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К ВОПРОСУ О РОЛИ ГЕНЕРАЛА В.Е. БОРИСОВА В СТАВКЕ ВЕРХОВНОГО ГЛАВНОКОМАНДУЮЩЕГО В 1915–1917 годах

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Аннотация. В настоящей статье автор рассматривает роль генерала В.Е. Борисова в принятии решений в Ставке Верховного главнокомандующего в 1915–1917 гг. Генерал Борисов был товарищем генерала М.В. Алексеева, и современники часто характеризовали его как негласного советника последнего в военных вопросах. В августе 1915 г. генерал Алексеев был назначен начальником Штаба Верховного главнокомандующего и прибыл в Ставку в Могилеве. Борисов последовал за ним, хотя в Ставке официального статуса для него не предвиделось. На основе изучения почерка из личных документов Борисова и неподписанных документов из фондов Ставки, содержащихся в РГВИА, автор делает вывод о том, что Борисов участвовал в создании нескольких записок, касающихся сношений России с союзниками по Антанте и определивших стратегию России по отношению к ним. В некоторых случаях Борисов являлся единственным автором записок, в некоторых случаях он писал их совместно с Алексеевым. Особое внимание Борисов уделял вопросам Сербии в частности и Балкан в целом, поэтому автор приводит подробный анализ проекта союзного наступления, предложенного Борисовым в ноябре 1915 г. На основе этой записки была составлена известная телеграмма командующим союзными армиями с предложением одновременного наступления из Галиции и Салоник (отвергнутого союзниками). Установление деятельного участия Борисова в деятельности Ставки проливает свет на процесс принятия стратегических решений в штабе русской армии в 1915–1917 гг. и позволит в будущем с большей точностью определить идейное происхождение стратегических решений российского командования, поскольку, в отличие от генерала Алексеева, Борисов оставил обширное теоретическое наследие.

Ключевые слова: Первая мировая война, Россия, М.В. Алексеев, военная стратегия, Антанта.

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On Role of General V.E. Borisov in the Stavka of the Supreme Commander in 1915–1917

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Abstract. This article examines the role of General V.E. Borisov in the decision-making process at the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander of the Russian Army in 1915–1917. General Borisov was a friend of General M.V. Alekseyev, and their contemporaries often characterized him as an unofficial advisor to Alekseyev, especially on military matters. When in August 1915 general Alekseyev was appointed as the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Commander and arrived at the Stavka in Mogilev,

Borisov followed him, even though he did not have any official status at the time. Comparing the handwriting in Borisov's personal documents with the unsigned documents from the documents of Stavka, preserved at the Russian State Archive for Military History (RGVIA), this article concludes that Borisov in fact took part in the creation of several major notes on Russia's relations with the Allies in the Entente that laid the foundation for the Stavka's strategic military decisions. In some cases he was the sole author of the documents, sometimes he wrote it together with Alekseyev. Borisov paid particular attention to Serbia and the Balkans, so this article analyses in detail the project of the Allied offensive from Galicia and Salonika, developed by Borisov in November 1915. Confirmation of Borisov's participation in Stavka's strategic activities improves our understanding of Stavka's functioning and allows us to determine the ideological origins of the strategic decisions of the Russian high command, since, unlike General Alekseyev, Borisov left a vast theoretical legacy.

Keywords: First World War, Russia, M.V. Alekseyev, Stavka, military strategy, Entente.

In Russian historiography, a considerable attention is traditionally paid to the role that General Mikhail Vasilyevich Alekseyev, Chief of Staff of the Headquarters of the Supreme Commander (Stavka), played in the events of the February Revolution in 1917. However, the issue of the functioning of the Stavka under Alekseyev before 1917 is no less important, because Stavka made the strategic decisions that determined the course of the war for the Russian Empire.

General Alekseyev was appointed the Chief of Staff of Stavka on 19 August 1915, four days prior Emperor Nicholas II assuming the Supreme Command of the Russian Army. The new Chief brought his own team to the Headquarters in Mogilev. General Nikolai Savvich Pustovoitenko replaced Yuri Nikoloforovich Danilov the Quartermaster General of Stavka. General Viacheslav Evstafievich Borisov, his comrade from the 64th Kazanskii Regiment and Academy of General Staff, became a General for special assignments at Stavka, although he did not get an official appointment until April 1916 and worked in Stavka without any official status¹.

