



**STORIES OF DESTRUCTION,  
RESCUE AND SURVIVAL**

**BORODYANKA: FROM FEBRUARY 24 TO MARCH 31, 2022**

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*Resembling some macabre Apocalyptic stage sets, images of wrecked nine-story residential buildings in the center of the small town of Borodyanka, near Kyiv, hit the world press hard. They became a symbol of the Russian army's barbarism. I happen to have seen what was happening with my own eyes. Here's a collection of stories from real witnesses of Borodyanka's resistance to the enemy, of the town's destruction, of rescue efforts and survival of those lucky to survive, illustrated with documentary photos. They demonstrate the ages-old chasm in worldviews of the so-called 'brotherly nations' - Russia and Ukraine. After all, the border between Europe and Asia, as it was marked on Late Antique and Medieval maps, coincided with eastern borders of today's Ukraine.*

## Story One: Stories of Resistance and Destruction

### Escape

I found this cartoon portrait on a crumpled piece of paper on the floor of a hastily abandoned house (photo 1).



It was drawn by Natalia, the house mistress, for her three-year-old son Platon. My guess it's a portrait of Barney - a big shaggy dog, the entire family's favorite. On the first day of the onslaught Barney's owners grabbed their three children, left the dog with the landlady's mother, jumped to their car and rushed for Poland. This is what hundreds of thousands of Kyivans and residents of Kyiv suburban zones did - mostly they were young, active and financially well-off people. They gave up everything: businesses, careers, houses or apartments in prestigious buildings. Some of them even had had time to arrange veterinary passports for their pets - dogs or cats. Because they had preferred to listen to the warnings from USA and Britain's intelligences about the imminence of the coming war, rather than President Zelensky's pretty naive statements of that time that Russia hadn't yet been ready to attack. Therefore, a continuous stream of passenger cars flowed through Borodyanka immediately after the war began. This flow did not subside even after the arrival of Russian armored vehicles on the

eastern outskirts of the town on February 26. It just switched to other highways, going from Kyiv to Kovel and to Zhytomyr.

Subsequent events proved that all those who had left were absolutely right. However, the majority stayed at home. Most of them were people with low income, with no cars, pensioners or people with disabilities. Others were Russian-speaking Borodyanka inhabitants, who didn't see Russians as a threat. Forty years ago many of them came here from different parts of the former Soviet Union to work at a local excavator plant and they never spoke any other language but Russian, back then and now, so they believed they were safe. Besides, there were also Putin's avid admirers, who actually helped occupiers. But also there were people like me. For some reason we believed the war would end quickly. It seemed to us that as soon as Russian troops would meet determined resistance, they would retreat so not to get involved in a protracted and therefore hopeless confrontation with Ukraine and the entire West.

Majority of people rushed to buy food, medicine, and other necessities, such as toilet paper, or withdraw cash from ATMs, which was only natural at the face of war. There were also brave men who waited in long lines in front of the local military commissariat to enroll in the ranks of the Territorial Defense forces and get weapons. Frankly saying, the commissariat functioned only to some extent and only for the first two days after the onslaught, and Kalashnikov assault rifles were not in ready supply for everyone willing to fight against aggressors. The advance of the Russians was so rapid that most members of the local Territorial Defense forces did not have time to collect their weapons. At that time, representatives of The Armed Forces of Ukraine (ZSU) called on Borodyanka community's administration. In particular, they asked not to try to stop the enemy within the populated areas to avoid casualties among civil population.

## **Resistance**

Russian paratroopers failed to achieve the surprise capture of the Gostomel and Vasylkiv airfields and break into Kyiv on the move. After that the Russian General Staff decided to besiege Kyiv from the west side to capture it. So the troops were ordered to break a corridor through Borodyanka, Makariv and Fastiv and further as far as Vasylkiv, in order to cut off the Zhytomyr and Odesa highways and the railway.

Historically Borodyanka formed along one street. This street is part of the ancient Kyiv-Iskorosten road, which leads further west. The street is called Tsentralna (i.e. 'Central'), and locals joke that it's 'as long as a dog's wail'. After all, it's seven kilometers long! No wonder that most of the events described in this book take place around this street.

