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Wagner Commander Who Fled Russia Details Summary Executions

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Andrei Medvedev **CNN**

An ex-commander with Russia's notorious mercenary group Wagner who is currently seeking asylum in Norway described witnessing summary executions of fellow soldiers during an interview with The Moscow Times on Tuesday.

Andrei Medvedev, 26, said that he witnessed a double execution at a Wagner center where the group was training inmates recruited from Russia's jails.

"There was a case when they brought two prisoners who refused to fight and they shot them in front of others for refusing to follow orders," Medvedev said from Norway.

"There were a lot of such cases."

Medvedev fled to the Scandinavian country earlier this month after fighting in eastern Ukraine for four months as a member of Wagner, which is run by Yevgeny Prigozhin, a former chef believed to be close to Russian President Vladimir Putin.

After deserting the mercenary group in November Medvedev crossed the Norwegian border on foot, apparently narrowly escaping from Russian border guard patrols.

Wagner fighters in Ukraine were "treated like cattle" by their military leaders and "sent to the frontline like cannon fodder," Medvedev said.

"I regret that I was there at all."

However, Medvedev refused to specify exactly what crimes Wagner soldiers — who played a key role in battles around the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut — committed, or whether he gave any criminal orders as a Wagner commander.

Medvedev served as the leader of the first squadron of the 4th platoon of Wagner's 7th Assault Detachment and fought near Bakhmut, according to Russian human rights NGO Gulagu.net.

Wagner is believed to have as many as 50,000 fighters deployed in Ukraine, including thousands of Russian convicts who were promised early release from jail in exchange for signing 6-month contracts to fight in Ukraine — but threatened with death if they deserted.

While there are no exact figures available, Wagner has reportedly suffered heavy casualties, with special "Wagner cemeteries" set up in Russia since the start of the war.

Wagner fighters have been accused by Ukraine of murdering civilians near Kyiv.

Medvedev, who grew up in an orphanage in Siberia's Tomsk region and has multiple convictions for robbery, said he joined the mercenary group as a volunteer in July.

But he said he decided to desert after he "saw what was happening" in Ukraine.

One of the 15 men apparently under Medvedev's command was convicted murderer Yevgeny Nuzhin, who was killed with a sledgehammer by another Wagner fighter in an apparent execution that was captured on video and circulated on social media in November.

Nuzhin surrendered to Ukrainian forces last year shortly after being deployed to Ukraine.

Wagner head Prigozhin said at that time that Nuzhin deserved a "dog's death," but later denied the group had any involvement in his murder.

"It was expected, Wagner has no other methods," Medvedev said when asked about Nuzhin's execution.

Medvedev's lawyer told AFP earlier this month that he was "willing to speak about his experiences in the Wagner Group to people who are investigating war crimes."

While Medvedev said that he was too junior to have direct communication with Prigozhin, he recounted that when he met Prigozhin at a Wagner training center he gave "the impression of a sick person."

"A sane person would not do what he does," Medvedev added.

After crossing the border into Norway and being questioned by local security service officers,

Medvedev was released, pending a decision on his application for political asylum.

“I want to start a peaceful life,” Medvedev told The Moscow Times.

While Wagner confirmed earlier this month that Medvedev has been one of their mercenary fighters, The Moscow Times has not been able to independently verify Medvedev’s account.

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