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Russia Sentences 8 Mobilized Soldiers to Prison for Deserting in Ukraine

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Vladimir Novikov, Press Service of the Mayor and Government of Moscow / Moskva News Agency

A Russian military court has sentenced eight mobilized soldiers to prison terms of up to seven years for deserting their unit in eastern Ukraine, the independent Mediazona news website reported Tuesday, citing their lawyer.

The soldiers had been sent to a field camp in the Moscow-occupied region of Luhansk after being drafted in September as part of the Kremlin's "partial" military mobilization for the war, Mediazona said.

The soldiers, who complained of a lack of equipment and provisions, had been set to go to the front on Dec. 24, but fled the camp in order to "save [their] life and health," lawyer Yevgeny Saveskul told Mediazona.

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According to Mediazona, they then went to the Moscow region town of Podolsk and handed over the weapons issued to them during their military service to the police.

A military court in the Baltic exclave of Kaliningrad found all seven men guilty of desertion committed by an organized group and failure to comply with orders during a period of mobilization or armed conflict, Mediazona reported.

Junior sergeant Yevgeny Kravchenko and private Alexander Bogachenko were sentenced to seven years in prison; sailor Alexander Babeshko and private Nikolai Kolmachev to six years; and mobilized reservists Dmitry Medvedev, Alexander Eliseev, Igor Medvedev and Denis Balakhin to six-and-a-half years.

Russia introduced lengthy jail terms for wartime acts including desertion and "voluntary" surrender shortly after the start of its mobilization campaign last year.

According to the law, desertion during a period of mobilization or wartime is punishable by up to 10 years in prison, while conscientious objectors face a sentence of up to three years.

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