



In the Rucksacks of the Sofrino Brigade: Snickers and Pork Fat

OE Watch Commentary: Located 30 miles north of Moscow, Sofrino is home to the Sofrino National Guard Brigade- a military unit that reports directly to President Putin and the National Security Council. The Sofrino Brigade is a former Internal Affairs unit that has subsumed many of the functions and units of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. It saw combat in Chechnya and is considered one of the better trained and easily deployable units close to Moscow.

The accompanying article discusses some of the tactical field training of the reconnaissance troops of the Sofrino Brigade. The scouts are considered an elite military force and experience rugged training, as provided in interesting details in the accompanying article. What Western readers might find interesting is that “practically everyone carries.... Snickers and *сало* [salo] in their haversack.” The reference to *сало* (cured pork fat) notes that “hunger and cold constantly plague scouts on their reconnaissance missions,” so high-caloric foods are essential for winter combat. *Сало* is not lard since it is not rendered and it has too little meat to qualify as bacon. It is sliced and cured fatback which often has the skin attached. It is popularly held that other uses for *сало* include waterproofing leather boots and baiting mousetraps.

The village of Sofrino is on a main rail line. Sofrino is also known for being home to the factory that produces about 95% of the ecclesiastical vestments, icons, candles, candelabra, vessels and accessories for the Russian Orthodox Church. The Moscow Patriarch owns the factory. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

Source: Grigoriy Milenin, “Pork Fat is a Must: How Russian National Guard Troops train to destroy Terrorists”, *Московский комсомолец* (Moscow Komsomolets), 6 November 2017. <http://mk.ru>

Four shadows glide silently between the trees. A forward patrol approaches a hidden “terrorist” base in a forest outside Moscow. The remaining members of the reconnaissance group stealthily follow behind. The point man shows a hand signal and the team freezes. There is a booby trap on the path. The point man cuts the trip wire to a mine.

The patrol begins to move again when fire erupts from a dugout position....The scouts scatter to encircle the dugout. The bulk of the team pins down the “bandits” with fire, while two scouts approach the dugout from behind. They can see a covered entry behind the dugout, hidden under dead leaves and needles. One scout throws a grappling hook onto the hatch cover and pulls it to one side, while the other throws a couple of grenades into the ... opening. The “terrorist base” is destroyed.

“Our main mission is to approach the enemy without being seen, to check how many people they have, what they are armed with, how their camp is equipped, etc. They used to say: ‘As soon as shooting starts, the reconnaissance mission ends.’ But these days everything is different. Reconnaissance groups often have to destroy the bandits. This was especially the case in the North Caucasus. This is why we constantly rehearse such situations.”...

Before they find a terrorist base in the mountains, reconnaissance groups spend more than one day on a search mission. They often have to sleep in the open. Carrying a tent is a luxury and scouts have to think hard about every extra gram of cargo that they carry. However, if they can, scouts will build a hide, in which they can rest in relative warmth, even in freezing temperatures.

The guardsmen from the Sofrino Brigade showed journalists one such “dwelling.” When you pass it, all you see is a fallen tree, but there is a small shelter behind it, which can accommodate three scouts. The floor is covered with branches of coniferous trees over which lay special one-centimeter-thick mats. These are denser and hold warmth better than the foam mats used by campers. A smokeless campfire radiates heat nearby, its flames hidden in a hole in the ground.

“We build a campfire very rarely,” Captain Igor says. “It can betray us. We only build one if the conditions are right: if there is a mist or if we are near an inhabited village. But if we are on wild mountainous terrain, with no settlements around for tens of kilometers, a campfire is out of the question.” ...For the same reason... scouts cannot always warm up their food or boil their tea using camping gas burners... The smell of hot stew or tea can alert some starving “outlaw,” even if he is far away.

Counting Calories

Hunger and cold constantly plague scouts on their reconnaissance missions. In addition to not being able to eat properly, the scouts constantly have to fight hypothermia. “One of the most dangerous situations is when you sweat in freezing temperatures. If you are drenched to the bone, there is only one thing to do: take off all your wet clothes... and change into dry clothes. As a rule, we take with us two sets of clothes, sometimes we are able to dry the damp clothes by a campfire. But we do not often manage to do that.”

