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Wagner Fighters Return to Bakhmut After Prigozhin's Death – CNN

September 27, 2023



Wagner mercenary fighters. **Erik Romanenko / TASS**

Wagner mercenary fighters have returned to the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, CNN reported Wednesday, citing a Ukrainian serviceman.

Reporters embedded within the Ukrainian military interviewed a drone operator who had spotted the mercenaries back on the Bakhmut battlefield to plug a manpower shortage.

"[Wagner] came back, they swiftly changed their commanders and returned here," said the serviceman, who was only identified by his call sign "Groove."

The private military outfit played a key role in the war's longest and bloodiest battle to seize Bakhmut in May, when its erstwhile leader Yevgeny Prigzhin announced his fighters' withdrawal.

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Ukrainian forces almost immediately began pushing back around the northern and southern flanks of the war-battered city and have reported incremental gains. However, progress has been slow due to heavily fortified Russian defenses.

“[Russia] gathered troops from surrounding areas and brought them here,” Groove added. “They don’t have much personnel left here.”

On Saturday, the U.S. think tank Institute for the Study of War (ISW) said Wagner-affiliated sources claimed that some 500 Wagner personnel have joined a “new unspecified organization” for further deployment on Bakhmut’s southern flank.

They were reported to include those Wagner fighters who had refused to join Prigozhin’s mutiny against Russia’s military leadership on June 23-24.

ISW assessed that the “disjointed” Wagner contingents were “unlikely to organize into a cohesive fighting force or have an impact on Russian combat capabilities.”

Original url:
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