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Russian Journalist-Turned-Mercenary Killed in Libya – Reports

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Amru Salahuddien / Xinhua / Zuma / TASS

A former journalist may be among the dozens of Russian mercenaries believed to have died while fighting in Libya's civil war last month, the Znak.com news website reported Monday.

Previous reporting said that more than 100 Russian mercenaries arrived at a base in Libya in early September and up to 35 may have died in an airstrike later that month. Linked to President Vladimir Putin, the private army is said to be providing unofficial assistance to a Libyan commander as he wages an offensive against the country's internationally recognized government.

Related article: Dozens of Russian Mercenaries Killed in Libya – Meduza

Former journalist Yevgeny Ilyubayev was among the airstrike's victims, an acquaintance told Znak and an eastern Ukraine war veteran confirmed. Russia does not officially recognize private military contractors and does not tally their deaths.

“We began to inquire if he was among the dead. So it happened: they called his relatives about two weeks ago, telling them to come for an identification,” Ilyubayev’s unnamed acquaintance was quoted as saying.

Ilyubayev, said to be aged 55 at the time of his reported death, was reportedly buried last week in his home region of Orenburg bordering Kazakhstan.

The Meduza news website, which reported on the dozens of deaths in Libya, said the casualties came mostly from central Russia and that their bodies would not be repatriated until late October. At least two combatants were reported to have been transported for burial back home as of early October.

Ilyubayev’s acquaintance added that he may have received in 2018 a courage medal for one of his alleged deployments to warzones, including Syria.

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