

ULTIMATE UKRAINIAN

Women - Warrior

Yulia Mykytenko: Giving it All
for Ukrainian Independence

Hybrid War Is On!

How Ukrainian Universities
Collaborate to Fight Russian Misinformation

Learning From the Past

NKVD - KGB Archives are Open in Ukraine

Unconquerable Soul

Ukrainian Veteran's Way
to Rehabilitation

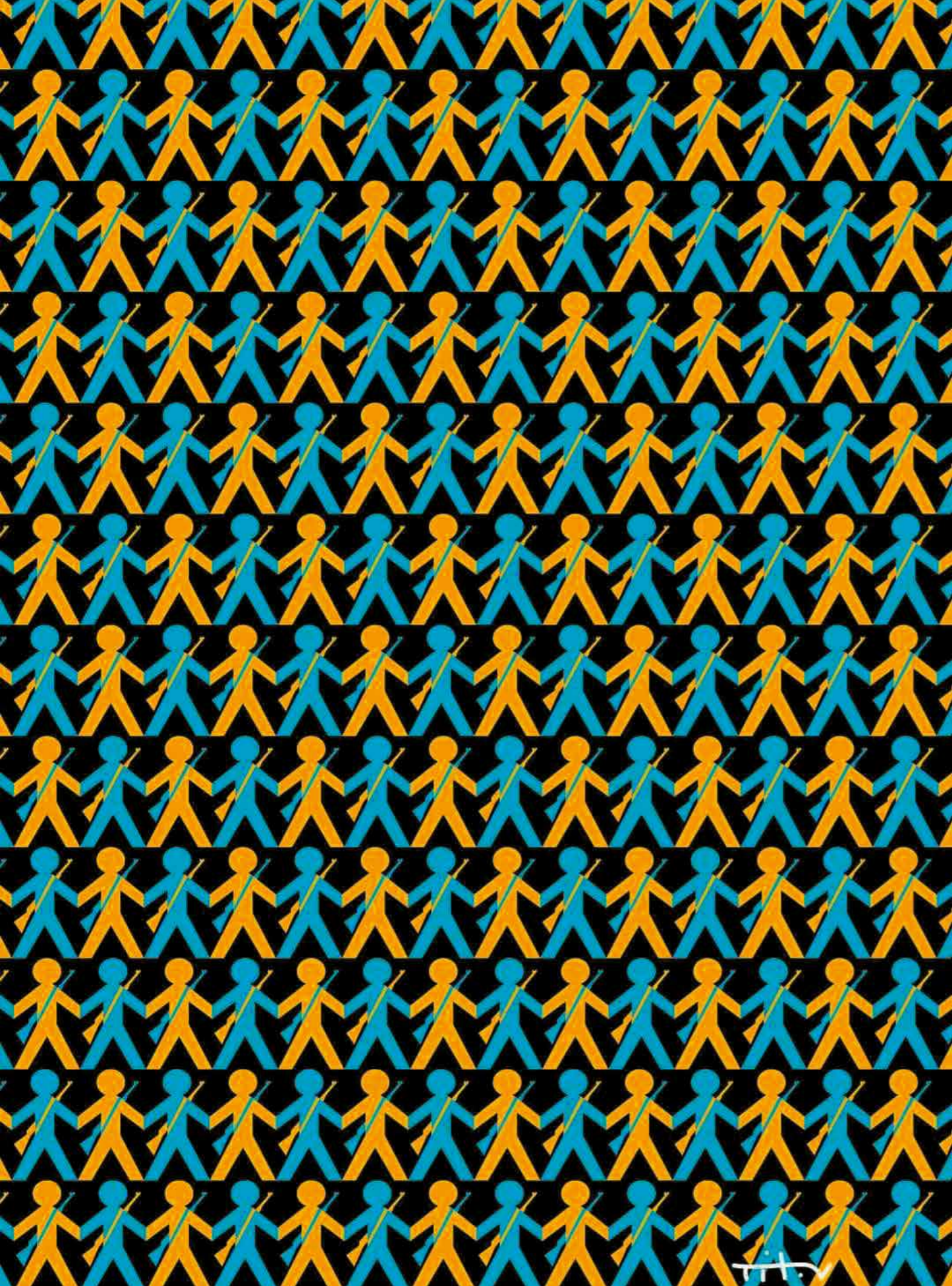
The Right Sector

Ukrainian Nationalists
Stand for Their Land

**AND MORE
IN OUR
2021 ISSUE**



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UKRAINE'S FIGHT FOR LIBERTY AND FREEDOM

The Ultimate Ukrainian 2021 presents to you, our dear reader, **real-life stories of Ukrainians** who are standing solid and united, men and women, against the powerful and skilled enemy, the Russian Federation, and its anti-Ukrainian informational and military campaign.

For eight years, Putin's regime has been attacking Ukraine using hybrid war as a tool to divide, diminish, and destroy Ukrainian independence and governance. As a result of the ongoing military conflict, **some 13,000 people have been killed, a quarter of them civilians, and as many as 30,000 wounded** in eastern Ukraine since it broke out in April 2014, the United Nations says.

How do ordinary Ukrainians deal with these attacks? What helps them to hold ground? We invite you to **look inside the mind and soul of the Ultimate Ukrainian:** soldier, veteran, and patriot. You will notice that despite the horrible losses and current political uncertainty, Ukrainians are looking forward to a future and reinventing themselves as parents, artists, business owners, and, first of all, as a citizen of a free country.

The life choices they make are not impulsive, but based on the **long history of generations of Ukrainians pursuing freedom and happiness** for centuries — first, breaking away from the Russian Empire; later, from the oppressive Soviet regime; and now, from yet another attempt by Moscow to



destroy Ukrainian sovereignty. This time, Russia is using hybrid war tactics, combining military operations, occupation of Ukrainian territories, and a malign informational campaign.

Russia has been using an advanced form of hybrid warfare in Ukraine since early 2014, one the Russians call "reflexive control." **The primary objective of the reflexive control techniques Moscow has employed in Ukraine has been to persuade**

the West to remain on the sidelines as Russia pulls Ukraine to pieces. The Russian propaganda narrative about Ukrainians being untrustworthy, a lost nation of underperformers, not able to hold up the modern standards of fast-paced development is meant to divert your interest from Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Ukrainians are breaking this narrative by taking an active position not only at the front lines but also in the informational space. What we see from real-life snapshots presented in our magazine is that Ukrainians are very well aware of the political environment. Their decisions and choices are not dictated by someone, but are based on their desire to see Ukraine independent, to pass a free country on to the new generation of Ukrainians.

That is why they are fighting fearlessly, will not stop fighting, and will prevail in this long stand for Ukrainian independence. And it is a time for you, our dear reader, to **take a side, support Ukraine, stand up for liberty and freedom!**

"We've been blessed with the opportunity to stand for something — for liberty and freedom and fairness. And these are things worth fighting for, worth devoting our lives to."

Ronald Reagan



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Russian disinformation is still a threat

Can Ukraine build resilience?



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uaeuxperts.org

Kremlin disinformation poses a persistent threat to the democratic process all over the world. The goal of the information operations run from Moscow is to manipulate our opinions and choices, sow chaos, and polarize our societies. The strategic objective of these campaigns is to weaken and destabilize the West at every level and threaten the unity of the alliances. Russian interference tries to undermine election processes, while at the same time fueling anti-Western sentiment.

Disinformation targeting other countries has become Moscow's main foreign policy instrument. Russia has been weaponizing information since Soviet times, and the methods Russia uses are adapted to increase impact and efficiency. Rapid advances in technology allow malicious information to flow freely and virtually unhindered. Modern Russian propaganda is swift, continuous, and cyclical, being able to quickly respond to the latest developments.

Ben Nimmo studied Russia's information warfare doctrine and described the strategy as the "4 Ds": dismiss the critic, distort the facts, distract from the main issue, and dismay the audience. Later a fifth "D" was added - divide.

Russia seeks and exploits existing vulnerabilities. These are usually issues that society is already divided about, and where there is an opportunity to polarize it even more. For example, during elections, or on the issue of language, or historical events. Moscow is trying to depict Ukraine as a zone of its priority influence. Starting in 2014, Ukraine has become a battleground for testing new tools and techniques of information warfare.

The war in Eastern Ukraine provides a clear demonstration of how Russia sees information operations as an effective tool to achieve its strategic goals.

The Kremlin uses agents and specific channels to inject manipulative or fake information that is later spread by pro-Kremlin media and its supporters. It is noteworthy that recently top Russian officials, like Dmitry Medvedev and Vladimir Putin himself, became the sources of false narratives about Ukraine, which they cover in their articles. Russia uses its network of officials, journalists, paid commentators, and internet trolls to generate multiple alternative versions of events to create the impression that no information is trustworthy. More and more, Russian disinformation shifts to online media and messaging apps, where it spreads instantly, making it even more difficult to counter. The tools, techniques, and methods applied by the Kremlin have become more flexible and inventive over time, targeting specific social groups.





However, while Russia's propaganda network is well-organized and well-funded, its messages are predictable. In most cases, information operations follow a similar plot, with the main narrative based on the thesis that Ukraine is under external governance from the United States and the only possible future for Ukraine is to have close relations with Russia. According to research by **Olga Yurkova** from **StopFake**, the issue of the Kremlin's influence in Ukraine remains high on the political agenda.

This blurs Russia's role in spreading toxic narratives and undermines the perception that Russia's actions pose a threat to Ukraine.

To this end, well-established civil society initiatives and various programs on exposing disinformation play a crucial role. Ukraine's civil society remains the driving force in this fight and it has done much to increase Ukrainians' resilience to disinformation.

Resilience is also a key component in the National Security Strategy of Ukraine. The two other main principles of the state national security policy are deterrence and cooperation. According to the Strategy, Russia is recognized as an "aggressor state, a source of long-term systemic threats to Ukraine's national security" that conducts "hybrid" aggression against Ukraine.

Naming and shaming are still a working strategy.

Systems for monitoring information attacks are actively developing to systematically collect and document cases of pro-Kremlin disinformation. The government recognizes that the media and information are strategic national assets.

Any encroachment of these assets entails liability. A promising area to countering disinformation is to boost media literacy. A well-informed society, media, and government contribute to ensuring greater resilience to foreign disinformation campaigns.

Effective counteraction also requires the joint efforts of government and civil society, based on mutual trust. It is the destruction of such mutual trust that Kremlin propaganda seeks to achieve in targeted democracies.



www.StopFake.org

It uses internal tensions to weaken society, and sociological polling indicates that society remains quite vulnerable to manipulation. Moscow relies on local agents of influence, including national television channels. The Ukrainian media market remains quite vulnerable to disinformation. The Kremlin's narratives resonate with various vulnerable groups because of effective rebranding and the simultaneous distribution of such narratives through many different channels.

(Against Manipulation & Propaganda Messengers)

The Center for Countering Information Aggression AM&PM

The Center for Countering Information Aggression AM&PM (Against Manipulation & Propaganda Messengers) was created in September 2020 at the Military Institute of the Taras Shevchenko National University in Kyiv.

Initially, the team was created to participate in the international competition "Peer to Peer" with the other teams from 76 countries of the world, which was aimed at developing knowledge and skills among young people to fight against destructive propaganda. The AM&PM team's successful participation in the competition and serious results made it a permanent project, which was supported by the Military Institute's commanders.

Now the team includes not only cadets (majoring in military journalism, international information, and political science), but also professors and officers of the institute. In fact, the AM&PM Center is a platform with two functions: training and practice. Performing tasks on the operational and tactical level, the project participants gain new knowledge and skills and solve specific issues.



The main task of the Center AM&PM is to form critical thinking, information resilience, and media literacy among the service members of the Ukrainian army. The Center has direct cooperation with the Operational Commands and Departments of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and the Ministry of Defense.



Bohdan Senik

Head of the Public Relations Department of the Armed Forces of Ukraine: “The AM&PM team participants, the cadets and professors, demonstrate a sufficiently high and motivated level of approach to solving the assigned tasks. Considering the conditions of their work, the forces and means they have, I can evaluate their work as perfect.”

Center AM&PM carries out work in areas such as

research

media monitoring, analytics, forecasting

creating visual content

memes, infographics, leaflets, posters, booklets

information and analytical articles

content for Ukrainian online media, radio, and TV.

Center AM&PM carries out work in areas such as research (media monitoring, analytics, forecasting); creating visual content (memes, infographics, leaflets, posters, booklets); and information and analytical articles and content for Ukrainian online media, radio, and TV. The team has its own training group and two basic trainings to develop knowledge and practical skills in cybersecurity and media literacy (both trainings

are available on the Center’s YouTube channel). The AM&PM team actively works in social networks through its own platforms and in cooperation with partners. The team’s experts are frequent guests on the radio programs “Voice of Donbas” and “Army FM” and on the TV programs “Security Factor” on Channel 24, “Secret Front” on ICTV, and “War Technique” on channels 24 and 5.

As a result of working with social networks and Ukrainian media, the AM&PM team created its own media network, which covers about 20 million contacts among the population of Ukraine. The Center’s team actively cooperates with colleagues in the EU and the USA, providing Western partners with their developments and studying their experience in countering information threats in the military sphere.

Sigita Struberga

Secretary General of the Latvian Transatlantic Organization LATO:

“The Latvian Transatlantic Organization highly values our cooperation with the AM&PM team. These young, talented people are not only very inspiring, but also have reached a high level of professionalism. Their mission should be continued in new projects and new activities to build the informative resilience of Ukrainian society. The team of Latvian Transatlantic Organization is looking forward to cooperating in the future.”



The AM&PM Center actively cooperates with Ukrainian NGOs and independent information and analytical centers. Among them, StopFake, a project that is well-known in Ukraine and far beyond the borders of our country, operating at the Media Reform Center.

Media Reform Center is a public organization that provides information about events in Ukraine. Established in March 2014 by leading Ukrainian experts in international relations. It provides support to media representatives covering events in Ukraine.

Viktoria Romanyuk

Chief Editor of StopFake:

“Today, there are many who talk about misinformation and fakes. This problem is discussed at various levels, state and public. And it is very pleasant that young people, future journalists and information workers, are joining in solving these problems today. The AM&PM team is distinguished by its creative and innovative approach. The projects and ideas that this team has already managed to implement deserve a worthy assessment and respect.”



The analytical group AM&PM’s research is one of the hallmarks of the Center. Since September 2020, the group has conducted weekly monitoring of the Ukrainian media space, which makes it possible to identify destructive narratives and messages that are thrown in by Russia. Several sociological studies were carried out, which made it possible to identify the weakest spots in the media literacy of Ukrainian military personnel and determine the most effective ways to counter Russian propaganda. In particular, based on the data obtained, a formula for the penetration of Russian fakes into Ukrainian media was identified, which was a three-level infiltration system.

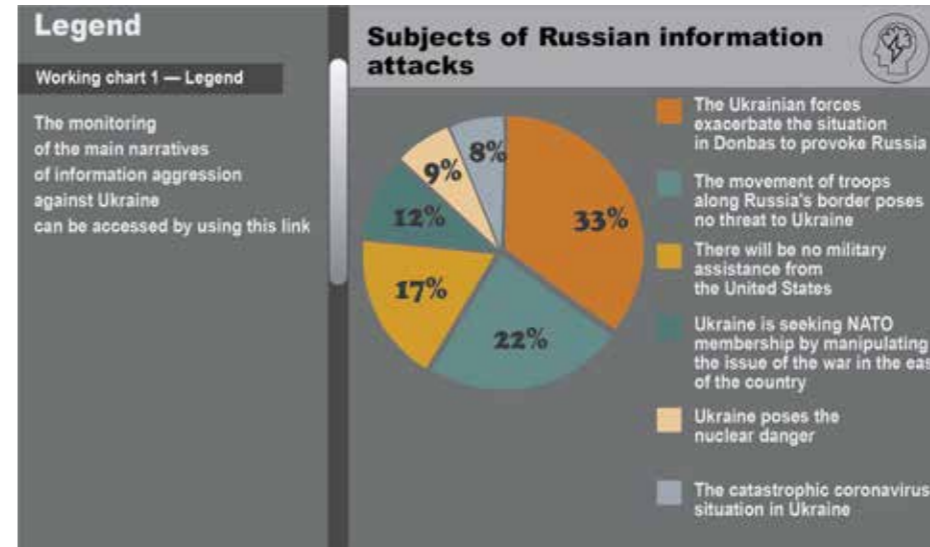
An exclusive product of the AM&PM team is an interactive map of detecting and fixing fakes in the central and regional media of Ukraine. The map allows you to visualize information threats for specific regions at specific time periods. This approach makes it possible to track the enemy's information activity, destructive tendencies, and processes, as well as to recognize information attacks.

A specific area of the AM&PM team's work is the identification of dangerous media viruses that Russia throws into Ukrainian media. As a rule, they are launched with the help of TV series, popular music, flash mobs, and on social networks. This is one of the most dangerous types of modern information weapons.



The AM&PM team actively participates in thematic conferences and also holds its own events. One of the most significant was the international online conference "Modern information threats in the military sphere", which took place on May 22, 2021.

At this conference, military and civilian experts from Ukraine and the Baltic countries discussed the information components of the concentration of Russian troops near the Ukrainian border in the east and in Belarus near the borders of the Baltic countries.



The AM&PM Center's video group is working on creating videos that reveal the project's main directions. Videos with commentary by well-known Ukrainian and foreign experts on information security and media literacy are especially popular.



Aleksandr Kurban,
Mentor of the AM&PM Center for Countering Information Aggression:
 "Even at the stage of creating our Center, we set far-reaching and ambitious goals. In fact, it was an experiment in creating a structure that can combine the initiative of youth and the experience of adult professionals. This experience turned out to be very successful. Today we are working on creating a network of such centers and are negotiating with our Ukrainian and European colleagues."

THE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY:



CURRENT TRENDS

The International Forum “Informational Security: Current Trends” traditionally gathers experts, practitioners, scientists, government officials, and NGO activists on relevant topics at the end of the year (first Saturday in December). These professionals mostly work with digital, managerial, humanitarian, and psychological technologies in the security sector. Representatives from Latvia, Kazakhstan, France, and Georgia in the field of information security and geopolitics joined the forum. Each of these countries has its own history, but present issues have created very mutual concerns.

“This year, Russia’s attacks on the information space in the Baltic states and Poland were linked to the influx of migrants from the Middle East on the Belarusian border with Lithuania and Poland,” said Sigita Struberga, Secretary General of the Latvian Transatlantic Organisation (LATO), a leading Latvian security expert.



