



Few Elite in the Russian Military

OE Watch Commentary: Several recent polls indicate that Russian attitudes toward its armed forces and military service have improved significantly over the past decade. Better pay, upgraded living conditions, and a persistent positive media image, combined with the state's successful portrayal of operations abroad, are restoring the status of those in military uniform. Many young Russians, especially from poorer regions, now regard military service as a social lift, either for pursuing a private sector or civil service career. However, as a recent article in the popular pro-Kremlin daily *Komsomolskaya Pravda* suggests, the Russian elite does not fully share this positive attitude toward military service. In the accompanying excerpt, military journalist Victor Baranets describes why the son of a wealthy businessman recently decided to join the army and the wider message it sent to Russian society.

Baranets begins by recounting a conversation with a senior Ministry of Defense official, whereupon he learned “that the famous Russian businessman - billionaire Alexei Mordashov, when sending his son into the army, persistently asked him to pick ‘a real unit’ where he will not have indulgences and where the harsh army school will make a real man and a good specialist out of him.” The son complied and is now in basic training and then will be sent to a regular engineering unit. According to the article, the new recruit has discovered that military service now includes “a warm barracks with all the amenities, showers, and where we are fed like at a buffet!” Baranets goes on to explain that Mordashov’s son “joined the army after being expelled from the Higher School of Economics, where he studied for a year.”

Baranets concludes the article by asking rhetorically, what other “children and grandchildren of famous people in Russia today have served in the army?” and ruefully replies, “there are not many of them.” He lists but a handful of recent examples of elite sons who have donned a military uniform. Reader comments to this article are mostly indignant, pointing out that in today’s Russia the elite appear to operate with a different set of rules, asking for instance, “by law, isn’t he supposed to serve?” Another reader complains, “the list of honest guys from the top is too small.” While the status of Russian military soldier has risen considerably over the past ten years, elite representation within the ranks remains an exception to the rule. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**

“Children and grandchildren of famous people in Russia today have served in the army? There are not many of them....”

Source: Victor Baranets, “Миллиардер отправил сына в армию — поучиться жизни (The billionaire sent his son to the army – to learn about life),” *Komsomolskaya Pravda* (popular pro-Kremlin daily), 14 January 2021. <https://www.kp.ru/daily/27226/4352384/>

...Well done father, he directed his son along the right path. This decision can only command respect, - I heard these words during a telephone conversation with one of the military leaders of the Ministry of Defense. From him I learned that the famous Russian businessman - billionaire Alexei Mordashov, sending his son into the army, persistently asked Nikita to pick ‘a real unit’ where he will not have indulgences and where the harsh army school will make a real man and a good specialist out of him...”

As a result, he was sent to the ‘training’ (educational unit), where he is now preparing to take the oath. And then he will be sent to one of the engineering units. Where is she stationed? “In Central Russia,” the Defense Ministry told me. More precisely, they refused to name the coordinates....

Nikita also confessed to his colleagues that he did not expect to “see an army like this.” At the Higher School of Economics (Higher School of Economics), they say, they told him horror stories about the service, and here “a warm barracks with all the amenities, showers, and where we are fed like at a buffet!”

It is worth noting that the son of the billionaire Mordashov joined the army after being expelled from the Higher School of Economics, where he studied for a year....

MILITARY DOSSIER “KP”

Children and grandchildren of famous people in Russia today have served in the army?

There are not many of them....

...Nikita is the son of the famous writer Sergei Mikhalkov: a famous film actor and film director, served in the Pacific Fleet. In the same place, in the Far East, the grandson of Mikhalkov Sr., Stepan (in the naval unit of the border troops), also served.

The son of the first deputy chairman of the board of VTB and chairman of the board of directors of FC Dynamo Vasily Titov was called up to serve after graduation.

The son of the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation Igor Shuvalov served on Russky Island in the naval special forces of the Pacific Fleet. The son of the former governor of the Amur Region, Oleg Kozhemyako (now the governor of the Primorsky Territory), also pulled a strap in the ranks of the marines.

Reader replies:

By law, isn’t he supposed to serve?...

The list of honest guys from the top is too small....