With the change in supreme command the process of decision-making in the Stavka also changed. Until August 1915 most of the operational work was done by Quartermaster General Danilov, but after his appointment, General Alekseyev personally took over all strategic planning and operational decisions. According to contemporaries, he did not like to delegate even minor tasks to his subordinates and preferred to do everything by himself². The Russian State Archive for Military History (RGVIA) contains numerous telegram forms filled out in Alekseyev's neat handwriting, along with the notebooks, where the Chief of Staff wrote down intelligence information coming from different fronts³.

From August 1915 until May 1917, General Alekseyev was undoubtedly the central figure in Stavka and made most of the key decisions himself. However, to understand the logic of these decisions, it is extremely important to determine who influenced Alekseyev's strategic thought; with whom he consulted; and whose opinion he trusted. Many contemporaries, who visited Stavka at the time, mentioned General Borisov as an inconspicuous adviser to Alekseyev, the 'gray eminence' of Stavka in words of Admiral Bubnov⁴. At the same time, contemporaries often gave contradictory of Borisov assessments: from the real talent, who was behind all decisions of mediocre Alekseyev, to the 'stratégiste', bookish philosopher, who had no influence on the Chief of Staff⁵. Only now, thanks to the digitization of documents and improved access to the archives,

¹ Российский государственный военно-исторический архив (далее – РГВИА). Ф. 409. П/с 66–379. All dates are given in the old style (Julian calendar).

² Шавельский Г.И. Воспоминания последнего протопресвитера Русской армии и флота. Нью-Йорк, 1954. С. 396.

³ РГВИА. Ф. 391. Оп. 2. Д. 111; Ф. 55. Оп. 1. Д. 6, 15.

⁴ Бубнов А.Д. В царской Ставке // Конец российской монархии. М., 2002. С. 81–82.

⁵ Ганин А.В. Доктрина генерала Борисова // *Его же*. «Мозг армии» в период «русской смуты»: статьи и документы. М., 2013. С. 344, 350.

historians finally have an opportunity to clarify the role of General Borisov in determining Russia's military strategy in 1915–1917.

The most complete study of General Borisov's personality and ideas to date was carried out by Andrei Ganin in his article 'The Doctrine of General Borisov', published in its most detailed version in his collection '«The Brain of the Army» during the «Russian Troubles»' that came out in 2013⁶. Ganin was particularly interested in Borisov's activities in 1918 at the Academy of General Staff of the Red Army, but he also managed to collect a large number of contemporaries' testimonies about the General, that led him to conclude that 'Borisov was the right hand of Alekseyev in Stavka in years of the First World War'. He also suggested that further conclusions about the role and activities of General Borisov in Mogilev could be made after a more detailed examination of Stavka's documents⁷.

The author of this article managed to access Borisov's personal documents located in the Archive of Serbia in Belgrade, as a part of the personal documents of General Nikola Arandjelovic, with whom General Borisov spent his last years⁸. These documents alongside the documents of Stavka preserved in the Russian State Archive for Military History (RGVIA) and published works of General Borisov allowed to shed more light on General Borisov's activities in Mogilev in 1915–1917 and his role in decision-making of the Russian high command.

There is no doubt that Borisov and Alekseyev were close. They had known each other since 1882 when Borisov has joined the 64th Kazanskii Infantry Regiment as a second lieutenant, where young lieutenant Alekseyev was serving. Even though Alekseyev was four years older than Borisov, they entered the Nicholas Academy of General Staff together in 1887⁹. They finished it in 1890, and although both of them were at the top of their class (in the first category), Alekseyev remained in St. Petersburg, and Borisov was attached to the Headquarters of the Vilna military district. A year later he left European Russia for the Far East to join the South Ussuri Department as a senior adjutant of the headquarters¹⁰.

After graduating from the Academy Borisov and Alekseyev stayed in touch. According to the wife of General Alekseyev, Anna Nikolaevna, Alekseyev helped his friend when a 'great misfortune in personal life' that befell Borisov (his wife died during childbirth sometime between 1896 and 1899)¹¹, and he was placed in the mental ward of the Warsaw military hospital. Alekseyev got Borisov transferred to the Nicholas military hospital in St. Petersburg, where he visited him¹². After discharge Borisov lived with the Alekseyev's family for some time, until he resumed his service in the Far East. In 1900–1901 Borisov served as the Chief of Staff of the Beijing Allied Detachment that took part in the suppression of the Boxer uprising in China.