“The Kremlin’s hybrid occupation of Belarus and its influence on Belarusian civil society through social media, primarily through Telegram, (is a concern),” says Maria Avdeeva, Director of Research, European Expert Association, OSCE Project Coordinator in Ukraine.



“The victory of the radical Taliban movement in Afghanistan and the intensification of Russia’s attempts to absorb Kazakhstan caused various informational and hybrid attacks in Kazakhstan and other Central Asian countries, which are former Soviet republics,” claimed Batakoz Isa, Kazakh human rights activist and journalist.

France, Georgia, and Ukraine face information security issues, as well, say experts from those countries, French Professor Olivier Vedrine; Georgy Jahaya, a well-known Georgian blogger and Kremlin information aggression fighter; and Viktoriya Romanyuk, editor of Ukrainian website StopFake.

All of them have been dealing with cybersecurity for many years, and have now reached some significant achievements and valuable results. However, generalizing experience, finding commonalities, and expressing expert opinions remain the key tasks of each scientist involved. Therefore, special attention was paid to the reports from scientists. Here are a few statements: Lina Vezhel, Associate Professor of Kyiv Shevchenko National University and member of the NGO Center for Communication and Content Security, spoke about the “meta world.” She cited relevant experts from the U.S., China, the EU, and Russia: “We live in a time of ultra-dynamic trends, when people don’t have time to seek the truth. Those who spread fake

information benefit from using artificial intelligence. It’s pretty cheap to maintain and it is easy to apply such technologies anywhere, without any further investigation or accusations. But it is possible to resist fakes, and only clear instructions can help us fight misinformation. For instance, on the Fortnite platform, an average gamer spends from 6 to 10 hours a week. Even one of (U.S. President) Joe Biden’s strategists suggested using this advertising platform to attract young people to the electoral process. In addition, the Pentagon is very successful in using the Twitch platform. The site has over 15 million users and you can watch e-sports tournaments and live broadcasts of games, bloggers, and musicians. The U.S. Army began to use the service to tell viewers about serving in the armed forces.” Oleksandr Vysotskyi, Professor of the O. Honchara Dnipro National University, spoke about the nuances of modern digital diplomacy and its role in modern information and hybrid wars: “Digital diplomacy is the implementation of a country’s soft power on the

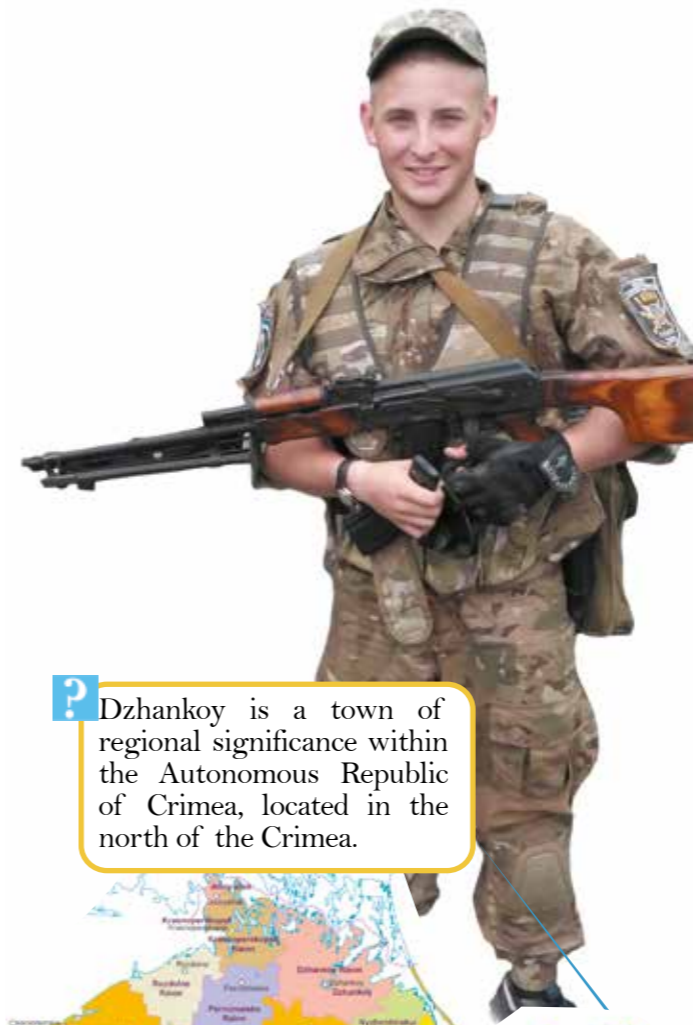
international stage, promoting the state’s interests in the world by mobilizing the support of foreign nations.” The International Forum “Informational Security: Current Trends”, which has been held annually since 2014 at the Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University, has long been a well-known brand among experts. A separate workshop for young professionals, students, and cadets was an innovation at this year’s forum. Among the participants were representatives of the Military Institute of B. Grinchenko Kyiv National University and students of the B. Grinchenko Kyiv University Institute of Journalism and I. Kozhedub Kharkiv Air Force University. The work of the AM&PM Center for Counteracting Information Aggressions and the InChoice team was presented at this event, as well. Young participants proposed to actively involve public associations in spreading media literacy among the service members of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. All students and cadets agreed on taking responsibility for implementing those plans.



nomad

Meet Oleksandr Afanasyev, call name "Nomad", who is 27 years old, in his own words: "single believer, has been practicing military archeology since the age of 12, loves historical prose and poetry, sings, plays the guitar, veteran of the war with the Russian Federation."

@Larysa KUZMENKO



? Dzhankoy is a town of regional significance within the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, located in the north of the Crimea.



? An internet meme, a cliché of Russian propaganda to denote the occupying troops without insignias that landed in the Crimea; an ironic name of Russian military without insignias on uniforms and identification plates on equipment who, as part of special forces, were involved in blocking units of the Ukrainian army and facilities during the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014.

You were born in the south of Ukraine, on the Black Sea coast, in Yevpatoria. How did you end up in Berdychiv, 800 kilometers from the warm sea?

My father died in 2002. And we left the city where I was born, where I was baptized. Now my mother and sister live in Moscow. And I have been in Berdychiv since I was 17.

In February 2014, you were 19. People were protesting against the government in Kyiv. Over a hundred protesters were killed. President Yanukovich fled the country. Meanwhile, armed men invaded your native Crimea and occupied the peninsula. And soon the Russian Federation started a war in the east of Ukraine. What did you feel at that time?

Betrayal. If anyone had attacked Russia before March 2014, I would definitely have fought (any country) for Russia.

As a witness to those developments, what could you say to those who claim that the Crimea became part of the Russian Federation voluntarily?

This is absolutely wrong, because the Crimea was Russia's military base and the occupation of the Crimea began when Yanukovich was President of Ukraine. By the time people without chevrons occupied the parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea, back at the beginning of the seizure of Simferopol and Sevastopol by "green men", the Crimean Parliament had already been paralyzed. And when I saw photos of people in Russian uniforms walking through the streets of Simferopol with Russian machine guns, I realized that there would be war. But then I believed that we would fight for the Crimea, somewhere near Dzhankoy. My uncle was the deputy mayor of Dzhankoy. Before those events, I served as a sergeant in the Interior troops (now it's the National Guard, but it used to be the Interior troops). I planned to live in Simferopol after demobilization and serve in the police. I came to the chief of the Simferopol police (he was dismissed later, and then went back to serve again, under the Russians that time). He suggested that I stay in the Crimea. But I said that no one likes traitors. So, I can say that those who had military experience, served in the army, understood that the invasion was ongoing.

Why didn't the invaders wear chevrons?

For one reason only: they weren't sure how the Ukrainian state would behave and how it would react.

The Russians immediately used the civilian population to prevent military confrontation in the cities, to prevent active hostilities. If there had been civilian casualties, the Ukrainian leadership would have had to respond and start active resistance. And so, the Crimea was seized without a shot being fired. But, in my opinion, we could not have fought in Simferopol, Sevastopol, Yevpatoria, but we could have started resistance in Dzhankoy, in the Crimean steppes. Theoretically, this was quite possible. The officers, snipers who were on the Maidan during the shootings, said so. Ukrainian snipers who did not shoot at people. Now everyone knows for sure that it was the **Russian Wagners** who were shooting on the Maidan. All this is linked with the seizure of the Crimea. It's all one chain. Even the Russian Federation's medals "For the Return of Crimea" are dated February 20, 2014, and the shootings on the Maidan began on February 18. They should have taken responsibility to start a war. You see, there was no person at that time who would have taken such a responsibility. The Crimea even carried out mobilization. And people gathered under that mobilization order. But after seeing that there was no authority in Kyiv, those who were ready to fight for Ukraine rolled back to the Russians. I'm sorry for those who died during those events. They are not even known. There were also naval officers who were just shot dead.

Didn't you have any doubts, didn't you hesitate? Your relatives were in Russia and supported Russia. Didn't you think you were going up against your kin?

By that time, I had already served in the Ukrainian army, I was a sergeant, had taken an oath. I said, "I swear never to betray the Ukrainian people." These words were important to me. I was 19 years old. I had no family, no children. I only had a desire to defend my country. For example, **now I know for sure that the best soldiers are 18-22 years old.**

How did you join the army?

On March 11, 2014, they started to gather reservists. It was not a mobilization yet. The Crimea had already been surrendered, but mobilization was not in full swing. Weapons were suspended; **all that junk began to come back to life.** I became commander of the T-30 howitzer gun in the 95th Airmobile Brigade. But, as I realized that no one would fight for the Crimea (I was at a reservist training camp, I was not mobilized), I spent a few weeks at that training camp, got qualified as a gun commander, and returned home in late March.

I was then looking for another way to get more involved in the events. On May 9, the city of Mariupol was captured, and I saw that a soldier who had been my subordinate during my **compulsory military** service was killed: Bohdan Shenkevych, he was 18 years old. I contacted people from Kyiv who formed volunteer units and went to Kyiv, where

? Mercenaries of the Russian private military company Wagner created in 2013. They took part in combat operations, including in the Donbas (on the side of Russia), in Syria (on the side of Russia's ally, the Assad regime), and in Sudan. It is believed, for example, that the structure is a unit of the Special Operations Forces of the Russian Federation. Although it disguises itself as a private company, it performs the tasks of both the General Staff of the Russian Ministry of Defense and the FSB.

IMPORTANT!

During the interview, Oleksandr expressed the opinion that it was the Wagnerians who had shot the protesters during EuroMaidan. This opinion has not been officially stated or confirmed.

? The conscription (draft) system established in Ukraine (inherited from the times of the USSR) is the mandatory enlistment of people in military service. The requirement to start such (compulsory) military service is called the draft. Men are subject to draft at the age of 18. Since Ukraine gained independence, there has been a tendency to reduce the term of service and an alternative service has been introduced for those who do not agree to serve in the army for religious reasons.

I met a lot of people who were well-known at the time. Many of them are no longer alive, such as Serhiy Tabala (call name North). Later, I saw many of them in different units.

How did your mother feel about what was going on with you at that time?

I feel very sorry for her. She was in Moscow at the time, and my sister was in Moscow. I never asked how I should live. She didn't tell me how to live either. Yes, she worried a lot, very much indeed. Even now I understand what she went through, it's ...

August 2014. These were the hardest times for Ukraine ...

I was in Sloviansk. I was very eager to go to Ilovaik. I was in Lysychansk, Sloviansk, Severodonetsk, in the rear. We stayed there because after those cities were liberated, there were a lot of collaborators left. We had to search for them in their homes; many disguised themselves and stayed at home. It seemed that in a month or two the war would end. Well, it would have been so. Russian mercenaries would not have held out any longer, so the Russians came.

If you were to write a book describing those events, what three passages would you include, and what impressions would you describe?

One day a man brought honey. It was a diversion, I almost died. An old man. He was arrested and convicted later. Did time. But did not serve the whole sentence. He was swapped for three of our Ukrainians. **I wanted to kill him. I am sorry about that.** I should have done it. Guys died. I have a lot of impressions of those times. I've never been tied to one place. Even my call name was Nomad. A lot of guys who fought in those days were tied to the same place. They permanently fought in the same place. That is, they held the line in a particular city for a year, or had two or three rotations. I have never fought like that.

I was a scout. **I went to war for adrenaline. Like someone who goes skydiving.** I've been interested in war since childhood, I have been doing military archeology since I was 12. Always in touch with World War II ammunition, maps, charts, documents, battle logs of those units ... Knowing all that gave me the opportunity to understand how everything happens in war. Being on active duty gave me the opportunity to be on a proper level, because there were people who could not shoot, literally got to the front without being able to unload weapons.



Did they come as volunteers or draftees?

They were volunteers, but their level of training was lower than that of a month-long rookie. People came from the Maidan. There is a company of soldiers, an order to “unload weapons” is given, and a few shots are fired. Because about 50% do not understand that the weapon is loaded, and in order to unload it, you have not only to press the magazine release and remove the magazine, but also to remove the cartridge from the chamber, and they make a trial shot into the ground, not knowing that ammunition may still be inside the chamber.

How did this war end for you? And has it ended?

I was in Marianka, I was already concussed, I needed treatment, I was sent to hospital. For many reasons, I did not find an answer to why I was there, and what we were doing there. When I caught myself thinking that I had hit someone there just to tell my friends about it ... **Mental health also has its limits. I could see the war was starting to absorb me.**

How did you get into archeology?

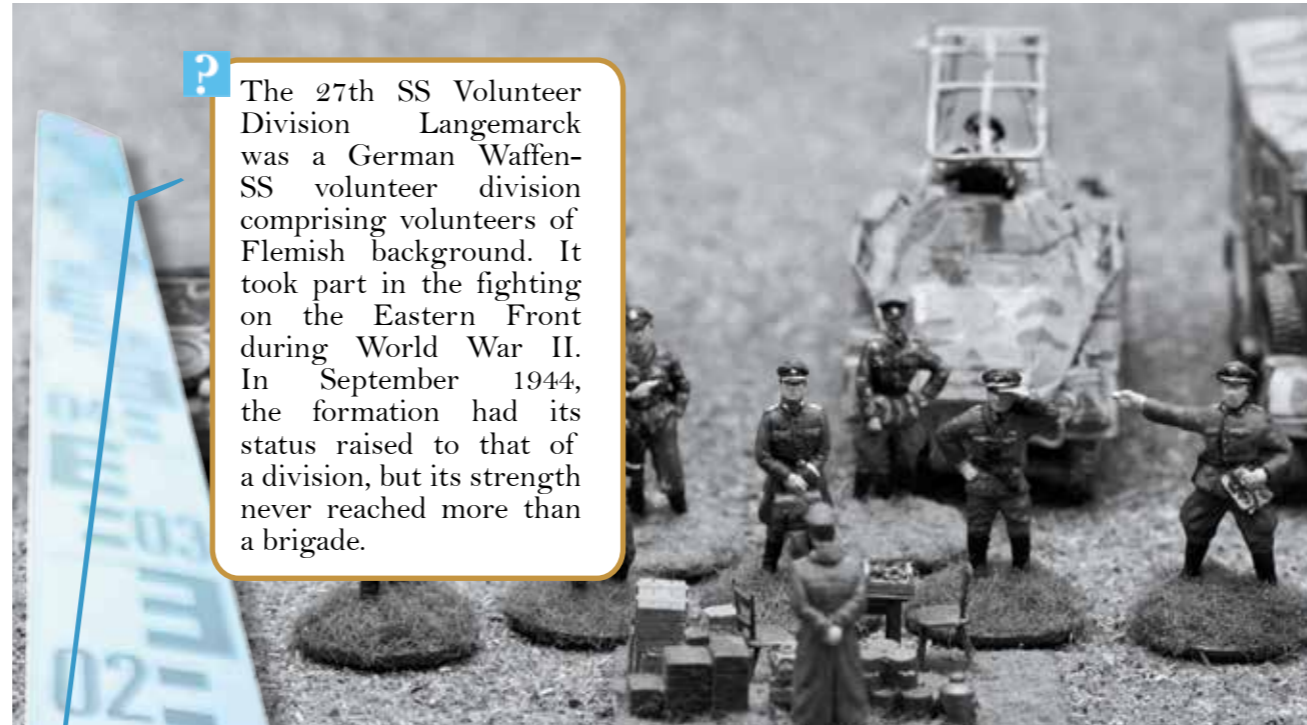
When I was 12, my uncle told me that some interesting things had been found during an excavation of gravesites of German soldiers. It aroused my interest in it. To encourage me, he gave me a German helmet. I only had a shovel and knew the location of the temporary but then forgotten burial site of the Nazi soldiers. There were remnants of clothing, ID tags, metal objects. It was very interesting to me. Later, I got interested in reading about a historical event, and I'd go to that place and find evidence of the facts described in historical documents. It got to the point where I could find a photo, come to that particular place, stand exactly where the Belgian volunteers from **Seslav Lumark's brigade** were photographed in 1944, and say that it was there. Based on war diaries, I could find things left in the former dugouts and trenches.

Did you search mainly in Zhytomyr Oblast?

Usually. There is no need to go far, because the front line passed through Zhytomyr Oblast twice, and that was enough for us to still find traces of that distant war.

You managed to find many lost graves. Were there only graves of German soldiers or did you also find Soviet soldiers' graves?

We did not find Nazi soldiers' graves. There were some, mostly unmarked. It is very rare to find a German soldier's grave.



? The 27th SS Volunteer Division Langemarck was a German Waffen-SS volunteer division comprising volunteers of Flemish background. It took part in the fighting on the Eastern Front during World War II. In September 1944, the formation had its status raised to that of a division, but its strength never reached more than a brigade.



? WWII Berdychiv

Why?

Because unlike the Soviets, the Nazis never just put bodies into the ground unless they retreated. The Germans always paid their final respects to the deceased. If possible, they organized an honor guard. This is evidenced by the shell casings near the human remains. Besides, soldiers were always buried with all personal belongings and weapons. The Soviets did not do that. However, if we dig on the former battlefield of 1941, we see that the locals also buried the Soviet soldiers with all their equipment and personal belongings. The dead were young men conscripted into the army in 1939–1940, by the way. In 1941, the Soviet troops were still trying to win back Berdychiv, so the casualties were high there. The Wehrmacht's 11th Panzer Division was stuck there for a week. At the very beginning of the war. Both sides suffered high casualties. German General Franz Halder wrote in his personal diary that the 11th Panzer Division had lost 2,000 servicemen (wounded and killed) near Berdychiv. The Nazis marched into Berdychiv and sat there in the trenches for a week. The Soviet troops rammmed the city from all sides in an attempt to win it back, because they retreated from Tallinn and they had to straighten up this front line. The soldiers took part in devastating knife attacks. This is evidenced by the knives attached to rifles. This is a very scary picture. There are many documents, despite the fact that these two armies (the 6th and 12th) were annihilated a month later. With all their commanders. The armies, which after the battles for **Berdychiv were encircled near Uman**. So, we were looking for these servicemen. They are young, aged 20 to 25.

