

Report to the Central Committee from the Front

From: Butt, V.P.; Myshov, N.A.; Swain, G.R. (Eds.): The Russian Civil War. Documents from the Soviet Archives. St. Martin's Press: London, 1996, 100-102.

Archive location: RTsKhIDNI, f 17, op. 65, ed. khr. 155, l. 48

Balashov [a town on the Southern Front]: Report to Central Committee 3 November 1919, signed at end 'Beloborodov'

Dear Comrades

Evidently we should conclude that the enemy has finished his operation against our army. Over the last two days our divisions have begun to push forward without encountering any resistance. Our men have occupied the stations Samodurovok and Povorino almost without a fight. As far as we can judge by the information at our disposal, the enemy is regrouping his forces in order to make a new thrust on the right flank of the 9th Army and the left flank of the 8th Army (in the area of the stations Koleno and Borisoglebsk). It is quite obvious that Denikin has exhausted his reserves of men for service. While I have been with the 23rd Division half of the prisoners who have come into our hands are old men from 49 to 55 years. The prisoners are not in any official uniform; they are going into action wearing the clothes in which they left home. If our soldiers are badly off for uniform, that is absolutely not because things are lacking, but arises from the scandalous, exasperating disorganization of our supply system.

There is as yet no perceptible inflow of active, efficient workers into this branch of our organization (I am taking the 9th Army as an example). For this same reason our soldiers go hungry, since in areas where military operations are actually taking place one will never see a single food supply commission charged with buying food. Cavalry units especially suffer from this, being frequently moved about: the supply commissions are completely unable to attend to their needs. Our cavalry have a miserable time through the fault of another body, the so-called 'purchasing commission'. They, too, stay far back in the rear and work slowly, at a snail's pace. The cavalry units get no remounts and the men (horsemen with no

horses) are left hanging around in the baggage trains.

The army's sanitary and medical services are still in a disgusting state. The typhus epidemic has stopped and cases of typhus are now quite rare, but, on the other hand, care for our wounded is terribly badly organized, particularly any form of first aid to be given during a battle. I spent two days near our advanced positions; men who came out of the line had to drag themselves along for several *versts* before they could get a first dressing for their wounds. This was happening during very fierce fighting in the 23rd Division's sector (in the area of the station Budarino).

There is no reading matter in the front lines. I had to cover about 200 *versts* in the course of a week, and I did not see a single newspaper, even in the rear areas. Neither the Red Army men, nor the command staff, nor the commissars have any idea at all of what is going on in the world. Even the RVS has been without a newspaper for more than a week. It naturally is impossible to carry out any political work in such conditions. The radio station is taken up with operational work and thus the whole army finds itself cut off from the world outside. We are setting to work all that collection of people who are hanging about in the rear with nothing to do. If we can get some intake of Party workers from the centre it will allow us to brush up our complement of commissars, who are mainly an exceedingly uninspiring and inactive bunch.

A certain lull at the front will now give us the chance to get some reinforcements into the divisions. In the 9th Army there are really only two divisions left, the 22nd and 23rd. In the 14th Division and in each of the brigades of Divisions 36 and 21 there are only a handful of men.

The 56th Division (formerly 4th Ukrainian Division) has been completely disbanded, in view of its absolute collapse under the enemy's blows, and thereafter. The final break-up of the Division was brought about by the commanders, who were thoroughly rotten, and by its useless political workers. To crown it all, the remnants of the Division arranged a meeting yesterday, and discussed the order to advance. They sent a delegation to the RVS. The delegation has been placed under arrest and will be shot; the Red Army men are being disarmed

today and every tenth one will be shot. The Division was made up of Ukrainian peasants.

Our chief affliction, as before, remains the enemy's cavalry. Our infantry have never ceased to fear it, in spite of the greater fire power on our side. Besides their special cavalry strike units, on the flank of each infantry regiment the enemy places a squadron of cavalry (100-200 strong), and by passing round our flanks these force our infantry to fall back. Our own special commissions to deal with cavalry will not be much use, because they are too small in number. The specialists who are meant to give training to the infantry are a completely incompetent lot, less experienced than our average front line troops, and have much to learn themselves before they start teaching others. The only thing the commissions can do is to concentrate the active service commanders' attention on working out methods to combat cavalry. They will do a certain amount of good in this way. At the present moment Army HQ is moving to Serdobsk. Here in Balashov there remain only the RVS and the Army Commander with his operations section. If the enemy relaxes his pressure the other parts of headquarters will be brought back to Balashov.

With comradely greetings A. Beloborodov

P.S. The Army has absolutely no paper. If there was paper it would be possible to work up a strong leaflet campaign among the enemy's units. Our air force ^{is} working splendidly. I cannot praise the pilots' conduct too highly. The aircraft sometimes get up to 20 holes when they are carrying out reconnaissance and literature drops. Pressure must be brought to bear on the Head of Paper Supply to stop printing all unnecessary material, concentrating only on what is essential for our defense.

True signature B.