

**The God of
Ukrainian Artillery**
Colonel Roman Kachur

Hear Ukrainians! See Ukrainians!
*Defeating Russian propaganda
worldwide*

What makes us humans at war
Saving pets under missiles attacks

Love and Hope
Ukrainian weddings in war time

And more in our 2022 Issue

ULTIMATE UKRAINIAN

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RUSSIA INVADED UKRAINE.

Today, the largest war in Europe since World War II has been unfolding. Once again, the world has to stand against evil, against terror, against genocide. Ukrainians are the ones on the battlefield today, but in a modern globalized world, everyone already is or will be affected by this war. And if the terrorist Russian state would not be stopped now, the whole human history may take a darker path for the decades to come.

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has continued to harbor significant resentment against Independent Ukraine. Vladimir Putin, along with many Russians, shares a deeply flawed narrative about Ukrainians and Russians being “one nation”, and Ukraine being an essential part of “Russia”. Part of the empire they are trying to restore.

However, Ukraine has chosen a different path over the years – an independent path of democratic development, reform, and European integration. **Ukraine decided to look into the future rather than be dragged back into the past.**

Unwilling to comprehend or respect Ukrainian’s choice, Russia started its military aggression in 2014, occupied Crimea, and attacked the Donetsk and Luhansk regions. On February 24, 2022, the full-scale invasion began. Russian troops crossed Ukrainian borders to occupy more land, to suppress Ukrainian identity, to destroy independence and democracy itself.

Ukraine is giving them a fight. But the war is still going on, and its consequences are spreading far beyond the frontline.

For once, the global security system may be on the verge of change, as many diplomatic instruments have not proven effective in preventing full-scale war. Russia is breaking international agreements as well as laws of war. And blocks every decision on the matter in the UN Security Council.

“President Putin has attacked an entire innocent country and people, with military force, to achieve his political goals. What he is really doing is challenging the world order we believe in. Where all countries, large and small, can choose their own

path. He does not accept the sovereignty of other countries,” said NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg.

Countries in Europe, especially those close to the Russian border and history, have begun to worry about their security. The defense budgets are going up. And this trend will likely be shared around the globe: even in countries in other parts of the world, resources will be put to building defense systems rather than developing better education systems or tackling climate change. And the war brings even more threats to the environment: environmental damage in Ukraine alone, caused by the Russian invasion, is estimated at over \$36 billion. Yet another security issue arose from the 20th century – nuclear threat. Vladimir Putin is telling the world he is ready to use “use all means”, including nuclear weapons, any time things go in contrary to Russian wishes. And that is only a part of Russia’s nuclear terror. Chornobyl NPP was occupied for over a month. And now, Russia is constantly endangering other Ukrainian nuclear power plants,



link to this article:



WHY DOES THIS MATTER TO THE WORLD?

Zaporizhzhia NPP in particular, by shelling and mining the site. Even if Ukraine is the main target here, nuclear pollution does not care about borders.

While nuclear disaster still remains a threat, food shortage in many countries has already become a reality. The war disrupted supply chains, Ukrainian ports remained blocked for months, and many Ukrainian fields are still occupied or impossible to harvest. Prior to the Russian full-scale invasion, Ukraine provided food for 400 million people worldwide. And now hundreds of thousands of them in Africa and Asia will face food shortages or even famine conditions because Russia is using food as a weapon creating a global threat.

“Smaller supplies and higher prices for food mean that the world’s poor could be forced to do without. This must not be allowed to happen,” said the WTO Director-General Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala.

The energy crisis is another part of the unfolding events. For years, Russia was successfully using natural resources to gain

influence. And now those supplies are weaponized and turned into leverage. Energy prices are going up and everything else follows, triggering inflation and economic crisis around the world.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres stated that Russia’s war in Ukraine “could throw more than 1/5 of humanity into poverty, destitution & hunger on a scale not seen in decades.”

Food shortage. Energy crisis. Lack of security and nuclear threat. All because Russia started a war to pursue its imperialistic fantasy.

And to end this war, Ukraine has to fight back. For Ukrainian independence, Ukrainian people, Ukrainian language, and culture, that Russia is trying to wipe from existence. For its own future and the future of the world, as current events will become a blueprint for other countries around the globe.

The outcome of this war will determine what path human history is taking from now on. Are we back to the world, where it is possible to invade an independent country – and still have a seat at the table?

Where military power is the only argument that matters? Where genocide can be committed without any substantial consequences?

“Were Russia to win this war, that would be a tremendous victory for all forces that oppose democracy, for all people who are planning to use violence of one kind or another to overthrow democracies,” stated historian Timothy Snyder.

Or are we building a world, where state borders and international laws are respected? Where we favor international partnership and cooperation over armed conflicts? Where countries and nations have a right to determine their own future?

That is what Ukraine is fighting for. Ukrainian victory will be a victory of freedom, democracy, and international partnership over tyranny and terror. And the powerful message to all the people and countries: evil cannot thrive in this world; it will not escape its end or its punishment.

And thus, Ukrainian victory is the only path to a better future for all.

HEAR UKRAINIANS, SEE UKRAINIANS!



DON'T CLOSE YOUR EYES!

@Larysa KUZMENKO

Ukraine has been under significant Russian pressure and influence for over 300 years. Ukrainians have been manipulated for too long. During the tsarist times, Soviet power, and Putin's autocratic rule, Russia has repeatedly claimed, "We do not want war, we seek peace, and we protect world peace." All the lies, manipulations and fakes are built on this "general myth" thanks to which the Russian regime throws its soldiers to perish in Ukraine, and encourages those soldiers' families to think the occupiers as heroes.

How did it happen? We ask Yuriy Khrystensen, an analyst at the Odesa Political Platform Media Center, a public organization in the south of Ukraine. The analyst refutes the statement about peace-loving Russians with a consistent, thorough, and comprehensive analysis of one part of history: the wars Russia has been waging since the end of World War II.

Odesa Political Platform is an NGO in the south of Ukraine, an organizer of a wide-ranging debate on social and political life in the country.



Yuriy Khrystensen

Yuriy Khrystensen (YH): According to the official version, the Russian army is not at war with anyone, but constantly defends itself "on distant approaches." This duality — "we are not fighting, but defending" — is reflected in Russians' minds. For example, in a questionnaire at a Russian military conscription

number includes only those which are officially recognized by the Kremlin. In fact, there have been twice as many conflicts.

UU: Why does Russia, with its huge territory and rich mineral deposits, have such an aggressive expansive policy?

to Russian aggression in the 30 years after the collapse of the USSR in order to regain control over the territories. As developed democracies plan the development of environmental technologies 10 years in advance, so the Kremlin plans wars for decades. It does this in such a way that only when



office, it was written "fought as a peacemaker in Georgia." That's the Russians' attitude to war.

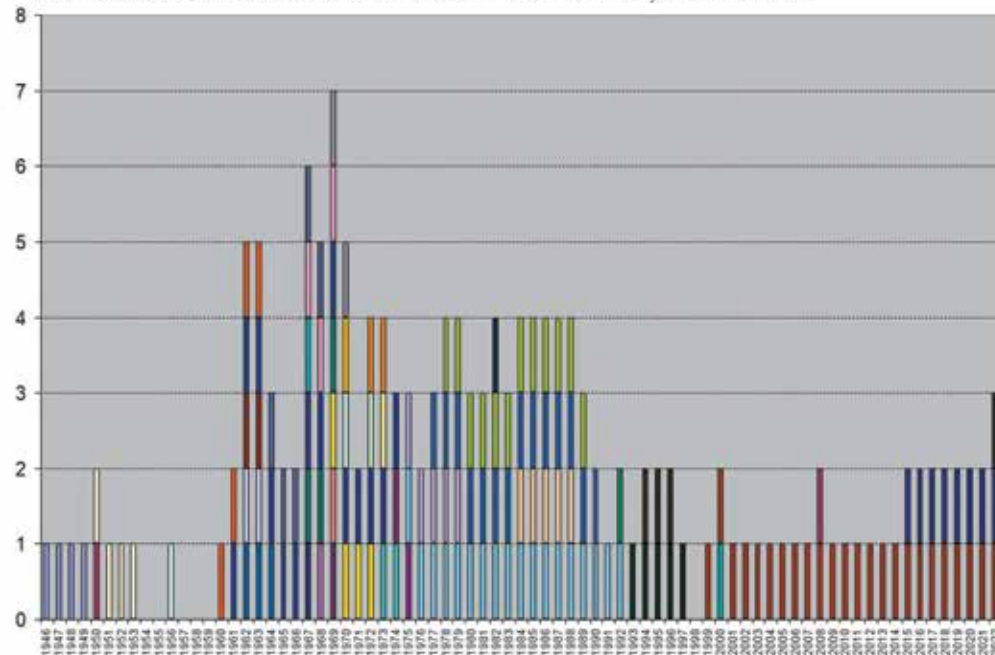
Ultimate Ukrainian (UU): On what basis do you draw these conclusions?

YH: If you look at the Russian Federal Law "On Veterans," which provides certain benefits to former military personnel, Russia's current war against Ukraine is the 40th military conflict since 1945. And that

YH: Russian conflicts do not start for the sake of victory. The Kremlin starts a conflict just for the sake of a conflict, which will allow it to control the leadership of this or that country and establish its own order there. In the former Soviet Union, after its collapse, only seven countries chose to rule democratically: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Armenia, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine. These countries, and in this sequence, were subjected

people find themselves in war do they begin to understand what is happening. The current conventional war in Ukraine is only one of the stages of a great hybrid war. All these stages, like bricks, make up the building of aggression dozens of times over, and humanity wins the war in Afghanistan, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Syria, Ukraine ... The list of countries is very long all over the world: Asia, Africa, Europe, Latin America.

Diagram: the number of officially recognized wars in which RSFSR/RF citizens participated, 1946-2022. After WWII, the Kremlin fought an average of 2.2 wars a year. The minimum was during the Khrushchev thaw after Stalin's death, when the number of wars decreased to zero. At the very end of the 1960s.



40. Performing tasks in Ukraine, 2022
39. Performing tasks in Syria, 2015-2022
38. Performing tasks in South Ossetia and Abkhazia, 2008
37. Performing tasks in CTO, 1999-2022
36. Performing tasks in Chechnya, 1994-1996
35. Performing tasks in Tajikistan, 1993-1997
34. Performing tasks in Tajikistan, 1992
33. Fighting in Syria and Lebanon, 1982
32. Fighting in Laos, 1969-1970
31. Fighting in Laos, 1964-1968
30. Fighting in Laos, 1960-1963
29. Fighting in Bangladesh, 1972-1973
28. Fighting in Cambodia, 1970
27. Fighting in Afghanistan, 1978-1989
26. Fighting in Ethiopia, 2000
25. Fighting in Ethiopia, 1977-1990
24. Fighting in Mozambique, 1984-1988
23. Fighting in Mozambique, 1975-1979
22. Fighting in Mozambique, 1967-1969
21. Fighting in Angola, 1975-1992
20. Fighting in Syria, 1973
19. Fighting in Syria, 1972
18. Fighting in Syria, 1970
17. Fighting in Syria, 1967
16. Fighting in Vietnam, 1961-1974
15. Fighting in Yemen, 1967-1969
14. Fighting in Yemen, 1962-1963
13. Fighting in Egypt, 1974-1975
12. Fighting in Egypt, 1973-1974
11. Fighting in Egypt, 1969-1972
10. Fighting in Egypt, 1968
9. Fighting in Egypt, 1967
8. Fighting in Egypt, 1962-1963
7. Fighting in Algeria, 1962-1964
6. Fighting near Lake Zhalanashkol, 1969
5. Fighting near Damansky Island, 1969
4. Fighting in Hungary, 1956
3. Fighting in Korea, 1950-1953
2. Fighting in China, 1950
1. Fighting in China, 1946-1949

UU: Based on your understanding of the time period, hybrid warfare methods have not changed since the Soviet Union?

YH: Yes, the methods developed by the KGB back in the days of the USSR and skillfully used in hybrid warfare are practiced to this day. These practices consist of permanent constructs, like bricks. These bricks can only change the order of getting into the construct of war. But the stages, means, and tools are always the same. Everywhere. The Kremlin's greatest favor to Ukraine in its quest to build its own democratic country, as bitter as it may sound, is the initiation and execution of a full-scale invasion.

KGB, the State Security Committee of the USSR (1954-1991), was one of the repressive bodies of the communist regime.

The Ukrainians, at the cost, if not of knowledge, then personal experience, have realized who the enemy is. Ukraine, the largest country in Europe, is incomparably small in relation to the Russian Federation and other countries of the former USSR where there are still a lot of supporters of authoritarianism.

Oleh Zhdanov, a Ukrainian serviceman, reserve colonel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, military expert, and video blogger, works daily for this audience. Colonel Zhdanov is well versed in the Russian ways of warfare, which have not changed at all since Soviet times. He analyzes the events at the front on his YouTube channel every day. He makes analytical forecasts and answers numerous viewers' questions.



Oleh Zhdanov



Oleh Zhdanov's YouTube channel



Kharkiv has been shelled daily since February 24, 2022. Remnants of missiles from the streets of Kharkiv

Photo from open sources

Viewer question on Oleh Zhdanov's YouTube channel (VQ): Tell me why some of the missiles fired from Belgorod (a city in the Russian Federation, from which Kharkiv and Kharkiv Oblast are shelled daily – Ed.) immediately fall near the launchers?

Oleh Zhdanov (OZh): The Russians are running out of missiles. The remaining missiles are 30- and 40-year-old Soviet missiles. Most likely, they violated storage norms when storing those missiles. The standards for missile storage are very strict. The main enemy of missiles is mice. If a mouse gets into a missile, it starts eating the braided wires. If a mouse gets into a missile, it will chew everything there. The missile will become technically defective. It should have been tested. But the Russian front demands missiles as soon as possible.

After the first incident, the entire batch should have been sent to the repair base. But the Russian authorities don't care where the missiles go, it is only important that one out of ten missiles went to Kharkiv. And the fact that nine missiles will fall on the heads of the Russians is "incidental."

VQ: The Ukrainian Armed Forces is hitting Russian depots in the occupied territories, and the missiles never run out. If you take all the depots as 100 percent, and our fighters demolished one, how much is it percentage-wise?

OZh: The fact is that even in the Russian Federation no one can say for sure how many of

those depots they have and how much ammunition is stored in them. During the years of computerization in the USSR (end of the 1990s), they began to establish accounting. But don't be surprised, the Soviet Union never had an accounting system for military supplies. Imagine endless depots with millions of tons of ammunition. Millions of tons! They used to keep records of that whole huge total stockpile in a notebook. They recorded all that pile of death in a little paper notebook. The warrant officer went with a pen and wrote down what he saw. It could be that some of the stacks with missiles under pressure from above went under the grass, something was not counted, and they wrote a lower figure. So, today no one can say exactly how much ammunition the Russian Federation has. It is millions of tons. No one knows more precisely.



Percentage data on the occupation of certain Ukrainian territories as of December 2022

VQ: Was it the AFU leadership's strategy to let the Russian troops in so far??

OZh: It was out of desperation; it was the only way to stretch out the Russian troops and start defeating them. If we had taken our units to the border, there would have been no one to defend Kyiv and other cities. On the Donbas line of defense, where we were ready for war, the line of defense held out. The line of defense in the Donbas changed slightly only when Russian troops broke through from the Crimea. We had been building a line of defense for eight years there. And here, if we had stretched the troops along the border, I'm not sure

that we would have withstood that onslaught and repelled the monstrosity that was poking at Kyiv from all directions. So, I think it was the right decision of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine to stretch the enemy and, despite losing territory, preserve the army's combat efficiency in order to defeat the enemy later on. We acted very intelligently when we started smashing those convoys piece by piece. At that time, in March, Russian troops were losing up to 1,000 men a day.

VQ: What are Russian losses as of today? How many new people join the Russian army daily?

OZh: According to the data of the General Staff, 400-450 Russian soldiers are killed per day. We cannot estimate the replenishment. Part of the reserve is Russian regular army. Part is a private military company, mercenaries, including a large number of "amnestied" criminals contrary to current Russian legislation. Part of the reserve is forcibly mobilized in the occupied areas of Luhansk, Donetsk, and Mariupol. As soon as a person receives a Russian passport, they immediately receive a notification about mobilization. If they refuse to go to the military enlistment office, they immediately fall under criminal liability under the laws of the Russian Federation. This is Russia's trick.



Photo: M. Avdeeva's archive

And now we turn to Maria Avdeeva, an information security expert. Before the war, Maria worked as director of research for the European Expert Association and spent eight years exposing Russian disinformation. She says that becoming a military correspondent was a forced step.

UU: Maria, even though the city has been constantly shelled by the Russians, you have remained in Kharkiv and regularly tell foreign media about life in the eastern Ukrainian city.

Maria Avdeeva (MA): It actually became a combination of the work I was doing before and what I am trying to convey to the world now – information about the war crimes committed and what is happening in the eastern regions and in Ukraine in general.



Maria Avdeeva



Avdeeva's Telegram channel

UU: How can we counter fakes and manipulative Russian propaganda?

MA: For Russian propagandists, Ukrainian society is not the main object of propaganda. It would not be able to work here. No one here will believe it. Russian propaganda is aimed at its own Russian audience, because Putin needs cannon fodder. He needs to recruit more and more soldiers and throw them into this war. That's why it is necessary to generate hatred towards Ukrainians. It doesn't work very well, but, in fact, that's what propaganda is for, to explain to the population of Russia why they need this war. It is effective there, because this is not the first year and not the first month that this propaganda machine has been operating. The Russians have been brainwashed enough for the level of war support and

support for Putin to increase. Of course, this is horrifying, but we understand that this hatred for everything Ukrainian is instilled, it is ingrained. As for the other groups targeted by Russian propaganda and disinformation, it is propaganda aimed at countries outside of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

The threatening Russian message is the message about good Russians. The “good Russian” thesis itself dates back to World War II. Back then, American soldiers ironically referred to residents of Germany and to Germans outside the borders of the Nazi country as “good Germans” who were supposedly unaware of what the Nazi government had been doing. And now we are talking about the Russians who are allegedly against the war, but they cannot do anything because there is an authoritarian regime. That’s why sanctions can’t be imposed on everyone either, because it’s just Putin’s war, but the Russians themselves allegedly didn’t want it.

This is a very dangerous thing, because the Kremlin propagandists take advantage of the freedom of speech and of the fact that Russian opposition is represented on Western media platforms. Propagandists drag this thesis there, they fuel it. These are not one-off speeches. This is a very noticeable trend at the moment: there should be a dialogue with “good Russians”, etc. I keep saying that it’s threatening.

Hear Ukrainians, see Ukrainians! Don’t close your eyes! You will hear about Russians who are

insulted, who are not tolerated and who are humiliated because of their nationality, about Russophobia. Russia will try, now they are doing it step by step, to get out with the message: feel sorry for us, we are deprived, we are suffering from Putin. In fact, we must do everything not to allow such messages to take root in the European and world space.

