

Who Is Stephen Hubbard, the U.S. Citizen Released by Russia?

By [Reuters](#)

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American Stephen Hubbard returns home following release from Russian custody. **U.S. Government / Handout via REUTERS**

American national Stephen Hubbard has arrived back in the United States, following his release from detention in Russia by President Vladimir Putin at the start of talks with U.S. President Donald Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, on Wednesday.

Here are the details of Hubbard's case:

Who is Stephen Hubbard?

Hubbard, 74, a retired schoolteacher, grew up in Big Rapids, Michigan, and served in the U.S. Air Force and National Guard, according to military records cited by the New York Times.

He earned a master's degree in English and lived in Japan for 25 years where he taught English before moving to Cyprus and then, in 2014, to Izium in eastern Ukraine with a Ukrainian

partner, according to his sister, Patricia Hubbard Fox.

Fox told Reuters in 2024 that Hubbard subsisted on a pension of about \$300 a month and had few connections with local people. The siblings last spoke in September 2021.

How was he captured?

Russia launched its full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022 and captured Izium two months later. Ukrainian forces retook the city in September 2022, but Hubbard was already in Russian custody by then.

Russian state media said Hubbard had been detained in April 2022 and alleged he had been manning a Ukrainian military checkpoint. Reuters could not independently establish the circumstances of his capture.

Fox said she recognized her brother in a YouTube video showing a man being questioned about his views on Putin and the war. Another video showed him with his hands bound, being struck with a sandal. Reuters could not verify when or where the videos were recorded.

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Why was he imprisoned?

Following a closed trial, a Moscow court convicted Hubbard of being a mercenary in October 2024 and sentenced him to six years and 10 months in prison. Prosecutors said Hubbard had joined a Ukrainian territorial defense unit, received training, weapons and ammunition, and was promised \$1,000 a month. Russian state media said he had pleaded guilty to the charges he faced.

Fox questioned the reported confession, however, saying Hubbard held pro-Russian views and was unlikely to have taken up arms in his 70s.

Martin De Luca, his U.S.-based lawyer, told Reuters in June 2025 that Hubbard had told him the charges against him were false and that he was not in any combat or military unit. He cited Hubbard as telling him Russian soldiers had simply grabbed him from his house.

What was Hubbard's status?

In January 2025, Washington designated Hubbard as wrongfully detained, enabling the U.S. government to pursue negotiations for his release.

The State Department has said Russia refused to grant U.S. officials consular access.

The New York Times reported in February 2025 that Hubbard had been moved through at least five Russian detention centers before his trial.

His lawyer said Hubbard's legal team found out only in April 2025 that he was being held in a facility in the republic of Mordovia, east of Moscow.

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