

# Elite Russian Intelligence Unit Suffers Major Losses in Ukraine – BBC

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A Ukrainian serviceman walks along road while searching for dead bodies of his comrades in recently recaptured town of Lyman, Ukraine. **Evgeniy Maloletka / AP / TACC**

An elite, highly secretive Russian military intelligence unit may have lost up to three-quarters of its reconnaissance manpower in Ukraine, according to research [published](#) by the BBC's Russian service Tuesday.

Like other special forces units, the exact size of the GRU intelligence agency's 3rd Guards Spetsnaz Brigade is classified.

But based on the brigade's death toll and likely attrition rate tallied by BBC Russia, the outlet concluded that it may have lost 75% of its reconnaissance company troops.

Overall, the outlet said it has found direct and indirect evidence from publicly available sources on 56 soldiers from the 3rd Guards Spetsnaz Brigade killed in the seven months since Russia invaded Ukraine.

One dead soldier's sister told BBC Russia she believes there may have been more losses, saying: "Do you expect they'll tell us about them?"

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The GRU's 3rd Guards Spetsnaz Brigade appears to have suffered its highest losses so far in the latest retreat from eastern Ukraine's key railway hub of Lyman last week.

Citing the soldiers' relatives, BBC Russia reported that up to nine brigade members died while attempting to defend against the Ukrainian forces' counteroffensive in Lyman.

"The entire 3rd Spetsnaz Brigade was laid to waste, thrown into the meat grinder," one soldier's unnamed relative was quoted as saying in a post on the Russian social media platform VKontakte.

The unit's previous highest death toll in a single battle known publicly was in the early days of Russia's invasion in March, when BBC Russia said four brigade soldiers had been killed.

One out of four 3rd Guards Spetsnaz Brigade soldiers killed under the command of Col. Albert Omarov were officers, the outlet said.

The deaths of such soldiers are particularly problematic for the Russian Armed Forces because they are very costly to replace.

Russian state media and pro-Moscow military bloggers avoid reporting on the GRU units' involvement in Ukraine, BBC Russia said, meaning information on reconnaissance soldiers' deaths appears after the fact. Experts cited by the outlet say the special forces suffer additional losses because they are forced to carry out tasks outside their remit.

Russia claims to have lost fewer than 6,000 troops in the seven-month conflict with Ukraine, 20 times less than what it claims the Ukrainian military has lost.

BBC Russia's joint tally with the independent Mediazona news website placed Russia's death toll at nearly 6,800 soldiers by Sept. 25.

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