Enemy armored vehicles appeared on the eastern outskirts of Borodyanka, where Tsentralna Street starts, in the morning of February 26. According to eyewitnesses, Russian soldiers were firing from their tanks at everyone they saw in that part of the town. At 1:40 p.m., a Russian missile destroyed the house of the Simoroz family in this street, killing six of its residents (photo 2).



By the evening the local forces of resistance built a barricade on the road, near the "Dovira" socio-psychological rehabilitation center, where they were based, burned one enemy armored personnel carrier and seized an enemy truck (photo 3).



On March 27, the next large column of armored vehicles took the ring road around the town, ironically, in total accordance with the road sign at the entrance to Borodyanka. There are no multi-story and almost no industrial buildings along

that road, so it was much more difficult for paramilitaries to hide there. Therefore, that column was fired upon closer to the industrial zone, near the excavator plant.

In the evening of the next day, another column of the 36th Combined Arms Army of Russia (deployed in the city of Ulan-Ude, the capital city of Buryatia in Russia), marked with large white "V" letters (meaning 'Vostok', i.e. 'East'), made another attempt to pass the town along the main Tsentralna street. But it was ambushed near the post office. Paramilitaries chose this place for the reason: on one side of the street there is a park, and a non-residential building on the other. My neighbor managed to film a short video of what was happening, from the ninth floor of his residential building. There you can hear a flurry of machine gunshots and see burning enemy vehicles, along with nearby private houses, set on fire by the Russians (photo 4).



On the morning of March 1, I went there and took these pictures of that battle results: burnt Russian vehicles and corpses of Buryats (Mongolic ethnic group from Buryatia) (photos 5-8).







Dmytro Hordienko managed to film the destroyed enemy convoy from the drone (photo 9).



Yuriy Butusov, a well-known military commentator, wrote about this battle on his Facebook page: *"Soldiers of the territorial defense of Borodyanka in the Kyiv region, commanded by Evgeny Lavrov, inflicted severe damage on Russian supply columns. In the clashes of February 27-28 three trucks were burned and four trucks were captured. One of the destroyed trucks is a command-and-control vehicle, and among the captured ones is a truck loaded with ammunition for the BMP-21 Grad MLRS, which the Russians were ready to fire at Kyiv. Glory to the defenders of Kyiv!"*

In fact, during those two-day clashes twenty enemy vehicles were destroyed and eight more were captured. The enemy thought they were attacked by special forces. The London "Times" in its issue dated on August 4, 2022 published an interview with Serhiy Piven, the head of the local Military Commissariat, who told about those events in the article titled "Ukrainian Partisans 'Fought Like Special Forces' Against Putin's Army." He said that forty five local men, half of whom had

never had any sort of military training, stood up to defend their town. They only had Kalashnikov assault rifles, a box of grenades, and bottles of incendiary mixture. The local "Autologistics" company also provided them with several passenger cars. So the partisans fought clothed in simple sports suits and running shoes. They managed to seize from the enemy some grenade launchers and other weapons and a lot of ammunition for them. That allowed them to burn a lot of enemy equipment. In the fights on February 27-28 six defenders from Borodyanka and surrounding villages died in combat. Here are their names:

*Bernyk Yuriy, died on February 27, 2022;*  
*Lazir Ivan, died on February 27, 2022;*  
*Yaroshenko Ihor, died on February 27, 2022;*  
*Kosyan Boris, died on February 28, 2022;*  
*Mykhalchenko Serhiy, died on February 28, 2022;*  
*Shulgach Serhiy, died on February 28, 2022.*

At the same time, the losses of the Russians were much bigger.

Serhiy Piven is confident that the resistance of Borodyanka people slowed down the enemy's advance and thwarted their attempt to capture Kyiv by surprise. He regretted that many of those partisans have not yet been granted the status of participants of combat operations. Mr. Piven also told that he broke up with one of his old friends who was sure that Borodyanka was destroyed due to the actions of the partisans.