We excavated soldiers of the 44th Motorized Rifle Regiment near the village of Semenivka. They were very well dressed and equipped with self-loading rifles, the newest ones (SVD-40) as of 1941. It is like giving me the M4 Carbine now. The German Army Group South armed with 850 tanks was deployed on the territory of Ukraine. And the Ukrainian military district was armed with 5,300 tanks, of which more than 500 were the pre-war T-34s. That is, the heavy losses suffered by the Soviet army at the beginning of the war with Nazi Germany are a disgrace to the command.

At first, your interest was so purely boyish, something like a treasure hunt. However, your attitude to it has changed over time. What is driving your search now?

My attitude to remnants of the perished ones changed after I realized they were soldiers like me. I see their wounds, how they died. It's sacred to me. A guy signed his cooking tin. I look for him in the database. I find him. His mother was still looking for him in 1953. He died in 1941.

Another case: a lieutenant died; he is in a pit. His mother was looking for him in 1951. But the Soviet authorities did not want to be bothered by his mother's inquiries and excluded that lieutenant from the lists of the Soviet army. That was their attitude. Besides, I was devastated to learn that people knew about these burials in these villages. And the Soviet government did nothing. I can't agree with that. My friend and I erected a monument there at our own expense: on the site of the battle.

Do you use any equipment during excavations?

Of course. Metal detectors.

So that's it? I know that drones are used for such searches.

Everything is much simpler. For us, our grandparents (and the Nazis as well) did everything we could do now. The NARA (National Archive and Records Administration) archive holds aerial photographs taken by the German Luftwaffe throughout Ukraine and the Soviet Union during the war. Excellent quality. They show where dugouts, trenches, shell holes, and damaged vehicles are.

And do you use these documents?

Certainly. Every American citizen can go to the archive and make a copy on a high-grade printer.

And do you use the help of Americans?

Certainly. And we use these copies in our searches. We can use base maps, but it happens that they interfere with one another, depending on who drew those



maps. But you will not change anything in a photo. Thus, we found a destroyed tank.

Can you tell me more?

There was a fight. Forty German tanks. Wittmann attacked Lubart. The 503rd Heavy SS Panzer Battalion. The Tigers (German tanks) had to recapture the settlement. Our tanks destroyed most of them. We got some pictures showing several tanks. Broken. We came to the place, put the picture on a modern map, and saw this huge shell hole. We used a metal detector, and the closer we moved it, the louder the noise was. We started digging, and saw track shoes, shell casings, pieces of armor ...

So, when I walk in the woods near Kyiv and I think that a huge pit looks like a shell hole from World War II, it is not just my imagination.

No, the war is not so far away. Shell holes are still visible to this day. Those that were formed in 1941–1944. Currently, the issue of demining is still relevant. A huge number of unexploded shells can be found directly in settlements. This year, we found a large unexploded mortar rocket of 203 mm right in a village.

Do you have a big team?

Depends. 1–2 persons. There are some principled people who do archeological work with me. The rest join us from time to time. I can search at night and go anywhere to do this. There are public organizations (e.g., "Search"), which usually come if someone finds quality World War II artifacts. Thanks to us, they have learned what equipment to

use, and now they can not only respond to the findings, but also conduct an independent search in the fields. "Search" uses metal detectors that can detect objects about 20 cm deep. But the depth should be increased up to one and a half meters and more. A soldier was sitting in a trench, was killed, covered with earth. The war was over. The field was plowed with a tractor, and the soldier remained well hidden underground. Corn is growing over him ... And there used to be soybeans there ... We are waiting for farmers to harvest the crops and then we will find those perished who are underground, under soybeans and corn. For the memory to live on.

How do you think World War II is related to what is happening right now?

Exactly the same is happening now, but on a different scale. **We and the Russians were brothers**, we voted as one country at Eurovision. But then **everything changed dramatically**. I think that was Putin's mistake. And he won't solve this problem in his lifetime. It is always a danger to start a war against Ukraine. To be honest, a couple of years ago, I supported the idea of ending this war, giving up these lands. Remember the first casualty counts: a lieutenant colonel was killed, killed in battle, his such-and -such family, lived in such-and -such place, fought, fought to the bitter end ... A few years later: two killed, one wounded, three wounded, one killed. Well, we have already turned such reports into statistics. It is unpleasant to hear the word "one", understanding how a person died there and what pain and suffering he endured ... Unpleasant. According to TV journalists, people change the channel when a story about the war is on. People hate to think about it. Not that I blame them. But knowing that Russians will not stop now ...



Unconquerable Soul

In 1875, the English poet William Henley wrote a poem that was later called "Invictus." Centuries later, people were born who were destined to live out this poem in real life and show the world their "unconquerable soul."

INVICTUS GAMES

@Yaroslava MATVIEENKO

Invictus

Out of the night that covers me,
Black as the Pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquerable soul.
In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeoning of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.
Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds, and shall find, me unafraid.
It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate:
I am the captain of my soul.

William Ernest Henley
1849-1903

In 2013, Prince Harry, grandson of Queen Elizabeth II, then captain in the British Army and a helicopter pilot, was invited to the United States, where he opened the 4th Warrior Games, an adaptive sport competition for wounded, ill, and injured servicemen and veterans organized by the U.S. Department of Defense.

The Warrior Games inspired the prince to create an international equivalent of this competition. In September 2014, London hosted the first Invictus Games, and two years later the competition was held in Orlando, Florida.

At the same time, in Eastern Europe, in Ukraine, a war was going on. With the first wounded and thus potential veterans, whose lives were saved by doctors and the heavens, rehabilitation became a particularly pressing issue, not only physical but also mental and psychological. Although Ukraine had taken part in NATO peacekeeping missions, the need to address the issue of returning combatants to peaceful life had never been so urgent.

In 2016, Ukraine hosted the first Games of Heroes, an international sports competition for veterans of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and armies of friendly countries and people with disabilities. The main purpose of the Games of Heroes, as well as Invictus and the Warrior Games, is psychological and physical recovery of soldiers, social adaptation of people with disabilities, and encouraging and



I AM



enhancing sports among young people, unprotected, and socially vulnerable groups. Competitions in cross-fit, iron-man, strength fitness, and shooting are being held for the fifth year in a row.

The games were initially conceived as a competition among wounded Anti-Terrorist Operation/Joint Forces Operation (ATO/JFO) soldiers, but later, other people with disabilities joined.

However, full recovery required something larger, given the almost complete lack of adaptive and inclusive sports facilities that would be freely accessible to those who needed them.

The Ukrainian path to the biggest competitions for wounded or injured servicemen and veterans began with the private initiative of two Ukrainian companies back in 2015. Subsequently, the Ukrainian Defense Ministry and other state bodies joined the negotiations with the Invictus Games Foundation.

In August 2016, **Ukraine was officially invited to participate in Invictus Games Toronto 2017 as a NATO ally in peacekeeping operations around the world, as well as due to the ATO/JFO in Eastern Ukraine,** and in the autumn of that year, the nationwide selection of candidates started.

In 2017, the third Invictus Games in Toronto met Ukrainian veterans for the first time. The debuting team was among the best of 17 countries. The next year, in 2018, members of a new Invictus team received a warm welcome in Sydney, Australia.



But most importantly, the Ukrainian Invictus participants felt the healing atmosphere of the competition, where medals are definitely not the main thing, where the most important thing is support, emotions, and an atmosphere of unity, respect, and gratitude for their service. True, **Ukrainian veterans were different and distinguishable from others in one essential detail — they served their country by defending their own land.** This experience makes them unique among other servicemen with injuries at such events. 2019 and 2020 were real “Cinderella” years for the Invictus Games and the third

Ukrainian team participants. At the organizing committees meeting in London in 2019, **Oksana Horbach**, head of the Ukrainian organizing committee, asked the participating countries for help and support. There was a desire to involve Ukrainian veterans in team sports, such as wheelchair basketball, but, unfortunately, there were no coaches and no equipment. And a miracle happened: the Americans responded.

“When I heard Oksana, I thought, **yeah, we’ll do it, we’re willing to help,**” recalls Marsha Gonzalez, an adviser to the Office of Secretary of Defense during the U.S. national team’s appearances at the 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018, and 2020 Invictus Games. Not only did the Americans give their Ukrainian counterparts ten special basketball wheelchairs, but also **a whole team arrived in February 2020 to train both the national team and the coaches for a month.** They held several seminars on adaptive sports and meetings to showcase the sports and veteran ambassadors in action, thus

inspiring the creation of a program to train sports veteran ambassadors in Ukraine.

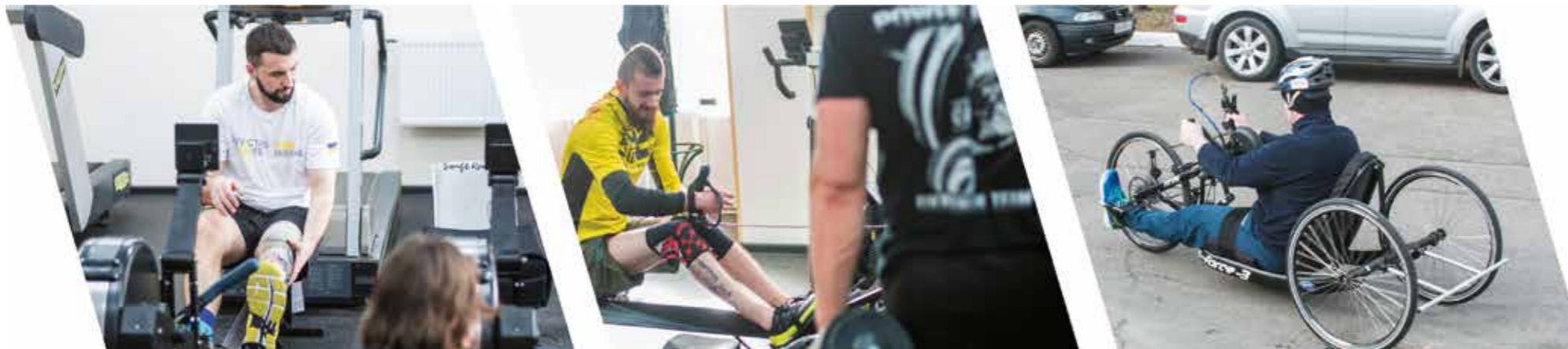
Within that short time, Ukrainian veterans mastered the new sport so well that they completely amazed their American colleagues.

And that's even with the fact that most of them do not know English.

"It was more than mentorship and brotherhood, it was a kind of spiritual connection," Oksana Horbach says, and you can't help but agree. In 2019, the Invictus Games in Ukraine gained new powerful partners in the homeland, too — the newly established Ministry of Veterans Affairs and the Come Back Alive Charitable Foundation, which is the largest fund helping the Ukrainian army. Concurrently, in 2019, negotiations on Ukraine's participation in the Warrior Games began. In February 2021, the United States invited the Ukrainian team to participate in the competition.

Ukrainian military veterans and injured servicemen will be competing with their counterparts from the United States, Australia, Canada, the UK, Denmark, the Netherlands, and the Republic of Georgia.

The global COVID-19 pandemic did not fail to affect the competition and once again proved that difficulties not only harden their participants, but also further expand opportunities for sport rehabilitation and increase motivation. During the quarantine, the team members joined flash mobs and challenges organized by fellow teams from other countries and the Invictus Games Foundation.



They did not stop training at home and participated several times in training camps and trainings for team sports. At the end of 2020, for the first time, Invictus Games 2.0 were held online.

The twice-postponed Invictus Games, which were to take place in The Hague, the Netherlands, in 2020, are now scheduled for April 2022. They paved the way for the Warrior Games in Ukraine. Besides, the pandemic gave our team extra time to get into good shape and improve skills in all sports.

After all, the emergence and holding of the Warrior Games is a kind of return to the basics. As noted above, it was this event that inspired the Duke of Sussex to launch the Invictus Games.

Although both competitions have the same goal, rehabilitation through sports, they differ in some respects. The Warrior Games are held annually, include more adaptive sport competitions, and are focused on athletic results, whereas the Invictus Games are focused on participants' mental and emotional health, increasing their life motivation in general, i.e. the psychosocial component.

The inclusion of Ukraine into the Warrior Games will allow Ukrainian organizers to mobilize the veteran community around sports and their rehabilitative capacity, and will help expand the opportunities for sports rehabilitation of Ukrainian veterans and servicemen. In May, more than 200 Ukrainian veterans took part in the Warrior Games for the first time.

The program included 12 events, among which shooting and archery were the most popular.

Veterans really enjoyed their first ever golf game—a new sport that can also offer opportunities for their development.

According to Oksana Horbach, head of Stratcom.ua, the Ukrainian organizing committee of the Warrior Games and Invictus Games, the biggest



Games are a huge community and one big, friendly family.

This summer, the national Invictus Games reached a new level and expanded their geography: for the first time, veterans competed not in the capital, but in other cities of Ukraine in Cherkasy, there were



Ukraine at the competitions in Dusseldorf in 2023–2024. Despite the support of the state, international partners, and sports organizations in Ukraine, the conditions for adaptive veteran athletes often leave much to be desired. However, there has been rapid progress



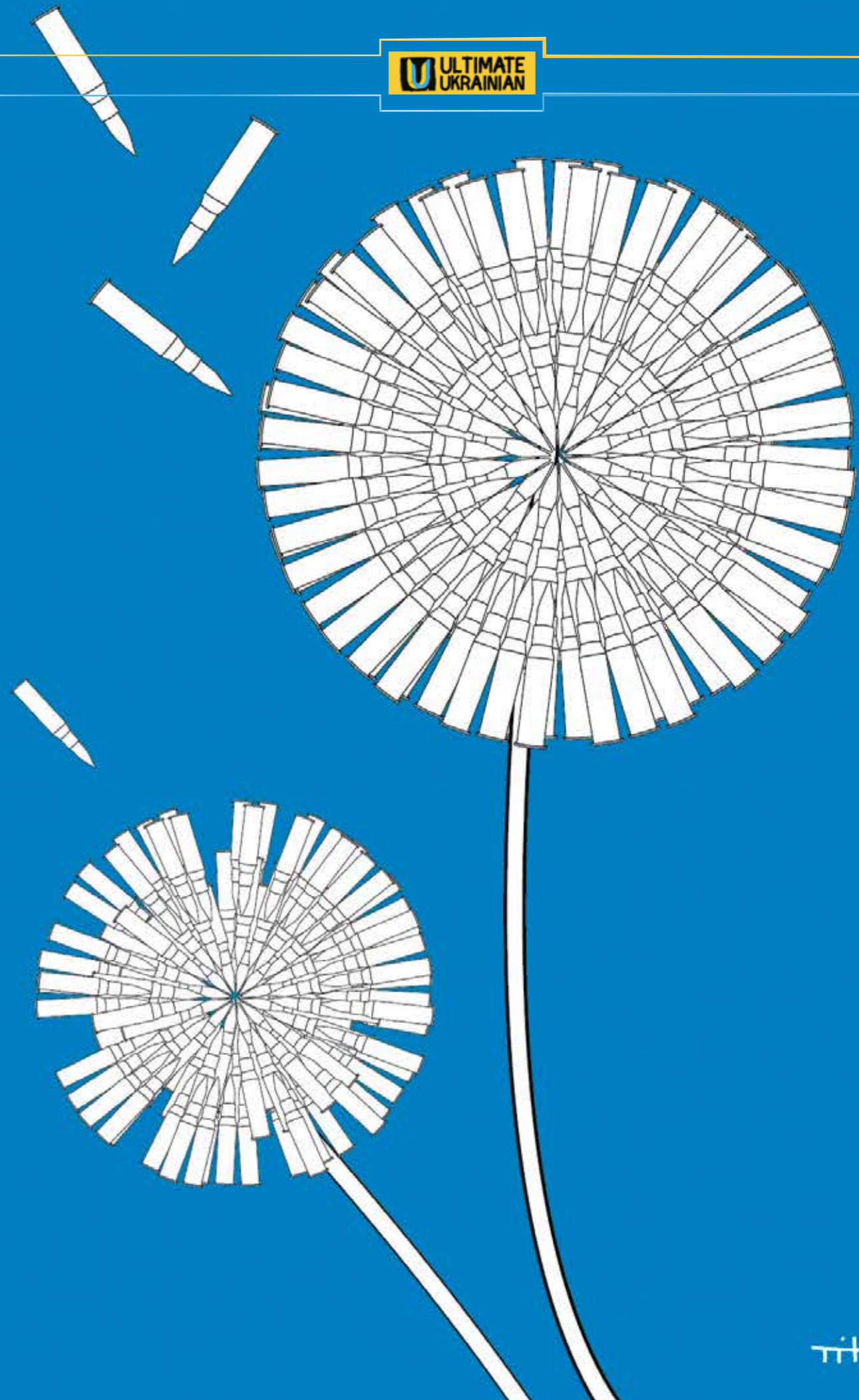
victory at the Warrior Games is holding national competitions in team sports such as sitting volleyball and wheelchair basketball.

For the first time after the quarantine, live competition became a real holiday for the participants, their families, volunteers, supporters, and all concerned. Because the Invictus Games and now the Warrior

competitions in track and field (100-, 400-, 1,500-meter races, shot put, discus), powerlifting (bench press), rowing on simulators (1-minute sprint and 4-minute endurance), and cycling (5 km on the highway). In Kryvyi Rih, there were swimming and archery competitions. By the time this article is published, it should be known who will represent

in this area over the past five years, evidenced by those who monitor the competitions and their significant effect on the rehabilitation and re-socialization of our combatants, and the even greater involvement of participants.

Therefore, **the unconquered path of Ukrainian warriors goes on ...**



The main character of our 2021 magazine, Yulia Mykytenko, seems to have seen a lot at the age of 26 years.

A lot has happened on her path from a foreign language philologist to a Ukrainian Army intelligence officer, public activist, and tutor at the military lyceum. She has lost those dearest to her in the war. The war has taken her big love — her husband, a brave young handsome man. Before she could cope with this loss, her father tragically died (he set himself on fire in the central square of the Ukrainian capital) after returning from the war. It seems that life tests Yulia's spirit. How does Yulia Mykytenko live? What is on her mind? How does she restore her life and what exactly gives her strength and hope?



? Three-year secondary educational military institution located in Kyiv. Named after Ivan Bohun, an active participant in the liberation movement for the independence of Ukraine (1618–1664)

INTERVIEW WITH YULIA MYKYTENKO

@Tetyana MAKUNINA

Could you describe your typical working day at Ivan Bohun Military School (IBMS), please?

