This date is special for Russians. More than 75 years ago, in the June of 1941, the Great Patriotic War began, which remains in the memory of many generations of Russian citizens. The author introduces the heroic pages of the war years in the polar region and Karelia, where in harsh Arctic conditions and environment of fighting for every inch of front-line ground railmen, water transport workers, dockers helped to survive our soldiers and sailors, population in the fight against the enemy.

**Keywords:** transport communications, history, World War II, polar region, Karelia, belt road, front, railway, port, water transport.

**Background.** In the difficult conditions of the Arctic zone, having nature, climate and lack of good roads at the same time as an ally, and involuntary «enemy», railmen, dockers and all other transport employees of the Soviet polar region and Karelia fought heroically, bravely at combat and labor fronts of the Great Patriotic War. Depending on the location of transport communications in one time or another – before, on, behind the line of the fighting – tasks and the nature of work varied. The fight went at all fronts and in different ways.

**Objective.** The objective of the author is to demonstrate some important pages in the history of Russian polar region and Karelia in terms of their participation in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945.

**Methods.** The author uses general scientific methods, historical-retrospective method, comparative analysis, scientific description.

**Results.**

**Belt road — symbol and support**

The core of all transport communications of Karelia and the polar region were Murmansk commercial port, railway junction and Kirov railway. Accordingly, Berlin formed its attitude to the area of activities and, although the German military command understood the strategic importance of Murmansk and Kirov railway differently. In addition to the «Barbarossa» plan the goal was to tear the USSR from its sea transport linkages, from the Arctic, to make Murmansk a support for the advance of German troops and the front through the Northern Sea Route to the Urals, Siberia and the Far East (12–14, 18, 38–40, 51, 52). According to the strategic plans of «Blue polar fox» and «Black and brown fox» in the shortest possible time Murmansk and Kandalaksha naval base of the Northern Fleet were to be captured, the functioning of Kirov railway should be stopped [5, 8, 10, 29, 51, 53].

German military historians have seen in the capture of Murmansk means to enter into an alliance of Germany with England and the United States against the Soviet Union, breaking the allied relations with the Soviet Union. Soldier mass saw «Maldives» in Murmansk, a key to the entire polar region [3, 1]. General Staff had planned to capture ice-free port, «the second of the Dardanelles», Kirov railway, the Kola Peninsula and Karelia in terms of their participation in the Great Patriotic War 1941–1945. Its influence extended to the activities of party and military leadership was formed. For example, the Vologda route Soroka–Obozerskaya–Vologda–Leningrad was seized the railway station Loimola, the road from Lodeynoye to Moselssky and threatened to isolate Murmansk from the country. Only in 1944 the site was set free and on July 16 along the track moved the first through-train Murmansk–Leningrad [18, p. 158–159]. Thus road for goods was reduced by 556 km in comparison with the Vologda route Soroka–Obozerskaya–Vologda–Leningrad [49, p. 158–159].

In 1941–1944, Murmansk commercial port, railway junction and Kirov mainline were united into a belt road (front-line) system. Its protection against the enemy was the main task of the Karelian Front Command. January 1, 1942 in the New Year’s greetings to the soldiers of the North Karelian Front Military Council had emphasized the importance of Murmansk railway junction, ensuring smooth operation of the railway, the need to counter all the efforts of the enemy [4].

Military-strategic and operational objectives of Kirov mainline originally were:

1. Organizational restructuring of railway management on a war footing.
2. Changes in the structure and increase in the number of rail units.
3. Evacuation of the population, enterprises and property of the railway.
4. Ensuring protection, technical protection of transport communications, carrying out protective works.
5. Construction of a new branch (Soroka–Obozerskaya) bypassing the occupied southern section of the road.
6. The conduct of military operations in the occupied southern section.
7. Increased capacity and carrying capacity of the mainline.
8. The participation of railway workers in mobilization, labor front, creating war economy, development of movement for an increase in the defense fund, donation.

The organizational restructuring of management of the railway on a war footing started since the early days of the war. The remoteness of the polar region and Karelia, poor communication, concentration of the central authorities on the global issues of defense of the country have led to a greater autonomy in the management of Murmansk region and the Karelia–Finland SSR. The role of the party and the organs of emergency management of Murmansk, Kandalaksha and Petrozavodsk defense committees (since September 1942) increased dramatically. A single centralized system of party and military leadership was formed. For immediate, primary measures (evacuation, mobilization, labor front, military, agriculture, Lend-Lease, buildup of Defence Fund) paramilitary organization «Obronostroy» was established [50, p. 2]. Its influence extended to the activities of the mainline [46, p. 10; 51, p. 4].