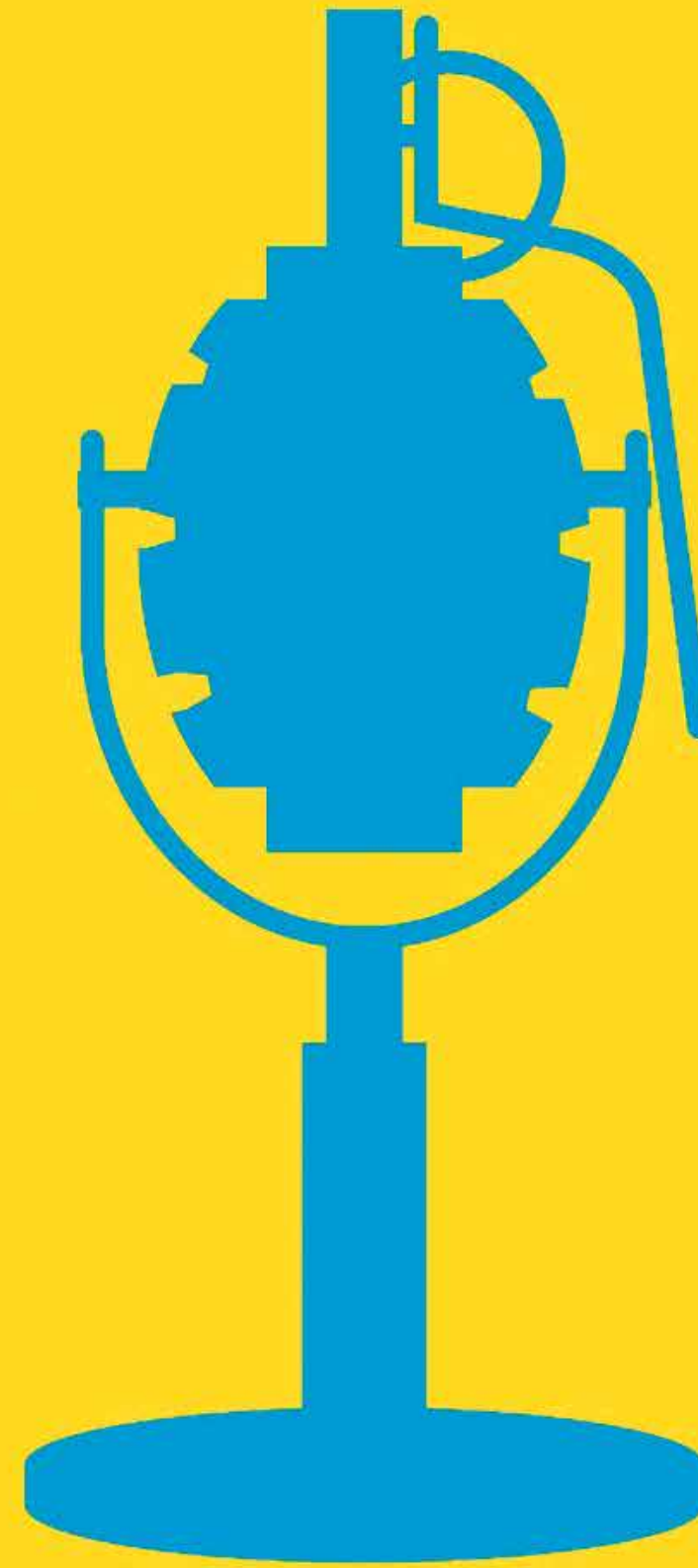
Of course, Russian propagandists talk about it. It’s an old scheme. The usual rhetoric that everyone around is an enemy, that everyone wants Russia’s death. What’s next? Then they will say that in order to avoid this, it is necessary to start a war. This is a well-known lie, and the Russians continue to promote it intensively. When the Russian servicemen wrote “For Children” on the missile that hit the railway station in Kramatorsk and ruined the lives of more than 150 people and killed children, what they really meant was: for the life of our population, we will kill Ukrainian children. It sounds wild to us, but Russians believe in it, it’s ingrained in them.

UU: What counter-propaganda tactics are effective?

MA: It is necessary to show human stories, of which there are many. I walk around every day, so I can talk to every person and record their stories. What the people of Ukraine are going through now ... I don’t know what it can be compared to or if there was anything like it. Everyone hopes for the collapse

of the empire and that Putin will finally be gone. But as long as this empire exists, even if the political leadership changes, I don’t think much will change for Ukraine. This imperial logic is deeply ingrained in the minds of Russians. And even if it is not Putin, the Russians will still think that it is a mistake that Ukraine is not part of their space. They simply do not realize that Ukraine is a different country, a space that has nothing in common with Russia. There is simply nothing in common. The connection was severed a long time ago, and it will never be established.

As for my city, I can say that quite obviously Kharkiv will play the role of a fortress. It will be a front-line city. It will constantly need to be fortified. The war will not end anytime soon, and even if there is a partial and temporary ceasefire, an attack could start at any moment. Ukrainians’ awareness of this leads to restructuring our entire lifestyle, restructuring our social consciousness. And we’re on our way to that. Now, as soon as the shelling has passed, we go out into the streets, start cleaning, putting things in order, flowers are planted around the city, gorgeous flowerbeds. All this shows that we will survive, we will resist, and we will rebuild everything. It’s just going to take more time. People will help us. I see a lot of people, foreigners, and everyone promises that they will help Ukraine to rebuild. We will rebuild everything even better than it was before. We have already won. We are already winning the information war.



If your country is attacked, a man must go and defend his country

@Vladyslav HREBELNYK

Rodion Tristan is a Ukrainian service member. He was born in the east of Ukraine, in Donetsk. He graduated from Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv with a degree in law. The war started for him in 2015, then he was wounded, and now he is back in the army. Our conversation with Rodion is about this and much more.



Ultimate Ukrainian (UU): How did your war start?

Rodion Tristan (RT): It was during the 2014 Ukrainian revolution; Russia started an offensive on our territories. I was helping people on the Maidan legally and financially most of the time, and when the revolution was over, I was invited to work in the Legal Aid Center for Victims of the Maidan as deputy chair. We provided consultations to people who took part in the 2014 events. But after the war broke out, we began to provide consultations to the Ukrainian service members who were defending Ukraine. There were so many wounded then that we started going to the hospital and advising the wounded service members on how to get veteran status.

In the hospital, I saw 18-year-old boys who were returning to Kyiv without arms or legs. I could not bear that. I felt ashamed that I was older than them, that I had been involved in military games for 3 years and always had a pro-Ukrainian position, that I was originally from Donetsk and the guys were not but they went there to defend this land. And even though I'm a native of the Donbas, I stayed in Kyiv. It had been gnawing at me for a long time and at some point, around 2015, I started thinking about how I could get to the front. I went to a training center, where I became a mine technician. During the drills, my comrades saw I was good with military equipment, so snipers came to me for advice on sights. At the same time, I was interested in

radio engineering. I was sent to another training exercise where I became an assault liaison officer, and upon my arrival in the east of Ukraine, I was appointed military analyst and made analytical spreadsheets. But at that time, I didn't see hell itself.

UU: What was your first combat experience?

RT: It was in Donetsk Oblast. We came there on a very hot day. There were industrial facilities, asphalt, and everything around was very hot. While we were moving, they opened fire on us and the car was not armored. The car looked like a sieve and a kind of "ventilation" appeared. Fortunately, there were no casualties. We were thrown into position, the vehicles were unloaded very quickly, and artillery began to work on us. For a long time, we stayed at those positions and did nothing; we were hiding and we had a direct ban on close-contact combat. But one night they wanted to take us by storm. Our commander was a cheerful man, he said that he should always stay behind and not get involved in the fight because if the commander dies, everyone dies. So, we kept waiting until the enemy would come closer. Eventually, the commander shouted "Fight!" and he was the first to attack. My comrade and I ran after him and lay down in the field. At first, I didn't understand anything and didn't waste any ammunition. Imagine: night, darkness, bushes, mines lying somewhere in the field, and you're lying down.

And you could only hear bullets flying over you.

UU: What was your motivation?

RT: This may sound a little wrong, but I had a friend back at university. He and I had a conflict and he said the right phrase that I will remember for the rest of my life, "To be a man is to be one all the time. Not when it's convenient for you, but all the time", and if you identify yourself as a man, you have to live up to that standard. If your country is attacked, a man has to go and defend his country. This is my land, I was born in Donetsk, I still have an apartment there, although something tells me that the building has already been destroyed and there is no apartment.

UU: What's wrong with your eye?

RT: It happened in 2015. We were at positions 2-3 kilometers away from Donetsk. We had the task to hold back the Russian offensive. And it turned out that our position was unreliable. The enemy could advance in our direction through a building that we could not physically shoot through. Then everything became clear: we would stay at those positions, they would just outflank us, and that would be the end of the war for us. The only option was to get out of our positions and start fighting. I took out the back plate from the armored vest, fastened it to my arm, and made myself a kind of "armor shield."

The idea was simple: if a bullet hit it, it would definitely break my arm, but I would stay alive. The Russians had quickly identified our position and an intense fight began. I found three targets and started shooting. Then something hit me in the head and I turned 90 degrees, because I thought the enemy had already outflanked us. And that saved me. Then a Russian sniper with a brand new Vykhop rifle, which is in service with the **FSB**, started working on me.

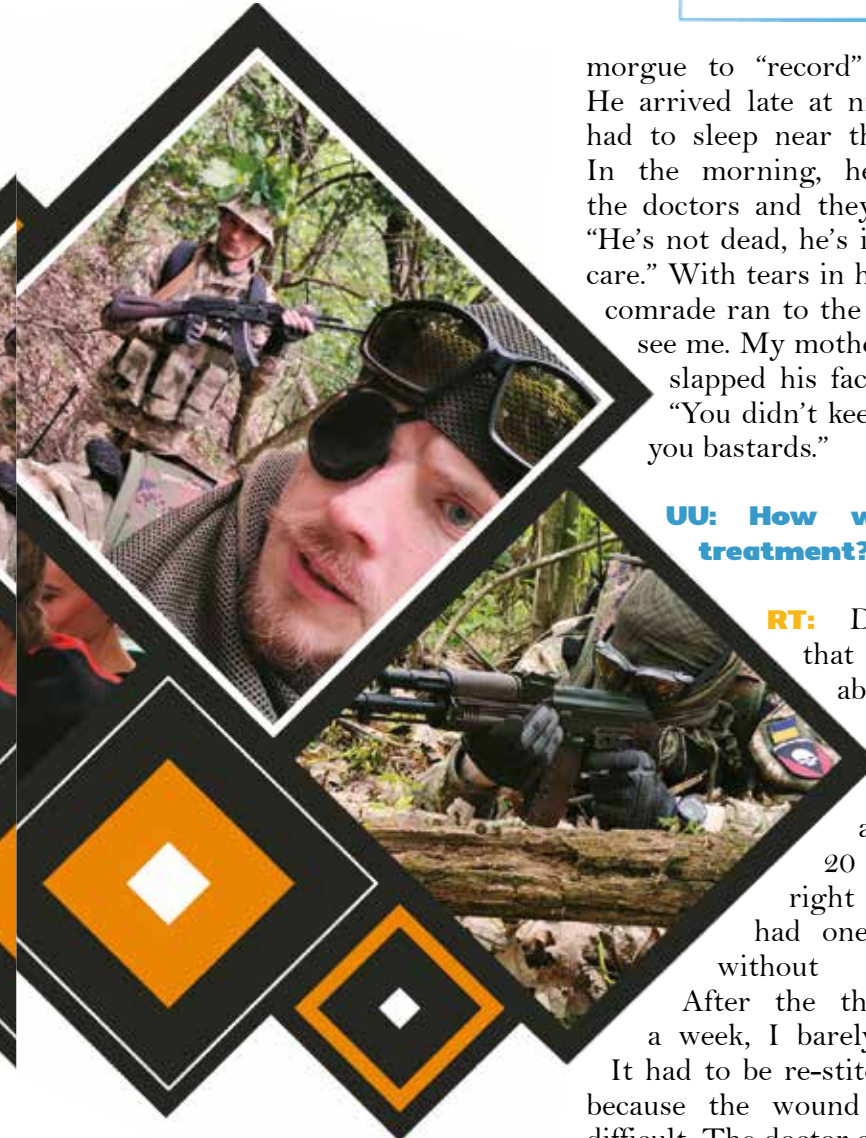
Q **Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (FSB)** According to Security Service of Ukraine data, the FSB is directly engaged in Russia's military aggression, terrorism, and armed conflict against Ukraine.

It was an explosive bullet and because I turned around, the bullet did not go straight into my head, but first hit my rifle and detonated right in front of my face. It felt as if I had been hit on the head with a sledgehammer. I fell down. My first thought was: that's it, it's death, I'm dead ... The second one was: no, I am not dead yet, I can still hear sounds and my head is buzzing. I felt someone grab my legs and begin to pull me out of my position. I heard someone shouting, "Why are you dragging him like a sack of potatoes?" Then that man ran up and helped them to carry me. They took me to the basement. I could hear everything; I was conscious but I couldn't move. All I heard was, "He's dead." And if such conversations were taking

place, it was definitely not in my favor, because they just wouldn't waste time on me. So I gathered

my strength and I yelled, "WHO'S DEAD?" And again I heard, "Morok, where does it hurt?" And someone replied, "He's missing half of his face, his ass must be hurting!" Then they grabbed me, carried me to a pick-up truck, and took me out of the position. My head was resting on our medic's legs. She started to calm me down and said, "It's okay, people live with one eye." I didn't understand what had happened and said, "What do you mean with one eye? I've got two, I'm fine with it." Frida, that's our medic's call sign, started crying. I pulled myself together, tried not to moan, and thought: they don't know who I am. So, I began to repeat my passport data, blood type, place of birth, where my mother lived and somewhere on the second dozen repetitions the driver said to me, "Morok, we've got it, shut up already, please." And I just kept repeating and

repeating. There were hospitals, doctors, painkillers that didn't work ... I began to ask where my phone was, although I had lost it long before those events, but I was convinced that one of the doctors had taken it away. They tried to calm me down but I continued to scream, I kept looking at my hand and thinking my hand was my phone. I put my hand to my ear and started shouting, "Everyone be quiet, I'm talking to my mother," and I said, "Hello, Mom, I've been killed a little bit," and at that point I fall asleep. About 7-8 hours of operations. During that time, there were intensive care specialists,



morgue to "record" the body. He arrived late at night, so he had to sleep near the morgue. In the morning, he came to the doctors and they told him, "He's not dead, he's in intensive care." With tears in his eyes, the comrade ran to the hospital to see me. My mother met him, slapped his face and said, "You didn't keep him safe, you bastards."

UU: How was your treatment?

RT: During all that time, I had about 50 operations on my left eye and about 20 on my right eye. And I had one operation without anesthesia.

After the third within a week, I barely survived. It had to be re-stitched again, because the wound was very difficult. The doctor called me in and asked, "What do we do? We can wait, but it could get worse, or we can do it without anesthesia." I chose the second option. We went into the operating room, he did it very quickly and I'll remember it all my life. Today, the eyesight level of my left eye is about 50%, the right one is gone. But I'm grateful to our doctors. There is no way to make any improvements in the current state of medical development.

UU: How did you meet the first missiles in Kyiv on February 24?

surgeons, and ophthalmologists standing over me at the same time. Usually, all the operations are done separately, but considering my injury, the doctors did everything to save my eyes and my life. Eventually, they did an operation on my eyes, stabilized me, and took me out to rest. At that point I began dying. They resuscitated me, I'd been in a coma for 10 days, but then I woke up. My mother was already there. There was a rumor amongst my comrades that I was dead. So a friend of mine was sent to the

RT: I was in the hospital for rehabilitation. But I didn't manage to do it. On the third day of my rehabilitation, it started. At 4 am, I was alone in the ward, I woke up and didn't understand why I had woken up so early. I heard sounds, very familiar and unpleasant. They were getting closer and closer. I realized that a war had broken out, there were rockets flying over Kyiv. I began to pack my backpack, threw it into the corridor, then I packed another bag and threw it away. I called my guys I've been friends with since the **ATO**.

Q **The anti-terrorist operation (ATO)** in the east of Ukraine is a set of military and special organizational and legal measures by the Ukrainian security forces to counter the activities of illegal Russian and pro-Russian armed formations in the war in the east of Ukraine

They told me they were coming. I went out, asked an old man for a cigarette. He gladly shared it with me and asked, "So what, the war has started?" So we stood with that old man and listened to the sounds of explosions. Then the guys arrived, picked me up, we broke through the traffic jams ... At seven in the morning, I was already in Kyiv Oblast, near the hydroelectric plant on the dam, and I saw a landing of Russian troops. Later, they brought us ammunition and we started to build defenses. The defense lasted 2 months and we started a counter-offensive in Kyiv Oblast. And the Russians were driven away, I hope, for forever.

UU: You have a glass eye, is it OK during the war?

RT: Yes, just when I was being discharged, I had to go to my military unit to confirm that I had handed over all my possessions, including weapons. At night, there were four missile attacks on the city where I lived. And in the morning, the shelling started again. My friend arrived and we quickly packed all my belongings and left the city. When I was already approaching the city from which I was supposed to go to Kyiv, I reflexively corrected my eye, but realized it was gone ...

I told my friend that I had lost my eye somewhere. At first, he didn't understand and thought that I was joking, but then I explained that I had lost my glass eye. I was already in Kyiv, I was upset. My friend texted me and sent a photo with the inscription, "I found it." He dug around and found it somewhere in the bushes. He sent me the eye by mail.

UU: What does it mean to you to be Ukrainian?

RT: It's a cultural identity. It's when you put the interests of your people above your own. I am not talking about complete altruism, but there must be a balance. If you understand that your private interests are harmful to the people, you are doing something wrong. To be a Ukrainian is to work in the interests of your country. For example, I was invited to work in Canada, even offered citizenship, but I am not going to leave. They

say that I have already fought my war, but I don't think so. I'm still going to fight. I'm going to go back to the army. If I'm lucky, they'll take me on as a signaler. I'll just reregister for the military service, I'm a lawyer, I'll find a way to get into the war. And after the victory, I want to get involved making reforms to veterans' laws, because I do not think that what the ministry for veterans' affairs is doing is sufficient. The second thing I want is to reform the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Change the doctrine. I studied this issue when I was a student, analyzed private military companies from the legal viewpoint, using Blackwater as an example. There is a global experience that we need to apply, because we are fighting on the basis of hybrid doctrine. Generally, in 2015 we had an outdated doctrine, which did not correspond to modern realities, and did not meet the requirements of modern wars. It is a question of armaments, the structure of the AFU, there are no units involved in video surveillance, we do it on our own initiative. It must be changed and adapted to the modern requirements. I am convinced that I can be useful in this.



Ultimate Ukrainian is following Andriy Zelinskyy, Ukrainian chaplain

The Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of the Ukrainian Greek-Catholic Church (UGCC) prepared a brief compilation of the principles of Christian teaching regarding the moral aspects of military service in wartime, "Catechism of the Christian Warrior."

One of the authors of the collection is deputy head of the Department of Military Chaplaincy of the Patriarchal Curia of the UGCC and military chaplain Andriy Zelinskyy: "In the world, chaplains are engaged in forming a soldier's personality, his moral hardening, his spirit. All of that together is called humanity. For us chaplains, it is important to help soldiers remain humans in a war. When we talk about victory, about the future, only a person who is armed with certain virtues, convictions, and love for the Motherland can do that. So the task of the catechism is to form a person who would correspond to Christian virtues. Very often, our soldiers turn to a priest with questions about how to act in a certain situation, what can and cannot be done."

Tips for the times of combat operations:

1. In terrible times, when chaos and fear all around us overshadow the calmness and peace, only the light of hope can dispel the darkness.
2. Do not allow confusion and anxiety to sow the gloom of despair in your heart. God is with us when we are with God. Therefore, do not stop believing in the ultimate victory of Good.
3. Prayer is communication with a loving God. Do not stop communicating with Him, telling Him about your fear, anger, pain, and hope.
4. No matter what challenges you have to face, always, under any circumstances, remain human.
5. When fear begins to overcome your convictions and permeate your body and soul, do not give up: think about everyone you love and those who love you. No matter what happens around you, you will always be remembered by those for whom you are the best and dearest in this world!
6. Remember: the most important and the best things in your life are yet to come.
7. Do not forget about the weak in spirit, about those who need your support. Be generous with brotherly love. Feel responsible for your comrade-in-arm.
8. Never lose your sense of humor. No matter how terrible the threat seems, your wise humor will make it disappear.
9. Stay true — preserve loyalty: to the military oath, to relatives and loved ones, to parents and children, to God, and to Ukraine.
10. No matter how dark the night is, dawn is always inevitable!

SAVING ANIMALS



and Remaining Human

@ Anna DEMCHENKO

The most famous 4-legged defender of Ukraine is certainly the dog Patron. In 2020, Mykhailo Iliiev, head of the pyrotechnics and underwater demining group at the State Emergency Service in Chernihiv Oblast, gave the dog to his son. He could have become a star of exhibitions with his pedigree, but instead, he began looking for mines and conquering Instagram. Patron's portraits are at rallies abroad and on city murals, people take photos with him. And children from all over the world depict him in their drawings. Since the beginning of the war, pyrotechnicians have found and destroyed more than 19,000 munitions in Chernihiv Oblast. Many of them were found by Patron.

Patron (born 2019) is a Ukrainian bomb-sniffing dog. He is a Jack Russell terrier and mascot of the Ukrainian State Emergency Service who gained great popularity during the Russia-Ukraine war.

SESU The State Emergency Service of Ukraine (SESU) ensures the implementation of state policy in the spheres of civil protection and emergency and rescue services.



Patron helps to look for anti-tank mines. "If he finds something, he starts digging, which means there is something there," says Mykhailo Iliiev in an interview with numerous journalists when receiving an award. "After that, he gets a reward and a sapper takes over. He learns different smells, and improves his skills every day. Because we regularly destroy explosive objects, we trained him to get accustomed to detonations.

