

## **Igor Kravchuk (Petropavlovsk – Kamchatskiy)**

### **The Worse It Gets the More Secret It Becomes**

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Had Dmitriy Koval, a sailor, been an orphan, the country would have never learned of the accident on Kamchatka, on the nuclear sub K-233, named “Podolsk”, the accident that took his life. Dmitriy’s parents buried him in their home city of Krasnoyarsk and informed the press, which then spread news of the accident worldwide. Our military prefer to keep these things secret. Their strategy always has been: the worse it gets the more secret it should become. Keeping accidents under wraps is our military tradition that stems from a perverse understanding of military duty. When Admiral Doronin was still in command of the fleet, his subordinates used to conceal even more scandalous facts.

Understandably, people are apprehensive about anything that happens on nuclear submarines. Because they are nuclear: they carry nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons.

What happened on the “Podolsk” was a technical accident: a high pressure water tank blew up. The population was never threatened, and the military reported, perhaps for the benefit of the potential enemy, that the sub remains combat ready.

This is not the first for this year fatal accident on the Kamchatka nuclear submarine fleet. Several months ago a sailor died aboard the nuclear submarine “Petropavlovsk – Kamchatskiy”. He was killed by electrical shock, as the result of a violation of safety regulations.

The “Podolsk”- class vessels are second generation strategic nuclear submarines. According to the US intelligence data, there are 12 ships of this class in the Russian fleet. The “Podolsk” (factory number 395) was built in 1979, in Severodvinsk. In 1990, in the Okhotsk Sea, she performed two launches of missiles hitting ground targets on the Kanin Nos testing grounds. There is another recent emergency that the military have shrouded in secrecy. On the eve of 2003, the nuclear sub “Samara” returned from patrol to her home port with a large hole in her outer hull. The hole measured several square meters and was located in the bow area, near the hydro-acoustic station compartment. The military maintained strict silence on the fact. I tried to find out what happened, but was either told that this is a state secret, or they just would hang up on me.

Just as telling was the reaction to the article I published about a large scale theft of electronic parts on submarines and on military installations. Sailors were removing electronic components containing precious metals and selling them, ruining in the process expensive equipment. In response to my article, Office of the Chief Military Prosecutor, basing on the conclusions of an

expert commission of the General Staff, opened a criminal investigation into the publication of the article allegedly divulging military secrets. Loafers from the military counter-intelligence came down here all the way from Vladivostok to question me. They failed to strike a conversation.

Had Dmitriy Koval survived his injuries, his parent would have had nothing to tell the press, and the accident would have remained secret.

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