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Officials Disclose Russian Troop Deaths 1 Month After Cross-Border Incursion

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Smoke rises over a building in the town of Shebekino damaged in a shelling attack on June 9. **Alexander Ryumin / TASS**

At least 14 Russian troops were killed during a cross-border raid by anti-Kremlin units made up of Russian nationals this month, regional authorities have revealed nearly a month after the incident.

Two anti-Kremlin militias fighting on the side of Ukraine staged raids into southwestern Russia's Belgorod region on June 1. Russia's Defense Ministry claimed to have repelled attacks by what it called "Ukrainian terrorist formations" without disclosing its own casualty numbers.

Mikhail Vedernikov, governor of the Pskov region in northwestern Russia, said Wednesday that at least 14 local soldiers deployed to Belgorod were killed in the raids.

"They died at the start of the month in a sabotage and reconnaissance group attack on the Belgorod region," Vedernikov said in a video address.

“Funerals were held last week and this week. Unfortunately, these aren’t the last vigils as we currently know of 14 killed [soldiers] in those days,” he added.

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Vedernikov said 10 soldiers from Pskov were captured in the cross-border raids, three of whom have since been exchanged.

“We can’t inform you about every single detail about the fate of our fighters. I understand it’s difficult to be kept in the dark about your close ones, but we simply have no right to disclose some of the data,” the governor said.

The cross-border raids by the Russian Volunteer Corps, a nationalist paramilitary unit, and another unit called the Freedom of Russia Legion, came amid heavy shelling of the Belgorod region from Ukrainian territory.

The border town of Shebekino has been the target of sporadic bombing since last September, when Kyiv’s forces recaptured much of the neighboring Kharkiv region from occupying Russian forces.

But the frequency and intensity of the deadly attacks have increased dramatically since May.

Ukrainian officials have never acknowledged responsibility for the attacks, which sparked mass evacuations from the Shebekino district.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has admitted that Moscow could have more successfully prepared the country’s southern regions bordering Ukraine for cross-border attacks.

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