The working day starts at 8 a.m. By this time, Ivan Bohun Military School cadets with an officer in charge (who stays with them throughout the day) have done their morning exercising, washed and dressed, made their beds and are at the morning check-in. The platoon commander (officer) keeps an eye on sergeants (also cadets) who are checking subordinates' uniforms. Then it is breakfast time, after breakfast — morning formation, daily briefing by the company commander. After that, cadets go to school under the supervision of platoon commanders. The platoon commander may attend classes and supervise the discipline, or deal with documentation and plan the rest of the day. Classes are over at 2:30 p.m., right before the afternoon formation. The students are given directions and sent to additional classes, to the library, or the gym. At 4:20 p.m. — formation and lunch. This is followed by an hour of free time. Between 5:40 and 8:20 p.m. is the time for individual study: students do their homework and projects under the supervision of tutors. 8:30 p.m. is dinner time. Then there is an evening walk (we breathe fresh air marching on the drill field). 10:00 p.m. — lights out. One officer must stay with the students overnight. If an officer does not stay overnight, his/her working day is over by 5:00 p.m.

What is the most difficult thing about your job as an educator in a military institution?

The most difficult is trying to educate the younger generation, who may become officers in the future, within the old system

The most difficult is trying to educate the younger generation, who may become officers in the future, within the old system. Very different kids come to our school. With different upbringings, backgrounds, there are a lot of military children, orphans, children of soldiers who died at war. Parents often send their kids to our military school by force because they cannot cope with them when they are teenagers. For myself, I set a task to teach them to be honest people and worthy Ukrainians. Probably the most difficult thing is to explain to them at such a young age (13-14 years old) what self- and mutual respect is. After all, they are a bit savage at this age. They assert themselves by humiliating each other. So, it is probably the most difficult to create a team of 32 boys and girls (the number of children in a platoon) with an atmosphere of respect for themselves, other people, and the country they live in.

What inspires you to work with your students?

I may one day reap the fruits of my labor, looking at the generation of officers I once had the honor to educate

It is inspiring to see the result of the effort I put in. When at each graduation ceremony, I see how they have grown (physically and mentally), become stronger. How the school influenced their views. And then there is faith.

Hi darling,
 It's been a long time since I wrote to you. No, I haven't forgotten. I think I didn't want to bother you.
 But today I will. I'll confess that the first year I couldn't bring myself to unpack your things, which I took out of the dugout. They were in a bag in my closet and every morning, when I got ready for work, I inhaled your scent.
 I'll confess that I wore your wedding ring on a chain for almost two years. It got a little bent, because at night it got right into my collarbone. I'll confess that for the first two months I wore your things almost without taking them off. They were too big for me, but I couldn't help it. It took me a year and a half to remove your portrait from my desk. And the urn with your ashes is still in the closet and I haven't figured out yet what to do with it. I imagine you looking at me now and pretending to be angry, because you told me not to do so.

Remember how we walked around the village with your sheepdog and admired the sunset? Remember how we cooked the most delicious pot roast together? Remember how you laughed at my habit of scattering shoes all over the hallway when I came home tired after school? I do. There are fewer of those "I remember" every year. I don't know if I'm cheating on you by forgetting those brief moments of happiness, but I do know one thing. For the rest of my life, I will remember that flash of light, very short, that you gave me with your presence. And that's all that matters. Because you are and will be with me forever. In my thoughts. In my actions. Thank you for that.

#WhatRememberMeans

Faith that I may one day reap the fruits of my labor, looking at the generation of officers I once had the honor to educate.

Do your students ask "difficult questions" related to the war? How do you respond?

I always try to be honest and frank with my students. And I demand it back from them

Sometimes they do. The most common questions, of course, are whether I killed people and how I live with it. Those are the easy ones. The difficult ones are questions about my husband's death.

A difficult question is "why haven't we reclaimed our territories yet." I always give honest and

open answers to everything that interests them. Firstly, they will still ask these questions anyway, so I'd rather they hear my opinion on this. And secondly, they are teenagers. They are very sensitive when you lie to them or don't tell them the whole story. So, I always try to be honest and frank with my students. And I demand it back from them.

Given your personal dramatic story related to the war (your husband's death and your father's suicide), how do you keep yourself in working shape, how do you manage to maintain a psychological balance?

Well, I don't call my father's act suicide. De jure, of course, you can label it like this.

I don't call my father's act suicide... for me, this is not a suicide, but a sacrifice

But I believe that he died for his beliefs and for Ukraine. So, for me, this is not a suicide, but a sacrifice. My work helps me to hold on. I remember when I transferred from the combat brigade to the military school after my husband's death ... I was not given any psychological rehabilitation or a break. And after the war, it was unusual to return to a peaceful area. But it was the children (students) who prevented me from falling into depression and self-flagellation. I immediately plunged headlong into their world, which was so different from mine.

Who helps you the most in your life? Your friends, family, colleagues?

My small family supports me the most. Mom and brother

My small family supports me the most. Mom and brother. We always stick together and always support each other. Also, my friends with whom we engage in public activity have always been there for me, pulling me out of the cocoon I was trying to hide in.

And colleagues ... tactfully, they did not ask about anything and took away part of the work when things got tough for me.

What would you recommend to service members and veterans who have returned from the front in terms of psychological rehabilitation?

You may not even be diagnosed with PTSD, but war is always in your head

First of all, to accept that war changes you and that you cannot cope with these changes alone. Acceptance is followed by the awareness that you must learn to live with your new self. You should teach your loved ones to accept you as a new person. Because war never goes unnoticed. You may not even be diagnosed with PTSD, but war is always in your head. And it greatly influences our further decisions and actions. And if we do not learn to accept these new changes in ourselves, we die. Physically, mentally. So don't hesitate to ask for help. It is bad for a person to be alone, as the Bible says. And you don't have to be. There are the same people around, with the same problems.

don't hesitate to ask for help. It is bad for a person to be alone, as the Bible says

And there are people who are willing to help you cope with those problems. The main thing is to not go into a shell.

Is it true that a woman in the army is an object of discrimination, have you ever experienced it?

only through great effort that I began to gain authority, and only a year after my service in the war, I was appointed commander of a reconnaissance platoon

Constantly. In fact, not only women. Men also suffer a lot. But women feel it more acutely. I've been in the army for quite a long time and I've become somewhat de-sensitized to those things and I don't notice them all. But the first time I came to a combat unit,

I was confronted with it from the very beginning. I wanted to get a combat position, but instead





I was assigned to the headquarters, and it was only through great effort that I began to gain authority, and only a year after my service in the war, I was appointed commander of a reconnaissance platoon. And this is just the most telling example. You are constantly confronted with ridicule, bad jokes of a sexual nature, sexist jokes - like you're too emotional and too stupid, or like you need a man to calm down. And only when you react rudely or even with force, they hold their tongue.

Can you change your students' (future commanders) attitude towards women in the army?

I never focus on gender

I think I can. I don't know if there will be a visible result, but I always guide cadets, both girls and boys, for professionalism. I never focus on gender. Of course, during the educational process I take into account the needs of girls, but I emphasize that they are on equal footing and, as future commanders, they should create an atmosphere of professionalism in their units. The gender issue will not be raised when everyone in the unit is confident in people watching each others' backs.

How do you view the future Ukrainian army? What do you think is the most important for its further development?

Strong, of course, but we are currently in a state of war and in

we are currently in a state of war and in a state of big changes

a state of big changes. The war has confronted us with challenges that we must overcome. By overcoming the Soviet system's stubborn resistance, we are advancing little by little. The most important thing, I think, is to change the attitude towards a service member. We should understand that a soldier is not cannon fodder, as it was in Soviet times, and as some high-ranked Soviet-era rudiments keep thinking. A service member is as professional in their field as anyone else. And they deserve respect, and decent pay for their work. So far, unfortunately, this is not the case. So far, our army is based on quantity rather than quality.

If you had a chance to change your occupation, or start your own business, what would you like to do?

I really want to open a youth entertainment and recreation center

In fact, I plan to leave the Armed Forces and start my own business.

I already have some experience, because I helped my brother with a shop I built in honor of my deceased husband and father. We often hold social and patriotic events there. The shop is in the village my dad and I come from.

So, this is a mentally important place for me.



what impressed me most was the respect for the military uniform

I really want to open a youth entertainment and recreation center there. It's no secret that young people often leave the village and go to the city, where they erase their ancestral memory. I hope my center will attract the attention of investors and enable me to implement several important social projects for the local community.

Do you have a hobby? How do you relax?

My civilian education is philology and I still have a habit of reading a lot. I often go to jazz concerts, charity fairs, and theaters. I really like vintage, so I read about the fashion of the last century. Well, I also like watching black and white movies. After work, I watch old American movies of the mid-20th century to relax.

Have you been to the United States? What do you think about this country?

I visited the United States as part of the Veteran Diplomacy

project implemented by the Women Veterans Movement. The project supports Ukrainian veterans to travel the world with films about the Russian-Ukrainian war and communicate with government officials and public activists.

I noted a cultural contrast in the USA. I visited New York and Washington. I have a lot of impressions, but what impressed me most was the respect for the military uniform. We attended meetings in our Armed Forces uniforms. And people came up to us and thanked us for our service. This is rarely the case in Ukraine. Rather, you may encounter rudeness and violence here. I was also impressed by the large number of joint projects for both active military personnel and veterans implemented by NGOs and the government. We are just beginning to understand our needs and convey them to the government.

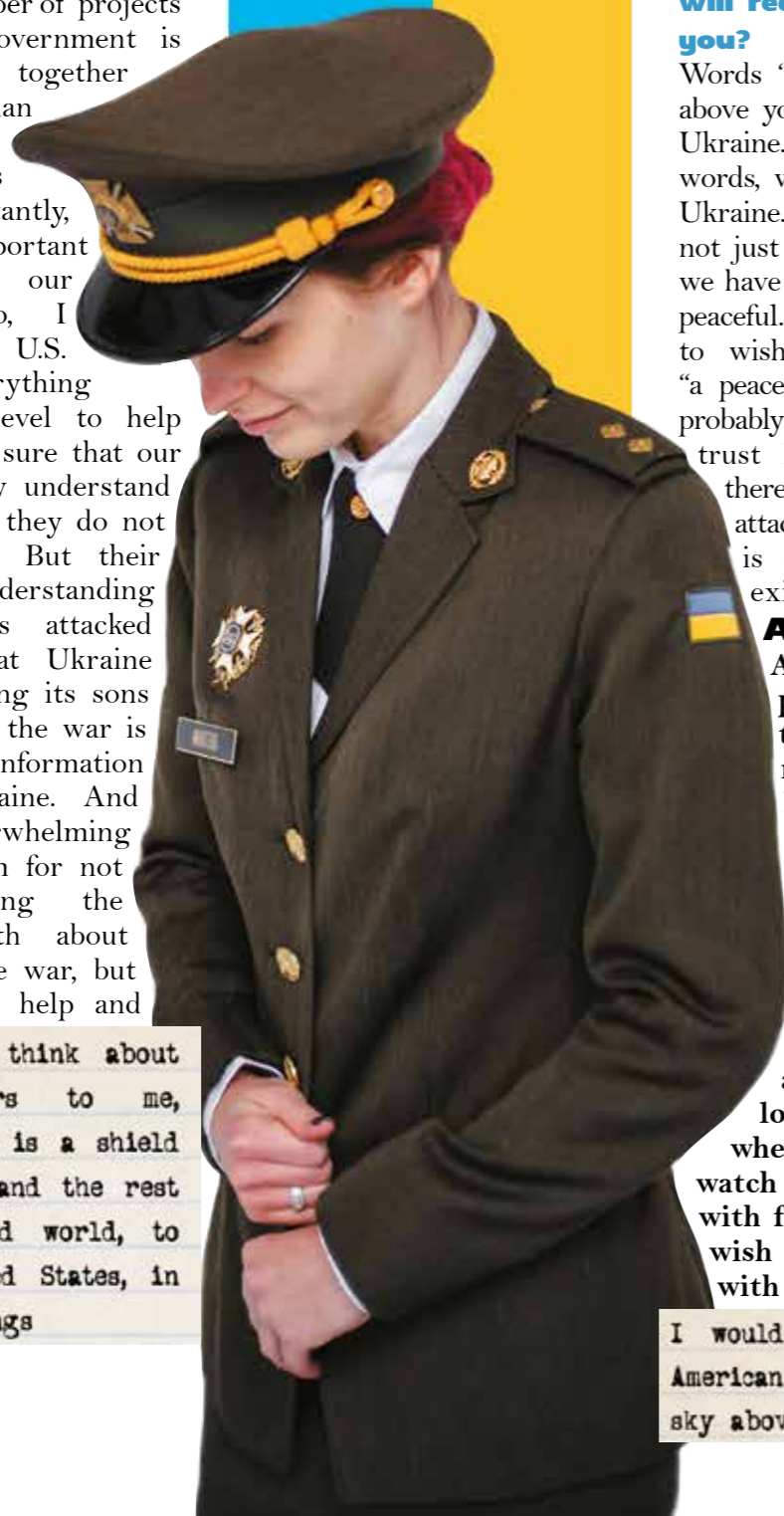
Does it matter to you what Americans think about Ukraine?

I would like to see the United States as a partner and ally in the fight against Russia. I understand that most Americans do not feel the enormous negative impact of Russia on the entire civilized world. But Ukraine is very close to Russia. And we are the first to feel the strongest decline that Russia brings with it. So yes, it does. What Americans think about Ukraine matters to me, because Ukraine is a shield between Russia and the rest of the civilized world, to which the United States, in particular, belongs. And it would be very good if Americans knew about it.

Do you think that America helps Ukraine, that Americans and the Ukrainian diaspora understand the situation in Ukraine regarding Russian aggression? Do you personally feel America's help?

I cannot see help and support at a small personal level, but I know about an incredible number of projects that the U.S. government is implementing together with the Ukrainian government. Although changes do not happen instantly, they lay a very important foundation for our development. So, I believe that the U.S. is doing everything possible at its level to help Ukraine. I'm not sure that our diaspora can fully understand the scale because they do not live in Ukraine. But their general understanding that Russia has attacked Ukraine and that Ukraine is constantly losing its sons and daughters in the war is important for the information support to Ukraine. And I feel overwhelming gratitude to them for not only broadcasting the indisputable truth about the nature of the war, but also for financial help and

What Americans think about Ukraine matters to me, because Ukraine is a shield between Russia and the rest of the civilized world, to which the United States, in particular, belongs



I believe that the U.S. is doing everything possible at its level to help Ukraine

support to many projects, both for military personnel and veterans in Ukraine. I feel this support very strongly.

What would you like to wish for Americans who will read this article about you?

Words "wish for a peaceful sky above you" are very common in Ukraine. They used to be empty words, when there was peace in Ukraine. Now these words are not just a sound for us. Because we have felt when the sky is not peaceful. Therefore, I would like to wish the American people "a peaceful sky above you", and probably would ask them not to trust Russia's fakes. Because there is no civil war. Russia attacked Ukraine. Ukraine is defending its right to existence on the battlefield.

Afterword:

As the article was being prepared, we learned that Yulia had left the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine and returned to her native village, where she and her brother were rebuilding the community, working with young people, planning to open a cultural center for locals. It will be a place where people can socialize, watch movies, spend time with friends and family. We wish Yulia every success with her new project!

I would like to wish the American people "a peaceful sky above you"





The Right Sector as a reflection of the Ukrainian soul and high troop morale of our glorious ancestors.

@ Serhii ADAMENKO "Patrick"

The Right Sector

Dear Friends,

I want to write a few words about people who fill our enemies with fear and who, in my opinion, are undeservedly in the shadows. Since the very beginning of the Russian-Ukrainian war, there has been much, often contradictory, talk around the Right Sector. Russian propaganda and its henchmen in Ukraine did their best to portray Right Sector fighters as bloodthirsty murderers, looters, robbers, fascists, and rapists.

Fully aware of the importance of information warfare, I began to closely monitor any information related to the Right Sector.

I watched the life of this unit from abroad and peered painfully into the faces of the fallen soldiers. I felt that **those who cared about the fate of our homeland were there. Those who go to their deaths without hesitation. Those for whom Ukraine is really above all.**

? Right Sector is a civic and military-political movement in Ukraine and abroad. It was formed in late October 2013 at the time of the birth of the Euro-Maidan. Right Sector advocates the abolition of the "regime of internal occupation" and the completion of the Ukrainian national revolution

I won't list all the fallen heroes. We know everyone by name and keep them in our memory. I want to mention only one, whose death turned my life upside down and influenced my decision to join the ranks of the Right Sector. This is **"Myth", Vasyl Slipak**, a man who had world fame and a big heart and was killed by a sniper's bullet in the village of Luhanske in June 2016. I often ask my readers if many of us knew that he fought in the ranks of the Right Sector and almost always get a negative answer.

? Vasyl Slipak (1974–2016) was a world-famous Ukrainian opera singer, soloist at the Paris Opera, participant in the Revolution of Dignity, volunteer in the Ukrainian army, participant in the fight against pro-Russian proxy fighters in eastern Ukraine. Code name "Myth." Slipak was killed during the war in the Donbas by a Russian sniper. He was awarded the title of Hero of Ukraine, the Order for Courage (1st Class), and the Order of the Gold Star.

Unfortunately, most people learned about him only when he was gone. And I think it extremely unfair, because extraordinary people such as Vasyl Slipak deserve our infinite respect while they are alive, not after they die. So, the following year, I decided to leave Ireland and join the Right Sector to see for myself what was happening at the forefront of this war. It was important for me to get to know the Right Sector fighters in order to shape my own opinion.

In November 2017, I joined the 1st Separate Assault Company, the Right Sector Ukrainian Volunteer Corps, commanded by “Da Vinci.” **This unit is characterized by strict discipline, combat experience, and ideological stamina.** Here I want to note that the Right Sector gives a lot of attention to ideological training, because a fighter who values freedom and respects his nation will never fall to his knees before the enemy and will frighten him even after his death.

That is why the Muscovites do all to denigrate this movement by comparing Right Sector fighters with Nazis. From my first days in the unit, I tried to take the most active part in its life. I was very pleasantly surprised by the support provided to our unit by volunteers from all over Ukraine.

With no recognition or assistance from the state, this unit, like other Right Sector units, was supported solely by the donations of caring people and volunteers.

