



## Change Is Coming for Russian Naval Infantry Brigades

**OE Watch Commentary:** The Russian Navy is somewhat unique among the three major branches of the Russian Armed Forces (Ground Forces, Navy, Aerospace Forces) because it is the only branch that has elements of the other units, namely aviation and ground combat. The Russian Navy's ground combat element is the Naval Infantry.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Nezavisimaya Gazeta* describes the role of the Russian Naval Infantry, which along with the Coastal Artillery Troops, is part of the Coastal Defense Troops. Interestingly, the article compares the Naval Infantry to the Russian Airborne (VDV) Troops, and points out that much as the VDV is hindered by the lack of Transport Aviation (VTA), the Naval Infantry is hindered by the lack of Large Landing Ships (BDKs). Since these large-scale offensive capabilities are lacking, Russian planners likely envision the role of these forces in large-scale conflicts in defensive operations for Russian exclaves such as Crimea and Kaliningrad, and extremely remote areas such as Kamchatka.

The accompanying excerpted article from *Izvestia* discusses Russian plans to increase the size of, and standardize, the composition of Russian Naval Infantry Brigades. (Currently, there is no standardized composition.) According to *Izvestia*, there will be six maneuver battalions in each brigade (three naval infantry battalions, one assault battalion, one tank battalion, and one reconnaissance battalion), along with a sniper company and an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) company. Although the Russian Naval Infantry currently lacks the necessary naval vessels and landing craft to conduct large-scale forced entry amphibious operations, these additions would significantly enhance its capability to conduct a coastal defense against a well-organized amphibious or airborne assault. Another interesting aspect of the article is a proposed role for the Naval Infantry in peacekeeping operations. Apparently the Naval Infantry is envisioned to work closely with Russian military police units during these endeavors.

The Naval Infantry was created along with the Navy during the reign of Peter the Great and is currently organized as follows: The Baltic Fleet, of the Western Joint Strategic Command, has the 336th Naval Infantry Brigade stationed in Baltiysk. The brigade is considered to be a significant portion of the ground element's defensive potential of the exclave of Kaliningrad. The Northern Fleet, of the Northern Joint Strategic Command, has the 61st Naval Infantry Brigade stationed in the town of 'Sputnik' in the Murmansk Oblast, not far from the borders of Russia, Finland, and Norway. In accordance with geographic location, its primary concern is Arctic operations. The Black Sea Fleet, of the Southern Joint Strategic Command, has the 810th Naval Infantry Brigade stationed in Sevastopol, with the exception of the 382nd Naval Infantry Battalion that is stationed in Temryuk, Krasnodar Krai. The brigade's situation improved significantly after Crimea became part of Russia. Much like the 336th Naval Infantry Brigade in Kaliningrad, the 810th is considered to be a significant portion of the ground element's defensive potential of the exclave of Crimea. The Caspian Flotilla, of the Southern Joint Strategic Command, has the 177th Regiment in Kaspiysk, Dagestan, with one Naval Infantry Battalion at the headquarters in Kaspiysk, and the other located in the city of Astrakhan, in the Astrakhan Oblast. The Pacific Fleet, of the Eastern Joint Strategic Command, is divided into two flotillas with over 2,000 kilometers between them, so the Pacific Fleet has two naval infantry brigades. The 155th Brigade is stationed in Vladivostok, while the 40th Brigade is deployed in Petropavlovsk-Kamchatka. Due to the remote location of Kamchatka, and the limited transportation network connecting it to Russian lines of communication, Kamchatka is occasionally described as an 'exclave.' As with Kaliningrad and Crimea, the ground elements aspects of the defense of Kamchatka is strongly tied to the Naval Infantry. **End OE Watch Commentary (Bartles)**

***“Therefore the real mission of the Naval Infantry in the foreseeable future is the defense of enclaves.”***

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## Continued: Change Is Coming for Russian Naval Infantry Brigades



Dress Rehearsal for 2013 Victory Day Parade on the Red Square/ Naval Infantrymen of the 336th Separate Naval Infantry Brigade.

Source: Vitaly Kuzmin via Vitalykuzmin.net, <https://www.vitalykuzmin.net/Military/VictoryDayParade2013/i-TrjX7r3/A>, CC BY-NC-ND 4.0

**Source:** Aleksandr Anatolyevich Khranchikhin, “Российская морская пехота сегодня: Возможности и задачи черных беретов (Russian Naval Infantry Today: Capabilities and Missions of the Black Berets),” *Nezavisimaya Gazeta Online*, 6 December 2019. [http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2019-12-06/2\\_1073\\_marines.html](http://nvo.ng.ru/forces/2019-12-06/2_1073_marines.html)

### ***Russian Naval Infantry Today: Capabilities and Missions of the Black Berets***

*The training level of Russian naval infantrymen is no lower than for airborne troopers...They are the ones assigned the mission of ground security of Russian airfields and air defense facilities in Syria. And judging from everything, the actions of naval infantrymen in Syria are not limited to security alone. In the Soviet period (during the 1970s and 1980s), naval infantrymen made combat landings in Somalia, Ethiopia, South Yemen, and the Seychelles, helping our allies of that time or supporting evacuation of Soviet specialists and diplomats. In all cases the missions were executed faultlessly and without losses...In the early 1990s it was the Russian naval infantry making assault landings in Georgia...The naval infantry of all fleets fought for all they were worth in Chechnya (up to 200 naval infantrymen died in the first war and up to 50 in the second).*