Soon, the occupiers were surprised to learn from their informants who had actually attacked them. So it is not surprising that they began to search the houses of Borodyanka residents for elusive partisans. The Russians already had photos of some of them, which they showed during the searches, but they never caught anyone. This is because, in contrast to Bucha, members of the local 'Teroborona' Territorial Defense Forces avoided coming back to their homes after the beginning of the fighting, and many of them had evacuated their families.

It is important to note that the Russians carefully prepared for the invasion and had gathered full information about Kyiv region settlements. They possessed not only road maps with locations of authorities, enterprises, warehouses and shops. They also had lists of home addresses of all residents, including ex-servicemen who fought in Donbas in earlier stages of Russia's aggression, or even addresses of hunting weapons owners. According to some people I know, the Russians also had lists of members of the local Teroborona. Here are some eyewitness accounts to confirm this.

The house of one of my friends, Anna, is located on the eastern outskirts of Borodyanka. She and her husband left on February 26, leaving behind their parents. The next morning the house was surrounded by two dozen Russian soldiers. They came to arrest Anna's husband as owner of a gun and a member of the Territorial Defense. The Russian commander had a portable metal detector on his helmet. He went around the house and made sure that the owner and the weapon were no longer in it. But in the process he instantly found a hidden safe

and identified that it contained some gold jewelry. He did not take it because he was in a hurry to get to some another house.

Another resident of Borodyanka, Valery, was stopped by a Russian patrol and was ordered to give his first and last name. The one who asked entered them into his tablet and read out Valeriy's address.

One of my friends, Serhiy, told me that on the evening of March 1, on nearby Nezalezhnosti Street, he saw the light of two flashlights that formed a straight line pointing at two five-story buildings which soon were bombed.

After the clashes in the center of the town it would be logical for the enemy to send the next convoys around the town, along the ring road, where there was less chance to be ambushed. However, the very fact of resistance from the civilians enraged the Russian commandment. So they acted as many times before in Chechnya, Georgia, Syria and in the East of Ukraine.

### **Destruction of Borodyanka**

Around 11 o'clock on February 28, a convoy of armored vehicles consisting of 24 tanks, 26 armored vehicles and rocket launchers, and 15 fuel tankers began destroying Tsentralna Street. I called them the "Savage Division". First, the Russians used a rope to tear open a metal door of the store at the entrance to the town and raided the place for cigarettes and bottled water. The same fate awaited two other food supermarkets (photo 10).



When the convoy approached residential buildings, they began to shoot them with cannons and machine guns. I saw it with my own eyes and photographed all this from windows of my apartment on the second floor (photo 11).



The administrative buildings, the military commissariat and, uncannily, the music school got the brunt of it (photos 12-13).





But residential buildings also came under fire (photo 14).



At the railway station, the "savage division" set fire to the oil depot, although it actually belonged to a Russian owner and had not been used since 2015 (photo 15).



But sometimes revenge comes on swift wings. Around 3:00 p.m. of the same day, three Russian tanks rushed down the street in the opposite direction. Probably these were the remains of the "savage division" defeated by the Ukrainian military near Makariv. The passage of the "savage division" terrified residents of houses on Tsentralna street and most of them left Borodyanka the same day, or found shelter somewhere further away from the downtown area. That saved many lives.

As reported on the same day at 5:08 p.m. by the "Military Equipment" website, "*Borodyanka Territorial Defense fighters burned several trucks and a command-and-control vehicle.*" The backlash from the invaders was swift.

The next day at 4 p.m., I was standing by the kitchen window talking to my friend Serhiy over mobile phone. He used to live near the circular intersection at the Kyiv-Kovel highway on the Borodyanka's western edge. And right at that moment there was a roar of planes, the sound of shrapnel's impact on the wall next to me, an explosion and his jumbled words: "*Damn! The windows and doors flew out, I was cut by glass...*" Those were the missiles launched by a Russian SU-25 attack aircraft fired at the first floor of my friend's five-story building (photo 16, by Sergij Kylymnyk).



My friend was lucky because his flat was at the opposite end of the building from where the missiles hit.

