



## The Russian Airborne Troops (VDV) Turn 90

**OE Watch Commentary:** The world's first parachute assault was conducted by Soviet troops, during an exercise, on 2 August 1930. This date would later be considered the birth of the Airborne Troops (VDV). Although the VDV did perform a few airborne operations during the Second World War, the VDV was primarily used as elite (non-airborne) light infantry. The accompanying excerpted interview of Vladimir Shamanov, former VDV commander (2009-2016) and current Chairman of the State Duma Committee for Defense, in *Izvestiya*, contains Shamanov's thoughts on the VDV's past and future prospects in the context of the VDV's 90th birthday. Of particular interest, Shamanov mentions the low number of conscripts the VDV currently has in its ranks: approximately 30%. Additionally, he points out that most VDV personnel, presumably meaning just the VDV officer corps, have deployed to Syria. The accompanying excerpted article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* provides an excellent description of the current force structure of the Russian VDV, including how the Airborne has earned the moniker "the polite people." **End OE Watch Commentary**

***“Wherever the Supreme Commander-in-Chief orders us to be, that is where we will head out to, in coordination with the Russian Aerospace Forces. A poster can be seen in the Ryazan Airborne School: “Whoever insults Russia will have to deal with the VDV.” This is not a simple bravado, but a specific warning: you will have to deal with us.”***

***-Colonel General (ret.) Vladimir Shamanov,  
Chairman of the State Duma Committee for  
Defense***



Colonel General (ret.) Vladimir Shamanov.

Source: Russian Ministry of Defense, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir\\_Shamanov#/media/File:Vladimir\\_Shamanov\\_Cabinet\\_photo.jpg](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Shamanov#/media/File:Vladimir_Shamanov_Cabinet_photo.jpg), CC BY 3.0

### Fangs of the Lone Wolf

Chechen Tactics in the Russian-Chechen Wars  
1994-2009

Dodge Billingsley  
with Lester Grau

*Fangs of the Lone Wolf* is about combat experience in urban, mountain and fairly open terrain. It is not a comprehensive history of conflict. This book is a series of snapshots — of vignettes — describing the difficulty, the hardship, the victories and the defeats of the participants. It is an examination of the raw data of combat in a foreign land, and is aimed to advance the professional military study of conflict.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/195587/download>



## Continued: The Russian Airborne Troops (VDV) Turn 90

**Source:** Roman Krezul and Alexey Ramm, “«Мы там, где национальные интересы России» [We are where Russia’s national interests lie],” *Izvestiya Online*, 2 August 2020, <https://iz.ru/1042545/roman-kretcul-aleksei-ramm/my-tam-gde-natsionalnye-interesy-rossii>

*On 2 August, Russia’s Airborne Troops (VDV) celebrate the 90th anniversary since they were formed. Today, the VDV is the most mobile and versatile service branch, which happens to be at the stage of serious reforms. In the next few years they will have own army aviation, and will be able to operate autonomously all over the world. On the eve of the holiday, Colonel General Vladimir Shamanov, Chairman of the State Duma Committee for Defense, VDV commander from 2009 through 2016, and Hero of Russia, spoke with Izvestiya about the VDV’s new image, of the draft law aimed at protecting the servicemen, and the difficulties of becoming a separate service branch.*

*In your view, what is the role of the Airborne Troops in the military conflicts of the 21st century? What is the difference between the missions of the present-day VDV and those they faced during the Cold War?*

*During the times of the Soviet Union, there was a powerful organization -- the Warsaw Pact. Nowadays, several countries have joined Russia to form the Collective Security Treaty Organization -- the CSTO. And Russia is the backbone of this defensive bloc. Our main task is to preserve our sovereignty, so that no one in the world would even think of laying claims on our wealth and our territories...A new geopolitical situation has developed today, and conditions have changed globally. Look -- global warming forces us to closely monitor the development of the situation in the Arctic zone. We have restored a radar field there, created polar stations, infrastructure, and the Northern Fleet operational-strategic command. And this is just the naval component. The ground missions are assigned to the Airborne Troops, among others. It is not by chance that we landed on Kotelnny Island and regularly perform airdrops at the North Pole.*

*We tell our partners, as they call them, although I call them our opponents: we are where Russia’s national interests lie. And above all, that is a reference to our Airborne Troops. Today they have received new models of weapons with increased fire potential. There are the latest air defense, electronic warfare, and fire weapons systems. We have formed entire battalion-level subunits equipped with guided parachutes. This makes it possible to airdrop forces over many tens of kilometers from the battlefield, and, using the element of surprise, to resolve missions set by the country’s political leadership.*

*It should be noted that, according to the CSTO Charter, an attack on any of the participating countries is an attack on Russia. This scenario also needs to be considered. And we are preparing to repel any threat. The CSTO rapid response grouping consists of two VDV formations: the 98th Airborne Division (Ivanovo) and the 31st Separate Airborne Assault Brigade (Ulyanovsk). This outlines the role assigned to the Airborne Troops in our country’s defense strategy...As of today, virtually all the troops have acquired the practical experience of employing forces and assets via rotational tours under the conditions of the Syrian conflict, rendering assistance to the people of the Republic...*

*On the whole, how would you assess the level of training of today’s paratroopers? How have their combat skills changed in recent years?*

*The increase of the share of contract employees has sharply improved the skills of servicemen of all categories, and above all -- on the platoon/company level. As a rule, these are people with unfinished higher or secondary specialized education, as well as those with an additional military specialty...Today, draftees make up only 30 percent of the Airborne Troops servicemen. Tentatively speaking, there is one draftee per two contract servicemen. And, as we all know, only contract servicemen may be engaged in the accomplishment of combat missions abroad -- as was the case with ensuring security in Crimea during the historic referendum in 2014, for example.*

