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Why Did a Russian Soldier Shoot and Kill 8 Fellow Recruits?

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A Russian conscript killed eight fellow soldiers in the country's Far East last Friday in a mass shooting the Defense Ministry quickly attributed to the shooter's nervous breakdown.

The conscript has been detained at military unit 54160 in Russia's Zabaikalsky region, where he and the victims served, and charged with murder. The Defense Ministry did not say why private Ramil Shamsutdinov, the alleged shooter, had suffered a nervous breakdown.

Here's what we know about the mass shooting almost a week after it occurred:

The victims:

— Two officers, two contract soldiers and four conscripts were killed in the Oct. 25 shooting in the closed settlement of Gorny.

— Two soldiers were badly injured and were being treated in a military hospital. Their lives are not in danger.

— Three other soldiers were said to have hidden and escaped injury.

The shooter:

— Russia's Investigative Committee identified the conscript who opened fire at his comrades as Ramil Shamsutdinov, 20.

— A military court in the city of Chita placed Shamsutdinov in pre-trial detention until Dec. 27 during the course of the investigation. Shamsutdinov faces a life sentence on charges of murdering two or more people.

— The young patriotic wrestler from the Siberian region of Tyumen dreamed of becoming an officer since at least the age of 14. He was called up to serve at the Defense Ministry's nuclear-weapons custodial force unit 54160 in July.

— A news report citing the Defense Ministry said a draft board had assessed Shamsutdinov to be psychologically stable. The board reportedly ruled him to be prone to nervous breakdowns only after a sustained period of hardship and danger.

The response:

— Shamsutdinov's father blamed his son's actions on the longstanding practice of hazing in the Russian military known as dedovshchina. Almost 20,000 people have signed a change.org petition to end dedovshchina and to call for Shamsutdinov's release in the wake of the shooting.

— The Union of the Committees of Soldiers' Mothers of Russia NGO's regional leader claimed that "a senior lieutenant dipped him in the toilet" and ordered others to abuse Shamsutdinov. A former unit 54160 conscript identified as Dmitry D. told local media that one of the shooting's victims, senior lieutenant Danil Pyankov, had abused him and other soldiers several years ago.

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— "[Shamsutdinov] intended to kill only one officer, the rest got in the middle of it," an unnamed investigative source told Kommersant business daily, lending credence to the hazing theory. Lawyer Yury Kulagin told the business daily that he had advised Shamsutdinov to see a psychiatrist during an earlier draft period.

— The Kremlin has brushed off suggestions that the shooting was the outcome of dedovshchina, the systemic abuse young conscripts face in the Russian Armed Forces. "This tragedy is an individual case," news agencies quoted President Vladimir Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying.

Theories:

— A Defense Ministry commission believes Shamsutdinov acted because of a "personal conflict" with one of the officers, the RBC news website cited an unnamed member as saying. Another anonymous source familiar with its preliminary findings confirmed the source's

claim.

— The commission was unable to confirm that Shamsutdinov was subjected to hazing or other forms of violence, RBC cited one of its sources as saying.

— “But increased mental stress suffered by military personnel during guard duty may have led to the interpersonal conflict that ended in tragedy,” the person was quoted as saying.

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