Patron thanked everyone for the awards with a loud "woof woof" and wagged his tail more than usually. A large number of other service dogs work alongside Patron.



The first 2-3 times, I held him, but then I realized that Patron ignored them." On May 8, President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy awarded Patron with the medal For Dedicated Service, and his human Mykhailo Iliiev with the Order of Courage III degree. The world-famous sapper dog received an award from the founder of Bomb Techs Without Borders Matthew Howard and Donna Culp from the Military Officers Association of America.

And this service is very symbolic, because sapper dogs protect not only people, but also many of their 4-legged relatives — other animals.



On February 24, 2022, the whole country woke up to explosions and alarming calls. People packed up in a panic, left, fled. They ran to bomb shelters, taking dogs and cats, fish and hamsters, parrots, and even horses instead of their belongings. On the first day of the full-scale invasion, five Russian missiles hit Feldman Ecopark near Kharkiv. People and animals were killed. There were moments of despair, when the owner had to choose between the death of animals from missiles and bombs or humanely euthanizing 5,000 creatures inhabiting the 140-hectare park. But ordinary people came to rescue the eco-park. They gave their cars and sent money for fuel for trucks.

Eco-park is a wildlife rehabilitation center not far from the front



A zoo in Mykolaiv, a city that has been under constant Russian shelling for six months

The zoo in Mykolaiv, in southern Ukraine, was under constant shelling for five months. During one of the attacks, a shell fell and did not explode between the enclosures of bears and tigers. That meant that it could explode at any moment. The bomb squad eliminated the danger, and the shell was placed in the zoo museum. The capital's zoo, in Kyiv, was awaiting occupation and starvation. The Daily Mail reported that some of the animals at the Kyiv State Zoo were transported to Poland. The journey took six days instead of the usual one. The convoy with animals hid from Russian tanks and changed its route several times to avoid encountering the Russians.

Another private zoo, not far from Kyiv, was occupied by Russians, who, at gunpoint, did not allow humanitarian food shipments to pass through. Wild and domestic animals were left without water, food, and heating for a month. Giraffes, rhinos, and hippos suffered from hunger and cold. The whole country rescued the animals. Those whom people managed to take out were treated, warmed up in zoos in other cities, and taken to Poland.



Evacuation at the beginning of the invasion. Kyiv Oblast

Throughout Ukraine, thousands of domestic dogs, cats, parrots, hamsters, and fish found themselves alone. Sometimes it was just impossible to evacuate together. And people had to choose. Animals were locked in apartments and houses. Many thought, "It's days only for a few" And then thousands and thousands of people united to save animals. In Ukraine, a volunteer movement was immediately born from people who rescued dogs and cats under fire.

Anastasia Tykha and her husband Artur Lee rescued 15 dogs, including a disabled one, five cats, a chameleon, a turtle, a hamster, and a spider from war-torn Irpin. She became a Ukrainian symbol of salvation. People learned to break down doors to rescue and feed dogs and cats locked in homes. They learned how to get into apartments through windows. They passed keys to apartments from hand to hand across the country: from owners who were abroad — by trains, buses, cars — to volunteers. Why did so many people start rescuing animals?



Photo: Christopher Occhicone, The Wall Street Journal

Not only because of personal qualities. Not only because of a sense of responsibility for all those who were made pets. And not only because every life is worth saving. **By saving animals,** those who felt worse and more frightened — says the heroine of this interview, Iryna Ivakhova — **people also save their own souls.**



Iryna Ivakhova with her daughter

Meet **Iryna Ivakhova**, 59 years old; a ballerina and librarian by education; by profession, a dog trainer, canine therapist, and service dog trainer. She is married to a military man, has a daughter, and dreams of expanding her family after the war by adopting a child who lost their family due to Russia's war. Why did a former ballerina, an experienced dog trainer who is well-known far beyond the country's largest city, become a volunteer?

"Because of feeling absolutely helpless," Iryna answers, "when you go crazy with fear for your daughter, mother, nephew, parents-in-law who couldn't get out of Chernihiv," (a city in the north of the country that was mercilessly shelled).

Iryna's husband, a military sapper who was at war in 2015–2016, volunteered for the Ukrainian army again. Literally, every one of her beloved husband's steps could be his last. "And there's nothing you can do. You can't stop the war. What can you do then? Find something to do," Iryna says.

Humanitarian aid was delivered: 1,430 pounds of dog food. "We had to unload it from the car, reload it again into another car, bring it to our house, and carry it up to the 10th floor," Iryna recalls with delight. "My daughter and I had such a wonderful time carrying it home! We did it with laughter and joy. It was an incredible feeling: we had food, we could help and give someone a ray of hope. It was still a big question who was helping whom: me helping them or them helping me? Most likely, thanks to the animals, I would not dwell on my problems. When my husband called and scolded me for carrying heavy loads, my daughter said, 'Dad, but it's some dog's life we are talking about!'" According to Iryna, many dogs die during demining operations; it is very hard work. Besides, in Ukraine, there's currently a lack of trained dogs and sappers working with such dogs. There was only one service that trained such specialists before the war. And now Ukraine lacks "furry fighters." That is why her husband went to the front again as a sapper, so that he could learn the job himself and train others. Dog deaths are an issue due to a shortage of trained sappers. Many civilians volunteer their time to look for mines because

they trained dogs to search for mines before the war. But civilians do not take into account that demining is a challenging, methodical task that is more than just a search. It is a search activity of the highest class. A dog never goes alone to search for mines; it is always accompanied by a trainer. A trainer never goes alone either; they always go as a group of sappers. As a rule, the trainer does not deactivate mines. Their task and that of the dog are to find a mine and mark the place. And only then, trained people will clear the mine. When Iryna managed to establish a smooth flow of food supplies for starving dogs, she realized that she needed a new challenge. She attributes this to her ballet training.

In ballet, the most important thing is a system rather than a diet or stretching. Success is achieved gradually, methodically. So, having mastered the "diet" exercise, she moved on to the next question, "What ELSE can I do?" She remembered her own **canine therapy** experience. It was the dogs and working with them that helped her husband overcome his PTSD. Iryna turned to a social assistance center in Kyiv, the capital of Ukraine. She was introduced to a psychologist who works with children evacuated from Mariupol.

? **Canine therapy** is a method of positive psychosocial and physical rehabilitation using well-trained therapy dogs.



Iryna's husband with a dog

Mariupol is the city most impacted by the war in Ukraine; it was almost completely obliterated from the face of the earth. Iryna, her daughter, and two female dogs — a corgi and a newfoundland — went to the center for their first lesson, which took place in a bomb shelter while the sirens were howling outside. The task was simple: **help the children mentally "exhale", to alleviate their anxiety and despair.**

The work with children is carried out through games with their dogs. Newfoundland Elya is so huge that three children can lie on her all at once — which they happily do!

When asked about the children, Iryna explains that after everything they've been through, many of them are withdrawing into their own worlds. It's as if they have mentally climbed into a closet, closed the door from the inside, and no longer respond to questions or appeals. They pretend that nothing has happened. Some of them have lost not just their parents or a home, but actually all their relatives. And when such a child approaches her at the end of the class and quietly asks her if they can pet a dog, the most important thing is to hold back her tears. Iryna says that she does not want to go to every class because a normal person does not want to face grief, trouble, and hopelessness, especially a child's pain. But it is important to help those who are worse off now. Iryna repeats this over and over again.

The main thing in this work is to help the child realize what

has happened to them, to bring to the surface the horror that they have experienced. Then the psychologist can work with it and save the child's future. Otherwise, this terror could ruin their lives: it might cause addictions or a psychological disorder. I don't really understand how dogs help. Iryna explains that they help because they are not humans. It is often very difficult for traumatized people to make contact with other people as they lack faith in their own kind. But with a dog, they know for sure that it will not say anything to anyone. You can cry into a dog's fur, pour your heart out to it, and it will just lick your face and be by your side.

After this conversation, I understand that it will take a long time for us to get out of the war internally. It will take us more than one generation to do so. **I know that I will pass on my hatred for war and for those who start wars to my children.** Such wars are waged against life itself, after all. And we must do everything we can to stop the enemy and safeguard the best that humans are capable of. The consequences of the war become worse the longer it lasts. That is why I want to take this opportunity to thank the Americans who help us stop those who have forgotten what love is.



Iryna's daughter distracts kids in a bomb during an air rad



A TOKEN OF GRATITUDE

Ultimate Ukrainian is following Daria Kaleniuk (@dkaleniuk) and her story on Ukrainian female soldiers visiting the USA and meeting with American politicians and media

“Jim, this is a coin from a destroyed Russian tank in Kharkiv Oblast, I give it to you, as I do for Congress members, and I ask for a modern American Abrams tank in exchange. My dream is to become the first American tank operator in Ukraine,” Andriana

Arekhta, a sergeant in the Special Operations Forces of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, said live on CNN. This broadcast is one of dozens of media interviews conducted by a delegation of Ukrainian servicewomen in September 2022 in Washington, DC and

New York. They also had many high-level meetings in Congress, at the State Department, and at the Pentagon. The delegation’s goal was simple: to thank the Americans for the Javelins, Stingers, HIMARS, and Howitzers that have helped protect Kyiv and carry out



We critically need hundreds of armored vehicles, from Hummers to Bradleys. We need to get weapons with instructions for use and repair. Unfortunately, the Americans provided us with howitzers and other systems without the instructions, making it much more difficult to maintain the equipment. The long-term task is to obtain modern tanks and fourth generation combat aircrafts.”

The servicewomen impressed all the congress members and politicians they spoke to, especially the media. The Americans were surprised by the strength of the modern Ukrainian army, where 25% are women. Yaryna Chornohuz, Daria Zubenko, Ivanna Chobanyuk, and Andriana Arekhta returned to the frontline to defend Ukraine.

an effective counteroffensive in Kharkiv Oblast; talk about using American weapons and describe the current situation at the frontline; and ask the U.S. to provide Ukraine with weapons that would save lives and help liberate all the occupied Ukrainian territories. “Unfortunately, we do not have enough firepower right now to kick the Russians completely out of Ukrainian land. The losses at the front are still very high,” emphasized representatives of the Ukrainian army while in Washington.

Urgent and long-term needs were discussed at the meetings. According to the delegation, “Ukraine needs air defense systems; in particular, the U.S. has C-RAM systems, which were used in Afghanistan. We ask for ATACMS and other missiles that fly more than 80 kilometers. It is important to get more HIMARS that are definitely in the U.S. stock and available to us. We ask for 155-caliber artillery and ammunition.



THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS A FORMER AZOV COMBATANT

@Vladislav HREBELNYK

In the USA, there is a tradition of marking the cars of relevant servicemen with the inscription "I served in Iraq." The owner of the marked car is perceived by society as a person worthy of respect. In Ukrainian society, the Azov Regiment and an Azov fighter are symbols of unprecedented fortitude, motivation, and patriotism. Azov combatants are highly respected by other Ukrainian military personnel and instill great fear in the enemies. The regiment's military history includes successful combat missions and front-line operations, where its fighters demonstrated a high level of professionalism and coordination of actions. The unit is like a real family, where everyone is ready to help the others.

The regiment's official name is the Azov Special Operations Detachment. It is a separate unit subordinated to the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Ukraine. Azov combatants took part in the defense and liberation of **Mariupol** in 2014. In 2022, they defended the city again. Now the Azov Regiment is known all over the world for its freedom-loving warriors who did not give up, but continued to defend the Ukrainian city even though they were completely surrounded by overwhelming Russian Federation troops. The heroes of Azov, blocked on a small piece of land between the sea and the Russian army, fought hard until the Ukrainian military commanders issued an order for them to lay down their arms. The history of the Azov Regiment goes back to the year 2014. As Russia made its first attempts to occupy a considerable part of Ukraine's territory, Ukrainians demonstrated their willingness to defend their homeland. Many of the country's citizens were ready to sacrifice their lives for its freedom and independence, for their nearest and dearest. As early as that spring, the Azov Battalion (as it was called then) was one of the first volunteer military units. The detachment included Revolution of Dignity participants and Ukrainians from the eastern regions of Ukraine.

Mariupol is a city in Ukraine, located on the shores of the Sea of Azov. As of 2021, it had a population of about 500,000 people. During the full-scale invasion, the city was almost completely destroyed by the Russian Federation Armed Forces.

Photo from open sources

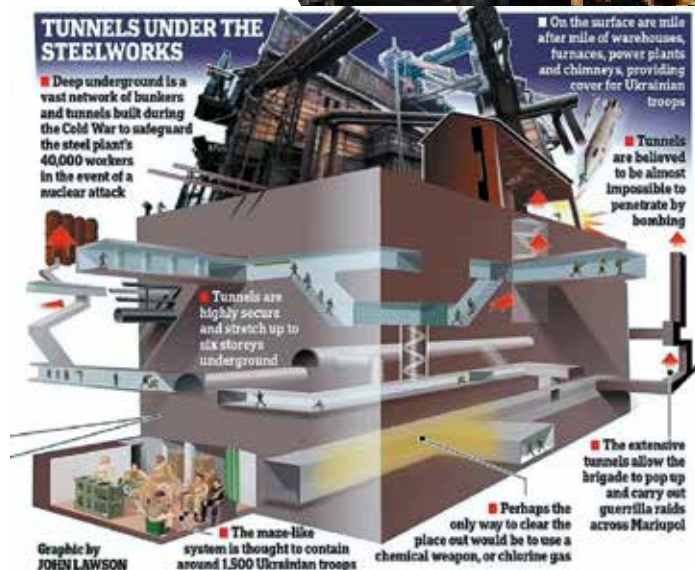
Military personnel and civilians were recruited to serve in the regiment on the condition that they had passed the so-called Young Fighter training course and were willing to defend the country's freedom and independence. Gradually, the number of people in the Azov Regiment increased. The unit comprised not only Ukrainian citizens of different ethnic origins and religious and political views, but also foreigners. **Azov fighters say that the most important qualities respected in the regiment are patriotism shown in actions, an irresistible desire to change the country for the better and, at the same time, improve oneself.** Every member of the regiment is proud to be in it; they are treated with respect, and they deserve it, because they are skilled and well-trained. The unit is led by a team of competent military officers who have learned and adopted the experience of the world's most advanced armies. If Ukrainians adopted the American tradition of making inscriptions about a servicemember's contribution, the wording would probably be like this: "There is no such thing as a former Azov combatant." Just like there is no such thing as a former Ukrainian.

In 2019, an unpleasant scandal occurred involving the Azov Regiment. In the U.S., a group of congress members demanded that the State Department add the Azov Regiment to the list of terrorist organizations. Russian propaganda going wild about Ukrainian neo-Nazism is one thing, but such allegations made by U.S. politicians is quite another. According to **Viacheslav Lykhachov**, a historian and researcher of far-right movements in the post-Soviet space, the congress members' initiative was rather due to the political situation in the United States. "Then, against the backdrop of the growth of far-right terror in the country, the congress members decided to demonstratively include — for the first time ever — some foreign group of 'white supremacists' (this is what far-right movements are called in the USA) in the list of such organizations. However, the initiators, who were guided by the image created in the media, did not even realize that the initiative concerned a government body unit rather than an informal paramilitary group. After clarification, the initiative was forgotten, and the first group of 'white supremacists' to be included in the list of terrorist organizations was the Russian imperial movement," Viacheslav Lykhachov explained.

Viacheslav Lykhachov studies ethno-political conflict, xenophobia in the post-Soviet space, ideology and activities of right-wing radical movements in Russia and Ukraine, political extremism, and the theories of nation and nationalism.

The most dramatic page in the Azov Regiment's history is the defense of **Azovstal**, the steelworks in Mariupol, in the spring of 2022, which lasted 86 days. Russian Federation troops first surrounded the city, and then the territory of the plant itself, where there were about 200 civilians and 1,700 defenders, including Azov combatants. During the almost 3-month siege, they suffered from a shortage of food and medicine. The Russian forces continuously bombarded Azovstal with bombs, shells, missiles, and other weapons from the land, air, and sea, but they never dared to try to take the steelworks by storm. According to Azov fighters, this made the enemy army focus its military efforts on the steelworks, which consumed its strength and stopped it from achieving a breakthrough in other sections of the front. During the siege, the Ukrainian intelligence managed to arrange transportation of supplies and personnel to Azovstal on 16 Mi-8 helicopters. 72 Azov combatants joined the fighters under siege, which is vivid proof that **the Azov Regiment is like a family and its members will follow their brothers-in-arms even into hell itself, if need be.** The daily shelling resulted in increasing numbers of killed and wounded civilians and service members in the nearly ruined steelworks. One day, Russian troops struck directly at the bunker that housed an improvised hospital with many sick and wounded. The patients had to be moved to another bunker. There was a critical lack of space, and doctors operated on the wounded and even amputated limbs right before the eyes of other patients.

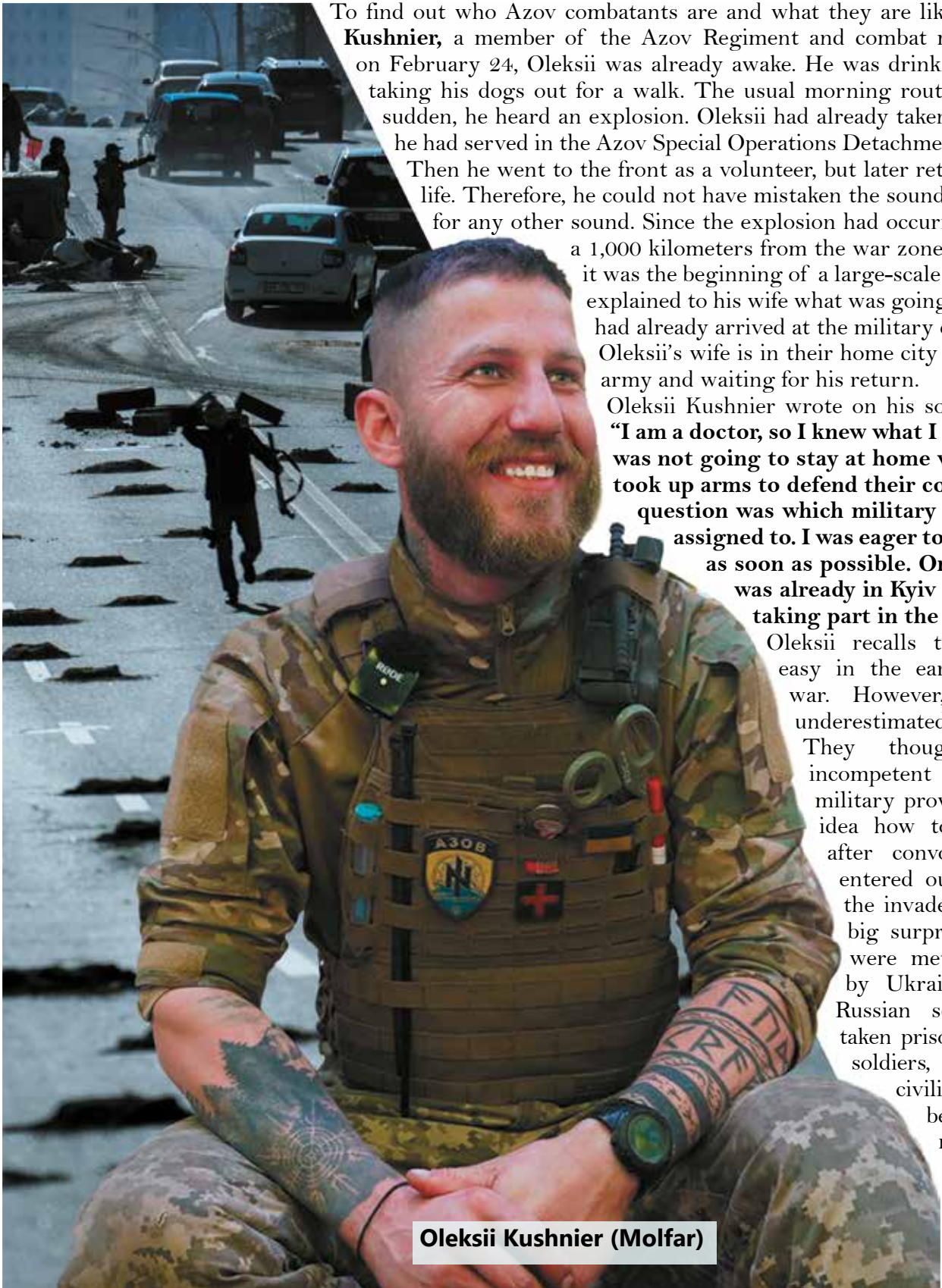
Azovstal is a metallurgical steelworks, whose products used to account for a significant part of Ukraine's exports. The company exported its products to more than 50 countries. Azovstal employed 15,302 people. The plant was completely destroyed by the Russian army.



