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AFP Journalist Arman Soldin Killed in Eastern Ukraine

By Emmanuel Peuchot for AFP

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AFP journalist Arman Soldin, walks in a trench as he is covering the war in Ukraine. **Aris Messinis / AFP**

AFP's Ukraine video coordinator Arman Soldin was killed on Tuesday by rocket fire near Chasiv Yar in eastern Ukraine, AFP journalists who witnessed the incident said.

The attack happened at around 4:30 p.m. (13:30 GMT) on the outskirts of the town close to Bakhmut, the epicenter of the fighting in eastern Ukraine for several months.

The AFP team came under fire by Grad rockets while they were with a group of Ukrainian soldiers.

Soldin, 32, was killed when a rocket struck close to where he was lying. The rest of the team was uninjured.

"The whole agency is devastated by the loss of Arman," AFP chairman Fabrice Fries said.

"His death is a terrible reminder of the risks and dangers faced by journalists every day covering the conflict in Ukraine."

French President Emmanuel Macron paid tribute to Soldin on Twitter, hailing his "bravery."

"With bravery, from the first hours of the conflict he was at the front to establish the facts. To inform us," Macron wrote, saying he shared "the pain of his relatives and all his colleagues."

Ukraine's defense ministry offered its "heartfelt condolences" to Soldin's family and coworkers in a statement on Twitter, saying he was killed in a Russian missile attack on Chasiv Yar in the eastern region of Donetsk.

"He dedicated his life to informing the world about the truth. His legacy, as well as his cause, will live on," it said.

The Kremlin said Wednesday it was saddened by Soldin's death, but that the circumstances of his killing under rocket fire near Bakhmut were unclear.

"We need to understand the circumstances of the death of this journalist," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. "We can only express sadness on this matter," he added, deferring further questions to the defense ministry.

Born in Sarajevo, Soldin was a French national who began working for AFP as an intern in its Rome bureau in 2015 and was later hired in London.

He was part of the first AFP team to be sent to Ukraine following the start of Russia's invasion on Feb. 24, 2022, arriving on the following day.

Soldin had been living in Ukraine since September, leading the team's video coverage and traveling regularly to the front lines in the east and south.

'Devoted to his craft'

Soldin's death means at least 11 journalists, fixers or drivers for media teams have been killed covering the war in Ukraine, according to the media advocacy groups Reporters Without Borders (RSF) and the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ).

In Washington, the White House also paid tribute to Soldin, with Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre saying the world was "indebted" to the journalists who lost their lives covering the conflict.

"Journalism is fundamental to a free society," she said in a statement.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken also offered his condolences during a speech at the Freedom House think tank in Washington.

"Today, we were devastated to learn of the death of AFP video journalist Arman Soldin in eastern Ukraine," he said. "Our thoughts are with his family and loved ones, and with the entire AFP family."

"Arman's brilliant work encapsulated everything that has made us so proud of AFP's journalism in Ukraine," the agency's Global News Director Phil Chetwynd said.

"Arman's death is a terrible reminder of the risks and dangers of covering this war. Our thoughts tonight are with his family and friends, and with all our people on the ground in Ukraine."

AFP Europe Director Christine Buhagiar remembered Soldin as "a real on-the-ground reporter, always ready to work even in the most difficult places," she said. "He was totally devoted to his craft."

Colleagues said Soldin knew in particular how to recount the lives of ordinary people caught up in the Ukraine conflict, desperately trying to survive amid the chaos.

In Kyiv, he found a tender moment between a conscripted father and his young son who had fled abroad, bonding over a strategy game online.

Earlier this month, he even rescued an injured hedgehog from a trench and nursed it back to health. He named it Lucky.

The founder of the Ukrainian animal rights organization UAnimals, Oleksandr Todorchuk, spoke of Soldin's "absolute kindness" when he came to the hedgehog's aid.

UAnimals was setting up a grant for volunteers and shelters that rescue hedgehogs "in memory of Soldin and his great heart," Todorchuk wrote on Facebook.

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