Along with «Obronostroy» in Murmansk and Kandalaksha regional and city committees of defense...
emerged. They made great efforts to mobilize human and material resources to help the front. All their activities were consistent with the Party and the Soviet leadership of Murmansk region and Karelia. Together they went to the scene and carried out a complex of organizational, political, ideological, economic, military events, but above all mobilization of reservists of the first stage in the ranks of the army and navy [49, p. 1; 51, p. 64].

Meanwhile, management of the mainline itself suffered from double management of rail troops from the People’s Commissariat of Railways (PCR) and the People’s Commissariat of Railways (PCR). Duality was supplemented by the weakness of railway troops. Rail units as parts of the Karelian front were small, poorly equipped with tools, lifting pile driving machinery, trucks and tractors. There was an acute lack of restorative materials. All this did not provide the main – high pace of work. Restoring the main line lagged behind the growing needs of troops, affected negatively on delivery of all necessary to the front. It was necessary to immediately rebuild process control [35]. January 3, 1942 SDC (State Defense Committee) decided to unite all the forces and means intended to restore the railway and transfer them to the PCR. Railway troops stationed in PCD were also reassigned to Commissariat of Railways. The number of military personnel increased significantly. Combined military leadership was banned to use railway units not for intended purpose.

In the polar region, even quite real and visible scene and carried out a complex of organizational, political, ideological, economic, military events, but above all mobilization from the national economy of Arkhangelsk region. Komi ASSR, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District: mushers – 1400 people, 10 thousand heads of deer, sledge 500 pcs.; on their arrival in Arkhangelsk until 01.01.1942 transports, gave the army and the front 5900 transport deer, 1700 sets of sleds for them, 1119 sledges [58, p. 2].

Deer walked loaded from Pechora to Arkhangelsk and Murmansk on their own, along Kirov railway 2600 km. On route 222 deer fell from exhaustion, 710 were casted out for killing. Of the 4552 animals only 3600 reached an animal-breeding farm near Petrozavodsk. The total number of deer in the 14th Army during the war reached 5 thous. heads, somewhat less that was in the 19th Army [58, p. 3].

In late 1941, the front of Murmansk and Kandalaksha directions stabilized. In defense gap to the rear of the enemy roads 17 thous. tons of ammunition and military goods. They evacuated from the tundra over 160 wrecked aircraft, ferried to the far rear of the enemy to 8 thous. soldiers and partisans [58, p. 1].

During the war the herders-lovokzertsy formed seven transports, gave the army the 5500 transport deer, 1700 sets of sleds for them, 1119 sledges [58, p. 2].

Formation of reindeer transport went on, however, with a long delay and in extreme haste. Only on 20.11.1941 a decree of the National Defense Commission was issued on mobilization from the national economy of Arkhangelsk region. Komi ASSR, Yamalo-Nenets Autonomous District: mushers – 1400 people, 10 thousand heads of deer, sledge 500 pcs.; on their arrival in Arkhangelsk until 01.01.1942 [58, p. 3].

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Yet combat missions were carried out. Deer-ski troops penetrated deep into the enemy rear, reached Revioniemi. It turned out to be difficult to organize and use methods of transportation. The material part of the air force, artillery and mortars were transported on special sledges, skis, towed behind the deer. Deer-ski battalions turned the polar night and the poor roads into their allies. They were engaged in transport operations, participated in the exploration, offensives, large raids behind enemy lines. A special place in transport was taken by evacuation of the wounded, disabled, civilians, mail, animals and assistance, participation in naval operations, crossing the rivers and bays.

Deer-ski units showed incredible resistance in the tragic Murmansk offensive in April-May 1942. In the extremely difficult conditions in the fighting army units received assistance from the hardy, cross country deer-ski units. On 3-11 June, in storm, snow, extreme cold, the animals blazed with a fire, worn out. Hungry deer stood. Herders climbed the rocks to collect moss for animals. They crumbled snow with ax to give the animals to drink. With great difficulty, they managed to get oats from Polyarny. Deer-ski transport saved many dying, freezing soldiers and sailors of the 14th Army, the 152nd Division and the 12th Brigade of amphibious assault [58, p. 6].

