

Anna Politkovskaya - the well-known war reporter of the Novaya Gazeta newspaper, arrived by helicopter to the village of Khankala on Thursday afternoon. There she had to undergo thorough questioning on details of her detention in Chechnya that took place shortly beforehand. Politkovskaya plans to return to Moscow on Friday. NTV correspondents met with the journalist in Khankala. Anna told them she had been brought to Khankala near 2:00 pm Moscow time on Thursday. Prior to that she had been held at the army unit in Khatuni, a village near Vedeno for two days. In official news reports the military spokesmen claimed she had received a warmed welcome in the unit**, but on Thursday Politkovskaya refuted those reports and made quite the opposite statements.

Judging from the news reports and explanation provided to Gazeta.Ru by the Novaya Gazeta's military observer Major Vyacheslav Izmailov, here is how it all happened: On Monday Anna Politkovskaya took a taxi in Mozdok and arrived in Chechnya. The destination of her trip was the mountainous village of Makhety in Vedeno District. Russian troops had destroyed that settlement through air bombings back in 1996. The key target of the federals' attacks was the headquarters of Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, who later turned president of Ichkeria. Not long ago the residents of Makhety declared they no longer considered it possible to live in ruins, and turned to the federal authorities with the request to help them move to Russia.

Anna Politkovskaya intended to go to Makhety in the company of the recently appointed Chechen government prime minister Stanislav Ilyasov to dissuade desperate locals from moving. But by some obscure reason, the journalist went alone to the settlement, where at local inhabitants welcomed her with numerous complaints about the actions of the military. From Makhety Anna Politkovskaya, accompanied by a group of the Chechens, headed to the Khatuni village, some four kilometers from Makhety, whereat the 119th paratroopers' unit was stationed. "She went there on her own, in order to hear the opinion of another side (the military), and they detained her," Novaya Gazeta's Vyacheslav Izmailov told Gazeta.Ru correspondent.

According to Anna's colleague, unwanted guests did not receive a hearty welcome from the paratroopers. They detained the journalist and the driver who brought her to Khatuni, and released them only three hours later. The driver preferred to return home (it is still not known, whether he got his vehicle back or not). As for the journalist she was detained again, shortly afterwards, at the nearest checkpoint. It is quite likely, that she had decided to continue the conversation to get more explanation from the military, and, naturally, her perseverance annoyed them.

All those events took place on Tuesday. News on Politkovskaya's arrest arrived in Moscow a day later, at midday on Wednesday. Upon hearing the reports, Vyacheslav Izmailov immediately started calling Kremlin's spokesman for Chechnya Sergei Yastrzhembsky and the Federal Security Service for more information on the incident. However, neither of the offices would provide any details. Yastrzhembsky's office began making inquiries, however, neither of the law enforcement agencies in Chechnya could answer their questions.

Gazeta.Ru correspondent called the FSB press-service on Wednesday for comment on the journalist's detention and that was how that agency learned about the incident. Several hours later the commandant of Chechnya Ivan Babichev asserted he had nothing to do with the journalist's detention and ordered to release her immediately. But when the journalist was found eventually, paratroopers would not release her. It had grown dark by the time, when

the Unified military group spokesman Konstantin Kukharenko emerged in front of cameras and said that due to poor weather conditions Politkovskaya could not fly away from Khatuni.

Then the official told the journalists that as soon as the fog lifts, Politkovskaya would be transported to the military base in Khankala, and afterwards, she will be deported to Russia. "Politkovskaya has gone on a hunger strike," the spokesman said, adding that what had happened to her was her own fault, for she had been traveling around Chechnya "without a duly arranged permission and without accreditation". However, Yastrzhembsky's office said Politkovskaya had a valid accreditation in Chechnya. "But (having) accreditation does not imply that one may go wherever he wants to. Anna Stepanovna (Politkovskaya) never informed us of her plans," a person at Yastrzhembsky's office told Gazeta.Ru.

And, indeed, it turned out that Politkovskaya failed to register with any of both press-centers of the military, in Mozdok and in Khankala. The military assume that journalists should not travel around the region without registering, "wherein the counter-terrorist operation is still on". Besides, the military insist that reporters who work in the region should negotiate their itineraries with the military. And the Novaya Gazeta journalist Anna Politkovskaya has always preferred to choose her routes on her own, her colleagues say. Earlier she managed to get away with it, despite the fact that most of her articles on Chechnya were extremely critical, exposing atrocities of the military and numerous cases of human rights abuse.

Politkovskaya wrote in one of her reports that it is not a problem to take an interview from any Chechen rebels in a downtown cafe in Grozny. All that's needed is to know informal rules of interpersonal communication. In Anna Politkovskaya's opinion, people she had encountered are mentally sick resulting from the conditions they are in. She said she had written a letter to the military prosecutor, for, she holds that if soldiers treat a journalists in such fashion, that means that all complaints filed by civilians about the atrocities and harassment are well-founded.

It is also known that the prosecutor had questioned Anna on each detail of her adventure, and the whole process lasted nearly 3 hours. In televised comments for NTV the FSB spokesman Alexander Zdanovich said Anna Politkovskaya had only herself to blame for her misfortunes. She merely failed to behave herself correctly. Notwithstanding the fact she had infringed all the rules of stay in the volatile area, she was treated very well, and at her request, she was brought to Khankala by helicopter. Zdanovich described her charges against the military as sheer nonsense. On Thursday evening Prosecutor General Vladimir Ustinov said he would take the investigation of the incident under his personal control.