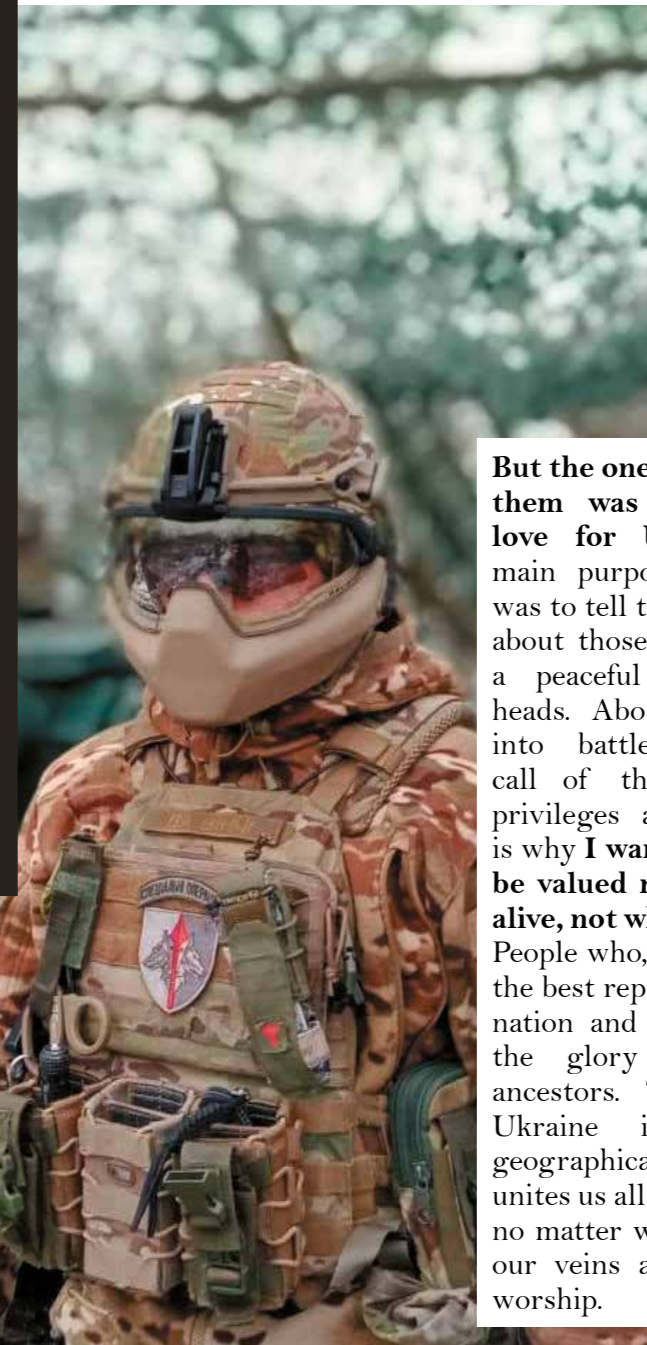
Our fighters were never hungry and even shared food with the Armed Forces of Ukraine fighters and local people. Any need was met in the shortest possible time. The unit always felt the care and help of the home front. A month later, I was sent to the frontline, to my platoon. I was there until the end of February 2018. During that time, I got to know a lot of soldiers. I knew some of them for several hours, and spent weeks and months with others.

I did not intend to write a book about fighters after my return. Moreover, I might not have returned. I just looked closely at the people around me. **I was interested in people who went to war not for awards and salaries.** It was important for me to know what made them leave their homes and families and go to the East. I was really happy to meet a lot of very interesting people there. Among them were people with higher education, businessmen, journalists, writers, priests, former law enforcement officers, and others. On my return to Ireland, I had the idea to write short essays about the fighters and volunteers I had met in the unit.

In April 2018, I started posting those stories on my Facebook page. They proved interesting to those I described. The heroes commented on them eagerly and looked forward to more. After I wrote quite a lot, I was advised to bring them together and try to publish a book.

The publishing house Bilka helped me to do that. So, in 2019, the first book “**The Heroes of the Modernity**” appeared, and two years later its continuation with more stories and an English translation was published. In these books, I gathered soldiers and volunteers who came from all walks of life.

There were fighters from 20 to 60 years old, geographically from every corner of our Ukraine — from Transcarpathia, Lviv, Odesa, Kharkiv, Zhytomyr, Vinnytsia, Luhansk, the Crimea, and so on. There were also fighters from other countries who came to Ukraine to fight against Moscow’s aggression. They all had different political views, education, nationalities, and religious preferences.



But the one thing that united them was their boundless love for Ukraine. So, the main purpose of my books was to tell the reader the truth about those to whom we owe a peaceful sky above our heads. About those who go into battle answering the call of the heart, not for privileges and awards. That is why **I want these people to be valued now that they are alive, not when they are gone.** People who, in my opinion, are the best representatives of our nation and the successors of the glory of our heroic ancestors. Those for whom Ukraine is not just a geographical term, but what unites us all in this very nation, no matter what blood flows in our veins and what God we worship.



Vovk - Wolf

A young promising commander. With a shaved head and a long beard, he looked like a Mujahedeen. I saw him several times before arriving at the front. How could I know that I would be celebrating the New Years with him and drinking children's champagne?

The attitude to alcohol in the unit was very simple. Do you want to drink? Take a break, go home and drink there if you need. The frontline is an alcohol free zone, because to drink there means to die. I have witnessed with my own two eyes what happened to those who broke that rule. That's why fighters of our unit are terrified at the very thought of alcohol.

At first I lived with him in the same room, and then moved to another house. And for the first few weeks I somehow couldn't find a common language with him, until one morning I saw him having breakfast in the kitchen. For some reason I said to him, "Hello!" in English. Which at first he froze and then laughed. Since then, we talked a lot, and he often took me with him on general rides. I remember one day we went to continue digging our trenches just a stone's throw from Russians.

He was always at the frontline, digging almost openly, not hiding. That day our "neighbors" got riled up and covered us with a dense fire. Wolf endured their attacks for a long time, but finally his patience ran out, and he went for his "fly"*. After his shot our former "brothers" calmed down in an instant, and we could finish our work.

I recently learned that he had been awarded a medal for his personal contribution to the struggle against the occupiers. I wish him further victories and success in our common business.

*"Fly" - rocket-propelled grenade RPG-18, 22, 26.

Patron - Cartridge

Patron was my first commander on duty. He was on leave when I arrived at the unit. I already knew that it was him I would go to the position with for the first time. I was a bit nervous, wondering if I would be a reliable soldier, given my lack of experience. During the first mission, already being on site, I took him aside and told him I was a rookie. I asked him immediately tell me when I would do something wrong. He was not surprised and gave me a full briefing. He located our battle positions and showed lines of the Russian mercenaries and separatists, after that he pointed to the ammo stock, escorted me to a dugout, and warned me about areas sighted by enemy snipers.

We stayed at the forward operating location (the so-called Zero position), but for the Right Sector fighters, it was not enough, and we started digging trenches towards the enemy positions. We dug together and I noticed that he was digging and vomiting at the same time. I thought he had a stomach ache. It became known over time that he had been in captivity for several weeks during his service in the Armed Forces. And his condition was a result of "hospitality" of our former "brothers". He was taken prisoner during the fighting near Shakhtarsk in the summer of 2014. He survived interrogations and torture by the Russian soldiers. During the exchange of prisoners, he gave his place to another seriously wounded soldier, with whom he exchanged his name.

We were digging closer to the enemies' positions. It was an unprotected and beaten zone. To build a dugout, we had to carry wooden logs on our shoulders at a distance of 400 meters. Halfway long we passed an open space, and took a great risk. When all the logs were handled, the commander of the regular forces battalion came and started shouting to us. He wanted us to bring everything back, as he had the idea of building a bathhouse from it. To which Patron said: "Well, if you need it, then go ahead and carry it back!" The commander swore under his breath and walked away.

Calm, balanced, and responsible Patron grabbed any work. Despite the fact that he has two bullet wounds and several shrapnel injuries, presence of which is still felt.

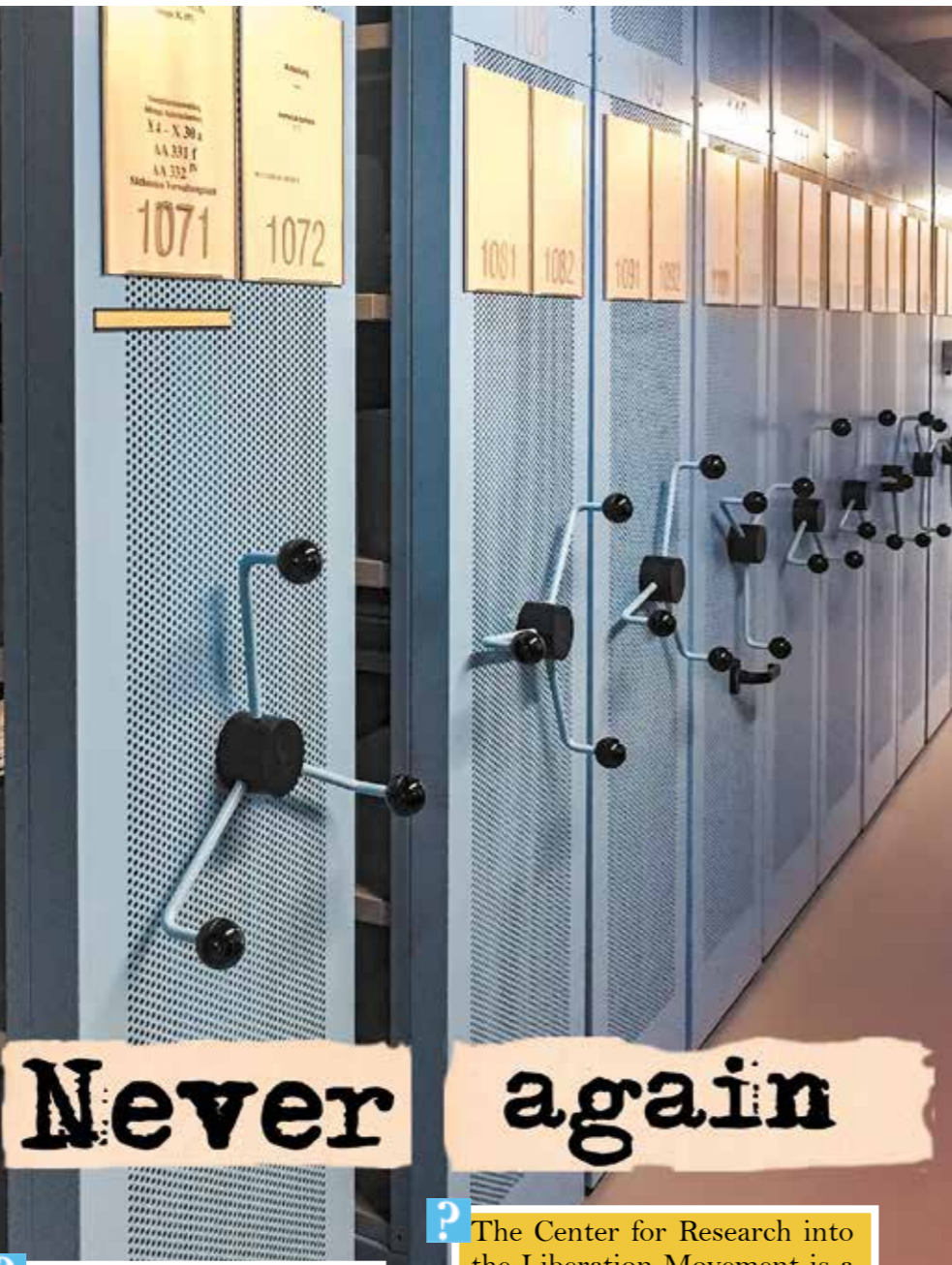
After our term expired, I met him again in Kyiv on the Volunteer's Day. He gave me a patch with the inscription: "Heaven is safer, but Hell is full of friends", which I gladly wear in Ireland and remember him, when doing so. We will meet someday, either at the front, or in Hell.



VOLODYMYR BIRCHAK, former deputy head of the branch state archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), historian, head of academic programs at the Center for Research into the Liberation Movement, deputy editor-in-chief of Istorychna Pravda (Truthful History): "I come from the Hutsul region, enjoy traveling, especially in the mountains and forests — it gives me a lot of energy. I can't live without reading books, I always find time for this, sometimes even at night".

We met with Volodymyr to talk about the open Archives of the Security Service of Ukraine (SBU), which contain a massive amount of information about the Communist and Soviet repressions against Ukrainians.

@Olena DOBROTVOR



Never again

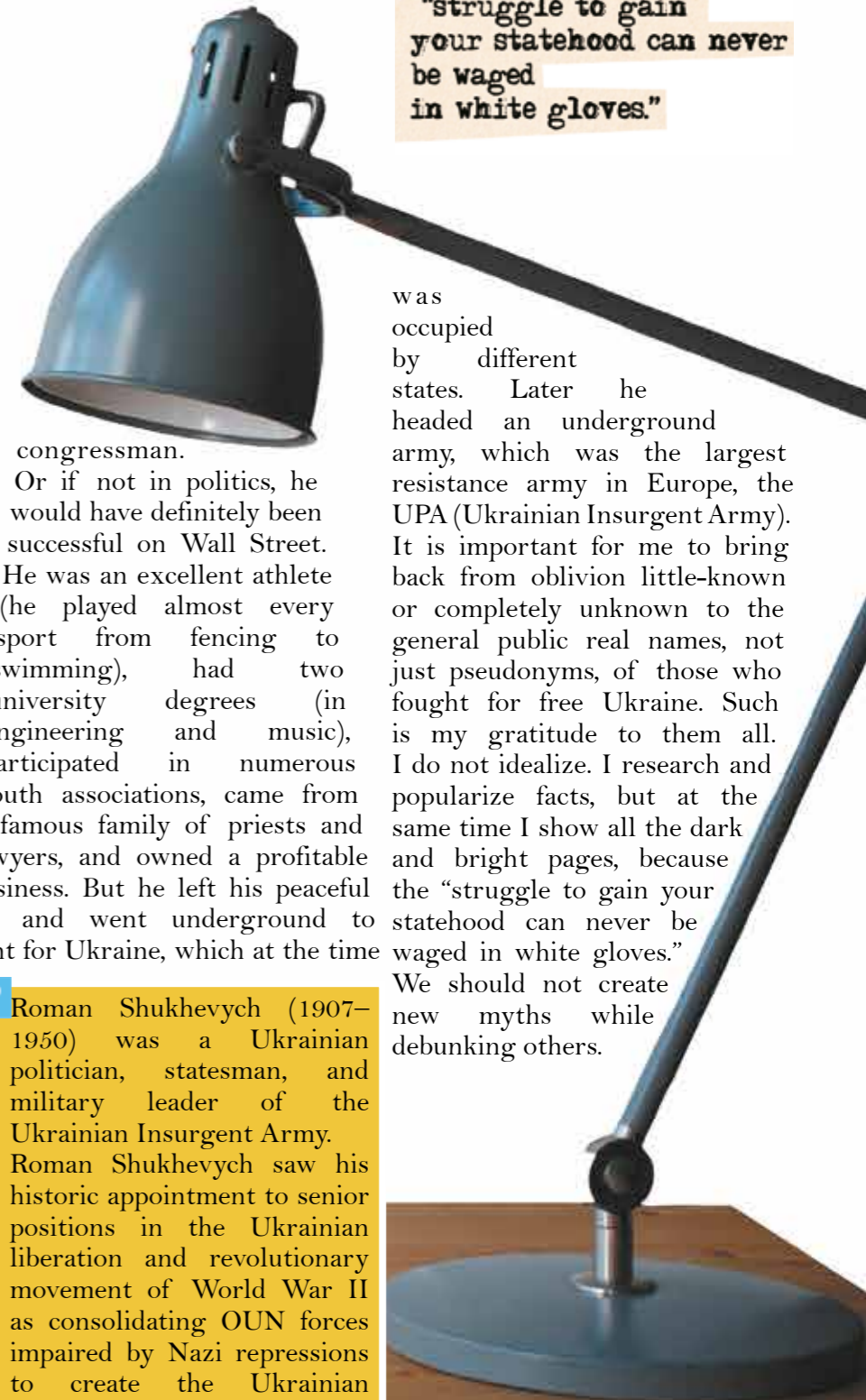
? The Security Service of Ukraine (SBU) is a state body of special purpose with law enforcement functions, which ensures the state security of Ukraine. The SBU is subordinated to the President of Ukraine.

? The Center for Research into the Liberation Movement is a non-governmental scientific organization that studies the Ukrainian liberation movement in the 20th century, in particular the history of state formations; history of socio-political movements; history of military formations; punitive and repressive policy of occupation regimes in the Ukrainian lands in the 20th century. Located in Lviv.

You have been professionally studying the past (history) for a long time. You actively disseminate information about certain historical events; participate in discussions, seminars, and lectures. Engage. Inspire. What topic is the dearest and the most important to you, and why?

I research the period of World War II, in context. My main topics are the Ukrainian liberation movement (specifically, the history of the **OUN** and **UPA**), repressions against the clergy of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, and the Holocaust in Ukraine. I am most interested in the stories of many people, often very young boys and girls, who left their comfortable homes for a higher goal of gaining an independent state. I study the history of Ukraine through a person who respects freedom and independence. The disclosed archives also help me, as a historian, to refute the imposed myths and propaganda messages. I like to cite the example of **Roman Shukhevych**. No kidding, if he had been born in, say, the United States, I think he could have been a senator or a

? **OUN-UPA** is a concept that in popular parlance unites the activities of the OUN (founded in 1929) and the UPA (1942–1954) during World War II. The abbreviation OUN refers to the branch of the Organization of Ukrainian Nationalists that emerged as a result of its split in 1940 and was headed by Stepan Bandera. The OUN branch was closely associated with the Ukrainian Insurgent Army (UPA).



"struggle to gain your statehood can never be waged in white gloves."

congressman. Or if not in politics, he would have definitely been successful on Wall Street. He was an excellent athlete (he played almost every sport from fencing to swimming), had two university degrees (in engineering and music), participated in numerous youth associations, came from a famous family of priests and lawyers, and owned a profitable business. But he left his peaceful life and went underground to fight for Ukraine, which at the time

? **Roman Shukhevych (1907–1950)** was a Ukrainian politician, statesman, and military leader of the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. Roman Shukhevych saw his historic appointment to senior positions in the Ukrainian liberation and revolutionary movement of World War II as consolidating OUN forces impaired by Nazi repressions to create the Ukrainian Insurgent Army and turn it into a tool of struggle for independent, united Ukraine.

was occupied by different states. Later he headed an underground army, which was the largest resistance army in Europe, the UPA (Ukrainian Insurgent Army). It is important for me to bring back from oblivion little-known or completely unknown to the general public real names, not just pseudonyms, of those who fought for free Ukraine. Such is my gratitude to them all. I do not idealize. I research and popularize facts, but at the same time I show all the dark and bright pages, because the "struggle to gain your statehood can never be waged in white gloves." We should not create new myths while debunking others.