*...the Russian Naval Infantry is far from the largest in the world. It hardly will have to take part at some time in classical amphibious landings in the course of large-scale wars, the more so as ...our Navy is not prepared to large-scale landings...the Naval Infantry is very similar to the VDV in this respect to colleagues in the VDV [Airborne Forces], who also have no way to conduct large-scale airborne landings and are not supported by military transport aviation...Therefore the Naval Infantry logically supplements the VDV as a component part of the Rapid Deployment Force. If such a need arises, specifically it will defend territories in the Baltic, Black Sea, and Pacific that are isolated geographically and possibly blockaded by the enemy, supplementing the Ground Troops and Coastal Defense Troops.*

*That said, the Naval Infantry is better suited than the VDV for raiding operations far from Russia's borders: the Naval Infantry does not need runways, assurance of air superiority, or a flight through foreign airspace. But there needs to be the constant presence of at least several large landing ships (BDKs) in various parts of the ocean, and at least one frigate must be “attached” to each BDK...To a certain extent that is how the USSR Navy operated during the 1970s and 1980s, but our BDKs are very old and, moreover, are overworked by the “Syrian Express,” and there is a great shortage of frigates as well. Therefore the real mission of the Naval Infantry in the foreseeable future is the defense of enclaves.*



## Continued: Change Is Coming for Russian Naval Infantry Brigades

**Source:** Aleksey Ramm, Aleksey Kozachenko, and Bogdan Stepovoy, “Выдадут броню: бригады морпехов усилят танковыми подразделениями (They Will Issue Armor: They Will Reinforce Naval Infantry Brigades with Tank Subunits),” *Izvestia Online*, 22 October 2019. <https://iz.ru/923772/aleksei-ramm-aleksei-kozachenko-bogdan-stepovoi/vydadut-broniu-brigady-morpekhov-usiliat-tankovymi-podrazdeleniiami>

### ***They Will Issue Armor. They Will Reinforce Naval Infantry Brigades with Tank Subunits***

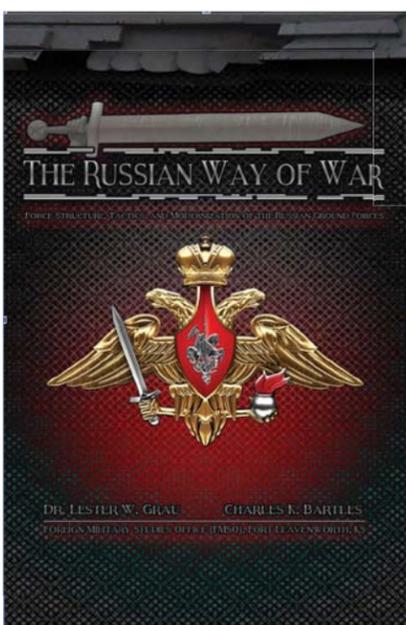
*The naval infantry brigades, which are in the Navy’s composition, will be reformed...The presence of heavy armored vehicles will permit the “Black Berets” to operate autonomously at any point of the world, without relying on the support of the other types of troops...the Russian “Black Berets” will become expeditionary forces, which accomplish an extensive range of military and political missions...*

*The brigades will get a new manning table – there will be six battalions in it (right now, there are two: an air assault-landing battalion and a naval infantry battalion - in the formations, and also a reconnaissance company and a number of smaller subunits). One reconnaissance, one tank, and two naval infantry battalions will also additionally appear. The tank subunits will increase both the “Black Berets” firepower and also maneuvering capabilities. The armored vehicles will permit the conduct of adequately large-scale combat operations. Furthermore, they will augment the brigade with two companies – a sniper company and an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) company. In the future, the naval infantrymen can obtain their own aviation subunits, sources in the Ministry of Defense told Izvestiya...In accordance with the new manning table, a naval infantry battalion consists of three companies – air assault landing and two “Black Berets” [Naval Infantry], a self-propelled artillery battery, antitank and grenade launcher platoons, and other units. Approximately 400-500 men will serve in those formations.*

*The transfer of the expeditionary functions to the Naval Infantry – is a well-considered step, Former Navy Main Staff Chief Admiral Valentin Selivanov thinks. “Right now, operations, like the Syrian operation, are becoming particularly important”, he told Izvestiya. “And the decision on increasing the combat capabilities of the naval infantry subunits – is correct. This is one of the most combat-capable types of troops, which has high proficiency and rich combat experience and history. The ‘Black Berets’ have participated in all of the military conflicts of recent years. And they have proven themselves everywhere, including in Syria”.*

*The operation in this Middle Eastern country have assigned a new mission – expeditionary - to the Russian Armed Forces, “Arms Export” Magazine Scientific Editor Mikhail Baranov is confident. “Historically, it has developed in such a way that the Naval Infantry is best suited for this”, the Expert explained to Izvestiya.*

*During the course of military, humanitarian, or peacekeeping operations, naval infantrymen will have to evacuate Russian citizens and take control of the naval bases and coastal facilities. Heavy vehicles – those same tanks – are needed to conduct the majority of those operations, Barabanov summarized. After the arrival of the main force, they will assign the functions for the maintenance of order in some or other populated area to the military police. But even in this case, the Naval Infantry will be responsible for the security of the external perimeter...*



### **THE RUSSIAN WAY OF WAR by LESTER W. GRAU and CHARLES K. BARTLES**

At any given time, assessments of the Russian Armed Forces vary between the idea of an incompetent and corrupt conscript army manning decrepit Soviet equipment and relying solely on brute force, to the idea of an elite military filled with Special Operations Forces (SOF) who were the “polite people” or “little green men” seen on the streets in Crimea. This book will attempt to split the difference between these radically different ideas by shedding some light on what the Russian Ground Forces consist of, how they are structured, how they fight, and how they are modernizing.

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