving on Soviet soil, came to the NKVD to confess. In one case, on September 12, 1942, in one settlement of Urda in the Kazakh USSR, two parachuters abandoned by the enemy willingly came to Soviet authorities. Their names were I.G. Baklunov and A.G. Galandzovsky. It later turned out that they had gone through special training in Poltava in the Abwehr's school for intelligence agents. They were provided the necessary fake documents, a compass, maps, a significant sum of money, and food rations for 10 days for completion of the mission. The objective of the parachuters was to disable a stretch of the Upper Baskunchak-Shungay railroad, as well as to eliminate the leaders of the Red Army. In their testimonies, Baklunov and Galandzovsky reported other German agents they knew of who had been sent to the Soviet rear before them ¹⁹.

During the Battle of Stalingrad the construction of the Kizlyar-Astrakhan railroad was of great interest to enemy intelligence services. Protection of the construction was assigned to the 47th brigade of the railroad troops of the People's Commissariat of communication lines (Col. V.M. Galynin) and the armed service divisions of the Red Army's rear. They faced the task of preventing any disruption to construction by intelligence units who had infiltrated the construction area ²⁰.

Due to the nature of the Kizlyar-Astrakhan line running mainly through empty, unpopulated areas, defending it was accomplished through the use of mobile groups equipped with vehicles and horse-drawn transportation. Each of these groups included approximately 150 soldiers. Furthermore, on 18 August 1942, by order on the 47th brigade, three battalions of this division were selected to lead general military reconnaissance at a depth of up to 50 km to the west of the railroad under construction. A company of 40 vehicles from the 36th motorized battalion was transferred to the 47th brigade to complete the mission. Communication between intelligence officers was carried out over a selector, using the call sign "Defense", as well as by messengers. The 47th brigade was strengthened by the 110th cavalry division, and the 30th division of armored trains monitoring the whole length of the track (along the completed areas). The armored trains were based out of the Ulan-Khol Railroad Station located in Kalmykia. The brigade's infantry were lodged at the Zenzeli and Yandyki stations. Their objective was to protect the railroad against any attempt from motorized military groups of the German Army to break through ²¹.

All attempts of the Fascists to penetrate the defense of the 47th brigade were successfully quelled, and the enemy groups were destroyed. In one case, on 22 August 1942, a mobile enemy group of 12 vehicles came to the railroad not far from Zenzeli Station. The Fascists blew up one section of the railroad and destroyed the line of communication. They were met by a mobile group of the 47th brigade and the armored trains. The Germans did not engage and retreated. Soviet soldiers did not wait for workers to arrive and began work on repairing the railroad which would already be complete the very next day on August 23. The greatest losses to the defenders of the railroad were inflicted by enemy aircraft. The situation was intensified by the lack of anti-aircraft guns and machine guns for the defenders of the railroad. More than a hundred people suffered as a result of the airstrikes of 15 August 1942. On September 16, a Fascist tank intelligence company broke through to the Zenzeli Station. The Fascists were able to shoot a freight train and destroyed the rails. However, thanks to the efforts of soldiers from the 47th brigade the enemy was driven away from the track ²².

As a direct result of the breakthroughs by the German motorized groups, measures were taken to increase the effectiveness of railroad defense. Taking into consideration the experience of fighting a large group of intelligence agents destroyed in the area around the railroad on 30 September 1942, the area under the responsibility of lieutenant colonel Bezviselny's division, with an expanse of 580 km, was divided into five-kilometer sections, each of which were guarded round-the-clock by patrols of five soldiers. The patrols were armed with PPSH-41 submachine guns and anti-tank grenades. In case of an attack on the guarded section, one of the battalions stationed nearby would quickly join the fight armed with machine guns, anti-tank guns, and cannons. An operational order from October 3 required the troops to periodically (once a week) play offense and defense against the landing troops with a pragmatic exit onto the inter-station section of the track ²³. In order to identify enemy agents, NKVD would periodically check documents in towns closest to the railroad.

Finally, the successfully organized defense of the communications of the front during the Battle of Stalingrad was thanks to the failed plans of the Fascist military command to destroy the railroads. The effective combat against enemy agents became one of the important reasons for the success of the Soviet troops' counteroffensive on 19 November 1942, which proved a complete surprise to the Fascist command ²⁴.

Thus, the Kizlyar-Astrakhan railroad line was created in a short time (summer 1941 — summer 1942), in difficult climate conditions, and through the hard work of Soviet citizens. The launch of this railroad line made it possible to better supply Soviet troops during the most difficult period of the Battle of Stalingrad and in the end led to the victory of the Red Army in this crucial battle of World War II. Since 1943 freights delivered to the Red Army through Land-Lease have actively been carried across the Kizlyar-Astrakhan railroad over its southern line through Iran.

References:

1. The History of World War II. Vol. 5. Moscow. 1975, p. 15—18.
2. YANUSH S.V. Military Organization of the Soviet Army during the Battle of the Caucasus (1942—1943). Stavropol. 2005, p. 80.
3. ANDRONOV I.V. From the History of the Battle of the Caucasus). Moscow. 1969, p. 17.
4. YANUSH S.V. Military Organization of the Soviet Army during the Battle of the Caucasus (1942—1943). Stavropol. 2005, p. 80.
5. KUMANEV G.A. Service in the Frontline and the Rear. Moscow. 1976, p. 77.
6. Ibid., p. 169.
7. POLSKAYA A.I. Patriotism of Workers in the Astrakhan Region during the War. Astrakhan. 1975, p. 11—12.
8. KHARLAMOV Y.A. The Oil Highway. In: Questions of Russian and Foreign History. Coll. of Articles. Stavropol. 2002, p. 21.
9. LEVIN E.I. The Road of Courage. — Volga, 09.05.1975.
10. LEVIN E.I. From the History of Constructing the Kizlyar-Astrakhan Railroad. — Gudok, 28.11.1967.
11. Veterans remember. — Volga, 04.05.1976.
12. LEVIN E.I. From the History of Constructing...
13. LEVIN E.I. The Road of Courage...
14. POLSKAYA A.I. Patriotism of Workers..., p. 15.
15. KHARLAMOV Y.A. The Oil Highway..., p. 22.
16. KUMANEV G.A. Service in the Frontline..., p. 172.
17. KHARLAMOV Y.A. The Oil Highway..., p. 30.
18. GRITSENKO M.N. Technical Coverage of Railroad Junction Facilities in Stalingrad. In: The Lesser-Known Pages of the Great Patriotic War. Moscow. 1990, p. 61.
19. OPALEV M.N. Defense and Protection of Railroad Communications during the Great Patriotic War. In: Constructing the Astrakhan-Kizlyar Railroad: its role and significance. Materials from the regional scientific and practical conference for the 70th anniversary of the construction of the Astrakhan-Kizlyar Railroad. Elista. 2012, p. 50.
20. ZAYTSEV V.I. Performing a Soldier's Duty. Moscow. 1987, p. 18.
21. Railroad Troops during the Great Patriotic War of 1941—1945. Ed. G.I. Kogatko. Moscow. 1995, p. 34.
22. Ibid., p. 35.
23. ZAYTSEV V.I. Performing a Soldier's Duty..., p. 19.
24. KRASNOZHENOVA E.E., KULIK S.V. Stalingrad during the German-fascist occupation (July 1942 — February 1943), — Modern History of Russia. Vol. 8, No. 4. 2018, p. 841—853.