This was not the only time Borisov lived with the Alekseyevs. After his scandalous resignation in 1910 that has even attracted the attention of the Emperor, he regularly visited Alekseyev's

⁶ I have been informed by my colleagues that V.B. Kashirin was also working on General Borisov's role in Stavka, but, unfortunately, I was unable to find any of his published work on the subject or to receive a confirmation from him personally.

⁷ Ганин А.В. Указ. соч. С. 351.

⁸ Архив Србије. Лични фонд Никола Аранђеловић (НА).

⁹ It is customary to indicate Borisov's birth date as 1861, however, in one of his service records from 1900 Borisov corrected in his own hand his year of birth to 1864 (РГВИА. Ф. 409. Оп. 1. Д. 132294). In other service records his birth date is stated as 1861 and no correction was made.

¹⁰ Там же.

¹¹ In Borisov's service record of 1896 his marital status was stated as 'married first time to the daughter of pomeshchik Mikhail Liorko, Evgenia Mikhailovna' (РГВИА. Ф. 409. Оп. 1. Д. 1. 32394). In his service record of 1900 his marital status was changed to 'widowed' (РГВИА. Ф. 409. Оп. 1. Д. 132294). It appears that Borisov was married to Evgenia Mikhailovna Liorko – daughter of a small squire from town of Topopets in Tver gubernia. She was a sister of Dmitry Mikhailovich Liorko, father of Valeria Liorko-Prishvina, second wife of writer Mikhail Prishvin. In her autobiographical novel 'Invisible city' Liorko-Prishvina mentions that both sisters of her father died giving birth before she was born in 1899 (*Пришвина В.Д. Невидимый град. М., 2003*).

¹² Алексеева А.Н. Ответ на статью Н. Потоцкого // Вестник первопоходника (Лос-Анджелес). 1962. № 14. С. 15–16.

family at their Kyiv dacha (from 1908 to 1912, Alekseyev served as the Chief of Staff of the Kyiv Military District)¹³. After the outbreak of the war, Borisov invariably accompanied Alekseyev on his few trips home and his vacation for medical treatment in Crimea from November 1916 to March 1917. So-called Alekseyev's 'Argentine Archive', preserved by the family of the General and transferred to the Russian State Library in 1995, contains a photo of 1916 presumably taken at the Alekseyevs' dacha near Smolensk, that depicts Generals Borisov and Pustovoitenko seated at a table with the family and relatives of General Alekseyev¹⁴. Another indirect evidence that Borisov was part of a close, almost familial circle of Alekseyev can be also found in personal letters of General F.F. Palitsyn to the Chief of Staff. Palitsyn was Alekseyev's former superior and a friend. In his letters, he inquired about not only the health of Alekseyev's wife but also about Borisov's affairs¹⁵.

Borisov returned to the army with the outbreak of the war, and Alekseyev invited him to work together, and Borisov followed Alekseyev in all of his appointments until May 1917. According to the youngest daughter of General Alekseyev, Vera Mikhailovna, her father did this to prevent possible harm from Borisov's 'fantasies' and 'strategic assumptions'¹⁶. Borisov himself explained this by the fact that Alekseyev was familiar with his theoretical work on strategy and tactics, as well as their similar strategic views formed during their joint work in the Main Directorate of the General Staff (GUGSh) in 1907–1907. He himself recalled August 1914 as follows: 'On the very first day of mobilization he [Alekseyev] telegraphed me, a retiree: «immediately report to Yanushkevich and come as soon as possible to Kyiv and then to me, regardless of where they will appoint you, we will work together»'¹⁷. Borisov compared his role under Alekseyev with the role of Bacler d'Albe under Napoleon (the head of the topographic bureau of the French army)¹⁸, calling himself a 'comrade-in-arms' and 'collaborator' of the Head of Stavka¹⁹. Borisov often compared himself and Alekseyev with outstanding military commanders of the past and present: Moltke, Napoleon, Ludendorff. Sometimes he even put himself above his German opponents²⁰.

After the war, Borisov found himself in exile in Belgrade, where he worked as the head of the library of the Serbian Military Academy. Having access to the latest publications on military topics, Borisov zealously followed what his contemporaries wrote about the work of Stavka. In 1934, he read the diary of Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich, who spoke very unflatteringly about Borisov: 'Small, dirty, unshaven, unkempt, greasy, slovenly, it is disgusting to even shake his hand. Alekseyev considers him a clever man (*umnitsa*), by everything he has done so far testifies very clearly that he is a scoundrel, a boor and a fool'²¹. Borisov responded to this attack

¹³ Hoover Archives. Golovin Papers. Box 13. Letter from Borisov, 1931 (1936). P. 13.

