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Arbat Battalion Commander Killed in Combat Mission, Kremlin-Installed Official Says

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Hayk Gasparyan. **ZARTNIR**

The commander of an ethnic Armenian paramilitary unit fighting on the side of Russia in the war against Ukraine was killed in combat, the Kremlin-installed mayor of the occupied Ukrainian city of Horlivka said Monday.

Hayk Gasparyan, who had commanded the Arbat Battalion since 2023, died earlier on Monday while carrying out a "combat mission," Mayor Ivan Prikhodko wrote in a post on Telegram. He did not say where Gasparyan was killed or provide any other details.

Born in the disputed South Caucasus territory of Karabakh, Gasparyan is believed to have been 34 at the time of his death.

The Arbat Battalion, which fights as an irregular military unit alongside Russia's Armed Forces, is made up of around 500 people, most of whom are ethnic Armenians. It is part of the

Pyatnashka international volunteer brigade based in eastern Ukraine's partially occupied Donetsk region.

In 2023, President Vladimir Putin awarded Gasparyan the Medal "For Courage" while he was still a member of the Wagner private military company.

Just three years earlier, a Moscow court had sentenced him to seven years at a maximum-security prison after he was found guilty of armed robbery. Russian media reported that Wagner recruited Gasparyan in August 2022 while he was serving his prison sentence in the Ryazan region.

Before his criminal conviction and military career, Gasparyan was a professional MMA fighter and trainer.

The Arbat battalion was founded in September 2022 by businessman Armen Sakisyan, who died in a Moscow apartment building suicide bombing in February 2025. Earlier, Ukrainian authorities listed him as a suspect in an investigation into Russia's recruitment of prisoner fighters.

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