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Russian Orthodox Church Denies That Troops Lost Medieval Warrior Prince's Relics in Ukraine

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Alexander Avilov / Moskva News Agency

The Russian Orthodox Church has denied reports that Russian troops abandoned fragments of the remains of St. Dmitry Donskoy while retreating near the eastern Ukrainian city of Lyman.

The pro-war Telegram channel Alex Parker reported that Russian forces may have lost the relics during a withdrawal in Ukraine's Donetsk region. Another Telegram channel, Kremlin Tabakerka, claimed that a site where officers had gathered for a prayer service came under fire, forcing them to leave the relics behind and retreat.

Neither channel's account was accompanied by confirmation from Russian military officials.

"This is a fabrication, and it is being spread, one can assume, with anti-church intentions," Vakhtang Kipshidze, deputy head of the church's department for relations with society and the media, told the state-run RIA Novosti news agency.

Related article: Russian Orthodox Church Sends Bones of Medieval Warrior Prince to Ukraine Front to Boost Troop Morale

Dmitry Donskoy, a medieval Russian prince, defeated the forces of Mongol commander Mamai at the Battle of Kulikovo in 1380. The Russian Orthodox Church canonized him in 1988.

Restorers opened his sarcophagus in the Moscow Kremlin's Archangel Cathedral in July. The church subsequently announced the discovery of his relics and proposed sending some of them to Russian forces fighting in Ukraine.

President Vladimir Putin visited the remains to pray before fragments were sent to the front.

Small pieces were separated from the remains and placed in specially prepared reliquaries for transport to the front line, said journalist Ksenia Luchenko, who writes about the Orthodox Church.

Relics of other Orthodox saints, including St. Nicholas, Sts. Peter and Fevronia of Murom, St. Luke of Crimea and St. Matrona of Moscow, have previously been taken to the front, along with religious icons, according to Luchenko.

The reports emerged amid a Ukrainian counteroffensive in the Donetsk region, where Ukrainian forces have reportedly eliminated a Russian-held salient near Lyman and threatened to encircle Russian units advancing toward Sloviansk.

Military consultancy Rochan Consulting estimated that Ukrainian forces had recaptured 240 square kilometers of territory.

Andriy Biletsky, commander of Ukraine's Third Army Corps, said his forces had captured 250 Russian soldiers during the operation, which Ukraine calls "Vivaldi."

"The Russians surrendered in entire units, along with officers, pilots and artillerymen," Biletsky said.

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