Did you often have to take risks?

In a way. When Ukraine's political regime changed and Yanukovich came to power, the country's foreign policy reoriented from the Euro-Atlantic direction toward Russia. This, in particular, meant closing access to the archives that were open at that time.

Please comment on the statement, "Anything that happened yesterday, but was not (!) documented immediately is a myth."

I do not agree with this statement. For example, the Cheka-KGB documents contain both truth and lies and falsifications. Although they are documents, they are quite specific. My colleagues and I within the KGB Archives for the Media project have prepared a guide with tips on how to work with such materials today. Eyewitness accounts are also an important historical source, albeit a subjective one.

But can we call the testimonies of Holocaust survivors, who (later, not immediately!) talked about their experiences, a myth?

During your service in the SBU archives, Ukraine adopted the law "On Access to Archives of Repressive Agencies of Totalitarian Communist Regime of 1917-1991" of April 9, 2015. What truth was made publicly available then?

Everything. I was among the developers of that law. Today, all documents from the Cheka to the KGB are publicly available, and the law prohibits their closure, i.e. classification. There is truth in this. A citizen of Ukraine, a foreigner or a stateless person is free to come to the archives and review these documents or get scans of the documents remotely. We can open the secret pages of the communist regime.

Can you provide brief instructions for a U.S. citizen on how I can request material? What is necessary and sufficient to specify in a request?

all documents from the Cheka to the KGB are publicly available, and the law prohibits their closure

KGB Archives for Media: Handbook

LEFT TO RIGHT: ROMAN SHUKHEVYCH, DMYTRO HRYTSAI-PEREBYINIS, KATERYNA MASHKO-LOGUSH, BUDERAZH VILLAGE, RIVNE OBLAST, NOVEMBER 1943



Everything is very simple. All you have to do is send an e-mail to the SBU Archive (arhivsbu@ssu.gov.ua). And the KGB Archives for Media: Handbook, developed by the KGB Archives for Media project, is available online. It will help you understand what Cheka-KGB documents are kept in Ukraine. So, write a free-form letter specifying the topic or person you want to receive information about. You should also note whether you want to receive e-copies, or plan to come to Ukraine and work directly in the archive.

In your opinion, is this something to be proud of, this openness of documents of Soviet special services in Ukraine and the access system? Can you point out the peculiarities of this process compared to other countries?

Yes, it is. Today, the largest open archives of repressive agencies in the former USSR are in Ukraine (many similar materials are state

secrets in Russia). Although it is not Ukraine that was the first, the Baltic countries were. This process also took place in the countries of the former Warsaw Pact: Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, etc. But the difference is that the latter did not have as many documents of the Soviet secret service, as the secret services of these countries were somewhat independent of the NKVD-KGB. However, it was a very important step, they opened the documents of punitive bodies that committed crimes in their countries when they were in the sphere of the USSR's influence. By the way, we are grateful for the advice and support of colleagues from the Baltic States, the Czech Republic, and Poland.

In your opinion, for which countries can Ukraine serve as an example today?

It's very interesting. With the Center for Research into the Liberation Movement, we

organize seminars, conferences, roundtables, and joint projects with other countries, including Georgia, Moldova, Belarus, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Kazakhstan. Their request for such cooperation and willingness to adopt our experience is valuable to me.

How did Europe/the U.S. view make such documents freely available online?

Rather positively. This increased the activity of Sovietologists from around the world — the U.S., Canada, Australia, Israel, and others. Let me remind you, unique documents are now freely available and easily accessible in Ukraine. However, these archives are interesting not only for historians, but also for those who are looking for information about their repressed relatives. I remember the powerful story of how a 90-year-old Australian woman who heard about the archives opening in Ukraine, and she flew to us with her son.

She was looking for information about her father, a former Ukrainian army officer who had disappeared without a trace. We managed to help her and provide copies of documents about his fate.

Was there a convergence of interests of Ukraine and other countries?

There is always convergence. The archive receives many requests from post-Soviet countries, where these documents are closed. There were funny cases when researchers from the Russian Federation complained on Facebook that the **FSB** had classified and did not publish documents of the Great Terror of 1937-1938. We found the documents in our archive, and scanned and posted them on Facebook.

The archives are open, please do not be afraid of contacting them

How did you and your colleagues prepare to communicate with those who would like to use information from the archives?

The most important thing for me was to provide everyone with complete and clear information, how to look for documents about their relatives, how to find materials for an article, research, etc. We made infographics on social networks, columns or longreads in the media, videos on television. "The archives are open; please do not be afraid of contacting them!" But even today, in 2021, I often remind people during lectures about their legal rights to access this information.

What is your biggest personal victory as an employee of the SBU archive and a historian? And is there anything that you haven't managed to do yet?

In fact, the victory is the opening of archives in our country! And as of today, we see a progressive trend in this.

minded people. We have not managed to ensure the transfer of Cheka-KGB documents from the Security Service of Ukraine, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Foreign Intelligence Service of Ukraine,

? The Federal Security Service (FSB) is a special service of the Russian Federation, the successor to the KGB. According to the Security Service of Ukraine, the Russian FSB has been directly involved in military aggression, terrorism, and the armed conflict against Ukraine since 2014.

the State Border Guard Service of Ukraine, courts, prosecutor offices, etc. to a separate structure. A separate archive for these documents is envisaged by law, the Archive of National Memory.

The demand for information is growing every year. Someone can find materials about a relative who disappeared without a trace, and someone can find materials for their book or movie. This is the victory of a team of like-



And our Western partners have successful examples. It is not the task of special services and law enforcement agencies to keep in a separate structure dealing with the history and policy of national memory.

and that the rights of all those to whom it applied were respected. And I think we have done a good job.

Have you personally had to psychologically support people who learned their family stories years later?

Yes. I have already said that these are quite specific documents containing the truth, lies, and falsifications. They can never be taken in good faith. That is why sometimes I had to read cases with people and explain to them what was false and what was true. For this purpose, we prepared the KGB Archives for Media: Handbook. There are other examples when people, for the first time in 70-80 years, learn what really happened to their relatives. Sometimes we even managed to identify a burial place of the shot man or woman. In such moments, although they are psychologically difficult, I understood that our mission is to reveal the truth.

What traits of your character proved to be crucial during your work on opening the archives of repressive agencies?

I think meticulousness and persistence. We had to do two important things. The first thing was to write a law that would ensure this opening and minimize the risks of a setback. And the credit goes to our entire team. The directors of the archives and I had to make sure that this law was observed

our mission is to reveal the truth

How do you assess the scale of requests? How many people applied in 2015 and 2020, for example?

I can talk about the period when I worked. In 2014, 1,329 people applied to the SBU Archive; 2,160 in 2015; and 3,161 in 2016. And an increasing number of foreigners visited the Archive: 35 researchers in 2014, 42 in 2015, and 80 in 2016. According to information from my colleagues, this number continues to grow. Now the archive processes 3,500-4,000 requests annually.

the victory is the opening of archives in our country



the incentive to open the archives was to reveal the truth about the communist regime to everyone, both Ukrainians and foreigners

Did you have personal reasons (relatives' history) for opening these archives?

Maybe, but they were not predominant. Indeed, the history of my family, both on my father's and mother's side, is the history of repressions. My relatives were serving sentences in remote areas of the USSR, some of them lost their lives in the struggle against the Soviets. But still, the incentive to open the archives was to reveal the truth about the communist regime to everyone, both Ukrainians and foreigners. Perhaps you have drawn conclusions about human nature.



It is part of human nature to show humanity and will

What is it like?

These documents only confirmed my conviction that history cannot be viewed in "black or white." There will always be undertints in history. This is important, and should be taken into account to avoid labelling people as exclusively positive or extremely negative. The truth always lies somewhere in between. It is part of human nature to show humanity and will. And I have no doubts about this.

The declassification of communist regime documents is needed to study the past. And what does this mean for our future?

This is one of the safeguards in preventing such things from recurring.

By opening the documents of the Soviet secret service, everyone can see what communism is and how criminal the ideology is. I compare communism and Nazism based on archival facts. The opening of such documents helps to understand the past, to overcome the consequences of the totalitarian past. So that in the future such regimes could not be revived. "Never again."

22.06. 1941



In Lviv prisons, they began executing prisoners associated with the OUN. The total number of victims is between 2358 and 2752

POSTER BY ANDRIY YERMOLENKO

Today is not the day I die

@Roman IVANIUK

Ultimate Ukrainians are ordinary citizens placed by the swing of fate into extraordinary situations. They have to fight for Ukraine's independence, go through hardships of rehabilitation, overcome PTSD, find a new sense of their lives, and become modern day champions.

But most of all, they have to look in Death's eyes and say: "Not today!"

One of the consequences and components of the hybrid Russian armed aggression against Ukraine on the Crimean peninsula, including anti-Ukrainian demonstrations in 2014 in the cities, blockade and seizure of strategic facilities, and military units of the Armed Forces of Ukraine by Russian army units under the cover of civilians and newly formed Crimean "self-defense units" until the complete occupation of the Crimea by Russia.

The general name of the national-patriotic protests that took place in Maidan Nezalezhnosti — the main square of Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine, in 2013–2014. They were directed primarily against corruption, law enforcement and special forces arbitrariness, as well as in support of the European vector of Ukraine's foreign policy and evolved into the Revolution of Dignity.

The dramatic 2014 developments in Crimea triggered a big social movement in Ukraine. Thousands of people felt they could change the country for the good of future generations.

Terms such as activist and volunteer quickly entered into the Ukrainian vocabulary.

The formation of the first units, whose fighters sought to defend our Homeland from Russian aggression on a voluntary basis, began in March 2014 as part of the National Guard of

Ukraine (NGU), along with the creation of this military and security service itself. There

were a lot of people who joined the volunteer battalions directly from the Maidan.

Many patriots lived and worked outside Ukraine before the events in the Donbas.

With the outbreak of undeclared war, they left everything and returned to defend their family and home.

Among them was 27-year-old Volodymyr Boichuk, who had been looking for a better life in Moscow for many years by that time.

He comes from Chernivtsi, a regional center near the border with Romania.

After he left school, without getting any special education, he began working as a furniture maker, then got married and became a father. Although his marriage ended, Volodymyr kept a warm relationship with his son and took an active part in his upbringing. At some point, like many of his countrymen, he decided to go and work abroad.

In the Russian capital, he was paid much more for the same work he did at home. It is quite possible that Volodymyr would still be working there today, but after the annexation of Crimea, he understood that he would not bust his hump to please the invaders.

"In March 2014, I went home. I spent a day in my native Chernivtsi with my son Myroslav, and the next morning arrived in Kyiv to find out where I could enroll as a volunteer.

And although I had never worn a military uniform before, I knew that I wanted to protect my family. I learned that the first reserve battalion of the National Guard had just been formed and they were recruiting for the second. That's where I enlisted," says Volodymyr.

Having pledged allegiance to the Ukrainian people, the newly minted guardsman and his brothers-in-arms began combat training. Senior soldier Boichuk recalls this period with special warm feelings, because at that time he got to know the people who became his second family.



The National Guard of Ukraine was introduced in February 2014 as a formation designed to protect and safeguard the lives, rights, freedoms and legal interests of Ukrainian citizens to replace law enforcement agencies disbanded by the relevant government decree that during the Revolution of Dignity had compromised their reputation as a military formation with law enforcement functions.

The man notes that mostly conscious people who wanted to protect their land and help restore the country's integrity joined their unit.

With such aspirations, on May 29, 2014, servicemen of the 2nd Reserve Battalion of the National Guard of Ukraine left for Donbas. The unit took up positions on **Mount Karachun**, near the small town of Sloviansk. That's where soldier Boichuk received his baptism by fire.



? Karachun is a mountain on a plain near Sloviansk, in Donetsk Oblast of Ukraine. Its height is 167.6 m. A 222-meter-high television tower was on top of the mountain. Sloviansk was the starting point of hostilities against Russian mercenaries and collaborators in eastern Ukraine. Because of the strategic importance of the mountain and the TV tower, fighting for Karachun between Ukrainian defenders and pro-Russian armed groups continued in April–July, 2014.

Among the most dramatic events, he mentions a battle during the retreat of Girkin's militants (one of the leaders of the **DNR** terrorist organization) from Sloviansk. At that time, there was a skirmish at one of the checkpoints, and Ukrainian fighters saw the enemy advancing. In response, units of the NGU and the Armed Forces of Ukraine (AFU) fired on an enemy column, and destroyed

Senior soldier Boichuk a lot of the enemy's manpower and equipment. The surviving militants fled towards Donetsk, and regular Ukrainian troops entered Sloviansk, thus liberating the city from the occupiers. In July 2014, servicemen from two volunteer battalions formed a combat support battalion - the legendary unit that, two years later, would be named after Hero of Ukraine Major **General Serhiy Kulchytsky**. Subsequently, after a short rotation, Volodymyr returned to the anti-terrorist operation zone and served in a joint battalion.

? Donetsk People's Republic is an unrecognized and self-proclaimed terrorist quasi-state formation established by field commanders and pro-Russian militant political leaders in Russia-occupied areas of some districts of Donetsk Oblast of Ukraine.

At that time, guardsmen were defending the checkpoints near Debaltseve. On August 28, they were tasked with evacuating wounded comrades from a checkpoint that had been fired on by militants. Several volunteers, including Volodymyr Boichuk, joined the guardsmen and set off in two armored vehicles along the specified route. As it turned out, they had the wrong coordinates for the destination and got lost. Entering an area not controlled by Ukrainian forces, the unit came across a fortified enemy checkpoint. There were no wounded nearby. Fighting broke out.

? Serhiy Petrovych Kulchytsky (1963–2014) — Ukrainian serviceman, Major General, Head of the Combat and Special Training Department at the Main Directorate of the National Guard of Ukraine. Hero of Ukraine. In the spring of 2014, after the beginning of the Russian armed aggression against Ukraine, Major General Kulchytsky took an active part in creating the first volunteer unit formed of Euromaidan Self-Defense activists — the 1st Reserve Battalion of the National Guard. He died on May 29, 2014 in a combat zone in Sloviansk, Donetsk Oblast.

The enemy was well armed and surpassed them, but the group managed to retreat without losses. On the way back, they were ambushed by terrorists.

The enemy fired a rocket-propelled grenade and damaged one of the armored vehicles. It was followed by full-fledged shelling. Despite numerous injuries and losses, the Ukrainian fighters did not even think of surrendering and leaving their brothers-in-arms. They managed to drag all the seriously wounded into the undamaged armored vehicle. The fighting lasted more than half an hour, and the enemy came so close that they had to fight back with hand-grenades. The combatants ran out of ammunition.

Apparently, nature itself was on our fighters' side, because the dry grass caught fire on both sides of the road. Taking advantage of a vast plume of smoke, the unit began to retreat, with more than twenty fighters on the only undamaged armored vehicle.

The shelling did not stop for a minute. A grenade from an automatic grenade launcher exploded next to

Volodymyr, who was sitting on top of the vehicle. He and several other soldiers were wounded by the grenade fragments. A few minutes later, a bullet also hit his wounded body.

Boichuk recalls that he tied himself to the armored vehicle with some wire so that at least his dead body would reach our positions.



? Debaltseve is a town in Horlivka district, Donetsk Oblast. Founded in 1840. It has been controlled by terrorist groups since 2015.

Hardly conscious, he waited for doctors, and kept repeating in his head, **"Today is not the day I die."**

As a result of that ambush, four of his brothers-in-arms were killed, including his closest



friend, senior reserve soldier Oleksiy Kurmashev (codename Alpinist). Apparently, this loss was more painful than all the wounds received in that battle. Soldiers with serious injuries were taken to a hospital in Debaltseve, where doctors fought for their lives. Fighting around the city did not subside. Terrorists along with regular Russian troops attacked.

When artillery fire began hitting the Debaltseve hospital, patients had to be evacuated. More than one surgery was required to put the wounded guardsman back on his feet, because his lungs, stomach, intestines, kidney, and liver were damaged. Overall, he received about half a meter of stitches. The doctors' prognoses were disappointing. In those difficult moments, when Volodymyr's life hung in the balance, **his son gave him strength to fight.** Volodymyr wanted to live fully again for his son. It was his son's arrival that forced him to overcome the pain of his wounds and not only get back on his feet, but also continue his military service. **Even though Volodymyr is not on the battlefield, but in an office, he serves his country faithfully.** His combat experiences had an effect on Volodymyr, like on many other anti-terrorist operation veterans. But the man does not give up and keeps repeating to himself, **"Today is not the day I die!"**



Oksana Chorna

@Yaroslava MATVIEIENKO

Oksana, you are currently living in Oman. How did you take the risk of going so far? Do you miss your homeland?

I've been living in Oman for 4 years. I can't believe how quickly the time has flown by. It seems like I just arrived. I had to learn a totally unfamiliar culture, get used to people in black and white dresses, and the 50-degree Celsius (120F) heat, fairytale houses of A Thousand and One Nights, palm trees and the ocean. And here I am driving around the city without car navigation and discussing new menus

at my favorite restaurants. I've always traveled a lot. Before Oman, I'd visited 39 countries. Moving to an Arab country was nothing out of the ordinary to me. Moreover, my friend, whom I visited in 2008, lived there. Of course, I miss Ukraine, my friends and nature. But most of all, I miss my brothers-in-arms and army life. As they say, a soldier can leave the war, but the war will never leave a soldier.

What do Omanis and your students and colleagues already know about Ukraine thanks to you?

Students, being normal modern young people, are active users of social media, so they follow me on Facebook and Instagram. Of course, they know that I served in the army, and they look at my photos and read my posts. So do my colleagues here. Thank goodness, Facebook automatically translates texts into any language. The teachers I work with at the university have come to Oman from different countries. They are all very interesting people, highly educated and travel a lot. To my great surprise, the dean of my university has been to Dnipro and is very knowledgeable about life in Ukraine. Colleagues ask a lot about the situation in Donbas.

Your debut book was published two years ago. In your opinion, is it fulfilling its mission? What was the most moving and memorable review?

The first book I wrote about the war, "Codename Cassandra: Summer 2015", was published in 2019.

a soldier can leave the war, but the war will never leave a soldier.

It was like the birth of a planet. I put all my pain and memory into it. I wrote it like a documentary. Fully based on real events and, in fact, it's documentary evidence of the war, although it contains both my experiences and subjective assessments.