Dmytro Kozatskyi (Orest), press officer of the Azov Regiment, won the prestigious Prix de la Photographie Paris (Px3) photo contest in Paris. His photo series of Azovstal won the first prize in the Press/War category and the second prize in the overall Press category.

Photo from open sources

The Azov Regiment combatants and other military personnel put up an impressive fight for 86 days against the prevailing number of Russian invaders, keeping them from advancing in other areas. On May 16, Ukraine's higher military commanders issued an order obliging the Azov fighters to lay down their arms and leave the territory of the steelworks. The regiment's commander, Lieutenant Colonel Denys Prokopenko, a teacher of English by profession, complied with the order. Ukraine's leaders took on the commitment to retrieve all Azov combatants from captivity. 211 defenders of Mariupol who had left Azovstal were taken to Russian-controlled territory in the Donbas. On the night of July 29, there was a strike on the prisoner-of-war camp in Olenivka, located not far from the front line. It has been established that the Russians blew up the building at the pre-trial detention facility from the inside. Although the Russians blamed the Ukrainian Armed Forces for the deaths of the captive Azov servicemen, experts accused the Russians of trying to cover up the crimes previously committed against the prisoners of war (POWs), which are a gross violation of the Geneva Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War. On July 30, 2022, the Russian Federation's Ministry of Defense published lists of allegedly killed and wounded Ukrainian soldiers in Olenivka., which included 47 POWs presumed deceased and 73 wounded. Unfortunately, this information cannot be verified by either Ukraine or international organizations, since no representatives of any international missions have been granted access to the Ukrainian captives. According to the Defense Intelligence of Ukraine's Ministry of Defense, there is no reason to believe that the Russian's list of POWs killed and wounded in Olenivka contains true information. Verifications conducted have established that the list contained the names of Ukrainian soldiers who had been wounded before the tragic event in Olenivka, the names of those for whom POW exchange agreements had already been reached for exchange in the near future, and the names of those who, at the time of the attack, were to have been in hospital rather than in the barracks in an industrial zone. Their relatives, brothers- and sisters-in-arms, and all Ukrainians hope that our combatants will be released from captivity. Azov Regiment member **Dmytro Kozatskyi** tweeted, **"By the way, I'm leaving you photos of the best quality; while I am in captivity, send them to all existing journalism and photography contests. If I win some prize, it will make me happier still when I get out. Thank you all for your support. See you!"**



Oleksii Kushnier (Molfar)

To find out who Azov combatants are and what they are like, I met **Oleksii Kushnier**, a member of the Azov Regiment and combat medic. At 6 a.m. on February 24, Oleksii was already awake. He was drinking coffee before taking his dogs out for a walk. The usual morning routine. But all of a sudden, he heard an explosion. Oleksii had already taken part in combat, he had served in the Azov Special Operations Detachment in 2014–2015. Then he went to the front as a volunteer, but later returned to civilian life. Therefore, he could not have mistaken the sound of an explosion for any other sound. Since the explosion had occurred at more than a 1,000 kilometers from the war zone, he realized that it was the beginning of a large-scale invasion. Oleksii explained to his wife what was going on. By 8 a.m. he had already arrived at the military enlistment office. Oleksii's wife is in their home city now, helping the army and waiting for his return. Oleksii Kushnier wrote on his social media page, **“I am a doctor, so I knew what I had to do. And I was not going to stay at home while other men took up arms to defend their country. The only question was which military unit I would be assigned to. I was eager to get to the front as soon as possible. On February 26, I was already in Kyiv Oblast, directly taking part in the hostilities.”**

Oleksii recalls that it was not easy in the early days of the war. However, the Russians underestimated Ukrainians. They thought we were incompetent in terms of military prowess and had no idea how to fight. Convoy after convoy, their forces entered our territory. But the invaders were in for a big surprise: the convoys were met and destroyed by Ukrainian tanks; the Russian servicemen were taken prisoner by ordinary soldiers, who had been civilians just a week before and had no military experience. Oleksii told us a story that happened to him.

When he was defending Kyiv Oblast, a Ukrainian tank struck an enemy military truck nearby. A number of the Russian soldiers were killed, and the rest fled the site. After some time, a reconnaissance unit informed Oleksii and his fellow soldiers about the fugitives' location, so they set out to find and capture the enemies.

“I saw a huge pile of manure — an elderly woman living there raised goats and cows — and an enemy soldier lying in it. I looked further and saw three more Russians pressing down into the manure. It was six years since I had fought at the front. Just a week before, I had been living the life of a civilian. And now I had come face to face with enemy servicemen. I stepped out and said, ‘Stand up!’ In front of me, there lay a big hulky 2-meter tall man with a VAL rifle in his hands. I guessed that he was a reconnaissance scout, the elite of the Russian Federation's army. I bent over him and, holding my machine gun in one hand, pulled out his rifle with the other. He showed no resistance, and was just lying in the pile of manure,” said Oleksii.

When the tactic of “marching in victoriously and taking everything” did not work and the Russian army met strong resistance, they immediately switched to another one. Now the invaders are using a “scorched earth” strategy in all sections of the front. As soon as enemy forces sort out the positions of Ukrainian units, they start destroying everything around them with artillery, aviation, and ballistic missiles, turning the territory into a desert. Only after a massive strike do Russian commanders send in infantry supported by tanks. Oleksii writes, “The enemy has not taken Mariupol; it has not taken Popasna. It has just levelled these Ukrainian cities to the ground and they have ceased to exist. The same has happened to any emplacement that our combatants were forced to leave. There is nothing to defend there anymore. But there were live people there, and if they had stayed in their positions instead of falling back, they would have simply been burnt to ashes.”

Oleksii's primary task in the war is to provide medical aid. There are three stages of providing medical aid at the front, and each involves a different kind of medical staff. At the first stage are the combat medics; they are in the combat zone along with all other combatants. Their task is to give first aid to the wounded or injured service members and hand them over to evacuation crews. Oleksii Kushnier is a part of an evacuation crew, which is the second stage. They are usually positioned at a distance of 3–5 kilometers from the combat operations area.

When someone is wounded, Oleksii goes to the operational area and does everything in his power to stabilize them and get them to the nearest hospital. Treatment in



Tsytramon medical crew, of which Oleksii Kushnier is a member, should make it on time. With love of life

military hospitals is the third stage. Each stage is unique. For instance, the first stage is associated with being under fire at all times. Sometimes this role is performed by people who do not even have medical training. In terms of an evacuation crew's work, they must make quick decisions. Oleksii explains, "We need to have quite broad knowledge of medicine, because in addition to stabilizing the wounded or injured, we have to ensure that they can stand transportation from the combat scene to the medical facility. In the conditions of this war, decisions need to be made quickly, because you cannot afford to think for a long time under constant artillery fire. You need to make decisions right away, even if they prove to be wrong or partially correct, because the longer you think, the higher the probability that the wounded or injured and the entire evacuation crew may no longer need evacuation."

For Russians, medical personnel are Target No. 1.

The enemy understands that the more medics who remain alive and able to work, the more wounded they can save, which means that more service members will return from hospitals to the front. Our hero says that once their evacuation crew might have been blown up, and recounts their close escape: "A rocket exploded two meters from the car, but, thankfully, we were not injured. Two days later, however, the Russians captured another team of medics in the same place and shot them all with machine guns. No one was taken prisoner." Oleksii is a military medic with extensive experience; he has seen many wounded and dead people. Nevertheless, he always smiles at others. He says that he feels more comfortable this way. A smile usually adds positivity, even when the situation is bad. Oleksii wants to be remembered as a person who smiles, because life goes on, even during war, "Should I die tomorrow, I will be able to say, hand on heart, that I have lived my life well and made a difference: I have helped with many social and volunteer projects, and I have saved many people with my own hands. And with these same hands,



Oleksii Kushnier with wife

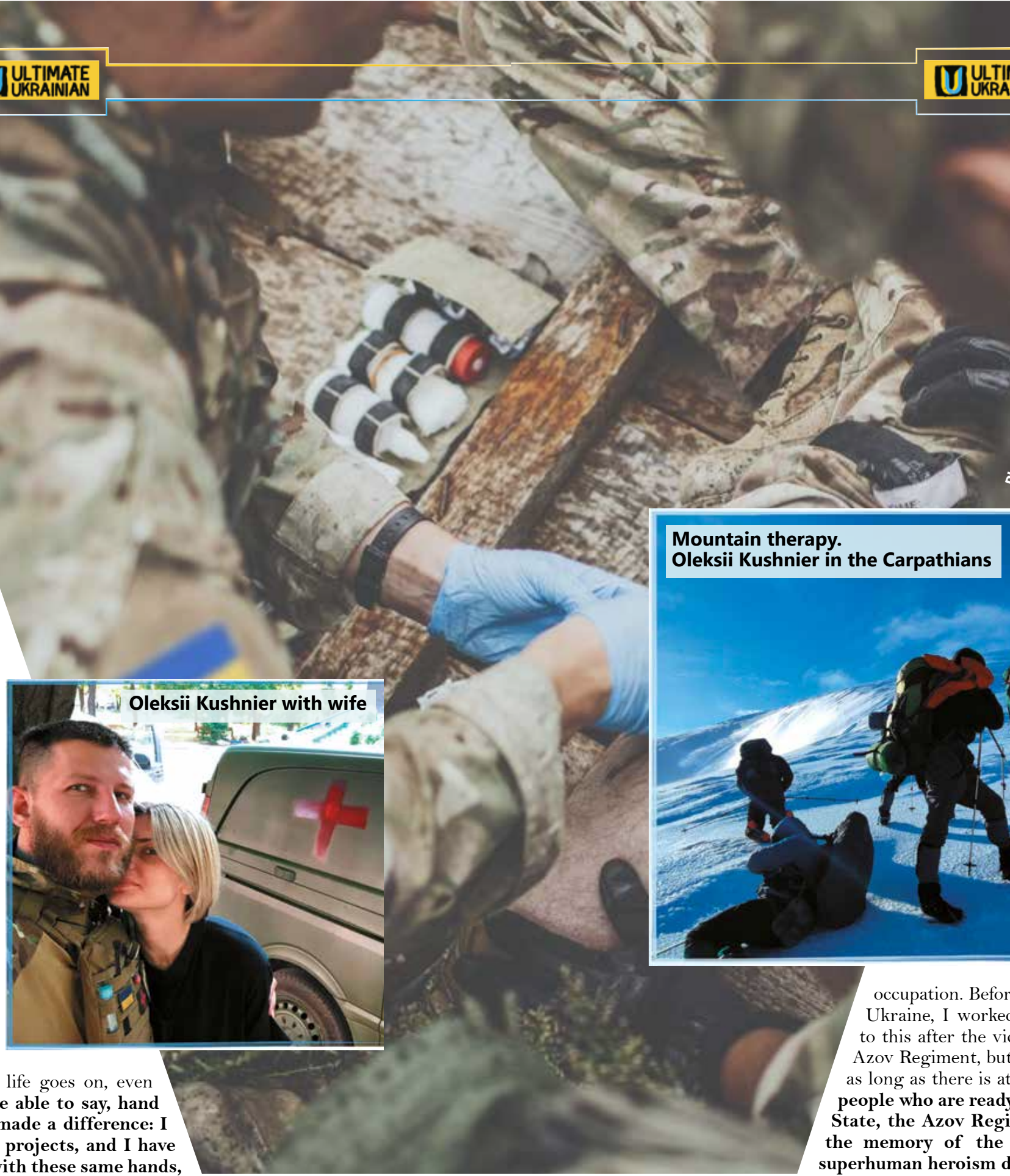
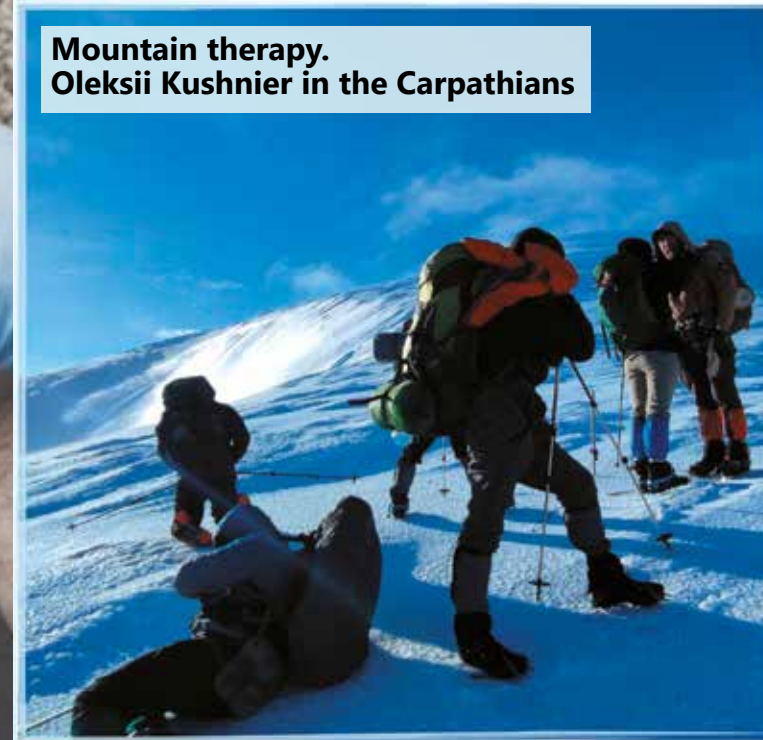


Photo from open sources

Mountain therapy. Oleksii Kushnier in the Carpathians



occupation. Before the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, I worked as a mountain guide, and I'm going to return to this after the victory. The Russian army wanted to wipe out the Azov Regiment, but the invaders did not understand the main thing: as long as there is at least one Azov combatant, as long as there are people who are ready to take up arms in the fight for the Ukrainian State, the Azov Regiment will be alive. It will live forever. So will the memory of the feats of our brothers-in-arms who showed superhuman heroism defending Mariupol, the city of Heroes."

I have killed enemies. So, my life mission is accomplished. As for dying ... We will all die, and to die in combat is not the worst option," says the military medic.

Oleksii comes from Belarus, but he considers himself Ukrainian. "For me, being a Ukrainian means putting the interests of the state first, doing everything possible to ensure that it continues to exist and sticks to democratic values, because my personal war began with the Revolution of Dignity on the Maidan in Kyiv. To be Ukrainian is not only to fight for the country during the war, but also to have a great desire to rebuild it," he explains.

Oleksii's motive to take up arms and save people during the war is obvious. He says that citizens have the right and duty to fight for their country. Of course, not everyone is ready to fight and not everyone is expected to do it, but if you want to feel that you are a true citizen of your country, if you want to do something for Ukraine, this is a good way to achieve it.

When Oleksii returned from the war in 2015, he had difficulty adapting to society. That is why he joined the Mountain Therapy project for war veterans. This project combined hiking in the mountains with a psychological rehabilitation program. "I really liked hiking in the mountains, it helped me a lot. It became my favorite hobby and, eventually, my



UKRAINE

THE BRIDGE TO THE FUTURE OF MANKIND

To get an idea of what the February–March 2022 evacuation in Ukraine was like, we should recall the scenes of an apocalyptic film in which zombies or alien invaders unexpectedly attack cities and villages. This is exactly what one could see in real life: miles-long traffic jams, overcrowded railway stations, bags and suitcases abandoned by those who were fleeing on foot because they were too tired to carry their luggage; long queues at Ukraine’s borders with Poland, Slovakia, Hungary, and Romania, where people waited for days for their turn to cross the border.

Not only Ukrainian citizens, but also foreigners were leaving Ukraine: all of them had decided to leave their homes, because after Russia fired missiles on 30 cities throughout Ukraine on the very first night of the full-scale invasion, they were well aware of the danger that threatened everyone. As of June 9, 2022, there were more than 4.9 million refugees in Europe who had left Ukraine due to the war, according to the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). These were mostly women, children, and elderly people.

Thousands of city residents left their homes to stay with their relatives or acquaintances in small towns and villages. Many people did not have any certain destination in mind: they were just trying to escape the attacks. Many of those who had left Kyiv and headed for the north fell into a trap: they immediately found themselves in the part of Kyiv Oblast that was occupied by Russians. The life of Ukrainians in occupied territories is another tragic story, which is covered in the article The Town Liberated from Occupation. Nevertheless, some statistics will help readers get an idea of how serious the situation

was: only about 700,000 out of **5 million** inhabitants remained in Ukraine’s capital in February–March, when the Armed Forces of Ukraine and Territorial Defence Forces were fighting to stop the advance of Russian tanks on the outskirts of the city. **These were mostly servicemen defending the city, volunteers who helped the defenders, medical personnel, the city administration, the leaders of the country, and military commanders.**

The majority of refugees left their homes taking only their documents, money, and pets. People whose houses or apartment buildings had already been destroyed by the daily missile strikes, bombing, and shelling had no belongings left to take with them. They ran for their life, because no one knew which area or building would be hit next.

It could have been any settlement in any part of the country. The only people who were prepared for evacuation were those who had already fled their home towns and villages in Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts, in the east of Ukraine and bordering on the Russian Federation, back in 2014–2015. Ukrainians who had found themselves under occupation had been terrorized by the Russian military. The entire population of

many Ukrainian settlements have been tortured and killed by the invaders. Russian troops are constantly shelling Ukrainian territory with artillery and missiles, killing civilians in their homes and in the streets. Ukraine has launched an investigation into war crimes committed during the Russia-Ukraine war, carried out in accordance with the legal framework of individual states and the principle of universal jurisdiction of international humanitarian law. On March 15, the U.S. Senate unanimously adopted a resolution calling for an investigation and the building of a war crimes case against Russian President

Vladimir Putin. On March 23, the Sejm of the Republic of Poland recognized Putin as a war criminal. As of the end of August 2022, the Office of the Prosecutor General of Ukraine had registered 30,253 crimes of aggression and war crimes. Fleeing the occupied or partially occupied territories must be covered as a separate page in the history of the evacuation in Ukraine. The leaders of Ukraine and representatives of the military and civilian administrations conducted endless negotiations to provide so-called “green” corridors for the civilian population to leave the zone of active fighting, but more often than not, either the

Russian party cancelled any agreements or unexpectedly turned the direction of the corridors towards the Russian Federation. In the latter case, Ukrainian citizens had no choice but to become captives, victims of humiliating filtration through specially-created filtering camps. Sadly, no one knows what has happened to those who “did not pass” the check for loyalty to the Russian regime. Those who were “lucky” to find themselves in the Russian Federation have tried to return to their homeland first through the Baltic countries, then the Scandinavian countries, Germany, and finally Poland. However, a large number of



On the platform near the train to Lviv at the railway station in Kyiv



Ukrainians are still stuck in the Russian Federation, mostly Ukrainian citizens who lost their passports. But for the intervention of international organizations, it would not be possible to find and extract these Ukrainians in the vast territory of the aggressor country – they cannot make their own decisions regarding where to live; they are forced to stay in the areas the Russian authorities have sent them to.

The fate of minors is the most deplorable of all: they become hostages of the Kremlin. According to a report of the Authorized Adviser on Child Rights and Child Rehabilitation in Ukraine, at least 5,100 children were forcibly deported from Ukraine as of July 20, 2022.

The Children of War platform was created to help find the missing children; reports on missing children and updates are registered on a daily basis.



childrenofwar.gov.ua



Halych. The center of the Halych (Galicia) principality. Having become the new center of political and economic life after the decline of Kyiv, the Galicia-Volyn principality played an exceptionally important role in the history of the Ukrainian people in the 11th and 12th centuries. Territorially and politically, it united almost all ethnic Ukrainian lands, thus saving the southern and western branches of Eastern Slavs from conquests and assimilation, and contributed to their consolidation and awareness of their identity.

Ukrainians who managed to escape in overcrowded trains under shelling found themselves in towns like **Halych**, located across the country more than 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) from Russia.



Oleh Kantor, the mayor of the town, told us about how the residents of Halych deal with the new challenges. He is the most popular of all mayors Halych has had. Aged 48, Oleh has three sons and he holds two university degrees, in Engineering and Economics. Before he was elected to the post, Oleh worked first as a Foreign Economic Relations Engineer and then as an Administrator at Enerhetik, the local football club owned by the Burshtyn Thermal Power Plant (TPP), the largest TPP in the region. We met with Oleh in an informal setting when he managed to find half an hour in his busy work schedule to tell our readers how exactly he and his team help refugees who arrive in their town on a daily basis.

