The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
INDEPENDENT NEWS FROM RUSSIA

Russian Officer Who Feared Execution After Troop Desertion Found Dead

December 05, 2022



Viktor Sevalnev **Gulagu.net**

A former Russian prisoner who had his jail sentence reduced to allow him to serve in the Russian military in Ukraine has been confirmed dead after claiming to have been threatened with execution, investigative news website The Insider reported, citing prominent prisoners' rights NGO Gulagu.net.

Victor Sevalnev, who served as the commander of the 7th motorized rifle company of the Luhansk "people's militia," told his wife Lilia by phone last month that he was going to be shot after soldiers under his command deserted, Gulagu.net said.

In a recording of the phone call shared with The Insider, Sevalnev told his wife that he would be removed from the hospital where he was recovering from a combat wound for "execution."

"Today it's me, tomorrow — another [soldier], and that's it. We are just material to be slaughtered. The Defense Ministry shoots people," The Insider quoted him as saying to his wife.

The Defense Ministry told Lilia last Thursday that Sevalnev died on Nov. 25 — five days after the phone call — from shrapnel wounds and a powerful blow to the head and that his body would be sent to Moscow in a zinc coffin, used primarily to spare families seeing the heavily disfigured remains of their loved ones.

According to Gulagu.net, Sevalnev was transferred from Correctional Colony No. 3 in the Kaluga region to a military camp in Luhansk in October. He reportedly signed a contract with the Defense Ministry after his son Oleg died in combat, having been recruited by Wagner as an inmate in the same prison.

Related article: Prigozhin Welcomes Wagner Deserter's Gruesome Sledgehammer Killing

Since late June, a growing number of reports have emerged of Russian prisoners being recruited by Wagner, which is known to arrange early release for inmates who agree to fight in Ukraine, while also threatening them with death if they desert or surrender.

Nearly 40 Russian prisoners recruited by Wagner have so far been executed by the group, according to Olga Romanova, the head of the Moscow-based organization Russia Behind Bars, which campaigns for the rights of prisoners in Russia.

Last week, a Russian soldier who was captured by Ukrainian forces and identified himself as prisoner Yury Butusov, said in an interview to a Ukrainian journalist that he had been recruited by Wagner and would be killed if he was sent back to Russia.

"They will immediately kill me. I know they will kill me. Please, no exchange," Butusov said

Butusov's sister Yekaterina confirmed to independent media outlet Verstka that the man in the video was indeed her brother.

Last month, a video that circulated on social media apparently showed self-described Wagner deserter Yevgeny Nuzhin, 55, being bludgeoned to death with a sledgehammer. Unconfirmed reports said Nuzhin had been part of a Russian-Ukrainian prisoner exchange.

Ukrainian forces in September also released footage of Nuzhin in which he describes the poor conditions at Wagner and in the Russian army.

Wagner Group founder and Kremlin-linked magnate Yevgeny Prigozhin initially praised Nuzhin's apparent execution, but later denied Wagner's involvement and accused the U.S. secret services of orchestrating the killing.

Original url:
https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2022/12/05/russian-officer-who-feared-execution-after-troop-desertion-found-dead-a79595