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THREAD: We travelled 8 hours out of Moscow, almost to Belarus, to a tiny village to interview the parents of a 22yr old Russian soldier killed in Ukraine. I urge you to read this because it helps explain Putin's Russia & the power that comes from controlling information. @itvnews <https://t.co/9RRQVAVy5e>



<https://www.itv.com/news/2022-04-19/in-putins-heartland-russian-mothers-mourn-their-sons-killed-in-ukraine>

The roads in western Russia are full of memorials to soldiers who died fighting Nazis during WWII. Statues stand in remembrance to them near the bogs in which some of their bodies still lie, almost 80 years after they fell. This statue was recently unveiled in Rzhev by Putin. <https://t.co/owahvz5vj1>



The whole area is littered with unexploded ordnance from battles where the Soviets sustained heavy losses at the hands of Hitler's Nazis in Russia. When snows melt & the ground thaws, every year the earth reveals more bodies, some of the 12 million Soviets who died during WWII. <https://t.co/zjmmfAWSOz>



It is from this land steeped in blood that Sergey Muraviev made his final journey to Ukraine from the village of Komary. It's down a road which is full of potholes, sometimes impassible, and almost entirely off the grid - no gas, limited phone & internet. <https://t.co/cEnBM77p5g>

Muraviev served in Kaliningrad in the 336th Independent Guards Naval Infantry Brigade before being sent to Ukraine. His mother knew he was going there. She says, "the last time he called me, he said "Mum, they've promoted me to Able Seaman." <https://t.co/QpsFpWTRr9>



Muraviev's family found out he died in Ukraine when a military official knocked on their door. They were told their son had died in Zlatopol in Zaporizhzhia region on 23rd March - almost a month exactly after Putin announced a 'special military operation' to 'denazify' Ukraine.

His father said 'he had wounds to his spine and his side because he covered ordinary people, his comrades.' His mother said her son 'would never hide, not for peaceful citizens, for no one. He was always a hero, he stood for justice, he was always honest.'

Russia's MoD says only 1351 Russian servicemen have died in Ukraine. Ukraine's MoD says it's 20K+. Some of their bodies still remain in Ukraine, left lying by commanders near the wreckage of battles which killed them. Many Russian parents may never be able to bury their children.

Sergey Muraviev's grave is covered in floral tributes from regional officials and local agriculture collectives. He is buried alongside his grandfather who was also asked, during his time, to sacrifice himself to the fight against fascism.

<https://t.co/g7pMOo8sCS>



A memorial in Komary takes the form of a tank: 'In memory of liberation of the village of Komary in March 1943 from the German-fascist invaders.' Villagers told me when the Nazis occupied this hamlet during WWII they burned all the houses apart from one. <https://t.co/WW1i3hdxFb>



The spectre of Nazism holds great power in this region where the bodies of Soviet soldiers lie in bogs and graveyards and where the only source of information is Russian state television.

Muraviev's aunt Svetlana said during WWII 'our grandfathers defended our country and the world from fascism, from the Nazis...now it is the turn of our children, our sons, and if needed it will be the turn of us old people.'

At the same time as saying she was ready to go and fight in Ukraine, his aunt Svetlana gave me this 'as a symbol of patriotism. The dove is a symbol of peace.'

The Z sign is now synonymous with Russia's war in Ukraine.

<https://t.co/Q7tG0eBLiq>



Russian state TV praises Russian soldiers who are shown freeing Ukrainians from their fascist government. Many Russians believe Ukraine has been killing Russian-speaking Ukrainian citizens for last 8 years since the war in Ukraine first began.

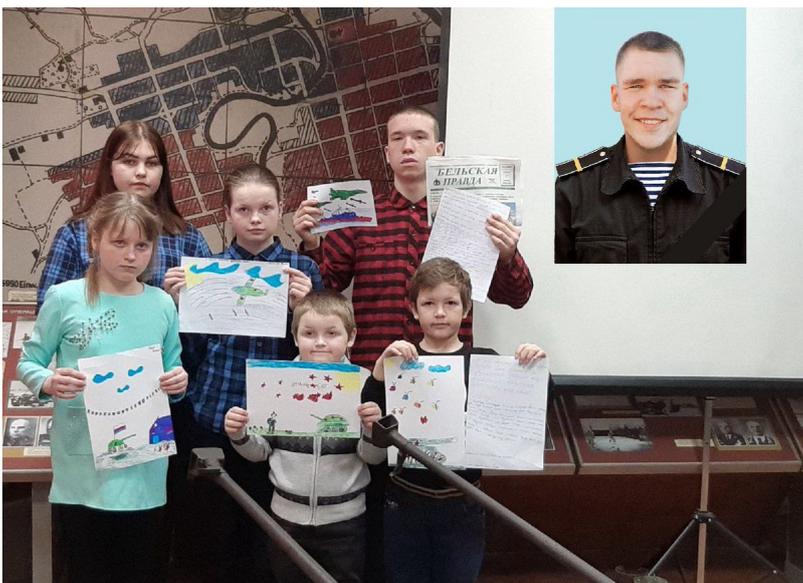
With limited communication with the world, the villagers here are receptive to the message from Russian state TV. (@navalny has an interesting thread on this <https://twitter.com/navalny/status/1514589869204508675?s=12&t=LdcQKVyz7Kyk3ooArtFJrA>)