¹⁴ RGB OR. Ф. 855. Оп. 12. Д. 33. Л. 1.

¹⁵ РГВИА. Ф. 55. Оп. 1. Д. 8. Л. 110.

¹⁶ *Алексеева-Борель В.М.* Сорок лет в рядах русской императорской армии. Генерал М.В. Алексеев. СПб., 2000. С. 340.

¹⁷ Hoover Archives. Golovin Paper. Box 13. Letter from Borisov, 1931 (1936). P. 12.

¹⁸ Borisov has indeed worked a lot with maps in Stavka. N.N. Yanushevskii reminiscing about Borisov in Mogilev wrote that General Staff officers whom he was acquainted with called him 'strategical boy' to Alekseyev — 'a draftsman who drew maps and diagrams for professors at the Academy' (*Ганин А.В.* Указ. соч. С. 349). Borisov indeed had an ability to draw maps. For instance, one of his hand-drawn maps could be found in one of Alekseyev's notebooks with intelligence briefings (РГВИА. Ф. 55. Оп. 1. Д. 6. Л. 93).

¹⁹ Borisov often used the term 'collaborator', for example, in a draft of his autobiography that he sent to Serbian War Minister in 1921 along with his plea to give him a job (Архив Србије. НА-125) or in a letter to V.L. Burtsev, editor of the newspaper 'Common cause' (*Obshchee delo*) where Borisov wanted to publish his comment on Russia's military strategy in 1914–1917 (Государственный архив Российской Федерации (далее — ГАРФ). Ф. 5802. Оп. 1. Д. 139. Л. 1).

²⁰ *Борисов В.Е.* Генерал М.В. Алексеев — начальник штаба верховного главнокомандующего в войну 1914–1915 годов (из воспоминаний генерала В. Борисова) // Военный сборник общества ревнителей военных знаний. Белград. Вып. 2. 1922. С. 10–11.

²¹ *Романов А.В.* Военный дневник великого князя Андрея Владимировича Романова: (1914–1917). М., 2008. С. 131.

in a letter to General Chernavin: 'I am reading the diary of Grand Duke Andrei Vladimirovich and heartily laugh together with others at what this baby-dandy writes about Alekseyev, about me, and about Pustovoitanka, Lechitskii. On page 22: "Borisov – dirty, unshaven, unkempt, etc." What would this dandy say about General Halwitz when he, during the attack on Rennenkampf, suffered "seit Tagen eine heftige Dysenterie" [*acute dysentery for several days*]'²².

At the end of his life, Borisov was writing a book entitled 'Strategy', in which he wished to summarise his experience of working with Alekseyev²³. Unfortunately, the manuscript of this work has not been preserved. But in 1924 Borisov described the 'process of the supreme strategic command' at Stavka in a brief article in the émigrés' magazine 'War and Peace' published in Berlin. In it, he called Alekseyev 'General' (*polkovodets*) and himself his 'operative worker'²⁴. Borisov compared his own role in Stavka to the position of Ludendorff under Hindenburg, calling the former 'the second Chief of Staff'. He turned to the Napoleonic army again, this time comparing himself to General Berthier, 'the second Chief of Staff' under Napoleon and drawing unambiguous parallels with his work in Russian Stavka²⁵.

Nevertheless, according to Borisov, the process of work at Napoleon's headquarters was different from Russian Stavka. If Napoleon processed all the correspondence himself before giving them to his assistant Berthier, the Russian 'General' (*polkovodets*) Alekseyev first gave everything to his 'operative worker' Borisov. The latter processed operational messages, reports and suggestions of third parties and presented them in the form of a daily written report, which was put on the Chief of Staff's table at eleven in the evening every day²⁶. This order of work of Alekseyev and Borisov was also confirmed by the daughter of General Alekseyev, however, she gives him the opposite assessment: 'being with father during the entire war, he invariably wrote his "considerations" on current military issues and put these notes on father's desk, where they lied for some time until they were sent to the archive'²⁷.

