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Ex-Wagner Fighter Charged in Killing of Two Women in Siberia

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Headquarters of the Wagner Group in St. Petersburg. **Anatoly Maltsev / EPA / TASS**

Russia's Investigative Committee on Tuesday opened a criminal case against a former Wagner fighter and convict over the killing of two women in a Siberian village.

Denis Stepanov is accused of setting fire to a home in the village Yermakovkoye, located in Siberia's Krasnoyarsk region, resulting in the deaths of a 68-year-old homeowner and a 35-year-old woman, according to the Baza Telegram channel.

The Sibir.Realii news website reported that Stepanov was sentenced to 3.5 years in jail back in 2021 for beating a man with the metal door of an oven.

He was serving his prison sentence for that crime when Wagner last fall recruited him to fight in Ukraine, where he served for half a year before being pardoned and returning to civilian life.

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The incident comes after a string of detentions and arrestes of Wagner fighters over recent weeks in connection to various crimes.

On Monday, law enforcement authorities in central Russia's Lipetsk region charged an ex-Wagner fighter —identified only as "Vladimir V." — with murder of a 4-year-old child.

According to investigators, the the former mercneary was intoxicated and fighting with his wife when he struck her daughter, who later died of the injuries.

In a separate case, ex-convict and former Wagner fighter Sergei Rudenko was sentenced last month to 11.5 years in prison for killing a woman, the Astra Telegram channel reported.

The Wagner mercenary group started its recruitment campaign in Russian prisons last summer to boost Moscow's troop numbers in Ukraine.

In exchange for their military service, prisoners were promised that they would later be pardoned and have their criminal records cleared.

Last week, Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Russian prisoners who died fighting in Ukraine had "redeemed themselves" in the eyes of society.

"Everyone can make some mistakes — they once did. But they gave their lives for the Motherland, and fully redeemed themselves," Putin said.

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