*In other words, is the VDV becoming a multifunctional force capable of performing the most diverse missions around the world?*

*Even now the VDV is the most versatile troops in our Armed Forces. Moreover, they are the best in terms of morale and combat capabilities. There are attempts to compare us with the American Marine Corps. But the US Marines are the formations, which protect, as they say, the US national interests around the world. Whereas the Russian Airborne Troops are an instrument, that first and foremost makes it possible to accomplish tasks of defending the territory of the country, and of cooperation with the CSTO allies. And, if necessary -- to carry out missions abroad.*

*Wherever the Supreme Commander-in-Chief orders us to be, that is where we will head out to, in coordination with the Russian Aerospace Forces. A poster can be seen in the Ryazan Airborne School: “Whoever insults Russia will have to deal with the VDV.” This is not a simple bravado, but a specific warning: you will have to deal with us.*



## Continued: The Russian Airborne Troops (VDV) Turn 90

***“Well, and we need to point out that the image of the Russian airborne troop has been branded even by the Americans in recent years thanks to the well-known events. The “polite people” - are now an integral part of the world political picture. And this image was not at all formed through the efforts of public relations specialists or the press. To be blunt, it created itself, from what and whom the Russian airborne troops are in fact - polite people. With precise missions and professional training.”***

**Source:** Ivan Konovalov, “«Войска дяди Васи» стали мировым брендом [‘Uncle Vasya’s Troops’ Have Become a Global Brand],” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 7 August 2020, [https://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2020-08-07/1\\_1103\\_brand.html](https://nvo.ng.ru/nvo/2020-08-07/1_1103_brand.html)

*Right now - there are four divisions and five separate brigades in the composition of the Airborne Troops. The reforms of the Russian Armed Forces, which began in 2008, affected first and foremost the VDV. And there were quite a few worrisome moments in the initial phase, when the very existence of the VDV was in doubt...In 2010, during the course of the first phase of the Ministry of Defense reforms, which the infamous Anatoliy Serdyukov headed at that time, the General Staff decided on the reduction of the VDV’s combat and numerical strength by approximately twofold. They proposed to disband two of the four divisions, while being motivated to do this by the absence of an articulated VDV employment concept and an adequate Military Transport Aviation fleet.*

*In 2013, they managed to return three air assaults brigades (11th, 56th, an 83rd) and 242nd (Sergeant) Training Center to the VDV’s composition, which had previously been transferred to the Ground Troops, thanks to the efforts of well-known airborne troops, who had gone into politics, also including General Vladimir Shamanov. At that same time, 45th Separate Guards Spetsnaz Regiment was transformed into 45th Brigade...In 2014, separate reconnaissance battalions were formed in 76th and 7th Guards Air Assault Divisions and 31st Air Assault Brigade (DShB). Two electronic warfare companies were created in 11th and 83rd Air Assault Brigades. Organic repair subunits were recreated in the VDV formations.*

*Separate tank companies were formed in all six VDV air assault formations - 7th and 76th guards divisions, and 11th, 31st, 56th, and 83rd separate guards’ brigades - in 2016. Three more reconnaissance battalions, two electronic warfare companies, and two unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) companies were formed. The first of three regiments in the VDV divisions - 76th Division’s 237th Guards Air Assault Regiment (as a result of these reductions, all of the Airborne Troops’ divisions were transitioned from a three regiment to a two-regiment composition. - Editor’s comment), and 38th Regiment was upgraded to a command and control brigade. The tank companies of the 76th and 7th Divisions’ and 56th Brigade were upgraded to tank battalions. The VDV Force Structure and Development Concept envisions the transition of the 31st Guards Air Assault Brigade into 104th Guards Division and the creation of a VDV artillery brigade. So, there will be five divisions in the VDV’s composition - two airborne and three air assault. The Airborne Troops’ personnel strength is approximately 45,000 personnel at present.*

*The Airborne Troops became one of the first in the RF Armed Forces Structure to transition to the contract manning principle. This was an obvious decision. The service of a well-trained airborne troop over the course of only a year is nonsense. All the more so that the VDV are the Supreme Commander-in-Chief’s reserve and the main Rapid Reaction Forces in the current Russian Armed Forces Force Structure Concept, which equates them with the Strategic Missile Troops, where only military professionals are also serving right now...*

*76th Guards Airborne Division became the first contract service division in the Russian Army in 2003. Later 7th and 98th Divisions, 31st Separate Air Assault Brigade, and 45th Reconnaissance Regiment, which has been deployed into a brigade, transitioned to the contract. 106th Guards Airborne Division is manned based upon the mixed principle. Approximately 30 percent conscripts serve in the VDV to this day. The NCO Corps is totally contract servicemen. Right now, in order to perform service in the airborne infantry, a conscript needs to withstand a very serious competition, which consists of not only tests on physical fitness but also on psychological stability...The VDV training system includes: Ryazan Higher Airborne Command (RVVDKU), 242nd Omsk Training Center, 332nd Warrant Officers’ School, and Ulyanovsk Guards Suvorov Military School...*

*Well, and we need to point out that the image of the Russian airborne troop has been branded even by the Americans in recent years thanks to the well-known events. The “polite people” - are now an integral part of the world political picture. And this image was not at all formed through the efforts of public relations specialists or the press. To be blunt, it created itself, from what and whom the Russian airborne troops are in fact - polite people. With precise missions and professional training.*