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Defense Ministry Denies Russian Combatant's Death in Syria

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Vadim Grishankin / TASS

Russia's Defense Ministry on Monday denied media reports published earlier claiming that a Russian soldier had been killed fighting in Syria.

"The information disseminated by specific media about the allegedly deceased Russian soldier in Syria on August 11 does not correspond with reality," the ministry said in a statement cited by the Interfax news agency. "There were no losses at this time among Russian servicemen in Syria."

The orenday.ru news outlet, based in the southern Russian city of Orenburg, reported Monday that a Russian citizen was killed by a roadside bomb in Syria earlier this month.

Alexander Yagofarov's remains were returned to his family on Aug. 26 and he was buried in a sealed zinc coffin the next day, according to Orenday. His relatives were reportedly told the soldier was killed by a roadside bomb on Aug. 11.

Conflict Intelligence Team (CIT), a group monitoring the wars in Syria and Ukraine says the 16-day delay between Yagofarov's death and burial suggests Yagofarov may have fought in the ranks of the private Wagner mercenary group.

CIT also says the lack of references to his service in the Russian Armed Forces on what is said to be Yagofarov's VK social media page is a clue that he may have been employed by the private military company.

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Mercenary deaths are not officially acknowledged in Russia because private military groups are illegal.

Yagofarov is the sixth Orenburg native to have died in Syria in the past two years, according to orenday.ru.

The Russian Defense Ministry says 34 Russian soldiers have died since Moscow launched the campaign in Syria in late September 2015.

Russia's Defense Ministry denied a Reuters report this month which claimed that at least 40 Russians have died fighting in Syria this year alone.

The ministry told journalists: "This is not the first time Reuters has tried use whatever means to discredit Russia's Syria operation to root out Islamic State* terrorists and return peace to Syria."

*The Islamic State is a terrorist organization banned in Russia.

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