



The Curator asked about Naval Infantry: Recruitment, Attrition, in the Far East as a result of Ukraine War (for similar study see Mind the Gap series and associated papers about the Northern Fleet)

Key finding: Both Pacific Fleet naval infantry brigades have been effectively destroyed and reconstituted multiple times since 2022. They recruit primarily from Russia's Far Eastern federal subjects — Primorsky Krai, Kamchatka, Khabarovsk Krai — meaning the human cost of the Ukraine war falls disproportionately on Russia's most geographically isolated and politically marginal communities. The reconstitution of these formations as divisions is an organisational aspiration rather than a current military reality.

The Two Formations

The Pacific Fleet's naval infantry comprises two principal formations. The 155th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade, headquartered in Vladivostok and the village of Slavyanka in Primorsky Krai, is the senior formation, tracing its lineage to the 55th Naval Infantry Division established in 1968. It was reconstituted as a brigade in December 2009 when the 55th Division was dissolved — a reduction in establishment that reflected post-Cold War downsizing. On 1 December 2025, the process reversed: the 155th Brigade was redesignated the 55th Guards Naval Infantry Division, in theory expanding rather than contracting its establishment. The redesignation was awarded partly in recognition of combat service in Ukraine, alongside the honorary title 'Kursk' (February 2025) and the Order of Suvorov (January 2025).

The 40th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade, based at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky, has a more complex lineage. It traces its origins to a Red Army division formed in 1918, which passed through multiple redesignations before becoming the 22nd Motor Rifle Division in the Far East Military District in the 1990s, transferred to the Pacific Fleet in 1998, and redesignated as the 40th Naval Infantry Brigade in September 2007. It operates under the North-East Group of Troops and Forces directed by the Kamchatka Flotilla headquarters — a command architecture that reflects the distinct operational environment of Kamchatka relative to Primorsky Krai.

Recruitment Geography

Both formations recruit primarily from the Russian Far Eastern Federal District — Russia's largest federal district by area and its most sparsely populated, with approximately 8 million inhabitants across a territory larger than India. The 155th draws principally from Primorsky Krai (population approximately 1.8 million, of whom perhaps 600,000 live in Vladivostok itself) and Khabarovsk Krai. The 40th draws from Kamchatka Krai (population under 300,000) and surrounding territories.

Both formations are mixed-manning: contract soldiers (kontraktniki) who sign voluntary service agreements form the professional core, supplemented by conscripts on their statutory 12-month service, and since 2022 by mobilised personnel called up under the partial mobilisation decree of September 2022. The proportion of mobilised personnel has increased substantially as attrition has consumed the pre-war contract force. Grokipedia's analysis of the 155th's manning history notes that initial authorised strength was in the range of 2,000 to 3,000 troops, with contract soldiers prioritised to maintain an elite force profile consistent with Naval Infantry standards.

The Ukraine Attrition Record

The record of both formations in Ukraine is one of sustained, severe attrition. Both brigades were transferred to Ukraine in early 2022 and committed to combat from the opening phase of the invasion. The 155th saw early action near Kyiv, where it was later accused of war crimes during the occupation of settlements in the Vyshhorod district. By November 2022, it was suffering catastrophic losses at Pavlivka, near Vuhledar, in the Donetsk region: the brigade reportedly lost 300 personnel over four days in early November alone, with accounts from within the unit describing poorly trained mobilised soldiers thrown into an offensive without adequate support.

The February 2023 assaults on Vuhledar were worse. Video footage from a single engagement showed approximately 30 Russian combat vehicles destroyed, including 13 tanks and 12 BMPs. The Institute for the Study of War assessed the footage as showing 'highly dysfunctional' combat tactics consistent with a unit composed largely of freshly mobilised soldiers with inadequate training. Overall attrition estimates for the Vuhledar period place 155th Brigade losses at approximately 2,400 personnel — around 80% of authorised strength — in that single operational sector alone. Grokipedia's analysis concludes that the brigade has been effectively destroyed and reconstituted up to eight times through successive mobilisations since February 2022.

The 155th's deputy commander, Rear Admiral Mikhail Gudkov, was killed by a Ukrainian missile

strike in the Kursk region on 3 July 2025. The brigade was subsequently named after him. On 30 May 2025, Ukrainian military intelligence claimed responsibility for explosions near Desantnaya Bay in Vladivostok, targeting the 47th Assault Battalion's command post and barracks — a strike, if confirmed, that reached the formation's home base some 6,000 kilometres from the front line.

The 40th Brigade's record is similar in kind if less extensively documented. Elements were operating in eastern Ukraine as recently as September 2025, alongside elements of the 155th, the 61st Northern Fleet brigade, and the 336th Baltic Fleet brigade — a deployment pattern that continues to consume the Pacific Fleet's ground combat element with no end date yet visible.

The Political Dimension

The regional recruitment base of these formations means the human cost of the Ukraine war falls with particular weight on communities in Russia's most remote and least politically connected territories. Primorsky Krai and Kamchatka are regions where federal authority is exercised at considerable geographic remove, where economic dependence on defence employment is high, and where the loss of young men to a distant war has immediate and visible community consequences. The letters from 155th Brigade personnel published on Telegram in November 2022, describing how they had been "thrown into an incomprehensible offensive" and calling for an independent investigation, represented a degree of public dissent from within a military formation that is unusual in the Russian context.

The redesignation of the 155th as the 55th Guards Naval Infantry Division in December 2025 is presented as recognition of combat distinction. It is also an expansion of establishment that the formation cannot currently fill: ISW and others note that the division is not staffed to doctrinal strength, and is unlikely to be so until the current conflict ends and a sustained period of recruitment and training becomes possible. The division designation is, for now, an organisational aspiration worn on paper by a unit that is still being rebuilt from successive depletion.

Implications for Pacific Fleet Amphibious Capability

The sustained commitment of both Pacific Fleet naval infantry formations to Ukraine has effectively suspended the fleet's amphibious capacity for the duration of the war. The planned expansion of Pacific Fleet amphibious shipping — Ivan Gren-class landing ships, potentially the

Ivan Rogov-class helicopter assault ship — proceeds on paper, but there are no meaningful naval infantry formations available to embark on them in their intended role. The amphibious threat to Japan's disputed Kuril Islands, or to any other objective in the Pacific theatre, is notional rather than operational for as long as the Ukraine commitment continues. This is not without strategic consequence: the 40th Brigade at Petropavlovsk-Kamchatsky exists partly to demonstrate Russia's capacity to reinforce the Kuril garrison or conduct operations in the Pacific island environment. That demonstration is currently impossible.

Note on Sources

Section I: US Naval Institute Proceedings (October 2024, Captain Chris Bott); Naval News (September 2024); Kremlin.ru official transcript of Putin's Okean 2024 remarks; US Army TRADOC Operational Environment Enterprise. Section II: Australian Sea Power Centre, 'Battle Reading the Russian Pacific Fleet 2023–2030' (Muraviev, March 2025); Wikipedia Pacific Fleet article (April 2026); Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik. Section III: Wikipedia, 155th Guards Naval Infantry Brigade and 40th Naval Infantry Brigade articles (both verified April 2026); ISW daily assessments; Grokipedia (Russian Naval Infantry, 155th Brigade); The Jamestown Foundation.

Russia Observatory | April 2026