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Ukraine Admits Pullout from Soledar, Captured By Russia

By AFP

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A Wagner Group fighter stands before a building destroyed by heavy fire in the embattled town of Soledar. **DPR People's Militia / TASS**

Ukraine's military conceded to AFP Wednesday that its troops had pulled out of the town of Soledar in the eastern Donetsk region, which Russian forces said they captured earlier this month.

"After months of heavy fighting, including over the past weeks, the Armed Forces of Ukraine left (Soledar) and retreated along the outskirts to pre-prepared positions," said military spokesman Serhiy Cherevaty.

Cherevaty did not disclose to AFP when Ukrainian troops had withdrawn from Soledar but he said the maneuver had been carefully planned.

The Russian mercenary group Wagner, which claimed to have spearheaded the offensive for

Soledar, said it had captured the town on Jan. 11.

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The Russian Defense Ministry only said two days later that Moscow's forces were controlling the salt-mining town with a pre-war population of around 10,000.

Moscow said at the time that taking control of Soledar was an important step to capturing the nearby larger town of Bakhmut, where fighting has raged longer than any other place in Ukraine since the Kremlin launched its invasion.

Cherevaty told AFP: "While some (soldiers) were holding the outskirts of Soledar, others were building a defensive line, fortifying new points, while at the same time delivering a massive blow to the enemy."

There had been no "mass capture" or "encirclement" of Ukrainian forces, he added.

The complete capture of the eastern Donetsk region of Ukraine, which has been partially controlled by Moscow-backed separatists for years, is Moscow's primary military goal in Ukraine.

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