In just a minute, another plane fired missiles at another house nearby (photo 17, by Roman Ustymchuk).



That terrible footage was almost immediately broadcasted on Ukrainian television. But aerial murderers paid no heed. In 2.5 hours, the next pair of SU-25s



arrived from their airfield in Belarus and destroyed another three five-story buildings (photos 18-19).



At that time, my another friend, Anatoly, was in his apartment on the third floor. It is located in the left, surviving wing of the building. He said that the first

blow destroyed floors from 4<sup>th</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup>, and the next one – floors from the ground and up to the 3<sup>rd</sup> floor. Finally, the pilot dropped an incendiary bomb on the ruins, igniting surviving apartments.

When a month and a half later, after the de-occupation, rescuers were dismantling the ruins, they found in the basement a mutilated male body. It was the body of my friend's son, who had been a very talented, God-gifted surgeon. His parents recognized him by prescription forms in his jacket pocket and a flash drive with doctoral thesis he had been preparing to defend. A finger with a wedding ring on it was everything that was left of his wife, my friend's daughter-in-law; and an elbow - of his little granddaughter. However, these remnants were not given to the family without a DNA analysis, so the son was buried alone (photo 20).



But even this was not enough for the murdering pilots. They arrived again around 11 p.m. and dropped incendiary bombs on already burning building of the Military Commissariat and nearby houses.

There were some propane cylinders in the Military Commissariat's boiler-house and nearby houses. Red-hot from fire, they were exploding one by one and flying in all directions with a shrill whistle, like rockets. A few flats in a nearby nine-story building were still on fire. All-in-all, it definitely looked like a scene from some apocalyptic movie. I'd never thought that I would witness anything like that with my own eyes.

On the morning of March 2, my wife and I woke up at seven o'clock. According to a long-standing tradition, I brewed some fragrant Arabica coffee (which I grind myself) in a clay Turkish coffee pot, and arranged some homemade

cheese, half a banana and my signature jelly on the plates. As for the jelly, I make it myself all winter long, from grapes and viburnum I grow on my garden plot. It was the last breakfast of our then so usual, but now gone, life.

At 7:47 a.m., we again heard the now-familiar and terrifying hum of approaching SU-25s. My friend Leonid from the neighboring house and his mother were at that time outside the building and they saw the plane launching three missiles. They hit the center of a nine-story building on the opposite from us side of Tsentralna Street (photo 21, by Oleksiy Katashinsky).



A huge explosion shook our panel house. It wobbled and rattled at the seams, and shattered glass poured in from windows. "Run!" - I shouted to my wife, who was sitting in the kitchen. When the second plane hit right in the center of the next nine-story building with missiles, we were standing in the corridor pressed against the wall (photo 22).



