

Missing Conscript Admits Deserting

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The  **Moscow Times**

A conscript who went missing for 11 years and claimed to have been sold into slavery was released from confinement after admitting that he actually deserted his unit, RIA-Novosti reported Tuesday.

Andrei Popov was held under supervision at a military unit in Saratov, but a local garrison court ruled to release him, citing the fact that he had exceeded the maximum age for compulsory military service, the report said.

Popov was reported missing in 2000, but returned home last August, claiming that he was kidnapped 10 months after being conscripted and made to work in a brick factory in Dagestan.

Investigators argued that Popov voluntarily left his division before hiding and illegally working in Dagestan.

Popov pleaded guilty in the courtroom, and his lawyer also admitted later that there was no evidence that he had been held in Dagestan against his will.

Popov faces up to seven years in prison for desertion. The next hearing in the case is set

for Jan. 20.

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