



Ukrainian medic released in prisoner exchange accuses captors of torture

By [Alex Marquardt](#) and [Pierre Bairin](#), CNN

🕒 Updated 0404 GMT (1204 HKT) July 7, 2022



Three months in Russian captivity: How one Ukrainian got out 03:04

Avdeeva, Ukraine (CNN) — A well-known [Ukrainian](#) paramedic who was held [prisoner](#) by Russian and separatist forces for three months after being captured in the southeastern city of Mariupol has accused her guards of psychological and physical torture during her time in captivity.

Yulia Paievaska, 53, widely known in Ukraine by her nickname Taira, has reached folk hero notoriety. She said the abuse started immediately after she was recognized at a checkpoint near Mariupol and taken prisoner, along with her driver, on March 16.

"For five days I had no food and practically did not drink," Paievaska told CNN on Tuesday, almost three weeks after she was released in a prisoner exchange on June 17. The abuse, including beatings, she said, was "extreme" and "did not stop for a minute all these three months."

From mid-March until mid-June, the pair were held in occupied territory in the Donetsk pre-trial detention center by a combination of forces from Russia and the self-



"Constantly you are told that you are a fascist, a Nazi," she said, comparing the conditions to a gulag. She said she was told it "would be better if you were dead than see what will happen next."

Frustrated that Paievskaya wouldn't give her Russian and pro-Russian separatist captors an on-camera confession of supposed neo-Nazi connections, she said, they "threw me into solitary confinement, into a dungeon without a mattress, on a metal bunk."

Paievskaya's notoriety in Ukraine has grown since she first came to prominence during the 2014 Maidan uprising, where she supported those protesting against the then pro-Russian president as a volunteer medic. From there she went east to the frontline as Ukrainian troops battled separatist forces in the Donbas region, eventually officially joining Ukraine's armed forces.



Russian servicemen patrol near the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol, Ukraine, on June 13, 2022.

Propaganda video



scenes of the injured arriving at the emergency room and the efforts to save them.



Related Video: Russia returns bodies of Ukrainian soldiers killed in Mariupol 02:08

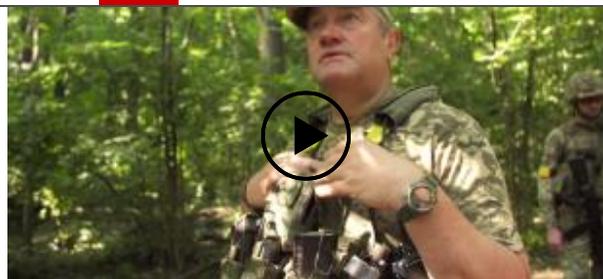
With Russian forces closing in, Paievskaya managed to get one of her memory cards to journalists from the Associated Press who were among the last to escape the city. The card was hidden in a tampon, Paievskaya said. She told CNN that she destroyed another card with her teeth and threw it out as she approached the checkpoint where she and her driver were taken.

The forces at the checkpoint soon recognized her, Paievskaya said, and within days of her abduction she was forced over several days to sit for Russian TV cameras for what would become a slickly produced 47-minute propaganda video that accuses her of using children as human shields and of harvesting organs and compares her to Hitler.

In the film, Paievskaya is marched into an interrogation room, handcuffed and hooded, and made to sit down under a harsh, bright light as the narrator plays up the supposed danger she poses.

The video, broadcast by state-run channel NTV, was released 12 days after Paievskaya was taken. In that time, and throughout her detention, Paievskaya wasn't allowed to contact her husband, Vadim Puzanov.

"You watch too many American films," she says she was told. "There will be no call."



Related Video: 'They're coming':
Ukraine fighters' spirits dampen as
Russia gains ground 03:53

first time in more than three months.

"I didn't recognize her [voice] because I didn't expect her to call me," Puzanov said. Along with their daughter, the family reunited in the hospital to which Paievskaya was taken by Ukrainian forces, a moment Puzanov described as "the most joyous event."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky announced the news in his nightly video address, saying: "Taira is already at home. And we will continue to work to release everyone else."

'Ruthless regime'

Paievskaya declined to say where the exchange took place or for whom she was traded. Since her abduction, the already slight, heavily tattooed Paievskaya says she has lost 10 kilograms (over 20 pounds) and is suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

She will not be returning to the frontlines anytime soon, she said, afraid of being a burden on the forces.

Instead, she is focusing on qualifying for the 2023 Invictus Games for wounded veterans in swimming and archery. She suffered a hip injury exacerbated by work at the front and had both her hip joints replaced.

Paievskaya blames the Kremlin's powerful propaganda machine for fueling the Russian war effort and, like Ukraine's leaders, says Ukraine needs more help from the west to defeat Russia.



destiny. You have to accept, just stop resisting."

Search CNN...



Audio

World

US Politics

Business

Health

Entertainment

Tech

Style

Travel

Sports

Videos

Features

Weather

More



FOLLOW CNN



[Terms of Use](#) [Privacy Policy](#) [Manage Cookies+](#) [Ad Choices](#) [About Us](#)
[Modern Slavery Act Statement](#) [Advertise with us](#) [CNN Store](#) [Newsletters](#)
[Transcripts](#) [License Footage](#) [CNN Newsource](#) [Sitemap](#)

© 2022 Cable News Network. A Warner Bros. Discovery Company. All Rights Reserved.

CNN Sans™ & © 2016 Cable News Network.