Ultimate Ukrainian (UU): Halych is a clean and cozy town on the banks of the Dniester River in Prykarpattia. Mr. Oleh, what is the population of Halych?

Oleh Kantor (OK): As of 2015, there were about 6,000 people in the town. However, the population has increased by almost 5,000 since the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24 due to the arrival of internally displaced persons (IDPs).

UU: Do you mean that more than 5,000 people came to Halych, fleeing the war zones?

OK: The thing is that the Halych Territorial Community does not only consist of Halych. It includes another 25 villages around the town, whose residents also gave shelter to those who needed help. Therefore, the total number of IDPs in the territorial community is much higher. But the number of those registered in Halych is nearly 5,000.

UU: There is a beautiful square in the center of Halych. We can see children playing there. At first glance, it seems nothing like war in this peaceful town. But the moment the air raid sirens sounded, I saw a very young mother pick up her little child, who had started crying, and run headlong across the square and then down the street, probably to some safe place. How does the territorial community address the issue of rehabilitating those who have found refuge in Halych, fleeing from Russian shelling?

OK: This is true. People who have come to Halych have lost their homes and family members. They travelled in overcrowded trains to escape from bombs, shells, Russian tanks, Grad multiple rocket launchers, and aircraft. Some evacuees told me that they had travelled in a gangway connection between train cars for 11 hours, because the cars were so crowded that there was no room to pass through them. Only mothers with young children and elderly people got seats. Even the train conductors gave up their compartments for passengers and travelled to their destination

standing. During the train stops, volunteers brought hot drinks and snacks to the trains. It was impossible for the volunteers to get into the cars and give the treats to the passengers personally. The food was passed from hand to hand, and first of all to those who were travelling in gangway connections. In addition to the shock caused by the war, late February and early March were unusually cold. Thus, we realized that we had to warm not only the bodies, but also the hearts and souls of those who came to us not of their own free will, but fleeing the horrors of the war. We decided that football (soccer) would be the best healer in that case. Football has always been popular in Halych. When I was a child, I liked to play this game with my friends. We spent almost all our free time playing it. Well, of course, a little later, when we were in high school, we saved part of our free time for **kavaliierka** (Oleh smiles). Jokes aside, as early as March, I invited **the Dynamo Kyiv Football Club** players to Halych to meet with the children who attended the town's Children and Youth Sports School. Many children who had been forced to leave their homes because of the hostilities were at the meeting. I wish you could have seen the admiration in the children's eyes when they were looking at their idols. In addition, the kids got to play a football match against the Ukrainian national team and, moreover, to score goals! I have no doubt that the meeting had a positive influence on both the children and adults, and helped them forget about their terrible experiences. We also created a Psychological Support Center for Internally Displaced Persons in early March. The psychologists working there are always ready to listen, support, and help everyone who needs it. No wonder: **a good word will melt a cold heart**, as people say.

UU: You have to provide the people staying in your town with meals, work, and places in school for their children, don't you?

OK: Yes, it's true. We also have to help our local entrepreneurs who have found themselves in uncertain circumstances with destroyed logistics. In this regard, we have received support from the government. In particular, they introduced preferential terms and conditions for paying taxes and compensation for each IDP that has been given a job. And the people of Halych have pitched in, too



Kavaliierka (dialectical word) - get-togethers, romantic dates, pleasant pastime in the company of young people.

FC "Dynamo" (Kyiv) visited Halych



The Dynamo Kyiv Football Club - a Ukrainian professional football club based in the city of Kyiv; the most renowned club of the USSR and Ukraine. It was founded in 1927.

A good word will melt a cold heart - a phrase meaning that goodwill, good attitude, and sympathy can do wonders.

Representatives of the Embassy of Switzerland in the framework of partnership with the DECIDE project



Cooperation with the charity fund "Caritas" of the Diocese of Bielsko-Zhywiec within the framework of the "Family-Family" project



Stepan Bandera (1909–1959) - a Ukrainian political figure, one of the leading ideologists and theoreticians of the Ukrainian nationalist movement in the 20th century. The author of the declaration on the restoration of the Ukrainian state.

— they are always ready to help those in need. School staff work with children, conduct trainings for them in accordance with the curriculum. Thanks to the support of seven parent-educators, four family-type foster homes in Halych have accepted 25 children from Luhansk and Donetsk oblasts. We arranged shelters for families with children in the kindergartens of Komariv village and Halych itself. We also prepare and distribute about 400 daily food kits for IDPs. This is possible due to the strong support from European countries. We receive help from Poland, in particular, from the Caritas Charitable Foundation of the Bielsko-Zywiec Diocese, the community of Gmina Dabrowa, Stanislav and Mateusz Tomczak from the town of Glubczyce, as well as from France, the Red Cross of Romania, non-governmental organization (NGO) Bevar Ukraine (Denmark), Germany, Italy, and the Embassy of Switzerland in Ukraine (DECIDE project). The humanitarian aid includes food, hygiene products, clothes, sleeping bags, mattress pads, mattresses, blankets, and medicines. We distribute humanitarian and medical aid among IDPs, as well as transport it to the cities affected by the war, to medical institutions, and to military units with service members from the Halych Territorial Community. We believe in the Armed Forces of Ukraine, so we are already making plans for life after our victory. We plan to build the MAYETOK residential complex for IDPs; the concept and design were developed with support from the community and a number of charitable foundations. We are going to open an All-Ukrainian Spinal Injury Center at our town hospital. We already have some achievements (Oleh smiles). Three babies were born to internally displaced parents in the maternity department of the Halych hospital. They are officially residents of Halych. In May, Halych saw the wedding of two young people from Donetsk Oblast, Andriy and Viktoria. The start of a new family is always a joyful event, even more so in time of war. We are especially delighted that these young people, who have found refuge in Halych, are planning to settle here for good.

UU: You were born and grew up here, in Halych, in the street that currently bears the name of Stepan Bandera — the fiercest enemy, according to Russian anti-Ukrainian propaganda. Stepan Bandera was born here, on this land, near Halych. What would you say to those who believe in cruel banderivtsi?

OK: The Soviet authorities made enemies of everyone whom they could not defeat or subdue. For example, we have **Karaimska Street** in Halych. Representatives of the ethnic group that this street is named after came to Halych in 1246 at the invitation of **Prince Danylo Romanovych**. The community happily lived here for seven and a half centuries, until the town fell into Russian hands in 1939 and experienced what we now call “Russian Peace.” The city was captured by the Soviet Union army, which destroyed the Karaites temple (kenesa). That is exactly what is happening now. For decades, Moscow was creating a hostile image of Ukrainians, mercilessly falsifying history for this purpose. People who took up arms to fight against the Soviet authorities for Ukraine’s independence, for the right to live and prosper, were called “banderivtsi.” And they fought till their last breath. For me, banderivtsi are patriots, the symbol of invincibility and heroic struggle. I am convinced that we have all become banderivtsi now.

UU: Why do you think Ukraine was destined to become the object of external aggression so many times throughout its centuries-long history?

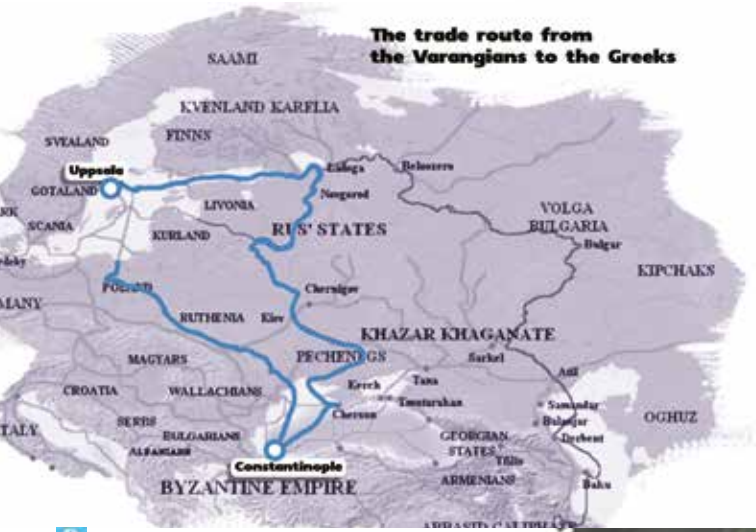
OK: I will give a very simple answer to this question, one that was formulated here in Halych. Ukraine has been the battlefield of many bloody wars and, sadly, is one now; but it has always been a territory where the enemy was stopped or significantly weakened. It’s all about geography. Ukraine, that is, its territory, has long been a natural transportation hub — a huge bridge created by nature at the intersection of trans-Eurasian routes. Incidentally, it was at the intersection of these routes that Halych, first mentioned in historic documents in the late 9th century, was built as a port on the Dniester River. Thus, Ukraine is a bridge, figuratively speaking. Numerous wars were fought with the purpose of capturing this bridge and controlling it. Over the past few months, it has become clear that this is no less than a bridge to the future of all mankind, because mankind is looking for answers to the question “What should the world of the 21st century be like?” — precisely at the intersection of these routes: the Silk Road and the trade route from **the Varangians to the Greeks**.

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Karaimska Street - a street in Halych, named after the Karaites, a Turkic people, descendants of the Khazars; an indigenous people of Ukraine who practiced Karaite Judaism; a national minority living mainly in the Crimea (Crimean Karaites) and Ivano-Frankivsk Oblast (Halych Karaites).



Danylo Romanovych - Danylo Halytskyi, crowned King Danylo Ruskyi in 1253; heir to the Kyiv dynasty, successor of the political and cultural traditions of Europe and Kyivan Rus.



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The Varangians to the Greeks - the trade route from the Varangians to the Greeks. Ukraine is a huge crossroads of river routes that lead from the north to the south of Europe (along the channels of numerous rivers and further to the Black Sea, from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean Sea and the world’s oceans) and land routes across the Carpathians (Halychyna is the only place where one can get to Western Europe and back without climbing the mountains).

UU: Why exactly do you love your town?

OK: I was born and grew up here; everything here is familiar to me and dear to my heart; I know each tree, each lane, and, actually, almost each passer-by. I also love my town for its atmosphere, it is unique, Halych-specific, and for the calm pace of life. Although Halych is small and cozy, it has everything you need. And there is nothing here that you don’t need. Everything is within easy reach. There is no excessive noise or big traffic jams. And a cherry on top is that there are magnificent views from Zamkova (Castle) Hill and beautiful sunsets from the banks of the Dniester River! These are not only my impressions. I am sure that everyone who has visited our town at least once shares them.

UU: What qualities do you appreciate in people?

OK: My parents were ordinary people, common folk — my father was a driver and my mother worked as a typist. They taught me to be kind to people and thoughtful, to treat everyone with respect, to help the needy, and not to shy away from any kind of work. For this reason, I try to live as my parents taught me, and in other people I also value honesty, kindness, the ability to empathize and sympathize with others, to love and protect them — in a word, what I appreciate in people is HUMANITY. There is so much evil in the world that we need to be kinder to one another.

UU: What plans does the head of the Halych Territorial Community have for the future?

OK: On September 22, 2023, Halych will mark its 1,125th anniversary. We had planned to complete many projects by that date: restore architectural monuments; renovate existing and build new social and tourist facilities; improve the transportation system; upgrade the engineering networks of a number of buildings and utilities; hold numerous spiritual, artistic, and cultural events. Unfortunately, the war prevented us from putting these plans into action, but we will surely do it all after our Victory. And I believe that this will come very soon.



Notable places of Halych



O LOVELY MAIDENS, FALL IN LOVE

- or a wedding in war based on online publications

The war has affected all spheres of Ukrainian people's life, unfortunately, and it has not bypassed weddings either. How many couples were planning their weddings in 2022! A brutal war disrupted all plans. But true love can't be paused. No matter how difficult the circumstances, life goes on. Many Ukrainians have learned not to put off important steps for later, because later may not come. "O lovely maidens, fall in love," ordered the classical Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861); however, he also added, "but not with Muscovites ..."

The Ukrainian Ministry of Justice wrote, "Summer is always a hot time for marriage. This year was no exception. 72,524 couples exchanged wedding vows this summer. This proves once again that no hardship can stand in the way of true love! Despite the war and hostilities, Ukrainians are getting married and creating new strong families." The top oblasts by number of weddings:

Kyiv: 8,874
 Dnipropetrovsk Oblast: 8,871
 Odessa Oblast: 5,414
 Kyiv Oblast: 4,916
 Lviv Oblast: 4,151

What are the wedding trends during the war:

- Many people got married before one of them joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine. During martial law, the service members had the opportunity to quickly register an official marriage.
- Fewer guests. Some guests can't make it, others consider large celebrations "not appropriate."
- Online wedding format, which began to be popular during the COVID-19 pandemic. It cannot replace live communication, but it allows relatives and friends to share this important day with the young couple, wherever they are now.
- Brides, grooms, and guests wearing national costumes. Weddings in vyshyvankas are popular.
- Weddings have become shorter. This is related to curfews.
- Weddings are often without dancing. Most couples shorten the musical part and have lunch instead of dinner.
- Boxes and "jars" for the Armed Forces of Ukraine. At weddings, there are boxes for charity donations. Instead of flowers, the bride and groom have a "jar" and accept donations.
- At every wedding, there is a moment of silence to remember the fallen Ukrainian defenders, thanks to whom "we can be here and celebrate."
- It is not uncommon to get married in the area of hostilities. According to the law of wartime, a commander of the Ukrainian army has the right to certify and register a marriage, and relevant documents can be sent to the State Register of Civil Status.

Weddings will not be the same as they used to, but they will still take place. No one will take love away from Ukrainians. A wedding is the creation of a new Ukrainian family, the reproduction of Ukrainian traditions, the birth of a generation of free citizens of a free country. This is the future of the Ukrainian state.



@Larysa KUZMENKO

This year, after the Russian Federation's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the whole world learned about the war that had begun in the center of Europe in 2014. The Russian Federation, which is 28 times larger than Ukraine in territory

and whose population is three and a half times larger than Ukraine's, is unsuccessfully trying to occupy and conquer Ukraine.

Colonel Kachur is one of a new generation of Ukrainian officers, those who did not serve a day in the Soviet army. Roman Kachur is a Ukrainian

service member, colonel of the Armed Forces of Ukraine, participant in the Russian-Ukrainian war, Hero of Ukraine, Knight of the Order of Bohdan Khmelnytskyi of the Third Class. He swore an oath to free Ukraine and serves faithfully in defense of his people.

Roman Kachur was born in Sumy Oblast. After school, he entered the Sumy Institute of Rocket Forces and Artillery named after Bohdan Khmelnytskyi and graduated in 2005. Since 2014, he has been in the area immediately adjacent to the combat zone, where he served as the chief of artillery of the 81st separate air mobile brigade. As part of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Airborne Assault Troops, his unit repelled the onslaught of Russian troops and their mercenaries, including in the Donetsk airport area. Until 2022, Roman Kachur and his soldiers carried out the task of restraining the occupiers to prevent further seizure of Ukrainian lands.

The defense of the Donetsk airport by Ukrainian forces constrained the enemy's forces. At that time, Ukraine was left alone with an insidious and dangerous enemy. It was a time of great losses for Ukraine. It was a time when the Armed Forces gained experience and training. In 2018, Roman Kachur became commander of the 55th Artillery Brigade Zaporizhzhian Sich.

The Zaporizhzhian Sich was a fortified outpost of the unregistered Zaporizhzhian Army in the second half of the 16th to the end of the 18th century, which was located beyond the rapids ('za porohamy') of the Dnipro River. Information has been preserved about seven Zaporizhzhian Siches, who followed one after the other.



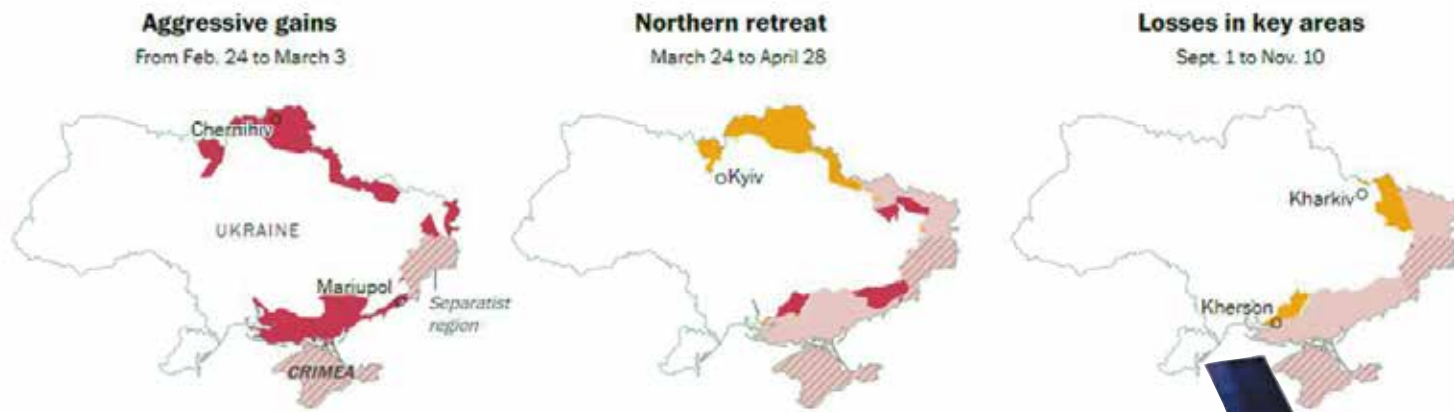
The brigade's motto is "We don't argue, we put an end to it." This unit, one of the oldest military units in Ukraine, is mainly armed with heavy artillery weapons of 155 mm caliber. Since February 2022, all efforts of Roman Kachur and his brigade have been directed at liberating Ukraine from the occupiers.

Volodymyr Datsenko, a Forbes's special reporter who writes on military issues, says "When the Russian military command was planning a full-scale invasion of Ukraine, they gambled on a breakthrough of heavy mechanized convoys and rapid capture of cities. This tactic gave results only in the south of Ukraine and partially in Luhansk and Kharkiv oblasts in the east. Theoretically, according to textbooks, the tactic could have been successful.

At the beginning of the war, the number of troops and the amount of equipment was not to Ukraine's advantage. The enemy's artillery advantage was approximately five to one, and in terms of the number of multiple launch rocket systems, at least seven to one. This beast must be constantly fed.

Change in Russian-controlled territory during three turning points in the war

Reclaimed by Ukraine Held by Russia Russian advances



Every day, Russia fires up to 2,000 tons of ammunition at Ukraine. But war is not just about addition and subtraction. **“The Russian army suffered incredible losses, got stuck in the north, and could not capture any large city except Kherson.** In the first month of the war, Russia lost more tanks than the UK, France, and Germany combined now have. The tactic of flashing breakthroughs was a failure. “The second phase of the war began with a radical change in Russia’s strategy. Artillery was put in the first place. A barrage of fire was supposed to move ahead of the advancing troops. This is the same way artillery was used to scorch everything in front of the Soviet army. In 1944–1945, Soviet troops reached a rate of about 5 million shells per month. Almost a month ago, the first reports said that the Russians were firing up to 50,000 artillery rounds a day. This is about 1.5 million shells per month, which is already comparable to the scale

RUSSIA'S TOTAL LOSSES FROM FEB 24 TO NOV 13	
personnel	- 80 860 (+650)
main battle tanks	- 2840 (+2)
armored combat vehicles	- 5742 (+12)
artillery systems	- 1837 (+8)
multiple launch rocket systems	- 393
air defense systems	- 206 (+1)
warplanes	- 278
helicopters	- 261
unmanned aerial vehicles	- 1507 (+1)
cruise missile	- 399
warships/cutters	- 16
trucks	- 4295 (+16)
special equipment	- 160

of World War II. Especially considering that the front line is much shorter now, and the artillery is much heavier.” A friend of mine, who is fighting in the south of Ukraine, told me that in early summer a scorched earth tactic was used on his unit, which conducts aerial reconnaissance to correct the fire of artillery units. Three Ukrainian service members who

were directing Ukrainian artillery at enemy positions were spotted by the Russians and were targeted by two Grad unguided rocket launchers. Eighty 122-mm missiles were fired at the three Ukrainian soldiers. This tactic has been used by the Russians everywhere along the front line and is based on the structure and method of control of World War II. Colonel Roman Kachur fights as a modern Ukrainian artillery commander, and he has always been greatly respected by his subordinates.

