



Russian Military Newspapers on the Decline

OE Watch Commentary: The military newspaper *Krasnaya Zvezda* has long been a primary source for those following developments within the Russian armed forces. Founded in 1924, it became one of the leading Soviet newspapers during the Second World War, with subscriptions once exceeding 2 million. While hardly known for critical or investigative journalism, *Krasnaya Zvezda* and similar district military newspapers could be relied upon for mostly objective reporting on the Russian military. However, this may no longer be the case, according to a brief excerpt from the popular privately owned military weekly *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer*.

The article, written by a former military journalist, describes the diminished state of official military reporting in Russia today, arguing that “the army has closed itself off from society.” Instead of reporting directly to a military news source, soldiers today must “now communicate with military journalists only with the permission of the Department of Information and Mass Communications of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (DIMK).” The author goes on to assert that “the task of DIMK employees is not so much to reveal, but to hide information.” The fear of reporting objective information in the military press stems partially from their direct subordination to the DIMK.

The author concludes by quoting “one high-ranking officer,” who told him “I don’t read *Krasnaya Zvezda*... there’s nothing interesting there.” While the author considers such a remark as “insulting,” he does not object since the newspaper today is filled with “ostrich politics,” presumably a reference to burying one’s head in the sand. He rhetorically asks, “are there no problems in the Armed Forces today that require analysis and search for solutions? ... Is there no hazing, or bribe-takers in uniform?” Rather than addressing genuine problems in the military, the author claims that “the content of the [*Krasnaya Zvezda*] newspaper is adjusted so that the leadership of the RF Ministry of Defense will like it.” As the title of the article suggests, official Russian military journalism is now struggling in finding the balance between objective reporting and public relations. **End OE Watch Commentary (Finch)**



Postage stamp of vintage copy of *Krasnaya Zvezda*.
Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Krasnaya_Zvezda#/media/File:1974_CPA_4310.jpg, Attribution: Public Domain

“The content of the newspaper is adjusted so that the leadership of the RF Ministry of Defense would like it....”

Source: Valery Gromak, “Обреченные на пиар (Doomed to PR),” *Voyenno-Promyshlennyy Kuryer* (popular privately owned military weekly), 2 March 2021. <https://vpk-news.ru/articles/61078>

The Ministry of Defense media, instead of improving the activities of the department, are aimed exclusively at glorifying the leadership.

I served in the Armed Forces of the USSR and the Russian Federation for a total of 38 years. Almost 30 of them are in the military press.... For 13 years I was a regular correspondent for the central military newspaper of the Ministry of Defense “Krasnaya Zvezda.” I’ve seen a lot. But what is now happening with the military press is not only surprising, but causes deep regret and vexation....

...My colleagues, without hesitation in expressions, say that the army has closed itself off from society, that a soldier can now communicate with military journalists only with the permission of the Department of Information and Mass Communications of the Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation (DIMK). But the task of DIMK employees is not so much to reveal, but to hide information....

...In Soviet times, the circulation of “Krasnaya Zvezda” was over two million copies, and the main subscribers were civilians. The newspaper was sold at every kiosk. And now? Its imprint indicates a circulation of just over 25 thousand copies, but in reality it is less. Moreover, this is mainly a mandatory subscription of military units. And only a little more than a thousand - a voluntary subscription, mostly of veterans. And this is for a million-strong army and four million military pensioners!...

...“I don’t read Krasnaya Zvezda,” one high-ranking officer told me, “there’s nothing interesting there.” Hearing such a thing is insulting. But there is nothing special to argue. Open a newspaper and see ostrich politics on its pages. The publications are made so as not to be responsible for them. And critical speeches cannot be found with fire during the day. Of course, no one likes criticism. But are there no problems in the Armed Forces today that require analysis and search for solutions? Is everything fine in the organization of combat training? There is no hazing, bribe-takers in uniform...

...The content of the newspaper is adjusted so that the leadership of the RF Ministry of Defense would like it....

...Finally, it is necessary to restore the authority of the newspaper’s word, and make the life of the army and navy transparent and understandable for society....