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'Russian Fighters' on Trial in Kiev Plead Not Guilty

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Russian soldiers, who according to Ukraine's state security service (SBU) are named Alexander Alexandrov (R) and Yevgeny Yerofeyev, and were detained on May 16 by Ukrainian forces, look on from a defendants' cage as they attend a court hearing in Kiev, Ukraine, Sept. 29, 2015.

The two Russians captured in eastern Ukraine earlier this year, went on trial in Kiev on Tuesday and denied all allegations against them, claiming they are 'unemployed' and contradicting their earlier claims of serving on active duty with Russian special forces.

Alexander Alexandrov and Yevgeny Yerofeyev previously described themselves as fighters on a military mission to aid separatists fighting Ukrainian government forces in the Donbass region.

The two men face charges including terrorist assault on Ukrainian armed forces, which led to deaths of military personnel, illegal entry to the occupied territories, and illegal possession of weapons. Both face penalties up to life imprisonment.

At Tuesday's hearing, the court dismissed as irrelevant Yerofeyev's lawyer's request that her

client be granted prisoner of war status, Interfax Ukraine reported. Alexandrov's lawyer said that the legal team of the two men was preparing updates to their petition to Ukraine's High Administrative Court, also concerning the recognition of the detainees as prisoners of war, according to Lenta.ru.

Both had been hoping for Moscow to show more interest in their fate following their capture, according to video interviews with the Novaya Gazeta newspaper published in late May.

On May 29, Reuters reported that Alexandrov claimed to be a Russian soldier on a three-year contract.

“I never tore it up, I wrote no resignation request,” he was quoted as saying. “I was carrying out my orders.”

Alexandrov and Yerofeyev's relatives told the state-run Rossiya television channel that the men had resigned from active service, in December 2014 and January of this year respectively.

Their claims matched those made by the Russian Defense Ministry, which told the TASS news agency on May 18 that Alexandrov and Yerofeyev “were not active-duty servicemen at the time of their detention” by Ukrainian forces.

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