They say, **“If artillery is the god of war, then he is the god of artillery.”** Such accolades must be earned. However, Colonel Kachur himself says about his unit that the 55th brigade sets the pace of development for the Ukrainian Armed Forces artillery. Colonel Kachur considers all his awards to be the merit of his team. “It is a reverse process. The commander shapes and trains the team, sets the vector of movement,” says Colonel Kachur.

He spoke about himself, his work, and the brigade in a video interview on the Facebook page of the Commander-in-Chief of the

Since childhood, I’ve wanted to do a real man’s job. Artillery is my career. This is exactly the case when passion and work merge into one whole. Any job is easy if you know it, if you understand it from beginning to end, if you know how to prepare the shooting, how to prepare the targeting systems, and how an artillery system behaves during firing at different ranges. Then the results will be high. “I would not change the 55th brigade, because a team is built over time. It’s constant work, constant combat training. That’s why the number of the brigade or the name of the brigade itself does not determine anything. It is the team of the brigade that determines

This is the hardening of a soldier to the status of a warrior. **“We cannot say: we are so tough. Artillery does not fight by itself. The achievements of the Armed Forces and the Defense Forces in general are the complex work of all the units of the Armed Forces and the Defense Forces.** Our Ukrainian artillery works more efficiently. The numbers speak for themselves. The brigade commander has a simple task. My task is to destroy the enemy on a section of the front. If there are no weapons supplied to us by our Western partners, we will do it with our own weapons. Do you understand?

“The main thing is: people fight. Weapons change, war tactics change, strategies change, but the nature of war does not change. The nature of the war remains the same. He who will not break will win.

Armed Forces of Ukraine.

His statements are clear and brief, like a shot. **“After victory, I will prepare for war. It is our profession to always be ready to defend our Homeland.**

everything. You have to be satisfactory; stubbornness is not an indicator of strength. It’s about training the army. Preparation is the character, the fighting spirit. Training is not just about wielding weapons.

We prevail in unity and we have a high fighting spirit. It is not a weapon that prevails. It is the warrior who prevails. Everyone contributes their share to the war. War is not a machine gun in your hand. The war begins in the head of each of us.

That is why all of Ukraine is currently at war.

We really need NATO MLRS. The system itself is effective in terms of firing range and the firing rate and the variety of ammunition that it can use. Of course, with these systems and the help of Western partners, we have the ability to accelerate the moment of victory. The key is that we will win. It's only a matter of time.



The MLRS is a highly mobile automatic system that fires surface-to-surface rockets from the M270 family of weapon launcher platforms. The MLRS Family of Munitions (MLRS FOM) can be fired in less than one minute by a 3-person crew.

“The requirements for my subordinates are simple: honesty, decency, constantly improving their professional and physical skills. They must keep the high standards of a soldier of the 55th brigade. Our units are non-stop shelling the enemy who set foot on our land. I do not track the enemy’s behavior. To me, they are all targets, their behavior does not matter. They will all be annihilated. The units of the 55th brigade do not experience any problems from the enemy’s artillery. That means that we know what to do. We dictate our conditions for artillery duels, and as a result, the enemy withdraws his forces. The enemy is afraid of us. Now there is a tendency that we begin to seek him out, lure him in order to hit and hear, ‘The target has been destroyed, thank you for your work.’”



Photo: General Staff of the Armed Forces of Ukraine

The AIM-120 missile launch from NASAMS



Photo: Aldrimer.no

“It’s not weapons that are fighting, it is people,” Roman Kachur insists. In the reviews of Western military analysts, you can often find the statement that Ukraine has one of the best artillery in the world. Over the eight years of the war, the Armed Forces of

Ukraine have built a simple and effective system of intelligence, coordination, and adjustment of artillery (the Kropyva system). Our artillerymen improved their skills and speed. Western military analysts are often surprised by the effectiveness



Ukrainian soldiers mastering the L118 during training in the U.K. July 2022

of their weapons in the hands of the Ukrainian military. HIMARS and M777 have been used in various military conflicts in the Middle East for years, but never caused such a response. They were not perceived as a formidable weapon. Ukraine gave the French a reason to be proud of their CEASARs. According to Colonel Kachur in an interview with FRANCE 24, with six CEASARs and several soldiers who trained for a short time at a military base in the south of France, his unit managed

to destroy at least 80 Russian artillery units (June 2022). Russia has an obvious advantage in the number of weapons on the battlefield. The enemy’s artillery advantage is roughly four or five to one, and at least seven to one in the number of MLRS. That’s a great advantage. It is almost impossible to hit a target with a single shot from a Soviet MLRS. Therefore, they are usually used in batches, or volleys. One volley from a BM-21 Grad can burn an area of 145,000 square meters, which is about 20 football

fields. An Uragan destroys up to 420,000 square meters, and a BM-30 Smerch destroys up to 670,000 square meters. That’s 50 and 80 football fields, respectively.

On the other hand, the NATO weapons used by the Ukrainian Armed Forces have a longer range, more accuracy, and significantly better characteristics. These weapons can hit targets at a greater distance using significantly less ammunition. If Ukraine gets enough MLRS, the task will not be direct counter-battery combat but combat with the enemy’s artillery supply. Each destroyed ammunition depot with tens of thousands of shells will stop the enemy’s artillery machine.

Another influencing factor is the enemy’s demoralization. Ukraine needs a weapon designed to hit not on the front line, but deep in the rear and precisely on target. The American M777 howitzer shoots farther, moves faster, and is easier to hide, which is what the Ukrainian service members were waiting for. Their arrival bolstered Ukraine’s hopes of gaining an artillery advantage, at least in some frontline areas. This is a key step toward military victories in a war now fought mostly on the flat, open steppe at long ranges. Ukrainian soldiers say that howitzers will also save civilian lives by shooting directly on Russian artillery concentrated in cities.

“We hit all possible targets, without exception: from the front line to positions deep inside. We constantly detect and destroy them everywhere, non-stop.”

M777 howitzer of the Ukrainian military. Autumn 2022.

Photo from open sources

Our priority is to destroy the enemy's artillery, but that doesn't prevent us from destroying their infantry, destroying key points and areas of concentration. We build a logical sequence of fire attacks and 'tear them apart into molecules.' I have no doubts about the strength of our brigade and Ukraine's final victory over Russia in this war, once and forever." This is how the Hero of Ukraine Roman Kachur sees his mission and his work.



A hand in your hand



Reviving Borodianka from the ashes of occupation

@Anna DEMCHENKO

Responding to Ukraine's accusations about the consequences of the occupation of Ukrainian territories, Russian propagandists shout loudly that it is the Ukrainians themselves who destroyed their cities and villages and killed their citizens. Those statements testify to the morbid imagination of sick supplicants. I went to **Borodianka**, which had been liberated a few months before, to meet with the daughter of a **Territorial Defense soldier**, a resident of Borodianka, who witnessed the tragic events and organized resistance to the occupiers. While on my way to interview my heroine Halyna Yerko, my heart was racing. I was trembling all over at the thought of what I would see in Borodianka. This town is one of the most terrible places of the war. And I knew that. But what I didn't know was the strength of the people living there. Instead of a burned-out desert, I saw a phoenix bird. Still burned, but bright, free, to the point of clenching fists alive. How is that possible? Halyna told me about it. The mother of twins, a local council member, and volunteer who saved as many people as some service members.



Borodianka is a small town in Ukraine with a population of 13,000 people. It is located in the Bucha district of Kyiv Oblast.

Territorial defense soldiers are non-professional military personnel, volunteers who stood up for their community during Russia's invasion.

38 days of horror — that's how long Borodianka lived at Russian gunpoint after February 24. On the first day of spring, 21 out of 29 high-rise buildings were bombed. Almost 500 private houses were destroyed. Another 450 were heavily damaged. Before the war, there were 47 administrative buildings in the town: schools, banks, hospitals, sports fields, and rehabilitation centers for the military. Now, 45 of them need a total renovation. A neighboring village was 70% destroyed. Even the Nazis of the Third Reich destroyed less ("only" 100 houses) during World War II. About 1,500 people remained under Russian occupation in Borodianka. Today, 3,500 have already returned.



Halyna Yerko shows me the town. People come up to her, say hello, and Halyna proudly reports to them, “We are building two more houses!” Halyna is so energetic that if you connect an electric turbine to her, she could light up the whole house.

Before the war, Halyna worked hard to make Borodianka a star of Kyiv Oblast: sports, varenyky festivals, painting the walls of houses, involving ordinary residents in political changes. Once Halyna started a bicycle race, and to attract more people she also arranged the arrival of bikers. I hear about the pre-war life of this town on the central street, where every house has a grave.

In the place of the former bicycle race



REUTERS photo: Gleb Garanich



Varenyky is a traditional Ukrainian dish of boiled dumplings with different fillings.



BELSAT photo

Ultimate Ukrainian (UU): How did February 24 start for you?

Halyna Yerko (HY): A friend called me and just said “It’s started.” I had no emotion. There was no time to respond. I woke up the children, who were 12 at the time, and today they are 13. I asked a friend to pick them up. I remember looking at our main street, and dozens of people were coming towards me. Everyone was leaving, escaping, fleeing. Someone was shopping in the stores. I ran to the military enlistment office and thought, “God, if only everyone manages to leave!” But they did not take me into the army, they said that they needed me for other tasks.

Ruscists is Ukrainian slang for the Russian invaders, used to emphasize the aggressive nature of the Russian regime.

So, I issued military IDs to civilians, handed out weapons, which were catastrophically in short supply for all those willing. I gave food to service members. And I did not sleep. I don’t even remember when I finally managed to close my eyes.

UU: Were you preparing for a big war?

HY: For such a war, no. We had no idea that such a thing could happen, that they would kill, torture, shoot at civilians, that they would not let doctors see mortally wounded children, whose car they shot. We prepared bomb shelters and hid documents. Especially the documents of former soldiers. But do you know what I learned about war and rescue? Everything you need for life, the most important things can all fit in one hand. And this is the hand of someone dear to you.

UU: (My throat tightens at these words. I know that tank convoys were moving towards them that day.) How did you manage to resist and were there any traitors?

HY: In Borodianka, no one welcomed the ruscists. Borodianka residents have a strong spirit. On February 24, hundreds of people stood in line in front of the military enlistment office. Some men who lacked weapons decided to go to Kyiv on foot and get weapons there — that’s 21 miles under fire. Two guys were killed. We focused on helping people. We set up warehouses outside

the occupation zone and took humanitarian aid there, food, medicine. Then disguised service members and volunteers carried aid to the city in civilian cars. Some of them died. They were shot. Once we were happy when we had a car with humanitarian aid stolen by the russians. We were happy because they gave the food away on their own behalf. Let them. The main thing was that people got what they needed.

UU: How else did you manage to help people?

HY: I kept in touch with people to understand who needed what, at what addresses, and what happened to them. How many people left. Where they went. If they managed to go to another town, we contacted the local authorities to help our people get settled. The most difficult was organizing pseudo-green corridors. Pseudo, because the russians never kept their promise not to shell civilians. Imagine: we tell people to get ready to leave, they arrive at the departure point, but there are no buses. The russians did not let them through. And those drivers who tried to pass anyway were pulled out of the buses, stripped naked (winter, snow, wind), shots fired over their heads, humiliated. But Ukrainians wouldn't be Ukrainians if they didn't manage to save at least someone. We were able to take out about 200 people. Partly by bus, partly in private cars. And that was very good, because so many people are missing.

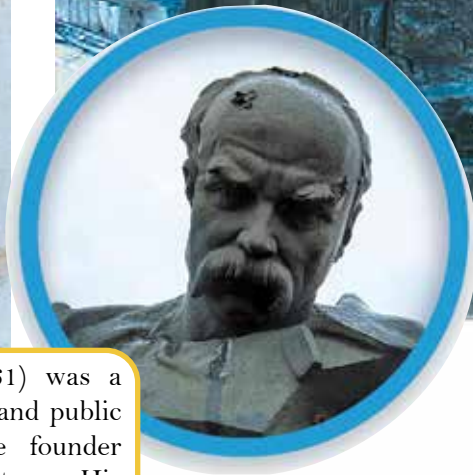
Some russian bombs did not even leave the ashes of people. There was also a case, we were taking kids away in a bus, and the bus was shot through and through, and the kids ... All were alive! It was a miracle. The thing is that before we left, we had hung homemade angels on a tree. I believe they saved them.

Halyna talks a lot about the people who stayed in town "under the russians." She calls them supermen, because in the breaks between shelling, they ran around the city and rescued the survivors from the rubble.

They secretly transported people to Halyna on paths the russians did not know about, and she drove the people further in her car, to safe places in Ukraine, even to Italy.

It is not surprising that Halyna began to be threatened. They promised to find and hang her, the house where Halyna's children were hiding was bombed. Ukrainian intelligence warned her and she managed to get her twins out. We are standing in front of the shot monument to the Ukrainian poet **Taras Shevchenko**, who was once imprisoned by the russian empire for poems in the Ukrainian language, which propagandists on the main russian television channels are now demanding be destroyed.

Taras Shevchenko (1814–1861) was a Ukrainian poet, thinker, artist, and public figure. He is considered the founder of modern Ukrainian literature. His biography is full of dramatic episodes and bright events, and made a huge contribution not only to literature, but also to the culture of Ukraine in general.



UU: What did you see when Borodianka was liberated?

HY: Do you know the song "Love is in the air"? We had "Death is in the air." A terrible feeling of death. You walk and see bodies. Legs sticking out of the basement. You walk, the wind blows ... It blows human ashes in your face. And you inhale it. And people without water, without

A symbol of the strength and indomitability of Ukrainians, the clay rooster from Borodianka

gas, without electricity, without communication. And this is 2022, the 21st century. A twisted world. Surrealism. Unreality. When you build, grow, you see a result. And suddenly it is not destroyed, no... It is mutilated, torn. My uncle died. When people who survived the bombing started coming out, they ... They are other people. Other looks. With pain, fear in the eyes. Stolen hopes. Stolen lives. Lost ambitions. No sense left ... After the airstrikes, there was nothing left of the furniture and people. You enter a house, there is nothing, but there are some rags in the bathroom. Only later did I understand that those were the remains of people. If a bath was cast-iron, it protected a little.

UU: What did you start doing then?

HY: Rescuing the survivors. We set up headquarters to distribute humanitarian aid. Once I burst into tears when an acquaintance brought bread to the town. Ordinary bread, but hot! Then celebrities began arriving, they brought **Starlink**, finally there was a connection. Doctors Without Borders brought medicine and medical equipment. Little by little, people began to return. Many people came to sort out the debris. People from all over the country helped. That was incredible! Such unity. It was so touching. There were a lot of minefields. Our electricians are super heroes! In order to restore light faster, they single-handedly cleared the approaches to power lines. That even led to an accident. By the way, we later found tripwires even in washing machines.

Starlink is a global satellite system deployed by SpaceX to bring high-speed broadband satellite Internet access to places where it has been unreliable, expensive, or completely unavailable.

FORBES photo



Hryhoriy Yerko, Halyna's father, mayor of Borodianka

We meet my heroine's father. He heads the united territorial community (an amalgamation of several villages and towns - Editor). It turns out that he never left the town, he joined the Territorial Defense. The man does not want to talk about himself. He says "he was just together with the guys." He says that they did not have weapons at first, so they had to get them themselves. I look at him and remember Mel Gibson's character in the movie "Patriot" about the struggle for the independence of the United States. They are even somewhat similar, perhaps in their determination to protect children from murderers. I wondered how a person without military training could get weapons from professional Russian soldiers. But he only smiles slyly in response, "I have military experience. But I never thought that I would be forced to take up arms again."

UU: How is Borodianka recovering now? Who is helping with this?

HY: Now we have the last and only chance to transform. Everything depends on how we use this opportunity, how we can consolidate, and show transparency in spending money. Hungary will rebuild a school and a kindergarten. Lithuania will help with another school. Poland donated mobile homes.

Several charitable foundations came and help people with money. For people to trust us, I developed a system that shows what a family, a person really needs, what they have or haven't received. The same goes for help with housing. I am currently looking for benefactors who will build houses for people. I am convinced that the "concrete problem — concrete solution" policy works. For example, one of our residents needs to make an oven. I contact volunteers and voila! Volunteers from France will come to the man



Poland gave a modular town to Borodianka

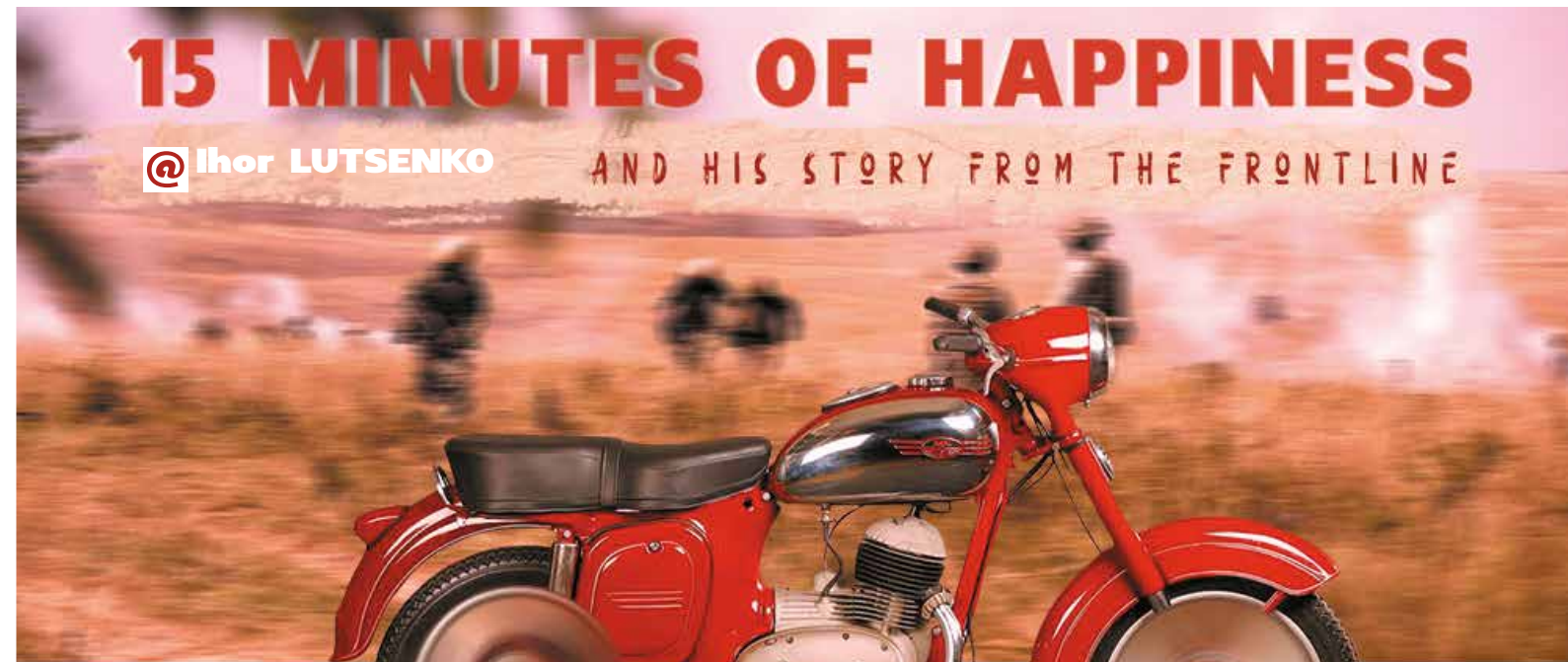
in a few days. I hope that the oven will turn out to be very "La Française." The symbol of Borodianka is a stork. It is an ancient Ukrainian symbol of returning home. Therefore, I hope that all our people will fly back to their nest. And we will be cozy and happy again.

We say goodbye and I mention that U.S. Senator Steve Daines and House of Representatives member Victoria Spartz visited Borodianka. Daines said at the time, "There's no substitute for actually being here, seeing it with your own eyes, spending time with the people and leaders here in Ukraine who have been terribly affected by this war." I look at Halyna, at her smile and think, Mr. Daines is right about the people. Along with them, you spread your own wings. You remember that a person does not need much. Family, communication, travel. And another person's hand is in your hand. Because then there will always be something to rise from the ashes, like phoenixes.

15 MINUTES OF HAPPINESS

@Ihor LUTSENKO

AND HIS STORY FROM THE FRONTLINE



15 minutes of happiness. I got a motorcycle. It's probably the worst motorcycle ever; it's from 1978, and it seems like the tires have not been changed since then; it has no mirrors, starter, and many other things. But motorcycles don't get old! They are able to give happiness at any age — and this motorcycle is no exception.

