

Disgraced Defense Minister Grachev Laid to Rest

By [The Moscow Times](#)

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Grachev accusing a reporter of libel for a “Pasha Mercedes” story in 1995. **Igor Tabakov**

Pavel Grachev, a former defense minister who said ahead of the devastating first Chechen war that the rebels could be crushed in a few hours with a single airborne regiment, was laid to rest Tuesday at Moscow’s Novodevichy Cemetery.

Grachev, 64, died Sunday at the Vishnyevsky military hospital outside Moscow, where he had been admitted in serious condition 11 days earlier.

The Defense Ministry said the cause of death was acute meningoencephalitis, an inflammation of the meninges and brain that can be caused by anything from food poisoning to a tick bite, and did not provide further information.

Media have speculated that Grachev ate poisonous mushrooms at a birthday party, while one of his sons told reporters that his father had suffered from high blood sugar.

Grachev's widow and two sons were joined at Tuesday's funeral by top military brass, including Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov and Nikolai Makarov, chief of the General Staff.

"Pavel Sergeyevich was always distinguished by his dedication and courage," said Vladimir Isakov, a former deputy defense minister who served with Grachev in the Afghan War, Itar-Tass reported. "He never hid behind the backs of his subordinates, and for this he received the high title of Hero of the Soviet Union. He was a real paratrooper and was proud of the fact that he served in the army."

Grachev was a commanding officer of elite paratroopers during the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and received the award for his service there.

Grachev, who had served under the late Boris Yeltsin from 1992 until 1996, is perhaps best-remembered for promising in 1994 to crush Chechen separatist rebels "in a couple of hours with a single regiment of paratroopers." The war stretched on for two years and ended with the Kremlin forced to sign a peace treaty.

Accusations of corruption connected with Soviet troops' withdrawal from East Germany, although never proven in court, earned Grachev the nickname Pasha Mercedes. Also, a journalist who had linked Grachev to corruption in the military, Dmitry Kholodov, was killed by an exploding briefcase in 1994, and his newspaper, *Moskovsky Komsomolets*, pointed the finger at Grachev. Grachev was not charged in connection with the killing.

Yeltsin fired his disgraced defense minister after his 1996 re-election. Yeltsin, who died in 2007, is also buried at Novodevichy Cemetery.

(MT, AP, Reuters)

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