On 06.09–06. 11. 1944 the 3rd deer-ski brigade as a part of the 14th Army participated in the battles for Petsamo, Nickel, Rudniki, Kirkenes, for liberation of the Soviet polar region and Northern Norway.

In 1941–1944, deer-ski were attacked German garrisons, strongest, mined roads. It was a difficult hike. «Fatigue was immense, monstrous fatigue...» [229, p. 9]. The effectiveness of a unique transport was nevertheless high. Herders drove through the mountains and swamps. Reindeer put in harness swam across rivers and lakes, bays without a sound. «The deer do not bark, do not howl, do not neigh, do not groan. Deer helped to survive and protect their homeland» [9, 1]. Nature, transport and people were unique as it was recognized later by the former commander of the Karelian Front, Marshal K. A. Meretskov [58, p. 9].

The most important part of the activities of management of Murmansk region and Karelia was evacuation of civilians from the war zone. From the region a large proportion of the population (115 thous. people) and large enterprises was evacuated almost immediately. The evacuation began at the end of June 1941 along Kirov railway, later — by ships to Onega, Lake of Ladoga and other lakes, highways, on which population was evacuated. September 27, 1941 on Onega Lake enemy artillery attacked by fire the steamer «Kingssepp», and a barge with women and children. Few had a chance to escape. Of 536 thous. evacuated about 90–100 thousand lived during the war in the neighboring regions — the Republic of Komi, Arkhangelsk and Vologda regions. More than 400 thousand, people were sent to Chelyabinsk region, Bashkir, Chuvash, Udmurt, Tatar Autonomous Republics and other regions of the Soviet Union. Few had a chance to escape. Of 536 thous. evacuated about 90–100 thousand lived during the war in the neighboring regions — the Republic of Komi, Arkhangelsk and Vologda regions. More than 400 thousand, people were sent to Chelyabinsk region, Bashkir, Chuvash, Udmurt, Tatar Autonomous Republics and other regions of the Soviet Union. Few had a chance to escape. Of 536 thous. evacuated about 90–100 thousand lived during the war in the neighboring regions — the Republic of Komi, Arkhangelsk and Vologda regions. More than 400 thousand, people were sent to Chelyabinsk region, Bashkir, Chuvash, Udmurt, Tatar Autonomous Republics and other regions of the Soviet Union. Few had a chance to escape. Of 536 thous. evacuated about 90–100 thousand lived during the war in the neighboring regions — the Republic of Komi, Arkhangelsk and Vologda regions.

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However, the difficult situation in some places resulted in confusion and spontaneous action. So, management of Karelia area, fearing Ukhta capture by the enemy, at the first approach of the enemy forces, hastily destroyed the food, supplies of non-ferrous metals and archival materials of state institutions. Ukhta was defended. In the area of Povenets bay of Onega Lake due to the frosts convoy of 19
ships with industrial equipment, goods, archive stuck. Raiding units and planes were sent to destroy these goods. Part of the property was burned, and some fell into the hands of the enemy.

To the rear parts of the country were evacuated institutions of science and culture. The state and party organs of the republic were sent from Petrozavodsk to Medvezhegorsk and then to Belomorsk [49, p. 2]. Management of Kirov railway was transferred from Belomorsk to Kem.

After liberation of the territory of the Republic of Karelia in the process of re-evacuation more than 500 thous. people from almost 700 thous. pre-war population returned. Once again, a huge burden fell on rail and water transport. In September-November 1944, more than 50 thousand completely exhausted people were re-evacuated. The government rushed assistance of 1000 rubles per family, temporary relief from cash taxes and compulsory deliveries of agricultural products to the state, assistance for those in need of footwear, textiles, etc.). From Leningrad to Petrozavodsk arrived the first car with teaching aids for schools in the city and the liberated areas of the republic [49, p. 2].

For country, people, victory

On defense of transport communications, towns and villages of the polar region and Karelia battle front merged with the labor front, where the railway men played a huge role. For 18 months of the war Murmansk railway workers, Vologda and Karelia were mobilized to military construction. The participants of the labor front on the outskirts of Murmansk and Kandalaksha created several defensive lines. With the participation of the civilian population large-scale construction of trenches, gaps, bomb shelters was carried out [49, p. 4].