General Alekseyev's documents from the collection of Stavka in RGVA indeed contain reports and notes written by General Borisov's hand. None of them are signed. For a long time, the handwriting of General Borisov was unknown to researchers and these notes were wrongly attributed to other Staff officers or even General Alekseyev himself. The author of this contribution was able to study samples of Borisov's handwriting from his personal documents in the Archive of Serbia and obtain an electronic copy of the letter of Borisov to General Golovin from the Archives of the Hoover Institute at Stanford (see Appendix 1)²⁸. Comparison of handwriting in Borisov's letters and documents from Stavka's collection allowed to establish authorship of a few manuscripts, including the well-known draft of the strategic project of the Entente offensive in direction of Budapest, proposed by the Russian command to the Allies in November 1915. It is often referred to as 'Alekseyev's telegram to Joffre' since the draft only indicates the name of the addressee without a date or signature²⁹.

²² ГАРФ. Ф. 5956. Оп. 1. Ф. 106. Л. 20.

²³ Там же. Л. 19.

²⁴ Борисов В.Е. Процесс верховного стратегического руководства (по опыту русского театра 1914–1917 гг.) // Война и мир. № 15. 1924. С. 13.

²⁵ Там же. С. 18.

²⁶ Там же. С. 13.

²⁷ Алексеева-Борель В.М. Сорок лет... С. 340.

²⁸ Appendices for the article can be found in an online depository at the link. URL: https://disk.yandex.ru/d/XI6_f6OexUjIfg (access date: 01.06.2021). Appendix 1. Letter of General Borisov to N.N. Golovin written in June 1931 and sent in December 1936. Hoover Archives. Golovin Papers. Box 13. V.E. Borisov's letter.

²⁹ When multiple Borisov's document were published as a part of 'International Relations in Era of Imperialism' collection in 1930s, they were wrongly attributed to Alekseyev. Nikolai Valentinov, who was the only interwar historian who worked on Russia's coalition strategy in 1914–1917, also mentioned them as Alekseyev's notes (*Валентинов Н.* Сношения с союзниками по военным вопросам во время войны 1914–1918 гг. Ч. 1. М., 1920. С. 81–82). Alekseyev himself sometimes claimed the authorship of some of Borisov's writings. In his letter to Foreign Minister Sazonov that accompanied a note from 28 November 1915, the Chief of Staff specifically referred to it as 'my note' (РГВИА. Ф. 2003. Оп. 1. Д. 52. Л. 152–154 об.).

Comparing it with the samples of Borisov's handwriting confirmed that he was the author of this document (see Appendix 2)³⁰.

Moreover, the draft was accompanied by a handful of other contributions also written by Borisov's hand: brief revisions of reports from the fronts, as well as considerations for the report to His Majesty (*vsepoddaneishii doklad*)³¹. There is no date indicated on these documents but given that Borisov mentions that 'October has already passed (the new style of November 11)', it can be assumed that the notes, including the draft, were written on 28–29 October 1915, and the report in question was sent to the Emperor on 30 October. Some of the documents found in Stavka's collection were written by Borisov and edited by Alekseyev before being sent to the addressees³², some were even started by Alekseyev but finished by Borisov³³. Thus, it seems that Vera Mikhailovna Alekseyeva-Borel was wrong, saying that Borisov's notes were sent to the archive without being read – General Alekseyev worked with them closely and used them in his strategic considerations. The position of A.M. Zayonchkovsky seems to be more accurate. According to him, with Borisov and Alekseyev 'it was difficult to decide where one ended and the other began in operational thoughts'³⁴. Borisov himself accepted Zayonchkovsky's judgment in his letter to Golovin in 1936³⁵.

Borisov denied any direct influence on the Chief of Staff. He emphasized that the Alekseyev 'was not a toy in his hands' and repeatedly mentioned the memoirs of his comrade in service in Stavka, Colonel Noskov, who claimed that Alekseyev consulted with Borisov on strategic issues, but was independent in making decisions³⁶. According to Noskov, Alekseyev 'was a man of great and bright mind, who knew how to take something from others, but he was the only one who made all decisions, and the only one who realised them'³⁷.