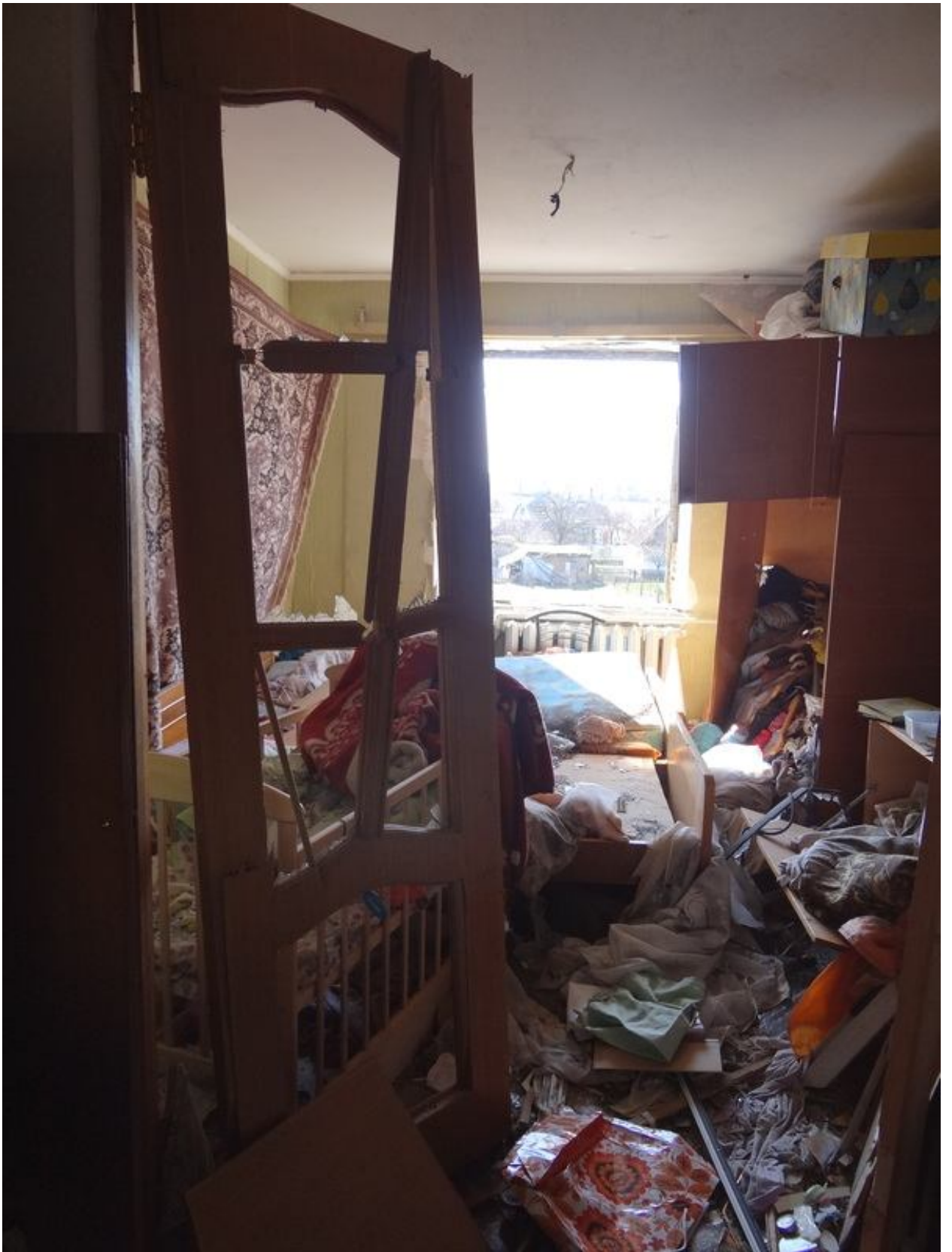
The blast wave threw people's mutilated bodies out of their apartments (photos 23-24 from the "Security Center" website and the REUTERS news agency).



Some people survived in basements of the destroyed buildings and were calling out for help for several days, but in vain. Aggressors forbade digging the rubble (photo 25).



In our apartment, the blast wave squeezed the remains of glass out of window frames and mangled all the doors. All walls were pierced with shards and shrapnel (photo 26).



One of the fragments flew in 20 centimeters from my head and hit the mirror in the corridor. Batteries from the wall clock dislodged and it stopped, recording the exact time of sudden deaths of many Borodyanka residents (photo 27).



And almost simultaneously, the first plane made a U-turn and, right before my eyes, hit Taras Shevchenko's bust sculpture in the Borodyanka center square, shooting from a 2-barreled 30 mm canon (photo 28).





I grabbed the go-bag I had packed the day before and together with my wife we rushed out of the house. Other people were doing the same. But some of them, like our neighbor Nadia, ran out as they were, wearing just a bathrobe and slippers.

After running for about 200 meters, my wife, who is partially crippled, ran out of breath and we stopped. Such a distance was a real record for her, because usually she can walk about 30 or 40 meters at a time, with the help of her walking Scandinavian sticks. Fortunately, a car stopped near us and the driver offered help. He took us to our lady-colleague's house, on the northern outskirts of Borodyanka. She welcomed us and took us to the mini-boiler room in the basement of the house. Due to over-stress and fatigue, my wife lost her footing and fell on the stairs. Together, we dragged her to the basement, where it took her quite a long time to recover. The only one benefit of that tiny cramped space was its thick concrete walls.

