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Captured Russian troops 'in Ukraine by accident'



Russian sources say the men were patrolling a section of the Russian-Ukrainian border

A group of Russian soldiers captured in eastern Ukraine crossed the border "by accident", Russian military sources are quoted as saying.

Ukraine said 10 paratroopers were captured, and has released video interviews of some of the men.

The incident comes as the Ukrainian and Russian leaders hold talks in Belarus.

More than 2,000 people have died in months of fighting between Ukrainian forces and separatists in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

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The two regions declared independence from Kiev following Russia's annexation of the southern Crimean peninsula from Ukraine in March.

'Cannon fodder'

A Russian defence ministry source was quoted by the Russian news agency RIA Novosti as saying: "The soldiers really did participate in a patrol of a section of the Russian-Ukrainian border, crossed it by accident on an unmarked section, and as far as we understand showed no resistance to the armed forces of Ukraine when they were detained."

The source also said that some 500 Ukrainian servicemen had crossed the border at various times, adding: "We did not give much publicity to that. We just returned all those willing to return to Ukrainian territory at safe places."

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Smoke rises close to the town of Novoazovsk, where Ukrainian forces said they had engaged an armoured column from Russia

Ukraine's security service said its military had captured the 10 Russian paratroopers near the village of Dzerkalne, about 50km (30 miles) south-east of the rebel-held city of Donetsk and about 20km from the Russian border.

Ukrainian military spokesman Andriy Lysenko said: "This wasn't a mistake, but a special mission they were carrying out."

A Ukrainian television report that carried the interviews with the men said they were from the 331st regiment of the 98th Svirsk airborne division.

It quoted one man, named as Sgt Andrei Generalov, as saying: "Stop sending in our boys. Why? This is not our war. And if we weren't here, none of this would have happened."



Russia has repeatedly denied Ukrainian and Western accusations that it is supporting the rebels.

On Monday, Ukraine said an armoured column had crossed the border into south-eastern Ukraine, sparking clashes near Novoazovsk.

Mr Lysenko said on Tuesday that Ukrainian forces had destroyed 12 armoured infantry carriers there. He said 12 Ukrainian military personnel had been killed in the past 24 hours.

Mr Lysenko said four border guards had been killed by fire from Russian Mi-24 helicopters.

Border controls

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko and his Russian counterpart,

Vladimir Putin, are discussing the crisis at Tuesday's summit in the Belarusian capital, Minsk.

Mr Putin said the current conflict could not "be resolved through further escalation of the use of force", and required direct dialogue with the separatists.

Meanwhile Mr Poroshenko insisted that the only way to end the bloodshed and stabilise the region was by establishing effective border controls.

The BBC's David Stern in Kiev says the summit is under the auspices of the Moscow-led Eurasian Customs Union, which also includes Belarus and Kazakhstan.

Analysis: The BBC's Oleg Boldyrev in Minsk

The gulf between the positions of Ukraine and Russia is huge. Russia wants an unconditional ceasefire in eastern Ukraine. But Ukraine has the upper hand against the rebels there and does not want to simply stop and let them regroup.

Russia stresses that Ukraine must talk to the rebels, but Ukraine says the rebels are not a force of their own - rather an extension of Russia's hostilities, and it is Russia that must talk to the rebels and persuade them to lay down their weapons.

What will bridge this gulf after so many months of fighting remains unclear.

The pair, who shook hands at the start of the summit, last met briefly in June at the D-Day commemorations.

Ahead of the meeting, Mr Poroshenko said: "I hope the result of today's meeting will be the achievement of an agreement that will bring peace to Ukrainian soil."

The summit in Minsk is also being attended by senior officials from the European Union which, along with the US, has imposed sanctions on Russia for failing to rein in the separatists.



A Belarusian honour guard awaits the start of the summit in Minsk

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