Murmansk port workers interacted with railway men. They took part in construction of long-term fortifications, erected 122 strengthening for 3700 people. According to labor mobilization during the summer (1941) enemy offensives on Murmansk citizens were building defensive facilities on the western shore of the Kola Bay. In other water bodies 1068 specialists were removed, 600 of Murmansk port workers went to the front, to people’s volunteer army – 250. As a result, only 700 people remained working there.

They guarded military cargo, port, railway junction, air defense system. They worked around the clock. They ate with soldiers. Dockers eliminated damage to access roads, built a section of Kirov railway from wood piers to the north, in the direction to Rosta [11, 44, 46, 47].

Transport communications (water, land and sea) took a leading position in «war economy» of the polar region. They were mobilized to fight not only on the front line of the home front, but also for strengthening of the army [55, p. 7–8; 54, 57]. In January 1942, through Murmansk went cargo flow of lend-lease. Unloading of the allied convoys was carried out at the port and railway junction around the clock, despite air raids of the enemy. All labor forces of the polar region, Karelia and a number of regions have been involved [25, 30, 31–34, 46, p. 10; 51, p. 5–62].

An important contribution was made by employees of Kirov railway. They ensured uninterrupted delivery of arriving on the lend-lease cargoes to their destination. The staff of Murmansk train depot built an armored train «Murmansk», which then took part in combat operations of Soviet troops [51, p. 6]. At a special position in the first days of the war were Kem railway men, who defended the bypass track (Soroka–Obozerskaya) – the main type of transport link of the polar region to central regions of the country [1941–1943]. Railway men disrupted enemy aspiration to paralyze the work of the «road of life». Steam locomotives left depots only at night. The trains were moving without lights. With exceptional courage and skill locomotive crews took trains out from under bombing, delivered goods to their destination just in time. Regardless of time of at least 10–12 hours, all the railway men worked a day [20, 21, 27, 50, p. 2].

Work of Kandalaksha electric locomotive depot was completely rebuilt on a war footing. Railway men restored quickly destroyed by enemy aircraft railway junction, station facilities, tracks, bridges, repaired locomotives and cars, ensured smooth transportation of defense goods, including military vehicles, equipment and food. Besides repairing locomotives manufacture of fuselage for antitank mines, individual nodes for mortar rounds, parts for crawler machines was established in depot [37, p. 4].

The slogan «All for the front, everything for victory!» has found its embodiment also in fundraising for the defense fund, which went for construction of tanks, aircraft and other military equipment. The residents of Murmansk region handed over 15 kg of gold, 23.5 kg of silver, have invested more than 65 million rubles. In 1941, 2.8 million rubles were credited on establishment of the squadron «Komsomolets of the Arctic».

The railway men built at their own expense a squadron «Soviet Murman». More than 60 thousand gifts were collected and sent to the front for soldiers of the Red Army. School buildings in the settlements were converted into hospitals. Timur teams established patronage over the wounded in the hospitals, the bereaved families of soldiers. All this was done in front-line conditions, under constant attacks by enemy aircraft, saboteurs [45, p. 8; 46, p. 10].

At the initiative of dispatchers of Kandalaksha railway junction 4 million rubles were collected for construction of aircrafts and 1 million 134 thousand rubles on state loan bonds. Many physiciains participated in donation. During the war, the points of Kandalaksha railway junction 72470 donors. They provided with blood wounded soldiers of the Karelian and partially Leningrad front.

Railwaymen of Kirov railroad transferred 1140 thousand rubles in early 1943 to build planes, tanks and armored trains. Tank column «Railroader of Kirov mainline» was built using these funds. Tanks were placed at the disposal of Colonel-General Katukov (future marshal of armored troops). During the war the inhabitants of Karelia have subscribed to government loans, contributed to the construction of tanks and aircraft more than 126 million rubles of personal savings. Tank columns «Karelian farmer», «Railroader of Kirov mainline», combat aircraft «Karelian-Finnish donor», «Karelian pioneer» and others built on the money of the working people of the republic, fought on different fronts of the Great Patriotic War [22, 23, 38–40, 56].