But I think this makes it more honest. I had a mission to preserve the memory of my brothers-in-arms. Of those who died, were wounded, who were there. Of those who will never tell about themselves, heroes of our time. Those people amazed me with their courage, stamina, and bravery. I received a lot of feedback. And each review is dear to my heart, it restores my desire to live. But the words of my brothers-in-arms were the most important to me. Their brief lines "Well-written. The way it was. How did you manage to remember it all?" made me happy.

Do you remember when you realized you wanted to write a book? Did you have such dreams before?

I can't say it was a dream. I wrote the book because I couldn't help writing it. This wasn't my desire or decision. The book is neither about me nor for me. This book will preserve the memory of those soldiers and officers who laid down their lives defending Ukraine. I am not a writer and I never



I had a mission to preserve the memory of my brothers-in-arms.

wanted to be one. And, most likely, I would not have written anything had it not been for the war. But this is the only way I can bring my friends back to life. This is the only way for me to return to those events over and over

again. It's incredibly painful. It tortures the soul and tears the heart. But I'm alive because they gave us all that chance. To speak, write, think, whatever we want, and not be afraid to end up in jail for it.

The collection of women's stories "What She's Silent About" includes your story. So, what is Oksana Chorna silent about, and what can she not be silent about?

I wrote three short stories for this collection about my struggle with fear and anxiety. All three are from completely different areas of my life: war, work in Oman, and diving. But what they all have in common is that they scared me to death. And in each of these stories, I show that overcoming fears gives a person tremendous strength and awareness of their unlimited possibilities.

A few years ago, there was an exhibition of your personal military photos "Point of No Return" in Kyiv. Did you ever think of publishing a photobook?



By supporting Ukraine, you are defending democracy in the world!

We protect our home, our land, our future.

This project is too expensive for me now. I can't afford high quality printing of such an album, and I have no patrons or sponsors. So, I am not giving up on this idea. Perhaps, when the situation stabilizes and there is more interest and support, we can return to making an album.

How did a person with PhD in Economics become a volunteer and a paramedic driver of the 28th separate mechanized brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine?

I would ask the question differently. How could a person, seeing what was happening in 2014, not become a volunteer or a soldier? Our future depended and still depends on each of us. And not just the future of an individual, but of the whole country. The complex of a "little man", who does not influence anything and is not responsible for anything, has been drummed into us since we were knee-high to a duck. But 2014 showed that this was not the case. The fate of the whole country was decided by a handful of people with wooden shields on the Maidan. The bullets that killed them pierced our hearts. At least that's how I feel. They laid down their lives so that Russia could not enslave Ukraine again. We didn't understand it then. It took us a long time to realize how critical the situation was. And my integrity will not allow me to bow my head to the anger and hatred of Muscovy. We protect our home, our land, our future.

Although most people don't like this question, I cannot help asking you about your creative plans.

My second book with the working title "Codename Cassandra: Stanytsya" is a continuation of war stories. I thought I would include my second rotation in Stanytsya Luhanska and Shchastia. I plan to finish it this year and publish it next year. And speaking of plans in general, I want to travel and make videos of my adventures. But it will only be possible in a couple of years.

I know that your husband is in the military. Did you meet before or during the war?

This is a very romantic and exciting story. Our war romance is now in its fifth year. And I wrote about this in my book "Codename Cassandra." It is hard to believe, but it did happen. Our love is a true story.

You have a new hobby, diving?

For me, diving has become a new stage in exploring the world. It gives me an awesome feeling of flying, the ability to move in three dimensions and control the body's position with just my breath. This is a challenge to my fears. As they say, you are moving in the right direction only by facing your fear. Oman is a great place for diving. In summer, the water temperature here is more than 30 degrees Celsius (85F), so you can dive without a wetsuit. Diverse underwater life, clear water, and low interest

in this leisure activity make diving a truly amazing pastime. I have already completed two levels of PADI training, and now I am learning water rescue. It's quite a challenging course, with a lot of theoretical material. All skills and knowledge I get usually turn out to be very useful to me later on.

What makes you really happy?

Like any person, I'm happy when I achieve goals. When my dreams come true. When fear recedes and the thrill of learning new things takes its place. It doesn't matter what exactly I do: skiing, kiting, diving, shooting videos, or writing books, I always start with panic-driven fear accompanied by numbness in the limbs and troubled breathing. And with each new attempt, the fear weakens, giving way to the happiness of learning new things. So, I am eager to know where this will lead me.

What inspires and motivates you in life?

Challenge. Challenges inspire me. When you have a goal and strive to achieve it. To prove, first of all, to yourself that you are able to do what no one believes. By implementing a project that seemed to be pure utopia. By overcoming fear and doubt. By getting a fraction closer to your goal. In fact, taking at least a tiny step every day, in a year, you will be surprised that you've reached the top. And this daily battle with laziness, doubt, fear, and denial is life.

What is your message to the American readers of our media outlet: about Ukraine, about our events, about Ukrainian veterans and volunteers.

We, Ukrainians, are fighting for freedom and independence. We are defending our homes and our families. We are confronting a huge bloodthirsty monster, Russia, which uses any means, destroying everything it can reach. Gassing children in Syria and blowing up hospitals, wiping out entire cities and massacring entire nations. Meddling in the presidential races in the USA and France, blowing up warehouses in the Czech Republic and Bulgaria, poisoning undesirables with radioactive polonium and Novichok. A murderous country. But we, Ukrainians, have become stronger and more united because we faced the threat of losing what we had not valued. Faced with the threat of being destroyed and deprived of national identity, freedom, and life. Every word you say in defense of Ukraine makes us stronger, helps us to prevent and counter attacks and defend ourselves. The same is true of every one of your posts on social media, every opinion or phrase said in our support. By supporting Ukraine, you are defending democracy in the world!



WE MADE THE NEWS IN UKRAINE

The history and heroes of the 3rd Special Forces Regiment named after Prince Sviatoslav the Brave

@Larysa Kuzmenko



Kropyvnytskyi is located at the intersection of railways and highways, and the city's geographical position has determined its status since its founding in the 19th century, when the city was built as a fortress. Since 2000, the 3rd Separate Special Forces Regiment has been stationed in the city. In 2018, the regiment was named after Prince Sviatoslav the Brave, the 10th-century ruler of Kyivan Rus'. Its ancient and interesting history prompted two officers, Serhiy Lysenko and Serhiy Syenchev, to search for historical information and to found a museum about the 3rd Regiment. The two officers, born in opposite parts of Ukraine,

1,200 kilometers apart, joined their forces. Serhiy Lysenko from Kolomyia (in the western part of the country), and Serhiy Syenchev from Donetsk (in the eastern part) started collecting materials and forming plans for the museum's exhibitions back in 2012. The very location of Kropyvnytskyi and the history of the city's names since its founding raise a lot of questions. For four centuries, Russia built a colony on the territory of Ukraine, used Ukrainian history to create myths about the Russian way of life, used the riches of the Ukrainian land, and used Ukrainians to replenish armies and further colonize peoples around Russia.

The leadership of the Soviet Union continued the policy of colonization. Moreover, the Soviet government trapped the country's entire population behind the Iron Curtain, depriving it of the right to move freely outside the Soviet Union. People could not change their residential address even within the Soviet Union without a special permit. Soviet authorities sent a third of the population to forced-labor camps. Most of the convicts were intellectuals who died from inhuman conditions in the camps or were killed. The Soviet government turned all the intelligentsia into dissidents and destroyed the propertied class physically through the Holodomor, an artificial famine

organized by the country's leadership to subdue the Ukrainian nation. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the policy of reclaiming former Russian colonies by force or keeping them under its protectorate through bribery and blackmail was continued by the Russian Federation, led by its unchanging leader Vladimir Putin, who has been ruling the country for over 20 years. The insidious occupation of Ukrainian Crimea in 2014 and the ongoing war in the east of Ukraine are a natural step towards subjugating Ukraine completely. The Russian Federation is not satisfied with the fact that Ukraine has chosen its path towards building a national democratic state. Serhiy Lysenko and Serhiy Syenchev collected materials on national resistance to colonization since the 17th century, on the struggle of different Ukrainian military units for Ukrainians' right to independence and the times of our struggles for independence. Unfortunately, in 2014, both officers were killed within a few days of one another during fighting on the Ukrainian-Russian border. They wanted to preserve and tell their descendants the country's history, but it was the story of their lives and deaths that hit the news of modern Ukraine.

From the news, 2014



In the late afternoon of July 28, special forces under the general command of Serhiy Lysenko (18 men — two reconnaissance groups of eight fighters under the command of Captains Kyrylo Andreyenko and Taras Karpa and two Ural truck drivers) approached an abandoned farm near the village of Latysheve. A local resident, 61-year-old Mykola Butrymenko, the farm's owner, warmly greeted the Ukrainian fighters and assured them that there were no Russian mercenaries nearby. He invited them to spend the night in his barn. Meanwhile, he went to Snizhne under the pretext of visiting his wife in the hospital and informed the militant command about the location of Ukrainian fighters. A powerful mobile group equipped with one tank and two armored personnel carriers (APCs) moved towards the village against the special forces fighters. On the morning of July 29, the guards on watch spotted the enemy's convoy, but since the vehicles bore the insignia of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, the militants managed to approach and surround the farm. The terrorists presented their ultimatum. After consulting together, it was decided that Captain Taras Karpa would surrender to save his life — his son had just been born in March 2014. He came out with his hands up, but had not even

walked 50 meters before he was gunned down. After that, the Ukrainian special forces decided to begin a breakthrough.

One of the Ural trucks broke the gate down and sped toward a field, while the other one turned right and moved along a fence. The first truck was destroyed and exploded, and the other was machine-gunned.

As a result of the battle against the numerically superior enemy, eight people were killed: Lieutenant Colonel Serhiy Lysenko, Captain Kyrylo Andreyenko, Petty Officer Oleksiy Hlobenko, Petty Officer Andriy Shershen, Sergeant Anatoliy Buzulyak, and Privates First Class (PFCs) Lev Pankov, Yaroslav Shymchyk, and Roman Rykalov (considered missing). Seven wounded men were taken prisoner; two of them were severely wounded (Captain Karpa and Ural driver



PFC Serhiy Hryshyn) and died later. Four sentries fought their way to Ukrainian positions. On August 7, people paid their final respects to Lieutenant Colonel Serhiy Lysenko in Kropyvnytskyi.

On August 8, he was buried at the Walk of Fame in the cemetery of his hometown, Kolomyia.

After these events, by Minister of Defense Order #714 of September 24, 2015, Serhiy Lysenko was posthumously awarded the military rank of colonel. And on June 27, 2016, Butrymenko, who betrayed our fighters and put Russian terrorists on the trail of the Ukrainian unit, was detained. Comrades of the dead servicemen did not abandon the idea of creating a museum. Oleksandr Trepak, Hero of Ukraine, took the initiative to continue the work. Oleksandr Trepak earned a high rank and



undisputed authority in society due to his participation in several operations in 2014.

From the news, 2014

On June 7, 2014, near the town of Bakhmut, a special forces team started an operation to search for and evacuate a severely wounded commander of the Armored Weapons Center, Colonel Volodymyr Chobitko. A subgroup of eight fighters led by Oleksandr Trepak seized a separatist checkpoint at the entrance to the town and held it for



three hours, providing a security corridor for a second subgroup to transport the wounded commander to a helicopter evacuation site. During the battle, he received a bullet wound in the leg but refused to be evacuated. For two days, he directed his group to repel the attacks of separatists and Russian mercenaries on the Central Artillery Base. Oleksandr Trepak was promoted to Colonel and awarded the Order of Bohdan Khmelnytsky of the 3rd degree, as well as a personal award firearm. A month later, after medical treatment in hospital,

? Donetsk airport was of great strategic importance: geographically and strategically, it is the “gateway to Donetsk”; a tall building with a good view within ten kilometers around; a powerful fortification that could withstand tank attacks; a media object — a symbol of Ukrainian soldiers’ unbreakable fortitude. The defense of Donetsk airport lasted 244 days. The Ukrainian military left the airport only after it was completely destroyed by Russian soldiers and their mercenaries.

Oleksandr Trepak found himself in another combat zone, at the **Donetsk airport**. Fighting for the Donetsk airport lasted from September 2014 to January 22, 2015, and was one of the fiercest battles in the war in eastern Ukraine. Battles unfolded between Ukrainian military and volunteer forces, on the one hand, and pro-Russian insurgents and occupation forces, on the other, for control of Donetsk International Airport. Pro-Russian forces carried out systematic assaults on the terminals, taking up new positions, losing them, and



preparing for assaults again. The fighting resulted in the destruction of the airport's infrastructure. In December 2014, the old terminal was severely damaged, and on January 13, 2015, the control tower held by Ukrainian soldiers finally collapsed. In the new terminal, battle was raging for its various floors. In the final stages of the battle, Ukrainian soldiers held the first floor, while the basement and upper floors were controlled by the enemy. On January 20, 2015, pro-Russian forces blew up part of the ceiling and the concrete floors of the new terminal building, causing it to collapse onto holed-up Ukrainian soldiers. On January 22, 2015, the survivors left the terminal building, but many wounded and shell-shocked Ukrainian soldiers were taken prisoner. The defense of the airport lasted 244 days. For their resilience, the defenders of the

airport were called Cyborgs. The word "cyborgs" was first used by an unknown Russian military man in September 2014 to explain why well-armed and numerically superior Russian mercenaries could not take control of the Donetsk airport, which was defended by dozens of Ukrainian soldiers with small arms. As if only robots could be able to endure such inhumane conditions. Oleksandr Trepak was one of the Cyborgs. He was directly responsible for repelling all attempts to assault and seize the airport, during which eight tanks were destroyed, one tank with minor damage was captured and evacuated, and more than 270 militants were killed and six were taken prisoner. Oleksandr Trepak personally organized counter-sabotage and counter-ambush work in the airport's vicinity, which

made it impossible for the militants to block the supply of food and ammunition to the airport's defenders. The feature film "Cyborgs" was based on the events of the defense of Donetsk Airport, and actor Roman Semysal played the role of Oleksandr Trepak. On March 14, 2018, the film "Cyborgs" was shown in the U.S. Congress. The film was a great success, with the audience applauding at the end. (photo: Oleksandr "Redut" Trepak, a real hero of the Russian-Ukrainian war, who was not known by sight.) In March 2016, Oleksandr Trepak was appointed commander of the 3rd Special Forces Regiment. And in February 2018, he said at the opening of museum's new exhibition, "In 2014, as commander of the 2nd detachment, I sent my guys to the front. On March 1, we loaded TNT and grenades into Ural trucks ... For the first time in our lives, we received

ammunition to perform a real combat mission. It was like a toy for the guys, but I fully realized how unprepared we were. And how important it is to prepare people, to be ready for war. The training of our soldiers begins here, from schools, kindergartens, from such conversations, from the stories told by parents. Big places must be places of strength." A year later, at the initiative of regimental service members, activists, volunteers, relatives of captured and missing persons, and concerned residents of Kropyvnytskyi, and with the support of the International Renaissance Foundation, three more displays were added to the Museum-Memorial Complex of the 3rd Separate Special Forces Regiment named after Prince Sviatoslav the Brave. The original design of the museum space and the non-standard presentation remained unchanged. The floor in the new part of the museum is paved, the corridor resembles a real street with lanterns, benches, and panoramas of the old city. In the halls, one can see photos on the walls, background information, and mannequins of soldiers in military uniforms of different historical periods. The displays are only the basis that sets the tone. The Museum of the 3rd Regiment is not a traditional museum. Rather, it is a center of military-civil cooperation where people could come to communicate with soldiers and unit commanders and learn more about their history. In



fact, this is where awareness begins. After leaving the museum, children will say, "Wow, that's interesting!", and continue their search in traditional museums and libraries, on the Internet, etc. The first room informs visitors about the history, tasks, and features of special forces. Considerable attention is paid to the history of the 3rd Separate Special Forces Regiment. Here one can find information about the military training system, military specialties, group composition, and various stages of training. Visitors can learn how snipers, radio operators, sappers, medical personnel, and intelligence officers are selected and trained, including psychologically. A special section is devoted to parachute training and landing and special equipment. The second room is all about the participation of the 3rd Separate Regiment in the Anti-Terrorist Operation in eastern Ukraine. The displays present information about how and where the regiment's soldiers began fighting; what tasks they performed in the Crimea before its occupation, in Ilovaisk, Debaltseve, near Savur-Mohyla; and how they defended strategically-important weapons depots in Bakhmut and other hot spots in the Donbas. All these stories are supplemented with recollections from the unit's servicemen. The room presents real exhibits, trophies brought from the fighting zone in the east of Ukraine.

Since the war in eastern Ukraine began escalating, the 3rd Separate Special Forces Regiment guarded and later defended the Donetsk Airport. The third room is dedicated to this page in the regiment's history. Through the stories and memories of the fighters, the display explains why they failed to take full control of the airport while it was still possible, and how the fighters managed to hold this strategic facility for such a long time. Here one can see the original trophies seized in the Donetsk Airport.

The Hall of Remembrance is in the fourth room, the hall of fallen soldiers. Photographs of the regiment's fallen soldiers, who gave their lives during the fighting in the east of the country, are projected on the walls. Symbolic fragments of shells are embedded into the walls. The rust of these fragments symbolizes the blood of the fallen heroes.

The military unit also plans to organize an open display of trophy military equipment captured by our service members in battles. The war has been going on for eight years. During all these years, the 3rd regiment has participated in all the hottest battles. Every day, soldiers of the 3rd regiment make history, and this is what the museum tells us about.

From a story told by special forces officer, call name Phoenix, 2021

This was at the very beginning of this story, 2014. Today it is a chronicle of Russian armed aggression.



... I plan to write a book of memories where I am going to describe everything in detail. And everything about my adventures, including in the Donetsk Airport, too ...

— What was most memorable in that experience?

— A story at the military

enlistment office. The one in Donetsk.

We were attacked there the first night. Some henchmen boxed us in with tires, brandishing all sorts of objects, which didn't actually impress us, as **we were well-trained and well-armed soldiers.** We were all scattered around the perimeter of the regional military enlistment office.

I was close to the main gate. The locals began their planned attack, everything happened strictly according to the script and in waves. The first wave was an assault by local "miners", as they called themselves, who were very skillfully tricked into saying something like **"those soldiers from abroad in American uniforms have infested our land!"** - that is, we were those soldiers, no one knows who, no one knows where from.

