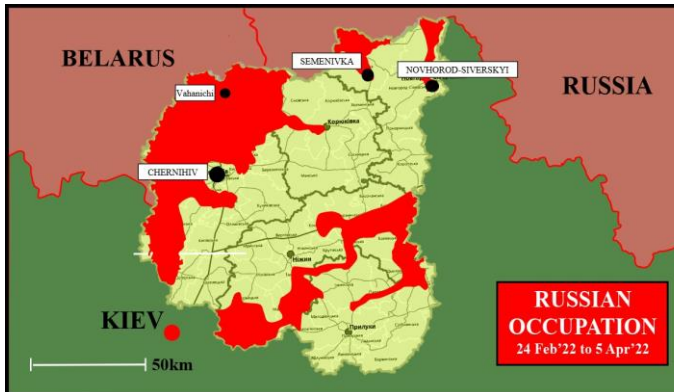


BRITISH HUMANITARIAN AID NEWS FEBRUARY 2024

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Chernihiv Oblast was invaded, and briefly occupied, by Russian troops during Putin's misguided attempt to occupy Kiev in 2022. Following their complete failure, they withdrew having according to Putin, "achieved all their aims."



Two towns, Semenivka and Novhorod-Siverskyi, close to the Russian border in the northeast of the region, are being shelled repeatedly. In July, just after our visit, the theatre in central Chernihiv was hit causing several deaths and many casualties. During our visit, the town of Bobrovitsya, northeast of Kiev was hit by shells.



All these attacks hit civilian, rather than military targets. Understandably, there is concern that a further attempt to seize Kiev may be made and this would inevitably be via Chernihiv Region. So, steps are being taken to give future defenders a better chance.



Following several relatively mild ones, this year Ukraine was in the grip of a "proper" winter in time for Christmas, moved from the Orthodox calendar to coincide with ours. During the visit, we experienced 30cms of snow, temperatures down to minus 20 degrees, blizzards and then a couple of warm days with rain, just to make driving conditions interesting.



While staying with friends in Vahanichi, we went to meet a family new to the village. Slava and Gala left their home in the Odessa Region, with their four children, to escape from the continual shelling. They arrived, with all their worldly goods in a couple of laundry bags.



Karina (10yrs) and Vova (9) are very lively. On "old" New Year's Eve they trekked 2.5 km to us through snow to "sing shchedrivky" (The Carol of the Bells), an ancient folk tradition wishing happiness and prosperity.



Solomia(4) and Artem(2) are shy and still unsettled by the upheaval they have experienced. The children's only toys were four soft ones! With BHA's help, Father Christmas delivered some more.

We are also trying to help with their future accommodation. The current house belongs to the abandoned "collective" farm, and it will be impossible to get documents. Our friends have found an alternative, but they need to find 1500 dollars to secure it!



After the weekend's rest in the village, we got back to work, distributing aid in the region. Fortunately, the main roads had been cleared of snow, even if only leaving a single track. The Nizhin and Korop Red Cross centres in both received loads. At Korop they are just moving into their new centre and are delighted that they can offer a wider range of services for the community.



On the way back, we detoured, via uncleared minor roads, to the Sokolyatko home at Budyshche. The hill up to the old school buildings was quite a challenge! This trip was special, as Odie, a young lady from Ewhurst, together with her school friends, had assembled presents and other aid, for all children. In addition, Bioteknik from Aylesford had kindly donated laptops for the teenagers to help with “distance learning”.



Several groups of determined “knitters”, from Whitfield and River, had donated a considerable number of blankets, and it was great to be able to distribute these, some direct from Aratta and others during our visits.



The team at Aratta, led by Victoria Filatova, are amazing. The lorries are unloaded by hand into the cramped offices of the charity. Aid is then donated according to the needs of the recipients, most of whom queue patiently. Every item donated must have an agreed value and is then recorded for the authorities.



Despite this, and the regular alarms, they are in good spirits. It is reassuring to be able to send aid from England knowing that it will be dealt with efficiently. Chernihiv also has the Parent’s Voice charity, that has been supported by BHA since its inception. They provide inspirational day care for handicapped youngsters. Despite everything, they are in great spirits and a group of the parents has been busy sewing clothes for soldiers and making 100 camouflage nets for their units.



The final visit, just west of Chernihiv, was to the social services for five villages that had suffered badly during the Russian occupation. Some villagers had been killed, and most properties looted and damaged. They are still suffering from stress and greatly fear a possible return of the Russians.



Apart from the regular alarms and occasional missiles and drones, most of Chernihiv Region is obstinately trying to resume a normal life. However, there are constant reminders of the continuing conflict. One soldier from Vahanichi was killed at the front, and four men stationed in the village during the summer have also lost their lives. Zennia, (below L) one of the foster family we supported, delivers ammunition and supplies to the fighting troops, and returns with bodies!



Anton Basanko (above R), a military paramedic recovers wounded troops from the front line in the east. When operating, they frequently must cut all clothing off and then have nothing to replace it. He visited Aratta seeking men’s clothing, which we only get in limited quantities. If you can help, please let us know.

Lorries went on 7th February and 19th March. However, the increased cost of these means that we are having to dip rather too far into our reserves. The aid donations are easily outstripping the financial and future lorries become more uncertain.

The warehouse will be closed for the first couple of weeks of April as I will be in Ukraine.

Philip G. Edmonds

March 2024