Implementation of tasks of SDC depended largely on the state of air transport communications that came to the forefront of the fighting in 1942. In the context of the frontal area of the city, the settlements, Kirov railway and lake pier subjected to constant air strikes. Since the summer of that year Murmansk was badly bombed, on some days the Germans produced 15–20 attacks on the city. Only on 18 June their aircraft dropped 12 thousand bombs. The fire destroyed more than 600 wooden buildings in the city.

Total from 1941 to 1944 in Murmansk occurred 792 air attacks of the German Air Force [46, p. 3; 51, p. 3]. Luftwaffe dropped about 7 thousand high-explosive and 200 thousand incendiary bombs. In the city were destroyed and burned more than 1500 homes (3/4 of the total housing stock), 437 industrial and office buildings. The German air force regularly struck at Kirov railway. During the military operations in the polar region at every kilometer of railway mainline fascists dropped an average of 120 bombs. No one could understand why the German publicists called Murmansk «northern Stalingrad». Both cities are comparable in intensity of air attacks and number of destruction. With the help of Air Defense Forces above Murmansk and the Kirov railroad 185 enemy aircraft were shot down in 1941–1943.

Despite constant bombing and shelling, Murmansk dockers and railway men of the mainline provided a continuous connection to the mainland. Along Kirov railway trains were moving around the clock [45, p. 8]. From the first days of the war Kandalaksha subjected to targeted air raids. City and exempted from the railway works, parts of the Arctic defense system. They worked around the clock. They ate with soldiers. Dockers eliminated damage to access roads, built a section of Kirov railway from wood piers to the north, in the direction to Rosta [11, 44, 46, 47].
on Kirov railway 2800 enemy air raids were committed. Over 90 thous. bombs were dropped, 1126 railway buildings were destroyed, more than 500 locomotives, 4950 cars were damaged. Thanks to the selfless work of railway troops and mainline workers from Murmansk were sent far inland 1246 thous. tons of military equipment and military supplies, equipment and supplies received from Allies on Lend-Lease [35, p. 2]. Kirov railway functioned even in truncated form – after a temporary loss of its southern section and construction of a belt road line (Sorka–Obozerskaya).

Railway troops of the Karelian Front throughout the war engaged in technical protection of areas of Kirov railway. There were three track and two operating company commands of Railway Battalion. During Petsamo–Kirkenes operation (7–10–1.1. 1944) the number of track battalions increased to four of the total number of 3651 people.

The northern section of the belt road from station Murmansk to station Kandalaksha length of 297 km was served by electric traction, and from station Kandalaksha to station Volkhovostrov – steam traction. In 1941–1942, the majority of air strikes were in areas with electric traction, and from 1943 – with steam traction (89%). Airstrikes were made irregularly (in 1941 – 475, 1942 – 1081, 1943 – 481, 1944 – 159) [48, 2]. In April 1943, of 524 bombs dropped by the enemy 89 were time bombs. At the beginning their elimination and neutralization caused delays of trains. Soon protected zones were discovered «secret» of Finnish and German fuses and neutralized bomb, not interrupting movement of trains. Particular attention was paid to technical exploration. It discovered the scene of fall of time bombs. In areas with intensive air raids arrived miners team of 2–3 people, equipped with necessary facilities for destruction of «gifts from heaven».

To combat enemy aircraft at major stations (Murmansk, Olenia, Imandra, Apaty, Kandalaksha, the Arctic Circle, Kemi and other) district local units were established and antiaircraft weapons were put. Emergency trains went to the line with anti-aircraft cover or supported by fighter aircraft. Dealing with the consequences of enemy raids was made by emergency trains, track and bridge short exercise, communication short exercise, water supply and restoration of the contact network. To return to operation of major international facilities railway battalions were involved. They participated, for example, in reconstruction of the port of Murmansk, together with special units of PCR ensured smooth operation of Kirov railway. Behind all this stood courage, cold-bloodedness, courage and resourcefulness of port railway workers [24, 26, 48, 2, 3].

Conclusions. Transport communications and, above all people, serving them, became a steel support for unity of port and railroad workers [24, 26, 48, 2, 3].

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Conclusions. Transport communications and, above all people, serving them, became a steel support for unity of the front and rear, a solid foundation of victory.

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Information about the author:
Borzunov, Valentin F. – D. Sc. (History), professor of Moscow State University of Railway Engineering (MIIT), Moscow, Russia, maja@maja.mkc.ru.

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