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Ex-U.S. Marine Accused of Spying in Russia Says Guard Threatened Him With Gun

By Tom Balmforth and Maria Kiselyova for Reuters

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Paul Whelan **Vyacheslav Prokofyev / TASS**

A former U.S. Marine held in Russia on suspicion of spying said on Thursday that a prison guard had forced him to his knees in custody and that he had been threatened with a gun, the Interfax news agency reported.

Paul Whelan, who holds U.S., British, Canadian and Irish passports, was detained in December and accused of espionage. He denies the allegations and says he was set up in a politically motivated sting.

On Thursday, a Moscow court ordered Whelan remain in jail until Dec. 29, the Interfax news agency reported.

Embed:

> Paul Whelan: ‘Russia says it caught James Bond on a spy mission. In reality, they abducted Mr Bean on holiday’
>
> He writes ‘I am innocent of a crime that never happened’
> pic.twitter.com/PAUVCKw3de
>
> — Sarah Rainsford (@sarahrainsford) October 24, 2019

At a hearing on Thursday, the court ordered Whelan held in custody until Dec. 29. Whelan, who appeared in court in a cage, accused the court of ignoring evidence of abuses against him and asked for the judge to be replaced, but his appeal was rejected.

"Prosecutors are systematically ignoring my complaints including about an incident in which one pre-trial detention guard forced me to my knees and another put a gun to my head," Interfax quoted him as saying.

Whelan was detained by agents from Russia's Federal Security Service in a Moscow hotel room on Dec. 28 after a Russian acquaintance gave him a flash drive, which his lawyer said he thought contained holiday photos but that actually held classified information.

At the hearing on Thursday, Whelan held up a hand-written note in which he said his life was being threatened in custody and that medical care was being denied to him.

"I am innocent of a crime that never happened," it said.

"Russia says it caught James Bond on a spy mission, in reality they abducted Mr Bean on holiday!" the note said.

Outside the court, Whelan's lawyer, Vladimir Zherebenkov, told reporters that Whelan had complained about an incident with a prison guard that arose in the exercise yard two weeks ago. He gave no details, but said the guard had been docked wages over the incident.

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