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3 Dead in Axe and Gun Attack at Russian Military Base

By Anna Smolchenko for AFP

November 09, 2020



Kirill Kukhmar / TASS

A Russian soldier suspected of killing three servicemen using an axe and a gun at a military base has been detained after a massive manhunt, officials said.

The shooting — the second at a military base in a year — took place at an airfield near the city of Voronezh where activists say army conscripts have been subjected to humiliating hazing.

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Authorities however insist that bullying rituals that plagued the military in the 1990s have been rooted out in the Russian army.

Investigators said that a 20-year-old soldier identified as private Anton Makarov attacked an

officer at the Baltimore military airfield near the city of Voronezh at 5:30 a.m. (02:30 GMT).

Voronezh is more than 500 kilometers (310 miles) south of Moscow.

"In order to get hold of a service weapon Makarov killed an officer with an axe," the Investigative Committee, which probes serious crimes, said in a statement.

He then started shooting his fellow servicemen, killing two and wounding one, the statement said.

He was detained following a manhunt and was being interrogated.

More than 100 members of the national guard as well as drones took part in the search operation, a spokesman said.

An unidentified source told the Interfax news agency that the shooting started when an altercation broke out between the soldier and an officer during an inspection.

The soldier "grabbed a handgun" from the officer's holster and fired, Interfax reported.

Russia's Western Military District however denied that a conflict had taken place.

Activists speak of hazing

Rights activists said that Makarov was a victim of hazing, which they claim is still common in the army.

Citing an informed source, Vladimir Osechkin, founder of the anti-torture project Gulagu.net, told AFP that servicemen at the base had been beaten and asked to pay extortion money.

Describing Makarov as a "principled" man of modest means, Osechkin said the soldier had refused to make the payments.

"In the eyes of his superiors, he did not respect them," Osechkin said, adding that he had been beaten up twice over the past two weeks.

Osechkin also said Makarov was violently detained.

In a video released by Gulagu.net that purports to show the detention, Makarov is seen lying on the ground with a foot on his neck.

"Do you know what you have been detained for?" he is asked.

"Yes, for everything," he allegedly answers.

Osechkin said that officials would look to shift the blame, pointing out that a number of media reported that Makarov was prone to fits of rage, and compared his case to that of conscript Ramil Shamsutdinov who opened fire on troops in October last year.

During that attack Shamsutdinov killed eight and injured two in an attack he blamed on

hazing that made his life "hell."

Military service is compulsory in Russia for men aged between 18 and 27, but many people use loopholes to evade conscription.

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