

A funeral has been held for an 18-year-old former conscript soldier killed in [Ukraine](#), days after Vladimir Putin assured mothers their teenage sons had not been dragged into his invasion.

Yegor Pochkaenko, the youngest known Russian troop to die, was one day from his 19th birthday.

The 'kind and cheerful' young man was named a hero in his hometown of Belogorsk, in the Amur region, after being moved 5,360 miles to fight for Vladimir Putin.

His death comes amid claims that young conscripts are being forced into enlisting as contract soldiers.

The Russian president insisted this week that conscripts – commonly aged 18 and 19 – were not being sent to fight.

Soon after, he was contradicted by spokesman Igor Konashenkov who said: 'Unfortunately, we have uncovered several instances of the presence of conscripts in the Russian units taking part in the special military operation in Ukraine.'

'Almost all of those servicemen have been taken back to Russia.'

Putin has apparently demanded the chief military prosecutor examine the evidence and 'punish the officials' responsible.





© Provided by Metro A funeral service was held in his hometown of Belogorsk, in the Amur region (Picture: east2west news)

But Russian senator Lyudmila Narusova, 69, claims conscripts are being ordered to sign up as contract soldiers, or thrust into this position without their knowledge.

In one company of 100 young soldiers forced to fight in the conflict, only four survived, parliament was told.

‘They lie there, with stray dogs gnawing at their faces’, she said. ‘Some cannot be identified because the bodies are so charred.’

It comes amid reports of platoons surrendering as they [‘didn’t think they’d been sent to kill’](#).

Russian soldiers are ‘crying in combat’ and [‘operating in complete disarray’](#), radio messages from the [Ukraine](#) frontline reportedly suggested last week.

On Tuesday, the US estimated between 2,000 and 4,000 Russian soldiers have been killed in the two weeks since shots were fired. Ukraine alleges this figure is closer to 11,000.

Ms Narusova’s comments are unlikely to please Putin, given she is the widow of his political mentor and ex-law professor Anatoly Sobchak.

She is also the mother of Ksenia Sobchak, 40, a leading opposition politician whose childhood baptism was attended by Putin.



© Provided by Metro Between 2,000 and 4,000 Russian soldiers have been killed in the last two weeks, US officials believe (Picture: east2west news)

Yegor's classmate Dmitry Radchenko said he was 'kind and cheerful' and loved football. He wanted to be a policeman before joining the army.

The young man was posthumously honoured with the Order of Courage and given a military salute.

'Yegor Pochkaenko died like a hero, not hiding behind the backs of his comrades', said army comrade Aleksey Tarasov.

'He was posthumously awarded the Order of Courage. We remember him as a good soldier, we will always remember him as a hero. The Ministry of Defense offers condolences to the family and friends.'

Andrey Dyumin, deputy prime minister of Amur region, said: 'He defended us all: our country, our residents.'

‘Unfortunately, the short peaceful periods of life in our country have always been replaced by a series of wars, when someone thought that they could trample on our Motherland, tear it apart. Thanks to men like Yegor, this will not work.’