Scouts from the Russian National Guard use chemical heating pads. Their uniforms even have special pockets for them. Medics carry a supply of alcohol, which they use, if they have to, for rubbing down their colleagues. Scouts’ food is also rich in calories. Some use sports snacks -- dry protein mixtures and bars. And practically everyone carries a supply of Snickers and pork fat in their haversack. “Pork fat is a must,” Captain Igor says with a smile. “We never go on a mission without this source of calories.”

Nevertheless, it is scouts’ stamina and their endurance capacity that help them withstand low temperatures better than anything else. “Just like military [Ministry of Defense] scouts, the focus in our fitness training is on raising our endurance capacity. For example, I forbid my fighters to do body-building. Only running, CrossFit, and boxing.”

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Continued: In the Rucksacks of the Sofrino Brigade: Snickers and Pork Fat

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*-Russian National Guard Captain Igor [National Guard scouts do not give their full names], Sofrino
National Guard Brigade*

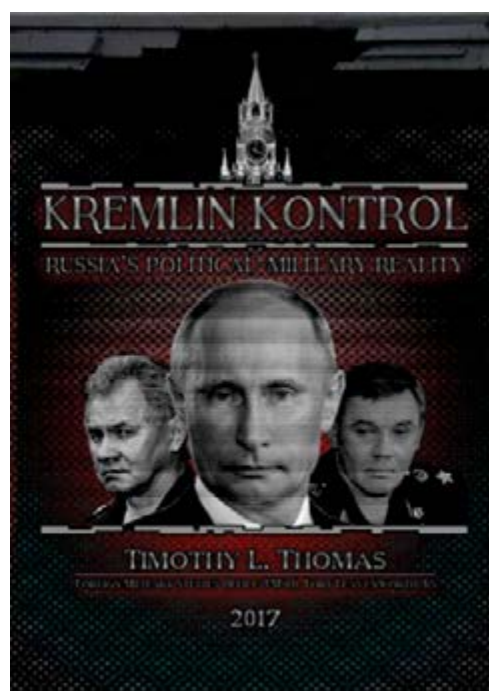
Russian NBC Arctic Training in 2017

OE Watch Commentary: Russian Nuclear-Biological-Chemical (NBC) troops conduct decontamination of areas, vehicles and personnel. They are also in charge of flamethrowers and smoke screens. The Russian Army uses a lot of smoke screens with particulate smoke which defeats visual and sensor detection. Smoke is particularly important- and often difficult to lay- when conducting amphibious landings and riverine operations. The accompanying article describes mounting the TDA-3 smoke generator unit on a 61st Naval Infantry Brigade vessel to lay a smoke screen to cover landings. The TDA-3 is a newer system that provides quicker and larger coverage than earlier systems. It uses an aircraft engine to disperse an aerosol fog in a horizontal or vertical pattern. The experimental combination of smoke generator and fast boat for laying smoke screens may become a regular feature of Arctic amphibious landings.

The article also describes Northern Fleet NBC exercises to mask garrison cities. It is unclear whether the smoke screens over the cities were actually conducted. However, in September 2016, the closed port city of Severomorsk was actually concealed under smoke for three days. **End OE Watch Commentary (Grau)**

“The year 2017 marked a turning point in re-equipping the NBC Protection Troops’ units and subunits with modern equipment -- the latest RKhM-6 NBC reconnaissance vehicles built on the of the BTR-80 armored personnel carrier, TDA-3 smoke vehicles mounted on the KamAZ truck chassis, and ARS-14KM mobile decontamination stations, which can also be used for laying down smoke screens. The new equipment significantly boosted the combat capabilities of the Northern Fleet’s NBC protection subunits...”

- Captain First Class Sergey Mihaylyuk, the head of the Northern Fleet’s NBC protection service



KREMLIN KONTROL by TIMOTHY L. THOMAS

In 2016 Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov instituted sweeping changes that have reorganized the country’s security forces and reestablished the nation’s military prowess. This study, Kremlin Kontrol, aims to describe how control over the security services and the military have hastened those changes.

<https://community.apan.org/wg/tradoc-g2/fmso/m/fmso-books/197266/download>

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