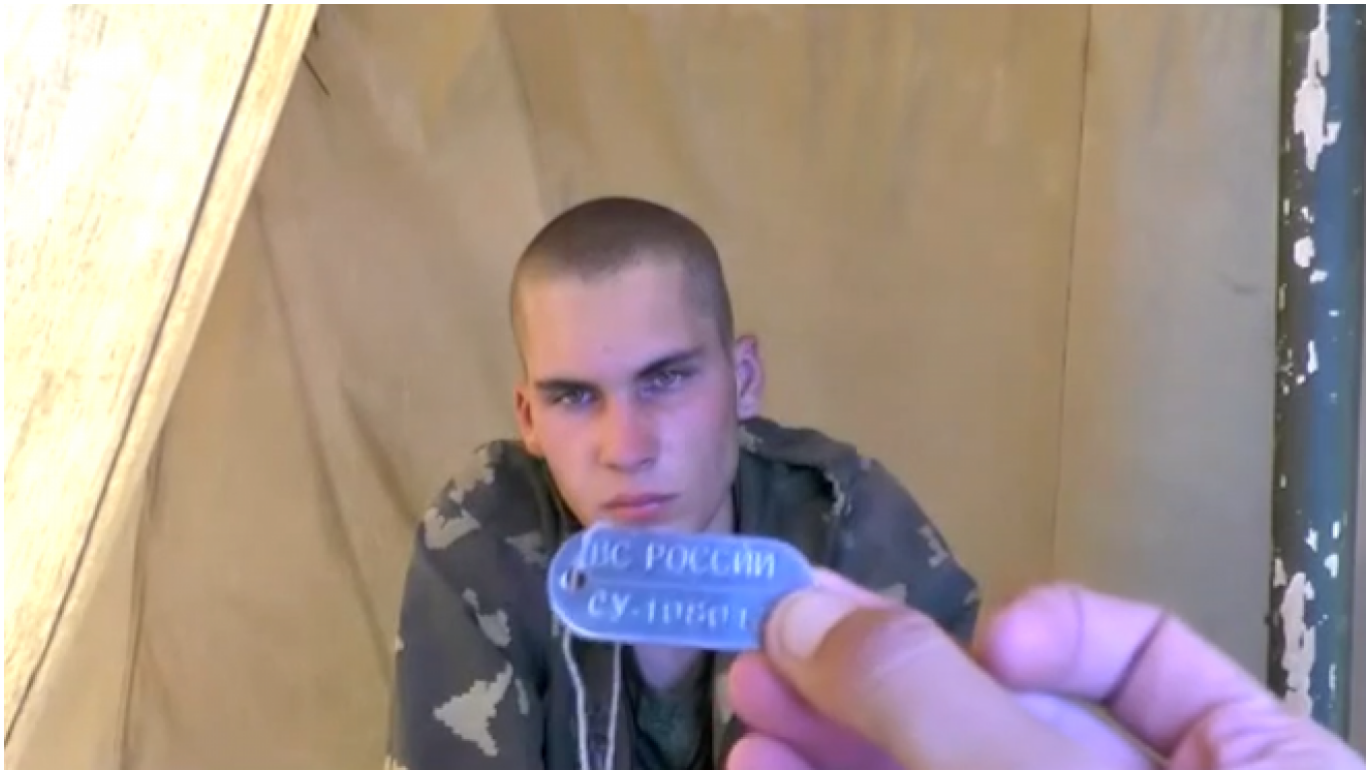
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INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russia Claims Captured Soldiers Crossed Ukraine Border by Accident

By Ivan Nechepurenko

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“We were told that we were making a 70-kilometer march and nothing else,” a man, who identified himself as Ivan Melchakov,19, said on camera.

The Russian Defense Ministry has confirmed that the ten Russian paratroopers captured by Ukrainian security services in the country's east are indeed Russian, but said they crossed the border by mistake.

Ukrainian security services earlier on Tuesday claimed they had detained ten Russian servicemen in the eastern Donetsk region and published footage of the men online.

A statement published by the security agency said the captured soldiers belonged to the 71211 military unit of the Russian Armed Forces, based in the Russian town of Kostroma.

The Russian Defense Ministry later on Tuesday confirmed to state-run media the detained servicemen are Russian, but said they had crossed the border “accidentally.”

“The mentioned servicemen were patrolling the Russian-Ukrainian border, and crossed it, probably, accidentally, at an unmarked border point,” an unidentified source told news agency RIA-Novosti on Tuesday.

The source in the Defense Ministry cited by the state-run news agency added Ukrainian servicemen had crossed the Russian border multiple times but that Russia had never made a fuss about it.

In the videos, men who identified themselves as servicemen of the Russian Army said they were transferred from the Kostroma region to Rostov on Saturday, adding only officers had been aware Ukraine was their final destination.

“We were told that we were making a 70-kilometer march and nothing else,” a man, who identified himself as Ivan Melchakov, age 19, said on camera.

The video shows Melchakov's Russian Army tag, bearing his personal identification number, in full view.

“Stop sending guys there [to Ukraine]. This is not our war. If it wasn't for us [Russia] there would be no war here,” a man, who identified himself as Sergeant Alexei Generalov, said in the video.

Ukrainian investigators have opened a criminal case into the illegal border crossing.

In all four videos, the soldiers said that they had been brainwashed by Russian propaganda and the situation on the ground had opened their eyes.

“Officially they are on military exercises in various corners of Russia. In reality they are involved in military aggression against Ukraine,” Ukraine's Defense Minister Valeriy Heletey said in a Facebook post in reaction to the videos.

Heletey also called upon the relatives of Russian servicemen to locate their kin.

“Take them away from Ukraine, where they have to die for the private interests of a handful of Kremlin officials, who are indifferent to the fate of your relatives and your country,” he said.

Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in a news conference with journalists on Monday reiterated his denial of any Russian military involvement in the ongoing armed conflict in eastern Ukraine.

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