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300 North Caucasus Soldiers Refuse Ukraine Deployment – Activists

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Sergei Bobylev / TASS

At least 300 soldiers from a single unit in Russia's North Caucasus refused deployment to Ukraine in the first month of the war, The Moscow Times' Russian service has reported.

The men from the republic of Dagestan were deployed in the pro-Russian separatist region of Donbas in eastern Ukraine, according to activists cited by MT Russian on Monday. Dagestan, a mountainous, predominantly Muslim region on the Caspian Sea, has had one of the highest military death tolls in Russia's invasion.

Without awaiting their discharge papers, the 300 soldiers reportedly returned to their base in the town of Buynaksk in March, where they launched the process of terminating their contracts and the local community received them as deserters.

Some of the soldiers returned with frostbite and their limbs had to be amputated.

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“The servicemen claimed they had problems with uniforms and weapons,” an unnamed Moscow lawyer who represented the soldiers told MT Russian.

They added that military prosecutors are reviewing their case for criminal prosecution due to their absence from the battlefield for more than 10 days.

Several of the soldiers later re-enlisted for deployment in Ukraine under pressure from relatives and local authorities, activists said.

MT Russian said it was unable to speak with the soldiers themselves due to the private nature of their return and the sense of shame surrounding it.

The incident follows activist reports of another 150 soldiers from the Siberian republic of Buryatia refusing deployment earlier in July after a rare video appeal from their wives.

Dagestan and Buryatia share the highest number of officially reported casualties in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine with deaths in excess of 200 in each region.

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