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Russian Deserter Says Ready to Testify on War Crimes in Ukraine

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Nikita Chibrin. **@MartinGenier / twitter**

A soldier from a Russian unit accused of committing war crimes in the Kyiv suburb of Bucha said he is ready to testify in an international court as he seeks asylum in Spain, The Guardian reported Thursday.

Nikita Chibrin, 27, told The Guardian he heard "widespread rumors" of fellow soldiers committing sexual violence and killing civilians before he deserted his unit in June, four months into the invasion. He implicated fellow soldiers in looting washing machines, electronics and other appliances from Ukrainian homes.

Chibrin denies witnessing any shootings or his involvement in the alleged war crimes, claiming he was relegated to "clean and load" after voicing his opposition to the war from its start. He claims did not fire a gun "once" while in Ukraine.

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“I have nothing to hide,” Chibrin, who was born in the city of Yakutsk in eastern Siberia and joined the Russian army in the summer of 2021 due to financial hardship, told The Guardian.

Chibrin said he entered Ukraine across the Belarusian border with his unit, the 64th Separate Guards Motor Rifle Brigade, on the first day of the invasion Feb. 24.

Ukraine says members of the 64th brigade tortured and killed civilians in Bucha and the surrounding Kyiv suburbs before being forced to withdraw in late March.

President Vladimir Putin awarded the brigade with the honorary title of “guards” shortly afterward, praising it for its “heroism and courage.”

Russian officials have repeatedly denied targeting civilians in the invasion of Ukraine, dismissing the evidence of atrocities in cities like Bucha as “fake” and a “provocation.”

Chibrin said his brigade spent the first month of the invasion in the village of Lypivka west of Kyiv and Bucha, and just south of Andriivka. The 64th brigade was accused of executing civilians in Bucha and Andriivka during that time.

According to Chibrin, his commanders stripped him of his rank as an army mechanic and placed him away from the battlefield after he expressed opposition to the invasion.

Chibrin said he deserted on June 16, stowing away inside a truck that was returning to Russia for food supplies.

Chibrin’s account could not be independently verified, but The Guardian said it received documents and photographs from the soldier showing he was stationed with the brigade.

A lawyer for the Russian advocacy group Military Ombudsman, Maxim Grebenyuk, said Chibrin had reached out to him this summer to discuss his opposition to the war.

Chibrin said he arrived this week in Spain, where he spoke with The Guardian from the airport by phone and was placed in a temporary shelter for refugees in Madrid.

Vladimir Osechkin, who heads the Gulagu.net prisoner rights group, confirmed that his network helped Chibrin evacuate Russia.

Spanish authorities declined to comment due to the risk of possible persecution of political asylum seekers.

Chibrin is at least the second known Russian serviceman to have fled the country after taking part in the invasion of Ukraine. He is also the second member of the 64th brigade to have publicly disclosed cases of apparent war crimes on the outskirts of Kyiv.

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