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Ukrainian Officer Savchenko, on Trial in Russia, Says She Was Kidnapped

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Ukrainian military pilot Nadezhda Savchenko gestures inside a glass-walled cage as she attends a court hearing in the southern border town of Donetsk, Russia, Sept. 29.

A Ukrainian officer charged with the deaths of two Russian journalists in eastern Ukraine said Tuesday she was kidnapped by Russians after she was captured by separatist rebels.

Russian prosecutors claim Nadezhda Savchenko intentionally targeted journalists and civilians when Ukrainian forces attacked rebel positions in June 2014.

Savchenko, a Ukrainian pilot who served in a volunteer battalion fighting alongside government troops against Russia-backed rebels, told the court she had been captured before the mortar attack on civilians and journalists.

After a week of captivity in the rebel-held Luhansk, Savchenko said, she was handed over to unknown men with Russian accents who took her across the border. Savchenko said armed, masked men took her to a hotel in the city of Voronezh where she was kept for a week before she was formally charged.

"I wasn't able to go out anywhere for a week: I was guarded by masked men," said Savchenko, who was dressed in a traditional Ukrainian embroidered blouse.

Savchenko said she was on a reconnaissance mission walking a few miles from where the mortar shells landed.

Russian prosecutors have denied that she was smuggled across the border. Instead, they insist that Savchenko escaped captivity in Luhansk and sneaked into Russia in order to perpetrate an act of terror.

The Ukrainian government has campaigned for Savchenko's release, claiming that the charges against her were trumped up and that she should be treated as a prisoner of war.

Since her detention, Savchenko was elected to the Ukrainian parliament and voted as a delegate to the Parliamentary Assembly of Europe.

Savchenko's trial is being held in the small southern Russian town of Donetsk, which has the same name as the Ukrainian city that is the main rebel stronghold, near the Ukrainian border. Tuesday's session was available on a webcast.

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