Assumptions that all strategic work was carried out exclusively by Borisov, expressed, for instance, by B.S. Stelletsy³⁸, indeed are not corroborated by the archival evidence. The final version of the project of the joint Entente offensive communicated to the Allies in November 1915, was written by Alekseyev himself. Although it shared the general idea – an offensive towards Budapest – with Borisov's draft, it differed from it in significant details³⁹. Borisov suggested that Russia took the leadership of the Entente as it did in the wars of the sixth anti-Napoleonic coalition. 'Napoleon in 1813, like Wilhelm today, had the advantage of the central position, and only the decision of Alexander I at Trachenberg – to join the main forces of the Russian army to the main force of the Austrian near Prague – deprived Napoleon of this advantage and made the simultaneous actions possible. So today only the determined persistent concentration of the Allied Anglo-Franco-Italian-Russian main forces on the Warsaw–Budapest line would deprive Wilhelm of the advantages of central position'⁴⁰. More pragmatic Alekseyev, understanding Russia's vulnerable position in the Entente in November 1915, omitted this suggestion from the final text⁴¹. Besides, the relationship

³⁰ Appendices for the article can be found in an online depository at the link. URL: https://disk.yandex.ru/d/XI6_f6OexUjIfg (access date: 01.06.2021). Appendix 2. First page of the draft telegram to General Joffre. S.d. RGVA. F. 2003. Op. 1.

³¹ РГВИА. Ф. 2003. Оп. 1. Д. 1165. Л. 4–10 об.

³² Там же. Л. 152–154 об.

³³ Там же. Д. 54. Л. 267 об–269 об.

³⁴ *Зайончковский А.М.* Мировая война. Маневренный период 1914–1915 годов на русском (европейском) театре. М. – Л., 1929. С. 382.

³⁵ Hoover Archives. Golovin Papers. Box 13. Letter from Borisov, 1931 (1936). P. 4–5.

³⁶ *Ibidem.*

³⁷ *Noskoff A.A.* Nicolas II inconnu: Commandant suprême, Allié, Chef d'État. Paris, 1920. P. 193.

³⁸ *Ганин А.В.* Указ. соч. С. 350.

³⁹ РГВИА. Ф. 2003. Оп. 1. Д. 52. Л. 20.

⁴⁰ Там же. Д. 1165. Л. 5.

between Borisov and Alekseyev was not static: sometimes they were close and sometimes they drifted away from each other. One of the Stavka's officers, M.K. Lemke, noted on October 21, 1915, that the relationship between Alekseyev and Borisov had cooled, which noticeably offended the latter⁴².

The use of examples from the Napoleonic wars is another indication that Borisov was the real author of the draft. Borisov had a reputation of a connoisseur of Napoleonic strategy. In 1897 he wrote and published a brochure in which he criticised General Leer, professor of the Nikolas Academy of General Staff and leading expert on strategy in Russian Empire, for incorrect use of examples from Napoleon's *Correspondances* and excessively 'methodical' approach to strategy⁴³. Borisov turned to *Correspondances* to prove his point so often that some contemporaries even thought that Borisov was raving about Napoleon, and his love for the French commander had an unhealthy, obsessive character⁴⁴.

Borisov authored a wide array of Stavka's documents: drafts of telegrams to front commanders⁴⁵, reports to Nicholas II⁴⁶, notes on maps and other materials — for example, lists of incoming telegrams⁴⁷, but most often his handwriting is found in documents related to the strategic cooperation of the Entente powers. The project of the Allied offensive in the Balkans was only one example of Borisov's vision for the Entente strategy. During the combined Austro-Hungarian, German and Bulgarian offensive that began in October 1915, Borisov actively participated in the formation of Russia's military policy towards the Allies. In June 1916, he received the Serbian Order of the White Eagle of the second degree (worn around the neck) from the Serbian representative in Stavka, Colonel Lontkievich⁴⁸.

According to his own testimony, he was 'the initiator, and this will be proven by archival documents related to the history of Russia in the war, of the insistence of the Russian high command in front of the French Headquarters on the unconditional salvation and restoration of the Serbian army in 1915, placing this case as a matter of honour for Russia, which began the war over Serbia; to create the new Serbian army, the ideas of forming Serbian divisions in Russia and transporting Russian brigades from France to Salonika were developed; of the insistence before the Entente at all costs not to clear Salonika that provided communication with the Serbian land occupied by the Germans'⁴⁹. Borisov wrote these lines already in Serbia, where as a recent émigré he found himself in a difficult financial situation and tried to present himself as a devoted ally of the Serbian people to find a job. The decoration received by Borisov was by no means a mark of his individual merits, but one of the many 'diplomatic' decorations exchanged between the Allies. In Stavka in 1916 the same Order of the White Eagle, 2nd degree was given to Generals Pustovoienko, Danilov, Kondzerovskii, Klembovskii, whilst Alekseyev received the Order of the 1st degree⁵⁰.