I rode that motorcycle around the village. The sun was setting and shining gold. Goats and cows were grazing, grapes and pears were ripening in the gardens. The soldiers were sitting on benches in front of the houses. I waved and smiled at them, they waved and smiled back and seemed to understand that I was just riding a moped. Cannons were firing from the wooded areas towards the enemy. The usual front-line work was going on.

The future of the world is being decided in those wooded areas, covered with dust, in those poor one-story villages of Donetsk, Kharkiv, and Kherson oblasts, so familiar to us with their half-sleepy lifestyle. **Those scruffy soldiers, who look like filibusters with a variety of clothes and character, turn the wheels of history in their direction.**

Dust stands over our fields, thunder rumbles. The filibusters shoot from everything they found across the seas and oceans — American, Soviet, Czech, German, and French guns.

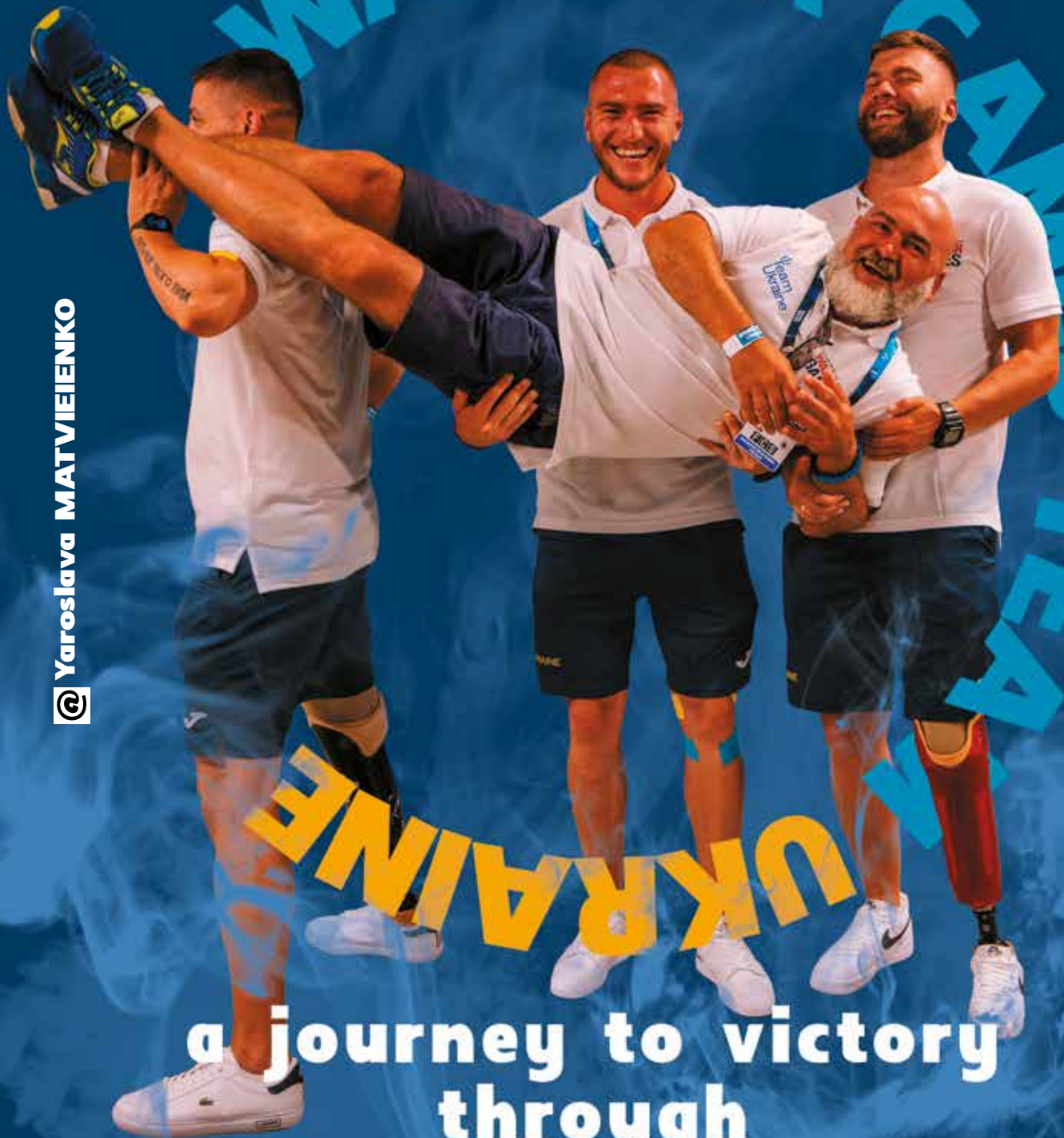
Air defense systems are working, missiles are periodically launched into the sky, and cluster **Uragans** hit a nearby town.

Washington, London, and Beijing are intensely looking at our fields through satellites, analysts are constantly analyzing and forecasting.

And here I am, riding my decrepit motorcycle for 15 minutes, the sun is shining gold, the artillerymen are smiling at me.

Anti-aircraft defense (air defense) is a set of organizational measures and combat actions aimed at repelling an enemy attack from the air, covering groups of ground troops or important objects in the rear.

BM-27 "Uragan" is a 220 mm salvo rocket system developed in the USSR. The complex has combat and transport vehicles based on the modified ZIL-135LM chassis. The system carries 16 rockets weighing 280 kg each, which can be fired in a volley in 20 seconds.



Yaroslava MATVIEIENKO

WARRIOR GAMES TEAM UKRAINE

a journey to victory through the paths of war

When Ukraine was invited to participate in the Warrior Games competition a year and a half ago, one could hardly have imagined that the COVID-19 pandemic would not be the only obstacle on this road for the Ukrainian team. And eventually that not all of the team members selected could make it to compete in Orlando on August 19-28, 2022.

wrote more about Ukrainian-American brotherhood spiritual and military connections with the Warrior Games at the heart of it, and now we are happy to continue the story. Just a short reminder about the Warrior Games themselves, in case you missed this information before. The Warrior Games is a multi-sport event for wounded, injured, or ill service personnel and veterans organized by the

Col. Greg Boyle and the United States Olympic Committee got involved, too. The first event was hosted at the U.S. Olympic and Paralympic Training Center in Colorado Springs, Colorado, which continued to host the event until 2014. Teams from the Army, Marine Corps, Navy/Coast Guard, Air Force, and Special Operations Command took part, competing in adaptive sports events.

Photo: Anastasia Telikova



The national team of Ukraine on the way to the Warrior Games

The teams' journey started in London in 2019, when Americans responded to the Ukrainian organizing committee's desire to involve their veterans in team sports. Help was given not only in words but in actions by providing the Ukrainian team with 10 basketball wheelchairs and coaches coming to Kyiv in early 2020 for a month. Two years later, the newbies almost beat their coaches with results any teacher would be proud of. In our previous issue, we

United States Department of Defense (DoD). The Warrior Games have taken place annually since 2010. It was created by John Wordin working with Gen. Gary Cheek (U.S. Army) while participating in the Ride 2 Recovery 2009 Texas Challenge. Subsequently, a meeting was held at the Pentagon with the USO (Sloan Gibson, Kevin Wensing, and Jeff Hill), Gen. Gary Cheek, Gen. David Blackledge, and Sgt. James Shriver. Soon, USMC

Athletes from the British Armed Forces took part in 2013, the first allied nation to join the event. Prince Harry, at the time serving as a Captain and helicopter pilot in the British Army, opened the games that year. His experience inspired him to create the Invictus Games, an international counterpart to the Warrior Games with many national teams. The first team for Ukraine was selected in 2021, with 40 of the best-of-the-best members,

including participants of Invictus Games teams from previous years. As the COVID-19 pandemic started to grow again, the in-person games were canceled, but an online adaptive sports competition was held instead. Ukraine won 49 medals! But more importantly, it brought hopes for a successful sportive new year in 2022 for Ukrainian veterans with both the Invictus Games and Warrior Games ahead.



With the outbreak of the full-scale war on February 24, there was little hope these plans would come to fruition. Most of the team members returned to the frontline to do the job they knew best: defending their country despite everything. No previous injuries and traumas could have stopped them.

As the war developed in the most unpredictable and unfortunately tragic way, painful news came. Three team members were killed in action fighting for their country's independence and freedom.

Dmytro Oliynyk died as a result of a rocket attack on the Mykolaiv Regional Council building on March 29. Dmytro Sydoruk died on April 5 in battle. Andriy Kotovenko died on May 2 around four in the morning near Kharkiv. Paramedic Yulia Payevska (call sign Taira) was trapped in enemy captivity for three months. Several others selected for the national team died in action, as well.

With the surprise news that the Invictus Games team came to compete in The Hague, Netherlands, in April, it was safe to say that the Warrior Games were definitely on the list for Ukrainian veterans and the military later in the year. And so it was. After a month of active training in Brighton, UK, the team was off to the USA. Proving miracles happen, Yulia Payevska was on board with her team just a month and a half after being released from Russian captivity.

"Victory begets victory."

Yesterday was the closing ceremony of Warrior Games 2022 in Orlando. Our extraordinary boys and girls, the national team of Ukraine (to which I have the honor to belong) at this world-famous competition for wounded or injured soldiers, won more than 90 medals during the week in a fierce struggle. This is an incredibly cool result, and I am proud to be part of such a cool team. By some miracle, I managed to win two gold medals, in swimming 50 m and 100 m freestyle, and bronze in powerlifting.



Undoubtedly, this is the merit of our star coaches, your support, and the extremely powerful help of the British, Canadians, and Americans, for which we are extremely grateful!

The Ministry of Veterans' Affairs also played a huge role. I love one little-known saying, "Victory begets victory."

I know that the sports victories of our undefeated team will encourage victory at the front. And part of our athletes will immediately return to Ukraine to perform their duties in combat units.

"Wish us all luck. And I send you congratulations from the team!" Yulia Payevska reflects on the competition.

Her teammate Maya Moskvych, who has recently returned to military service, remembers: "Gold! I won 2 gold medals in the individual archery competition at the Warrior Games! I won another gold as part of the archers' team.

I fulfilled my dream. I followed the last instructions of my late coach Dmytro Sydoruk.



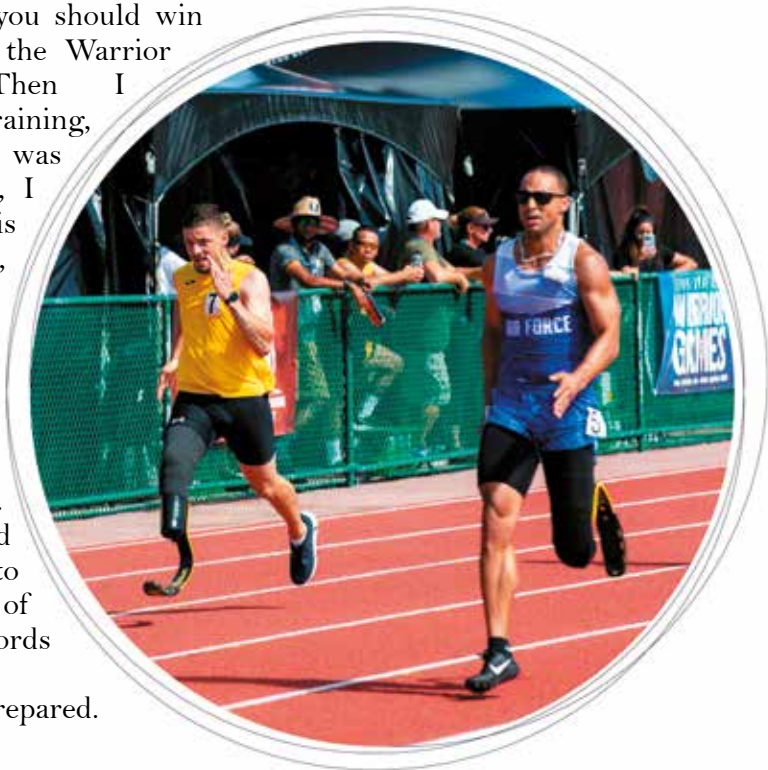
"A year ago, Sydoruk said to me 'Maya, you should win a medal at the Warrior Games.' Then I resumed training,

but the result was not very good, I thought 'What is he talking about,

doesn't he see how I shoot or something?' I didn't say anything, but I kept his words in my heart. And these words inspired me during all the training.

He believed in me at a time when even I did not believe in myself. It was most valuable. When Dima died in the East, and I was called to the national team, my first impulse was to refuse to participate. Because due to the lack of training, I would not be able to fulfill his last words to me.

"But I managed. Yes, I was not very prepared. My shooting didn't look perfect.



I sometimes made mistakes from excitement and my hands were shaking. But someone somewhere in Heaven decided to help me. I decided that the victory should be mine. Despite all. And arranged everything.

“At the qualification, I took 4th place with a gap of 20 points from the leaders. This is significant. But in sparring, I got a fairly favorable grid. All that was needed was not to waste this opportunity. And I didn’t waste it. “I thought I would cry. But I’m happy. Rejoice with me, as well. I have fulfilled my dream. I won the Warrior Games. I followed my coach’s last instructions.



Maya Moskvych, Yulia Payevska (Taira) and Yaroslava Mazur

“Thanks to everyone who supported me, cheered me on, and shared it all with me, and special thanks to the coaches of the shooting team.”

In total, the Ukrainian team won 85 individual medals and one silver team medal in 12 sports: archery, cycling, track & field, golf, indoor rowing, powerlifting, shooting, sitting volleyball, swimming, track, wheelchair basketball, and wheelchair rugby. For most people who are unfamiliar with the story, these are fantastic results. But for the Ukrainian team, each of them is of the utmost value, and an effort they are keen to remember.

Photo: Anastasia Telikova



The national team of Ukraine

What did the **WAR** bring to my life besides **anxiety, DESPAIR, and FEAR?** Meetings with incredible people. Among them is an American doctor. **Dr. Francis.**



Ultimate Ukrainian is following Inna Golovakha (@inna.golovakha) and her story about an American doctor in Ukraine

Dr. Francis goes back and forth between the U.S. and Ukraine with huge bags. A crumpled t-shirt, an old baseball cap of a “grayish” color, funny bracelets on his arm... He buys materials, tools, and medicine in America, takes everything to eastern Ukraine, does surgeries there, and returns to America again. “It’s hard to get here. Three planes, a bus, 57 boxes and a suitcase this time...” “Why won’t you just stay in Ukraine? Why return to America?” “Where can I get money for tools and materials? I go back, operate on patients, earn money, buy everything I need, return to Kharkiv, and operate on wounded soldiers...”

We worked together online, I translated, he treated Ukrainians in the war-torn areas. Online, he consulted my friend in Kyiv about her heart problem, when everything in Kyiv was still under threat of bombing. We met in person in a coffee shop in Lviv: I was returning to America; he was returning to Eastern Ukraine: “How is my patient?” (Asking about my friend) “She needs to walk more to train her heart. How is she doing financially?” I’m silent... He quickly reaches into his pocket and hands me a wad of hryvnias: “Can you send it to her

somehow? She needs vitamins and exercise.” I silently take the money, feverishly looking for a way to transfer it from Lviv to Kyiv. The path appears soon in a magical way. But this is the plot of completely different memories and a different book. “Thank you, Francis, for being such a help for my friend, for Ukraine, for... Why are you doing this?” “Because for the first time in my life, I see an unambiguous situation of good and evil. It’s usually more complicated. And here you can definitely be on the side of good.” “Are you scared?” “No, I have an underestimated sense of risk, and I don’t have a family.” I am proud that I got a chance to know such person.



@ Vladyslav HREBELNYK

MAJOR KYRYLO VERES IS THE GRANDSON AND GREAT-GRANDSON OF SOLDIERS WHO PARTICIPATED IN WORLD WAR I AND WORLD WAR II, A PROFESSIONAL SERVICEMAN WITH THREE DEGREES. HE WAS HONORED WITH THE HIGHEST STATE AWARD, THE GOLD STAR OF THE HERO OF UKRAINE. HE IS THE FIRST UKRAINIAN TO BE A FULL KNIGHT OF THE ORDER OF BOHDAN KHMELNYTSKYI OF THE 1ST, 2ND, AND 3RD CLASS. MAJOR VERES WAS AWARDED THE MEDAL FOR MILITARY SERVICE TO UKRAINE AND THE ORDER "PEOPLE'S HERO OF UKRAINE."

Nova Poshta is a Ukrainian international group of logistics companies, the leader of express delivery in terms of the volume of parcels delivered in Ukraine. The company provides businesses and individuals with a full range of logistics and related services. It was founded in 2001.

There is not a single image in which the hero would be with all his awards. Why? Veres jokes when answering this question: "Probably because all office branches of **Nova Poshta** have closed in Donetsk Oblast." He has no time for a photo shoot. He has no time for his family; Veres communicates with his family only twice a week. He rarely talks with them, because, as he says, you can't think about your family all the time. Veres has many soldiers under his command; he is obliged to think about them first.

He is engaged in an important activity, freeing his country from "Russian tourists." That's how the unit subordinated to

Veres jokingly named the Russian occupiers. The joke goes back to the early days of 2014, when the aggressor state, the Russian Federation, on all levels of communication, from its own propaganda channels to all international platforms, claimed that there were no Russian troops in Ukraine and it was Ukrainians' fault, and Ukraine had a civil war. But in the spring of 2015, Veres and his group detained Russian officers Aleksandrov and Yerofeev of the Main Intelligence Directorate, and that was irrefutable evidence of Russia's military involvement in the war against Ukraine.

"I joined the war eight years ago. I was young, handsome, and cheerful. Now, I'm only handsome and cheerful ... I have grown up ..." says the hero in an interview to Ukrainian TV journalist Nataliya Nagorna. "I remember the first time I went to the East of Ukraine in 2014. I was gathering people back then and said, 'We must be in time, we must be in time, because we will win quickly and I will not have time to make a contribution.'

I thought that we would end the war very quickly," he says in an interview with the Ukrainian channel ICTV. But there were too many "Russian tourists." So even now, any interview with Veres, as well as my short phone conversations with him, is accompanied by explosions. This is the work of his legendary K2 unit of the 54th Separate Mechanized Brigade, in which 90% of service members have various state awards.

Veres met the start of a full-scale war in February 2022 at positions in the Donbas. The Russians then concentrated on shelling and destroying the outskirts of the capital of Ukraine in order to surround and then seize Kyiv. The full-scale war came to Veres' positions only on the fifth or sixth day. "When the Russian convoy moved in our direction, I looked at them and thought, 'What should we do?' They will simply run over us and move

Illustrative photo



Photo: Genia Savilov/AFP/Getty Images

on. Then another thought came, 'We cannot retreat. This is our land, we must fight.' When we knocked out their second tank, I gave the command, 'No one moves back. We'll fight to the last!' Looking at their burning tanks, I knew that we would win. That is very important psychologically. Even if they had passed through our ranks,

we would have driven them into a cauldron and destroyed everyone," Veres recalled. When Major Veres says "we," he is talking about the soldiers of the K2 unit. According to Commander Veres, he is the first among EQUALS. Not only has the unit gained tremendous popularity, but it has also become one of the most elite

units in Ukraine. The unit has been defending the borders and destroying enemy equipment and manpower for eight years, so these soldiers have a lot of experience.

It is very interesting where the name of the unit came from. Veres says that everything happened by chance. "Once, I was driving through a checkpoint



Chevron of subdivision K2

and I said to a soldier, 'Tell them that Kyrylo Kyrylovych is coming,' but the guard at the checkpoint for some reason could not pronounce my name, and said, 'K2, enter.' Since then, it has stuck with us. It wasn't my idea, it was chosen by the soldiers of the unit. I would accept whatever name the majority chose. But I was pleased," says Veres. Currently, there are about 600 soldiers under the major's command. However, the K2 unit includes only a few dozen of the best soldiers. The main part was formed during the ATO. They were scouts who eventually turned into "universal soldiers." His fighters have mastered mortars, infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), tanks, and artillery, and they've shot from almost all available weapons.