So, our commanders let them in, to calm them down about "Blackwaters" and "American Special Forces." We showed our documents: **look, we're friendly, Armed Forces of Ukraine; we defend, protect and carry out orders.** Okay? Okay. They calmed down and left. The first wave left, then the second came, which obviously was not in touch with the first. To earn their fee, the organizers definitely needed several episodes showing the locals' "serious" discontent and protesting "anti-junta" sentiments. Yes, and everything on camera, everything was filmed by several TV cameras with microphones, those mouthpieces guided by provocateurs. The second wave — also locals and also highly

strung out — was also let into the military enlistment office. They also looked around, made some noise, and left.

But the third wave — in the evening, somewhere after 7 or 8 p.m. — was drug addicts and all kinds of criminals. Miscreants who will do anything for money. They swarmed, tried to break and smash whatever they could get their hands on. So, we too, in accordance with the orders, were ready to counteract and apply all the necessary measures and means according to the instructions. Their entire action was well lubricated by an appropriate amount of alcohol and other substances, so the attempts to swarm, smash, and climb over were accompanied with loud obscenities and dirty swearing.

However, the sounds of clicking bolts and warnings to open fire chilled even the most deficient ones, so there was only shouting and drunken staggering. The late Lieutenant Colonel Senchev went to negotiate with the first or second waves. There was clearly nothing to talk about with those third wave morons. At about 2 or 3 in the morning, everything suddenly ended. Obviously, the money they were paid by the hour on camera ended and they vanished. And, by the way, during this third "offensive", a female representative of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine came to our unit to "resolve the conflict." Although, in fact, the conflict was over by then. It seems that as a result of her visit, it was agreed that we would leave the military enlistment office and the next

? Rinat Akhmetov is a Ukrainian entrepreneur and politician, the richest person of Ukraine, president of the football club "Shakhtar", owner of a number of companies.



morning the entire regiment would move to the old terminal of the Donetsk airport to provide protection/defense and maintain the functioning of the strategically important facility. And we did.

We all got into the strategic facility the size of 30 soccer fields and assumed our

immediate duties. We stayed there a month or more, keeping watch and organizing the protection of posts.

In various ways. My guys were on watch at gas stations, **Akhmetov's** hangar, near the store METRO, and I was doing coordination work. We were on duty until the end of the month. We flew with Lieutenant Colonel Kovalenko to Kropyvnytskyi. We stayed there two days and then two people from my group, including Vitia Harkavenko (petty officer, deputy commander of special operations group, died on July 15, 2014, may he rest in peace), took civilian cars and traveled to the village where the 72nd brigade was stationed. Our main task was discreet reconnaissance operations in civilian vehicles in order to determine the location of enemy checkpoints, the number of military units, weapons, etc.

As for the group's mood, I can say that it was focused on our job, and everyone worked well. There was no discord or vacillation. All my guys are professionals, trained, disciplined. Real troopers, in short. And there was sort of an information vacuum, because we worked without any internet, social networks, a dozen text messages a day. For this reason, we plunged into work and did it neatly and without failures.

Of course, important news about the Russian-Ukrainian war reached us because the "soldier's radio" worked smoothly. **But, in fact, we made our own news. Exclusively with our own hands and our own work, we made the main news in Ukraine.**

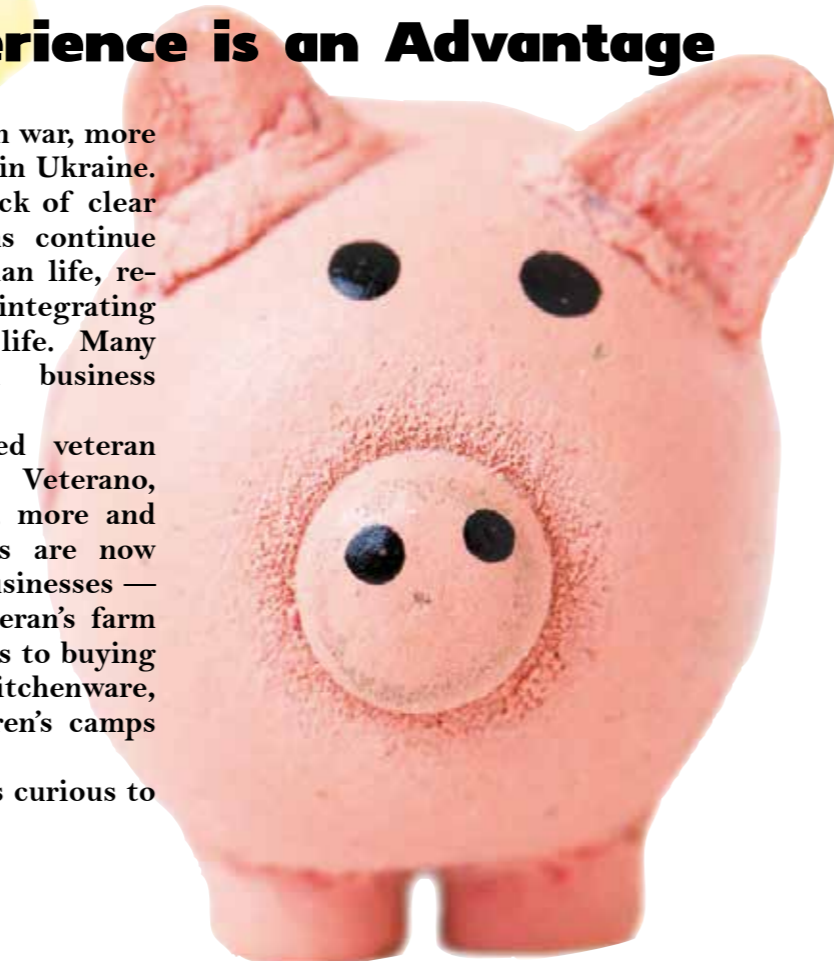


When Military Experience is an Advantage

In the eighth year of the Russian-Ukrainian war, more and more veterans have opened businesses in Ukraine. Despite poor government support and a lack of clear government policy on the issue, veterans continue to change careers after returning to civilian life, re-learn, and start their own businesses, integrating their military experience into civilian life. Many veterans unite to form professional business communities.

Previously, average Ukrainians associated veteran business with Leonid Ostaltsev's Pizza Veterano, primarily because of the name. However, more and more conscious and patriotic Ukrainians are now choosing to support Ukrainian veterans' businesses — from tasting strawberries grown on a veteran's farm and ordering ready made dishes for holidays to buying home decoration items, jewelry, and kitchenware, photo shoots, shoe repair, tourism, children's camps and computer services.

Although I'm not much into business, I was curious to hear the stories of Ukrainian veterans.



KOSTIANTYN FEDICHEV

Veteran Workshop Second WOOD, raw materials recycling



I was born in Bulgaria when my father served there, as I come from a family of servicemen with 200 years of military history. My brother, whom I am very proud of, is doing his military service now. As a young man, I went in for various sports: diving, trampolining, trapshooting, hand-to-hand combat. Personally, I didn't hesitate about what career to choose. In 2006, I entered the Military Institute of Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv. After graduating in 2011, I joined the 169th

Training Center of the Ground Forces of the Armed Forces of Ukraine as a company executive officer. I went to the ATO in April 2014 as a sniper. I had served in the Armed Forces of Ukraine for more than 10 years and decided it was time to change my life. The idea of processing secondary wood came to my mind while I was still serving in the Armed Forces. I noticed how natural resources were wasted, and that made me think about recycling secondary waste, such as wood.

I like to work with wood, especially if it is damaged and untended, to revive the beauty of this material, to discover its hidden treasures. It's a little difficult for me to describe this moment of creativity, but it seems that my soul is reborn with my work. I have good experience in carpentry and know how to use waste wood more efficiently and eco-friendly. It was quite easy for me to start my business, my family supports me, helps me, so I haven't had any significant obstacles.



The hardest part of my business is sales. It is sometimes hard to deal with customers, because, unfortunately, many people in Ukraine do not understand what “secondary wood” is and very often cancel an order. Although I’ve been in business for almost eighteen months, I do not consider myself a businessman. I call myself a woodworker and my business — a workshop. Every day I am motivated by my family, my wife and children. I want to teach them to live in harmony with nature, to take care of it. Apart from business, I opened a Safety from a Veteran page, where I share tips on personal safety and, if possible, help people who need assistance. Recently, I’ve started helping at the “Marusyn Polihon” (Marusia’s training area), which was founded by Marusia Zviroby,

a well-known Ukrainian activist and volunteer. We are trying to build a center for training conscious citizens — defenders of Ukraine. I am also developing a veterans’ organization, “Brothers in Arms”, which will be engaged in rehabilitation and assistance to veterans in our area. There are plans to develop a veterans’ organization like the American Legion to protect veterans’ rights and prevent a “revenge of communism” in Ukraine. I always have something to do! I want to open a recycling factory in Ukraine: to recycle tires and wood, including old chipboard furniture, which is very harmful to nature. I’m just starting on the journey to my dream. The main problem I face is with logistics, namely the delivery of recycled wood to my workshop. Without my own big car, it is

quite challenging, so I have to use other services, which leads to high prices of my products. It’s hard for me to say what I would do if I didn’t run this business. But one thing is certain: if I had not met my beloved wife, I would still be at war. I have plans to expand my business, but I must do it gradually. Of course, my own business has had a positive effect on me. I became calmer and more sensible. I want to have my workshop refurbished and then help other veterans and their families with rehabilitation, to conduct “relaxing” woodworking master classes. In my opinion, there are a lot of opportunities for developing veterans’ businesses in Ukraine. The main thing is to be persistent and have relatives’ support. There will always be some obstacles, but we must believe in our strength.



IRYNA TSVILA

handmade fresh flowers jewelry brand VERBA

Handmade fresh flowers jewelry brand VERBA

My life before the war ... It was perfect. Live and love what you do, do what you love. Believe in your strengths, ideals; enjoy the years, experience and result of your work. Isn’t that perfect? Before the Revolution of Dignity, my life was just like that. I created rose gardens, made bouquets and flower arrangements, created a personal website about roses, the first website about roses in Ukrainian, with Ukrainian assortments, where I shared information, photos of flowers and experience of growing roses in our climate zone. I took photos, learned, developed, and read a lot.

Of course, I was socially active. Social issues were not alien to me and, if necessary, I could often be seen at rallies and protests, supporting good initiatives that I considered useful for the development of our country. Then the Maidan changed both the schedule and the course of my life. It was a magnificent time. We were making the country’s history, were in the thick of things, and we were crystallizing as a nation. And then there was war! 2014. Like many of my friends and associates, I could not stay away from what was going on in the Crimea and eastern Ukraine. I enlisted in a volunteer battalion and my military life began.

Three years and seven months! And when it was time to return to civilian life, I realized that I didn’t feel comfortable there. My comfort zone was too small to share with others. Being outside my surroundings was too difficult. Most people’s indifference to the situation in the country was just killing me. And I didn’t want to be here, I wanted to go back to the war, because everything is real there, while here ... But I had to learn how to live, so I started working on my new life. It’s a long and difficult path. That’s where the need to create something beautiful and enjoyable appeared. I love plants and everything related to nature gives me strength to live on. I enjoyed my new hobby, I felt that creating alone, to the music, is exactly what I needed to feel alive.



That's how my little hobby business started. It is a hobby that comes first, because money is good, but not the main thing. I was saving myself! I've been doing it for two years now. I learn, improve, and develop. It is very valuable that my work strikes a chord with people. It may never be a big business because I don't have a penchant for business. I like to create rather than sell and promote a product.

But I have to, because I must live on something. However, my mental balance outweighs the desire to become rich. At least now. Veterans' businesses in Ukraine are developing. Many soldiers start a business after returning from the war. And I would rather buy something from my brother or sister in arms than a stranger. And that's exactly how it works. We stick together and support each other. And although the struggle for my own self is still going on, and it is not easy to win my own war, I look up to examples of success,

not degradation. An active life, not in solitude, is my way. Yoga classes, cycling, going to the theater, concerts, and just a nature walk is my way. Mountains, travels, and books are my way. Being worthy of my country is my way. Winning is my way! Out of love for my homeland! The name of my business VERBA is about a Ukrainian symbol, a tree that can regenerate, even if it is uprooted ...

MYKOLA STETSKIV
FainaBerry strawberry farm



Life before the war was relatively trouble free. I had an ordinary job without any global ideas; in due time, I entered Lviv State University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine to receive higher education in order to slightly change the world and society, my worldview and vision; there was nothing extraordinary in my life. Life was much calmer and much easier than it is now. Roughly, my life can be divided into pre-wedding, post-wedding, and post-war. I grew up in an ordinary, simple family; I have three older sisters and a younger brother. After school, I went to a trade school and then to university. I enjoyed and played sports. I have a strong sense of justice and a desire to do good, to protect, to change something, to be a hero.

I served in a volunteer battalion, where I enlisted in May 2014. Ten years earlier, from 2004 to 2005, I had served in the 80th Separate Airmobile Regiment. My native unit did not take me, because at that time I was already a father of many children: four sons were growing up. Nevertheless, I got to the front as a member of the Lviv battalion. There were trainings at first, and in July 2014, we went to the east of Ukraine. Everything we had learned turned out to be just the opposite in reality. Exercising did not go amiss, because we had to walk and run a lot. My battalion was deployed in Luhansk Oblast

— Severodonetsk, Stanytsia Luhanska, Lysychansk, and the surrounding towns and villages. There were many memorable moments and losses that changed me. During my service, I made good friends and I still maintain good relations and keep in touch with them. After I returned from eastern Ukraine, I promised my wife that I would not go back to war. She was terribly upset all the time because she could hear all the sounds of war over the phone, and her health took a turn for the worse. Watching her lose weight, I regretted being there. The Minsk Agreements were signed at that time, so I saw no reason for me to go back there. Returning home was depressing, I felt and saw this contrast between Luhansk Oblast and touristy Lviv. There were a lot



of different, partly destructive opinions, but the circumstances at the time were such that I had to feed my family. I didn't do any business before the war; I didn't have any specific example; I didn't have anyone to ask or compare notes with. I was told that I could get a one-time payment at the employment center to start my own business. The idea inspired me. I wanted to become an entrepreneur. There was one condition: to come up with an idea. I talked it over with my wife and we decided to grow strawberries. I started

searching on the Internet, but the information I found was not always true. However, we decided to try anyway. We drew up a business plan, defended it, and received 28,000 hryvnias. We spent the money right away on 2,000 strawberry seedlings, of which only 800 survived. So the story began with 800 seedlings and 10 decares (approximately 2.5 acres) of land allocated to war veterans on a priority basis. It was easy to start in 2016, but harder to get the result. We had to work a lot to reap the harvest. It seemed

like everyone was making money but us. We live in Lviv, so before we bought a car, we had to take two buses to get to the village of Rakivtsi, where our land plot is. We had to walk 1.5–2.5 kilometers to reach the bus stop each time; we carried water for irrigation from the river; the cart I brought with me broke because of the bad road; even a wheelbarrow couldn't pass there. We made five or six trips of 800 meters to the river a day. We needed funding for further development, so we took out a loan. There were many moments,



I don't remember them all. I am inspired and motivated by people, customers who believe in FainaBerry, make pre-orders and buy strawberries from us, by those who say they believe in us and our success. This is my main motivator. They do not let me give up. It's also my family and my wife who supported me. People follow me, saying that I motivate and inspire them. Many of those, who quit their jobs and started their own business, who attended my seminars or just heard of me. Stories where people give me feedback like "because of you we started doing this" or "thanks to you we started doing that" are really motivating. I expect to receive some compensation from the state. These funds will allow me to plant other crops, like

raspberries and blackberries, to build a facility with a café and refrigerator. In fact, I have a lot of ideas for expansion, which require additional funding. My own business has considerably influenced me, I am always busy; my thoughts and views are very different from those I had before. There used to be aggressive thoughts, but now I think about completely different things; aggression is gone. At the moment, I live for my business. I would like to travel more. I like traveling, the road. I like a lot of things, but my business takes all my time so far. This year, we opened a new location in the village of Honchary. We plan to create a real FainaBerry Park. We will grow strawberries, raspberries, blueberries, and lavender

there. And in June, an annual strawberry festival will take place there every year. People like to pre-order our products for a year, and then come with their families and friends to harvest. They enjoy working in the field, having a picnic, and being together. In my opinion, it will be difficult for veterans' businesses to develop without a clear strategy from the state. It is necessary to outline the steps, a sequence of how a veteran's business should develop. We share experiences, teach each other, yet this is not enough. I also talked with a person to whom we owe the opportunity to find veterans and veteran services in one place, as well as jobs and the opportunity to promote their own businesses.



LARYSA MYKYTION

Veteran Service

The idea was for a single platform where all veterans' businesses, services, and jobs for veterans would be collected when they started returning from the war. There were more and more offers from veterans on Facebook, but they often vanished. Therefore, I wanted to create a platform my friends and I could use. I shared the idea with my volunteer friends and together we implemented it. Initially, there were 10 veteran businesses on the website. Now, I think there are about 500 veteran businesses or even more. We have 250 on our website. Trends change over time. There are still cafes in cities, but outside cities veterans are organized into different cooperatives: agricultural, beekeeping, berry growing, farming, and it's good. Every veteran who runs his business and advertises that he is a veteran already motivates

others to work and collaborate. Together, veterans work fruitfully and efficiently, try to join and get better acquainted, especially those from the regions. In fact, it's very cool, because there isn't enough business collaboration, and this way veterans from the regions can see each other on our platform. We have an agreement with them that they will support and help each other, a kind of business mentorship. In my opinion, cooperatives outside cities are very promising and have a great future. Many veterans have received land plots and are thinking about how to cultivate them instead of renting them out, so a lot of them unite. In my opinion, agribusiness, berry growing, farming, and crop production show considerable promise for cooperatives. I did not notice any "gender" division in business. The only business in which female veterans do prevail is the beauty

and creativity industries. I think that each of these businesses is, to some extent, both rehabilitation and resocialization, because every veteran who starts his own business does not do what he does not like to do. They do what they set their heart on, what they love, what they are comfortable with and what appeals to them. At first, almost everyone is busy 20 hours a day; it is impossible to do what you don't like for so long. Therefore, all this supports the veteran on the path back to a peaceful life. Support from the veteran-volunteer community continues, and we work in this direction, promoting a positive image of veterans. Our website shows and proves it: "We stick together and support each other." It's a real pleasure to order services from veterans. Responsibility and attention are much higher here than in ordinary businesses.

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Tetyana Makunina is Ukrainian-American. She is President of the international development company Spilna Mova, and Editor-in-Chief of The Ultimate Ukrainian Magazine. She is an active member of the Ukrainian diaspora in the United States and develops social and business initiatives between the two countries.



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