Sergey Muraviev's aunt says everyone in her village and the surrounding ones supports Putin, because 'if he [Putin] didn't behave like this then maybe here too in Russia it would be a lot worse than it is now.' This is Vladimir Putin's heartland. <https://t.co/vShgWaG2W8>



Putin's actions, 'are always aimed at not capturing territory but at helping. He gave humanitarian aid to everyone. Whenever anyone asked for aid, he always helped,' Muraviev's aunt Svetlana said.

These beliefs are already being passed down to the next generation. Russian schoolchildren wrote Sergey Muraviev letters and drew pictures for him after his death: of a tank with a Russian flag under a smiling sky & a ship in Russian colours with missiles & aircraft overhead. <https://t.co/GntKZR0nFq>



Muraviev's aunt Svetlana said she asks the children who have not yet gone to serve in the army whether they are 'afraid' to go to Ukraine.

She said they told her, 'we are going to defend our motherland. Our grandfathers died and we will too for a peaceful sky above our heads.'

The 'motherland' of this family is a few villages; the lives of the inhabitants connected by a muddy road, filled with potholes. The family have never been to key regional cities, let alone Moscow, the capital from which their president sent their son to his death. <https://t.co/va2bvvdao>

The Russia of Sergey Muraviev's family and that of Putin are very different. In spite of their son's death, his family still support their president & believe in the 'special military operation' in Ukraine. There is no alternative narrative here.

In April, snow still lies on the ground next to Muraviev's grave where he is buried with his grandfather. Both men were ordered into battle by their country in the name of fighting fascism and there is no question in this part of Russia that both of them died for a just cause. <https://t.co/P3XGTbJH43>





'We have to believe Sergey didn't die in vain,' his aunt Svetlana told me.

The alternative for these people does not bear thinking about.

In Putin's Russia, state control over TV and people's thoughts in some places is almost absolute. I can see no Russia with Putin in power where the family of Sergey Muraviev see him as anything other than a man like his grandfather - a hero who fought against fascists.

His family will probably never think of their son in the same way as they do the Nazi soldiers who razed their village to the ground, destroying it and the lives of the people who lived here. It would probably break their hearts if they did.

<https://t.co/J9jlnlh3D>



The Russian village we travelled to is so small, local journalists who put us in contact with the family wrote a story about our visit. They said 'the British made a good impression, showed they are strong professionals, correct and well-mannered people.'

<https://xn----6kcalbbrfn0iijf7msb.xn--p1ai/news/obshchestvo/v-tverskoy-oblasti-zhurnalisty-iz-britanii-snyali-syuzhet-o->

Something which struck me when speaking to Muraviev's family was the cognitive dissonance: his aunt gave me a dove of peace emblazoned with a symbol of war. They believe Putin cares for them when they have almost nothing. These contradictions in Russia seem fairly widespread. <https://t.co/0IUh5fM5IV>



Ahead of Russia's May 9 Victory Day parade, I spoke to [@itvnews](#) about why the idea of Russia fighting fascism in Ukraine & control of state media are powerful tools for Putin. Many Russians support his war & are prepared to sacrifice their children to it - watch to understand why [https://twitter.com/EJ\\_Burrows/status/1516517836491046918](https://twitter.com/EJ_Burrows/status/1516517836491046918)  
<https://t.co/BwhNNxKZVp>

At Moscow's Victory Day parade, Vladimir Putin compared the fight against fascism during WWII to the war he is currently waging in Ukraine. I spoke to [@itvnews](#) about reporting in Russia & why this idea, and control of state media, is so powerful for Putin.

<https://www.itv.com/news/2022-02-24/what-you-need-to-know-the-itv-news-podcast-with-vital-information-and-analysis>