The soldiers have a special unit chevron with their own name. "To get it, you need to serve for 5-7 months, show yourself in action. Only then do we give a chevron after a general vote, if the unit accepts the soldier," Veres explains. One of the fiercest battles in which K2 participated was a "tank breakthrough" near Donetsk. The enemy tried to break through the defenses, and seven tanks, two IFVs, and two armored personnel carriers (APCs) with soldiers moved towards the Ukrainian positions. At first, the enemy tanks approached within 400 meters. The positions of Veres' unit were covered with artillery from above, but the Ukrainian soldiers held out. The tanks

began to move forward, a fierce battle started, and the enemy was stopped just 150 meters from the Ukrainian positions. "We are all heroes here. No one expected us to stop them. We didn't expect that we would do it. But we did what was required," recalls a soldier of the K2 unit. At that time, no one retreated, everyone stayed in their positions and held the defense. Retreating, says Veres, is always worse than defending, because then you will have to go back and assault the enemy's new positions, and that is always accompanied by heavy losses.

During the Russian offensive on Kyiv, Veres' house was burned down, as well as the homes of

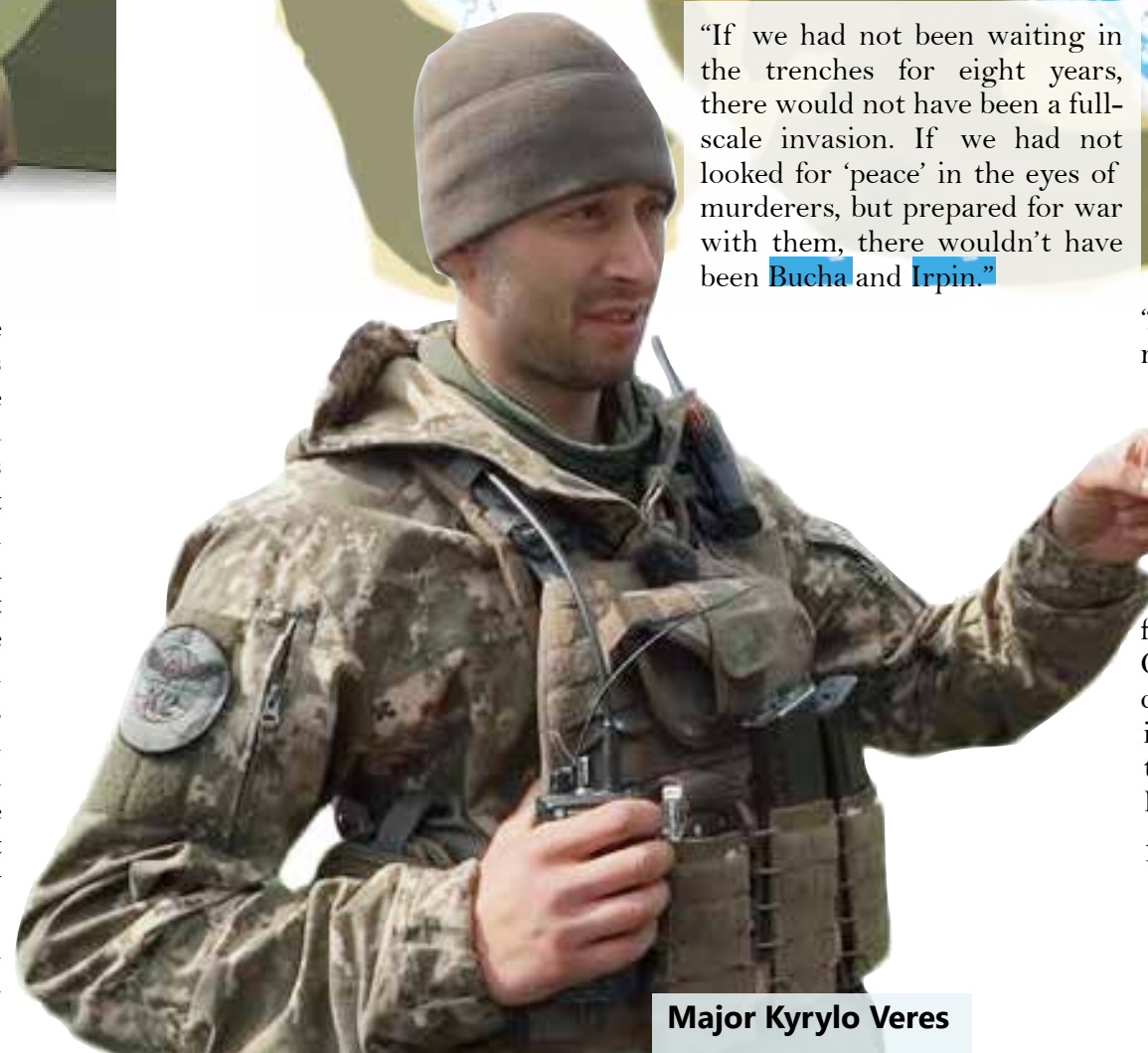
many other Ukrainians. The houses were destroyed by the Russian invaders. Major Veres is in no hurry to return and rebuild his house.

In this war, he dreams not only of victory and free cities that are not shelled upon by the enemy. Veres dreams that his 8-year-old son will not have to go to war as a 20-year-old young man in the future.



Bucha and Irpin, towns near Kyiv, were seized by Russians in an attempt to take the capital. For about a month, they were under the control of the Russian army.

"If we had not been waiting in the trenches for eight years, there would not have been a full-scale invasion. If we had not looked for 'peace' in the eyes of murderers, but prepared for war with them, there wouldn't have been Bucha and Irpin."



Major Kyrylo Veres

"After victory, I have to do one military thing. I want to create an elite unit that is not measured in numbers. After me, when I say that I want to retire and leave this unit, I want it to be so effective that when it is sent to some area of the front, I will be 100% sure of it. Or I'd just know that they had done everything possible and impossible to accomplish their task. So after the end of the war, I will need another 1-2 years. And then I'll go," says Major Veres.

Hero of Ukraine Major Kyrylo Veres dreams of creating such a Ukrainian army, where his elite unit will be the first among equals.



A VOLUNTARY SOLDIER
 who makes the world a better place

@Vladislav HREBELNYK

In late July 2022, President of the Russian Federation (RF) Vladimir Putin went to the Baltic Sea to celebrate Russian Navy Day. During his speech, he never mentioned Ukraine or the war, which he calls a “special military operation.” Neither did Putin mention the Moskva cruiser, the flagship of the Russian Black Sea Fleet sunk by the Ukrainian Armed Forces in the Black Sea. The dead sailors of the Russian cruiser are considered missing, the relatives of the dead can only guess about the fate of their husbands, sons, and brothers.

Ultimate Ukrainian (UU): You are 21, how did it happen that a young man from the capital found himself in the thick of war in eastern Ukraine?

Maksym Antonenko (MA): Everything became clear on February 24. I’m a political scientist, so it was no surprise to me that a full-scale war would break out. On February 24, when Kyiv woke up to shelling and bombing, I had already packed my bug-out backpack and bought a uniform and ammunition. I went to the military recruitment office and from then on everything was predictable: I do everything under the military oath and serve the people of Ukraine. The battalion was given an order to defend Kyiv. After the attack on the capital was repelled, we were ordered to move to the east, so here we are.

UU: What did you do at university apart from studying?
MA: It doesn’t sound so good for university, but for me university is not so much about studying as about what we did between classes or instead of them, including the debate club, literature parties, and a huge number of events and activities organized by students for students. The large number of social activities was probably a more important part of my university life than just attending classes.

UU: Why political science?
MA: Because in 2014, a little boy was watching TV and saw the burning tires at the EuroMaidan. It was me. At the age of 13, I was not interested in politics, but an understanding was born in the flames of those fires that I cannot stand aside when the weak are offended and when injustice is committed. And what is political science? This is the science of how to establish justice in society. I had no choice. The Ukrainian people made it for me.

UU: What do you think about the 2014 events and the Revolution of Dignity?
MA: Before the full-scale war, many people questioned whether that was worth it, whether that choice and the changes that took place after the Revolution of Dignity were worth the blood of the Heavenly Hundred.

EuroMaidan (the Revolution of Dignity) was a national-patriotic movement in Ukraine against government corruption and arbitrariness of law enforcement agencies and special forces, as well as in support of the European vector of Ukraine’s foreign policy.

Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv is a state higher education institution in Kyiv, Ukraine. According to the 2020 university rankings, it ranked 1st in Ukraine. It is the largest university in terms of the number of students and majors.

The Heavenly Hundred are the people who were killed during the 2014 Ukrainian revolution who fought for the freedom and independence of Ukraine.

the blood of thousands of those fallen during the war in the Donbas. I did not have such questions. We had to go through those trials in order to change the country's development vector. And the full-scale war that recently started is our challenge. This is the price for freedom, for a free country. Therefore, for me, the Revolution of Dignity is an event that will remain forever in history as a choice of dignified people who paid a high price for their choice. But is it possible to gain freedom without blood? For me, this is a rhetorical question.

UU: Do you associate the war that started on February 24 with the events of 2014?

MA: The Ukrainian choice, all those Ukrainian people's sentiment and their desire to live differently from how they did in the USSR, to live not in an empire, but in a free, progressive family of countries that place a person as a key element of the worldview or a key element of state-building — that is the reason for the conflict that arose between Ukraine and Russia. Therefore, for me, the Revolution of Dignity is a manifestation of the choice to be among the countries that value dignity. That is why it is called the Revolution of Dignity. There is such a chain: the desire to live among countries that value dignity — the Revolution of Dignity — absolute opposition, rejection of the old system and the Russian empire — the war in the Donbas — the gradual

development of Ukraine towards European values, absolute aversion and rejection of the Russian Federation — a full-scale war. All these processes are absolutely interrelated. This is our struggle for independence.

? **The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR)** was a federal socialist state in Northern Eurasia that existed from 1922 to 1991. Formally, it was a union of several national Soviet republics; in practice, it was a one-party dictatorship with a high degree of centralization of leadership and a planned economy managed by the Communist Party.

UU: When the war started, you were finishing your 4th year at university. What did the teachers say when you decided to wear the "pixels" of the Armed Forces and defend Kyiv?

MA: I studied at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv; the teachers were extremely loyal and supported all the students in the face of adversity. Moreover, as far as I know, many teachers are now my comrades in arms. Therefore, there is an absolute mutual understanding at our university that we must first protect Ukraine, and then study and build our country.

UU: As you said, you knew there would be a war. You prepared for it in advance. So tell me, how did you decide to go to the front?

MA: My choice was made in 2014, when I was still a teenager. Back then, I chose the career of political scientist. So, how can a person who has chosen the career of political scientist not stay in Ukraine, not be a volunteer, or not join the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine? Joining the defense forces as a soldier, volunteer, or some kind of media support is the duty of any person who has taken responsibility to express something or study socio-political issues.

UU: Are many of your fellow students at the front now?

MA: Our department has a chat where all the students fighting at the front can communicate. There are more than 20 people. I know five of them personally. There are junior students; I was a mentor to one of them, and now he serves as a combat crew member of the mortar battery at the front, in the Donbas. And one of my fellow students is currently in a combat position next to me.

UU: I know that your brother is also at the front. How did your mother react when you and your brother decided to go to war?

MA: It has been very difficult for my mother, but she is involved in charity activities and volunteer foundations. Thus, she joins the forces of resistance and defense of Ukraine on another front. Therefore, our whole family is now on different fronts. I won't say that my mother had a choice

Yesterday's student, today's soldier — Maksym Antonenko

Protesters' wooden shields against bullets of the riot police who betrayed their people. February 2014. Kyiv. Independence Square

to accept mine and my brother's choice or not (smiles), but after we went to war, she is helping us in every way possible. For example, to find ammunition or solve logistical issues. Relatives help the whole battalion. I don't think there's a family that wants their soldier to be here. But Russia left no choice for anyone. We are all here not to fight and kill, but to protect those who did not want us to go to war.

The impact of a fight with a Russian subversive-intelligence group on the outskirts of Kyiv



UU: What was your first combat experience?

MA: It's strange to recall, but the Russians believed that Kyiv would be taken in a few days. We saw huge convoys of Russian vehicles crossing the border. How they got to the outskirts of Kyiv and entered Kyiv Oblast: Chernobyl, Hostomel, and Bucha. Then our battalion took part in the defense of Kyiv and in the battles near Kyiv.

UU: What played a key role in the defense of the capital?

MA: All forces were sent to defend Kyiv. Unfortunately, many boys perished in the struggle for the capital. But the enemy was stopped through the joint efforts of many brigades. The fact that we had no choice played a key role. We had only one way out — throw the enemy as far as possible. The best illustration is the number of destroyed bridges on the outskirts of Kyiv and how my comrades in arms reacted. We stood at night on the first day of the war with only machine guns, no heavy weapons. We followed the Russian troops on the map and saw that they will soon approach us. And we got up. This honor appears, there is a desire to do something with them: to detain them somehow, to defeat them. It is not important how exactly, but to stop the invader. This honor, this Cossack desire to prevent



them from reaching Kyiv, to show them their place, and this place is outside the borders of Ukraine. In other words, we simply had no choice but to defend Kyiv.

UU: After the Russians were driven away from Kyiv, did you immediately go to the eastern front?

MA: There is no choice in the army. We all signed a contract and took an oath, so everyone who was given an order went to the east. For some time, many battalions were deployed in Kyiv Oblast, on the northern borders of Ukraine. They were looking for Russian deserters, dislodging them. In addition, at that time, there was a great threat of escalation from Belarus, so many battalions remained in their positions. But later, they began to send us to priority sectors, in particular, our battalion, one of the last, was transferred from the defense of Kyiv to the Donbas.

UU: Will you return to a peaceful life after victory, or will you continue your service in the ranks of the Armed Forces?

MA: Sometimes it seems that the whole world and the whole life that was before the war is a phantom, a dream that happened a long time ago. Sometimes, many of my brothers in arms and I myself say that it's addictive. This feeling of "being on the side of the Light" in the confrontation between light and darkness. However, after the end of the war, I plan to continue

my struggle on another, peaceful front. I am not a military person, I joined the Armed Forces only because of Russia's brazen aggression, and after our victory, I plan to return to peaceful life, we still have a lot of work to do.

UU: You said we have a lot of work to do. And what are your plans after the victory?

MA: It is a thankless thing to make plans during war. I know from experience that you can't plan for more than one day. However, of course, I would like to return to my family, walk around my native Kyiv, part of which I have not seen since February 24, and to many places that hold very warm memories for me. I will have to do a lot of housework, help my family, and see a lot of people. And then go back to studying, go back to my work. We will have to rebuild the country, so the struggle will not end after our victory. It's going to take some time to recover, but I'm definitely not considering giving up everything I love and on which I have worked so hard, and lost so much sleep over. I just can't help but continue studying and working.

UU: Now people are gradually returning to normal life in Kyiv. They drink coffee in cafes, walk in parks, as if there is no war. Doesn't that annoy you?

MA: We are all fighting so that people in the rear can smile, enjoy a peaceful life, drink wine, tea, coffee, and enjoy the days. And everyone should remember

that the war is near and we must hurry to live. This is what we are fighting for. We are not fighting for the whole country to become one military base, we are fighting for the country to be happy, European, and free.

UU: What does being a defender mean to you?

MA: That's a tough question. For me, protecting my family is simply not being able to sit somewhere else and pretend that nothing is happening. And because of this, it causes a healthy reaction — to protect those I love with my own body. It does not mean that I can do this only with a machine gun. This can be done by getting a second job or by blocking Russians' pages on Instagram or YouTube. Therefore, in my opinion, everyone who joins the fight against Russian aggression is a defender. Being a defender is simply not considering backing down when a gun is pointed at your girlfriend or your mom.

UU: And one last thing. What does being Ukrainian mean to you?

MA: There is a story that happened to my brothers in arms, with my company. We were at a position in an abandoned place. Swearing at it, we dug a well, and in one evening we built a shower and toilet there. For me, to be Ukrainian is to get into some abandoned place and all together make our life, the world that surrounds us, a better place.

FATES

of "The Ultimate Ukrainian-2021"

HEROES in 2022



@Larysa KUZMENKO

The largest conventional war since World War II instantly changed the fate of millions of Ukrainians. The war is full-scale and bloody, with front line, tank, and artillery battles.

A war in which thousands of Ukrainians have already died. Everyone who creates The Ultimate Ukrainian keeps in constant touch with the heroes of previous issues. I would like to tell about the fate of several heroes of The Ultimate Ukrainian-2021.

Maria Avdeeva. After Russia started its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Maria Avdeeva stayed in Kharkiv, a city 30 km from the border with the Russian Federation, which has been hit by missiles and bombs daily since February 24, 2022. Since then, Maria has been reporting about the situation in the city. She also works as a war correspondent in other regions of Ukraine where hostilities are taking place. She helps foreign media as a local representative, comments on the situation in Kharkiv for them, and travels to the sites of Russian shelling.

Volodymyr Birchak. Since the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Volodymyr Birchak has been in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. Volodymyr Birchak is a brilliant historian, editor of "Istorychna Pravda", head of academic programs at the Liberation Movement Research Center, and former deputy director of the Archive of the Security Service of Ukraine (2014-2016). He is currently serving on the frontline.

Yulia Mykytenko is the main hero of The Ultimate Ukrainian-2021. Having been through many difficulties, strong and courageous Yulia Mykytenko sticks to her convictions. Despite the fact that she retired from the Armed Forces in 2021, she returned to defend her homeland after the Russian invasion in February 2022. At the beginning of September, Yulia happily announced that she had finished her training and received a certificate of proficiency as a UAV Operator. She is now serving in Donetsk Oblast, near the city of Donetsk.

Larysa Mykytyon, a volunteer since 2014, is the head of the Veterano Service project. She is a mother who joined the Armed Forces of Ukraine on March 1, 2022, where she serves in the Witcher Unit, one of the new military units formed in 2022. During military rotations, Larysa organizes trainings to improve and increase soldiers' ability to effectively defend their homeland.

Oleksandr Afanasyev is now an officer of the Armed Forces of Ukraine. In March 2022, he was awarded the Order for Courage III degree. He took part in battles for the besieged Chernihiv, a city about 130 km from the capital Kyiv, near the border with hostile Belarus. He is defending the country as part of the 54th mechanized brigade in the hottest spots of combat operations.

Iryna Tsvila – teacher, social activist, photographer, member of the Sich battalion, participant in the Russian-Ukrainian war and of the battle of Kyiv. On February 25, 2022, she died while repelling a tank attack and defending Irpin. She is remembered by her brothers- and sisters-in-arms, she is remembered by the people to whom Iryna gave flowers. Roses. Iryna loved roses very much. On May 6, 2022, a street in Brovary was named in Iryna's honor, and people planted roses in Kyiv. As Ukrainians say, heroes do not die!

Ukrainians also like to repeat the words of 19th-century Ukrainian poet Taras Shevchenko: "Keep fighting — you are sure to win! God helps you in your fight!" Because, "In your own house, it is your own truth, your own might and freedom."



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Ukrainian journalist and active volunteer at the Invictus Games and other veterans' sporting events. She runs the Facebook community fan page dedicated to Invictus Games Team Ukraine. She is currently working on projects to help Ukrainian veterans, mostly for veteran writers, and she is studying psychology to be able to help veterans in the future.



Vladyslav Hrebelnyk
A political scientist studying legal journalism at Kyiv National University. An active public figure, he focuses on forming and developing a democratic environment in Ukraine.



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Nikita Titov was born in Estonia. He graduated from the Arts and Graphics Department of Kharkiv Pedagogical University and lived in Kharkiv for a long time. In 2021, he moved to Kyiv. He works in painting, graphics, book illustration, and design. He draws posters to support and glorify Ukraine, popularize Ukrainian culture, and visualize strong human emotions. He has gained incredible popularity among social media users who share his works on the Internet. In 2021, Nikita Titov had an exhibition at Landscape Alley in Kyiv.

Since the beginning of Russia's war against Ukraine, he has been creating posters depicting Ukrainian soldiers, doctors, and volunteers. A few weeks before the full-scale war, he created a series of coats of arms of Ukrainian cities based on a defense concept. The symbol for each city is a sword or other weapon. His motive was to show that Ukraine is capable of defending itself in the event of an enemy attack. After the enemy captured Zmiiny (Snake) Island, he painted a poster with a Kremlin-shaped ship sinking in blood. Now the poster reproductions can be seen on billboards in cities throughout Ukraine, as screensavers of blogger programs, and prints on clothing. He depicts Ukraine as a woman – gentle and fragile, protected by strong defenders. When asked how he would depict Ukraine after the victory, whether it will be very strong, Nikita Titov replied, **“Ukraine is already very strong. And after victory, I will draw it strong and very beautiful. Then we will rebuild our country. We will rebuild everything. Victory to all of us!”**



Nikita Titov

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