The documents of Stavka confirm Borisov's increased interest in Serbia. On 19 October 1915, Borisov wrote a response to Joffre's lengthy telegram, received three days earlier, demanding that Russia actively took action in the Balkans. Borisov listed various ways for Russia to help Serbia, including a march to the Balkans through Romania and a landing in Varna⁵¹. Only when,

⁴¹ In his letter to Foreign Minister Sazonov, accompanying a copy of the project that was sent to the headquarters of the Allied armies, Alekseyev wrote that he was not expecting for his suggestion to be accepted (там же. Д. 52. Л. 19).

⁴² *Лемке М.К.* 250 дней в царской ставке 1915–1916. Минск, 2003. С. 220.

⁴³ *Борисов В.Е.* Стратегические вопросы: Разбор положений соч. ген. Леера «Стратегия» (тактика театра воен. действий). Варшава, 1897. С. 24.

⁴⁴ *Алексеева А.Н.* Ответ на статью Н. Потоцкого // Вестник первопоходника (Лос-Анджелес). 1962. № 14. С. 15–16.

⁴⁵ РГВИА. Ф. 2003. Оп. 1. Д. 52. Л. 455–455 об.

⁴⁶ Там же. Д. 1165. Л. 4–10 об.

⁴⁷ Там же. Л. 56.

⁴⁸ Архив Србије. НА-125. Л. 3.

⁴⁹ Там же.

⁵⁰ РГВИА. Ф. 2003. Оп. 2. Д. 79. Л. 207 об.

⁵¹ Там же. Оп. 1. Д. 1167. Л. 4–4 об.

by the end of October 1915, it became clear that none of these options was feasible, and the only chance for Russia to save Serbia would be an offensive on the Austrians in Galicia – Alekseyev formulated this in his report to the Emperor on 30 October 1915 – Borisov suggested the idea of a simultaneous Allied offensive towards Budapest from Salonika and Galicia.

Russian project of the offensive was rejected by both the French and the British and was not even discussed at the Allied conference in Chantilly in December 1915. In addition, General Zhilinsky, Russian representative in French *Grand Quartier General*, learned that the British continued to insist on clearing Salonika and redeploying their troops to Egypt to repel a potential Turkish threat⁵². To advance its position on the issue of preserving Allied presence in Salonika, the Russian high command sent two notes to the Allies (primarily the British), dated 28 November and 9 December 1915. The draft of the later note is entirely written in Alekseyev's handwriting⁵³, but the first note was written entirely by Borisov with Alekseyev making only slight adjustments: removing the mention of the lack of munitions in the Russian army⁵⁴.

At the end of 1915 Russia was the only member of the Entente who defended a truly coalition vision of the war. Notes communicated to French and British command in November and December show that Stavka viewed all theatres of war as interconnected, and therefore demanded increased attention to be paid to Salonika front and even suggested the creation of a single coalition decision-making centre, a council at the French Headquarters⁵⁵. Establishing Borisov's involvement in the creation of these notes makes it possible to determine the theoretical origin of Stavka's strategic decisions since, unlike Alekseyev, Borisov left an extensive theoretical legacy. For example, the idea of a single command centre for the whole coalition correlates with Borisov's idea about the need for all operations to be managed 'by one person, not entertained by the affairs of current life'⁵⁶. Before the war, Borisov argued in favour of a unified command for the entire Russian army, which was preparing to fight different opponents on several fronts, but in 1915 this idea was transposed on the entire coalition.

Borisov's theoretical ideas can be discovered even in the documents that were not written by him. For instance, the memorandum for the second Allied conference in Chantilly that was supposed to take place in March 1916, implied a postponement of the Allied offensive until 1 July 1916, which angered the Russian Chief of Staff. In Alekseyev's opinion, 'agreeing on a plan for the offensive in July means not taking into account *the enemy's will* (italics mine. – S.A.), his active character and the urgent need for him to strive to deliver blows to achieve a sooner end of the war'⁵⁷.

Alekseyev's thoughts are very similar to those of Borisov expressed in his work 'Logistics (Art of the General Staff)' published in 1912. Borisov considered it to be the 'foundation' of his work with Alekseyev⁵⁸. After his retirement in 1910, Borisov began a prolific writer on subjects of military theory and history. He set himself the task of developing a military doctrine that would be most consistent with the Russian battle formation⁵⁹. 'Logistics' was the first work in the series on Russian military doctrine, in which Borisov detailed his views on issues of strategy. Referring to Napoleon's *Correspondances*, he defines strategy as 'everything that derives from moral conditions, *character, talent, from the interest of your enemy* (italics mine. – S.A.), from the concepts and spirit of your soldier'⁶⁰. Similar ideas can be found in Borisov's earlier pamphlet with a critique of G.A. Leer published in 1897. In it, Borisov advocated the art of command based on the

⁵² Там же. Д. 1165. Л. 86.

