

# Fighting in Eastern Ukraine Kills 43 in 24 Hours

August 20, 2014



Ukrainian citizens stand in a line to walk from Russia into Ukraine at a border crossing point Donetsk, in Russia's Rostov Region, August 20, 2014.

Government troops fought to gain control of the rebel-held city of Donetsk and a key highway in eastern Ukraine on Wednesday — battles that left 34 residents and nine troops dead in just 24 hours, authorities said.

The Ukrainian troops are trying to encircle Donetsk, the largest city still in rebel hands, and also drive the rebels out of the city of Luhansk. Several neighborhoods in Donetsk have been hit with artillery fire in the last few days, and fighting on the outskirts has become more intense.

The Kiev-backed administration in Donetsk quoted the death toll of 34 "local residents" killed and 29 wounded as of noon Wednesday, a figure it said did not include any government troop deaths.

Earlier, a Ukrainian official said nine troops were killed and 22 wounded in overnight fighting

in Ilovaysk, a town near Donetsk, as the government sought to retake a major railroad and highway that leads to Russia.

Andriy Lysenko, spokesman for the Ukrainian National Security Council who gave that toll, said fighting continued in Ilovaysk on Wednesday even though government forces have gained overall control over the town.

Among those killed in Ilovaysk was a Ukrainian-American known by the nom de guerre of Franko, said Anton Herashchenko, an adviser to the interior minister. He said Franko was an American citizen with a military background who had been living in eastern Ukraine for the past 10 years and who obtained Ukrainian citizenship before joining the battalion.

The situation in the besieged city of Luhansk, a rebel stronghold just 20 kilometers from the Russian border, remained critical Wednesday as the government and rebels fought running battles in city streets, local authorities said.

Luhansk has been without electricity, running water or phone connections for 18 days and residents are reported to be standing in lines to buy bread baked on portable generators as food grows scarce.

The Kiev government also has pursued diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflict, which the United Nations says has killed more than 2,000 people and displaced over 340,000 since fighting began in mid-April.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko will host German Chancellor Angela Merkel this weekend in Kiev before meeting next week with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Minsk, the capital of Belarus.

Ukraine has accused Russia of arming and supporting the rebels, a charge that Russia denies. The fighting began a month after Russia annexed Ukraine's Black Sea peninsula of Crimea.

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