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# 'We Have to Buy Everything': Russian Soldiers Under-Equipped In Ukraine War

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Captured Russian soldiers. **Mvs.gov.ua**

Russian soldiers preparing to be sent to fight in Ukraine are required to buy personal equipment at their own expense, according to several servicemen who spoke to The Moscow Times' Russian Service on condition of anonymity.

Some of the items apparently not provided by the army include footwear, body armor, bandages and tourniquets.

"If they issue you a field uniform, you're in luck — you can save some money. We still have to buy the jacket and pants, at least as a change of clothing... I'll be happy if our outlay on the uniforms pays off and we don't get screwed out of our paycheck," said one contract serviceman with Russia's National Guard (Rosgvardia).

The men interviewed by The Moscow Times said they were promised a monthly salary of about 200,000 rubles ($3,365) if they signed a contract to join the Russian troops fighting in Ukraine – but that they would have to buy all their gear themselves.

“A Level 4 combat vest — which can stop pistol and rifle rounds as well as shrapnel — costs on average 70,000 rubles ($1,200). A helmet is another 10,000 rubles ($160). Decent boots are about 5,000 rubles ($80), and you really need two pairs. A tactical vest costs from 5,000 to 10,000 rubles ($80-160). And you also have to buy a jacket, pants, T-shirts and pullovers. That comes out to about 200,000 rubles ($3,365),” said the Rosgvardia serviceman.

A Russian soldier in a military unit near the Ural mountains told The Moscow Times that almost no equipment was provided for those heading to Ukraine.

“We have to buy everything ourselves, with our own money. I'm not even talking about modern body armor and helmets: there are no warm clothes, no dry rations or first-aid kits,” he said. “All the equipment we are fighting with in Ukraine stinks of mothballs, and the weapons jam.”

Online military stores are recording increased demand for body armor, helmets and ballistic-proof uniforms, according to managers who spoke to The Moscow Times.

“A basic Level 4 costs on average 52,000 rubles ($860), but it won’t protect you from bullets. A high-quality, Level 4 vest with full protection costs 138,000 ($2,280),” according to Yelena, a consultant at one online store who requested anonymity to speak freely.

The Avangard equipment store was selling Level 4 vests for 195,000 rubles ($3,223), while helmets were priced at up to 50,000 rubles ($826).

“Visored helmets are the most expensive. A cheap helmet is just a cap. The visor protects the eyes, so the price is higher,” an Avangard salesperson told The Moscow Times.

But many soldiers don’t use specialist stores, preferring popular Russian online marketplace Avito to buy military equipment and clothing.

One seller of military equipment on Avito introduced himself as Ilya when contacted by The Moscow Times, saying he worked as a medical equipment engineer at the Defense Ministry.

Sales of vests and other protective equipment have skyrocketed on Avito since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, according to Ilya.

“A lot of guys want to fight. I barely have time to put up an ad when I sell out. I don’t just sell used equipment. I have helmets, ballistic-proof uniforms and tactical vests.”

Ilya said that the equipment he sells online has been rejected from military units.

“Everything they have is licensed and approved by the Defense Ministry, so if there is some little defect the gear is decommissioned. We sell it at a small discount. We don't want to throw it away. But it is 100% high-quality,” he said.

The servicemen who spoke to The Moscow Times said that they had not been issued with the Russian Armed Forces’ Ratnik military kits – but you can purchase them on Avito.

“You can buy a Ratnik for 35,000 rubles ($575). It's easy to walk and run in, but the ceramic plates only protect the chest and back. At most it can protect against shrapnel,” said Ilya.

A better option than the Ratnik is the Gladiator body armor that was used by the Russian military in Syria and costs 86,000 ($1,410), according to Ilya.

“Buy the best quality gear and don’t bargain. Staying alive is worth it,” he said.

Since the beginning of the invasion, there has been widespread evidence that the Russian military has had logistical and supply problems in Ukraine. Some Russian soldiers have even stolen footwear from Ukrainians, according to Ukrainian media reports.

One Russian soldier who was in Ukraine at the beginning of the war told The Moscow Times that the shoes and clothing with which he was issued weren’t winter gear.

“I got frostbite on both my feet,” he said. “In Ukraine we were always freezing, day or night, and I was always thinking about how to get warm.”

Not all military tents had stoves and Russian soldiers were trying to keep warm with rugs, according to Ruslan Leviev, founder of the Conflict Intelligence Team, which investigates Russian military and mercenary activity.

The Russian soldiers who spoke to The Moscow Times said they were also putting together their own first-aid kits.

“The one they issue has bandages, iodine and a tourniquet,” said the Rosgvardia serviceman. “They tell you ahead of time that it won't save you if you’re wounded. But putting one together costs more money.”

Avito seller Ilya confirmed that the medical situation at the front is problematic. “I put a kit together for 20,000 rubles ($325), and that's the bare minimum: antibiotics, tourniquets, an alexipharmic, trauma pad, syringes, coagulants. If you don't pack your own first aid kit, no one will save you. On the battlefield you can't staunch blood with iodine,” he said.

*This article has been adapted from The Moscow Times’ Russian Service original report.*

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