⁵³ Там же. Д. 52. Л. 411.

⁵⁴ Там же. Л. 152–154 об.

⁵⁵ Там же. Д. 1165. Л. 73.

⁵⁶ *Борисов В.Е.* Генерал М.В. Алексеев... С. 4.

⁵⁷ РГВИА. Ф. 2003. Оп. 1. Д. 53. К. 355 об.

⁵⁸ Golovin Papers. Box 13. Letter from Borisov, 1931 (1936). P. 4.

⁵⁹ *Борисов В.Е.* Логистика: (Искусство ген. штаба). СПб., 1912.

⁶⁰ Там же. С. 23.

commander's ability to make decisions that would respond to external circumstances⁶¹, as opposed to the 'methodist' Leer, who wished to offer ready-made solutions for different circumstances of the war⁶¹.

Mentions of the need to consider the enemy's will and to understand the nature of war better can be often found in Alekseyev telegrams on issues of assistance to Serbia, the fate of Salonika, the Entente offensive, Romania's entry into the war, etc. Borisov and Alekseyev had similar educational and career trajectories: both graduated from the Nicholas Academy of General Staff, both were involved in General Staff work and in 1906–1908 served as Quartermasters (*oberkvartirmeister*) at GUGSh. They were close friends and shared many views. According to Borisov, Alekseyev was a 'sincere adherent' of 'Napoleon's axiom' derived by Borisov from *Correspondances*. It consisted of the assumption that 'the forces, location and intentions of the enemy are unknown' that meant that the troops should always be ready for battle⁶².

However, only in Stavka, their cooperation acquired practical consequences. In Mogilev Alekseyev and Borisov saw each other every day, Borisov regularly accompanied Alekseyev on his daily walks. They had the opportunity to discuss the changing circumstances of the war and develop and implement strategic decisions. Alekseyev did not always edit Borisov's notes, and in some cases, telegrams drawn upon their basis were sent to the addressees unchanged, which manifests the trust that Alekseyev put in Borisov as well as the active participation of the latter in the strategic work of the Headquarters.

It is important to highlight that the addressees of the telegrams written by Borisov never knew about their true author: Alekseyev signed the telegrams with his own name and took full responsibility for them. During his time in Mogilev Borisov did not insist that his role was to be widely known. In 1922 in his article on Stavka's functioning he has even called it 'a machine in a silent mode'⁶³. However, after the war Borisov began to embellish his own role in Stavka and to over-emphasise his importance to achieve social benefits, while his opponents, on the contrary, sought to discredit him, to portray him in a bad light⁶⁴. The categorical nature of in this discussion made it difficult for historians to reach a balanced conclusion about the role of General Borisov in Stavka of the Supreme Commander in Mogilev.

This article does not seek to be the final say in the discussion of the role of General V.E. Borisov in Stavka, but rather to offer a new perspective on the issue with help of discovered archival documents. The comparison of handwritings on Borisov's personal letters and the documents of Stavka demonstrated that the general took an active part in developing Russian military strategy in 1915–1917, especially in matters of strategic interaction with the Allies in late 1915 – early 1916. But the question of the exact nature of Borisov's influence on Alekseyev remains open. It is unknown whether Alekseyev entrusted Borisov with what he did not have time to do himself; asked for advice, as indicated by Colonel Noskov; or Borisov was in fact the brain behind all decisions in Mogilev. Hopefully, as the availability of Stavka's documents from RGVA grows (in 2019, most of the documents from this fund were digitized and posted in the public domain on the online portal gwar.ru), the role of General Borisov and his theoretical legacy will be better researched and known to a wider audience.

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⁶¹ *Борисов В.Е.* Стратегические вопросы... С. 22.

⁶² ГАРФ. Ф. 5956. Оп. 1. Д. 106. Л. 20 об., 21об. More on Borisov's theory see: *Борисов В.Е.* Аксиома Наполеона // Война и мир. № 15. 1924. С. 139–160.

⁶³ *Борисов В.Е.* Процесс верховного стратегического руководства... С. 13.

⁶⁴ *Ганин А.В.* Указ. соч. С. 350–351.

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