That's how simply but efficiently the "savage division" and four planes killed more than a hundred civilians in two days and drove about three thousand inhabitants of Borodyanka out of their homes. Soon the Russians completely

destroyed and burned the base of Borodyanka partisans - the "Dovira" medical center (photo 29).



During the "cleansing" of Borodyanka the so-called "liberators" killed another two dozen civilians. Those people were victims of shelling, or just purely unlucky men who somehow evoked the slightest suspicion, or even those who were simply driving their own cars. Invaders set up permanent roadblocks at the entrance to Borodyanka and in its center, along the main Tsentralna Street, and strictly forbade local residents to step on it (photo 30).



By that time, the Russians had already looted or destroyed almost all Borodyanka stores, pharmacies, cafes, restaurants, banks and workshops. And when the Russians were not in sight, there were local marauders, who also actively engaged in looting. The local hospital was the only facility still functioning, more or less. Volunteers had managed to supply it with a certain amount of medications from not yet looted pharmacies. Now Russian convoys marched freely right through the center of Borodyanka, not fearing any attacks, bypassing concrete structures of the checkpoints, burnt vehicles and the ruins of destroyed houses. And although now it was actually faster to drive through the ring road than going

through the town center, military convoys obstinately went on moving along the main street. Thus, an "exemplary Russian order" was established in our town.

When I was cleaning my apartment after the de-occupation, I came across a little book titled "*Chronicles of the Homeland. Borodyanka Region*". It contained the following lines written by the local historian Oleksandr Tsuruly: "*At the end of 1240, the Mongol hordes swept through our region like a fiery tornado. All the settlements and fortifications on their way were destroyed and burned, part of inhabitants perished, others escaped to forest thickets.*" By the way, during the Second World War's German Nazi occupation Borodyanka stayed almost unharmed.

Later, analyzing the above-mentioned events, I realized that the SU-25 pilots acted in fact very rationally in their crooked logic. They wanted to cause maximum damage, so they targeted ground floors at the middle of residential buildings consisting of at least several blocks, with separate entryways, and then they would set the ruins on fire with incendiary bombs. My wife and I are lucky to own an apartment in a comparatively small tower-like single block residential building. Looks like the pilots have received quite a good training in destruction of cities and mass killing of civilians in Syria. But such crimes do not stay unpunished in Ukraine.

For the few following days planes from Belarus always flew over Borodyanka. On March 9, I was relieved to count only three of four SU-25s coming back after bombing of Irpin. I heard right. In the evening of the same day, Ukrainian radio confirmed that one of the attacking planes had been shot down. It seems that later the same fate befell the rest of them. However, if any of pilots of those planes managed to survive, they would scarcely die of natural causes. Their commanders and leaders will never allow them to testify at the Hague Tribunal. But let's return to the main theme of this tragic story. Both Ukrainian and Western mass media gradually made the ruins of two residential buildings in the center of Borodyanka, shown in photos 21-22, a symbol of the Russian-Ukrainian war and of crimes of the Russian Army.

### **‘Peoples' Friendship Arch’ and ‘Stage Scenery’**

Photo 21 shows one of the most recognized Borodyanka ruins – the one of a multi-story panel building at 353 Tsentralna Street, which is right across from my house. The explosion created a rectangular hole in its center, ranging from the ground up to the seventh floor. The facade slabs of the eighth, ninth and the tenth floors (the upper one being the service floor) hung above this gap, forming a sort of an arch. It is not surprising that numerous photos and videos of this house, stealthily taken by residents of Borodyanka, at once flooded social networks. The wits immediately nicknamed this half-ruined building the ‘Peoples' Friendship Arch’, alluding to the Kyiv's monument of the same name erected back in Soviet times as a symbol of ‘friendship’ between Russian and Ukrainian peoples. It was erected in 1982 but it was renamed as the Freedom Arch right before Russia's attack on Ukraine in February 2022 (photo 31).



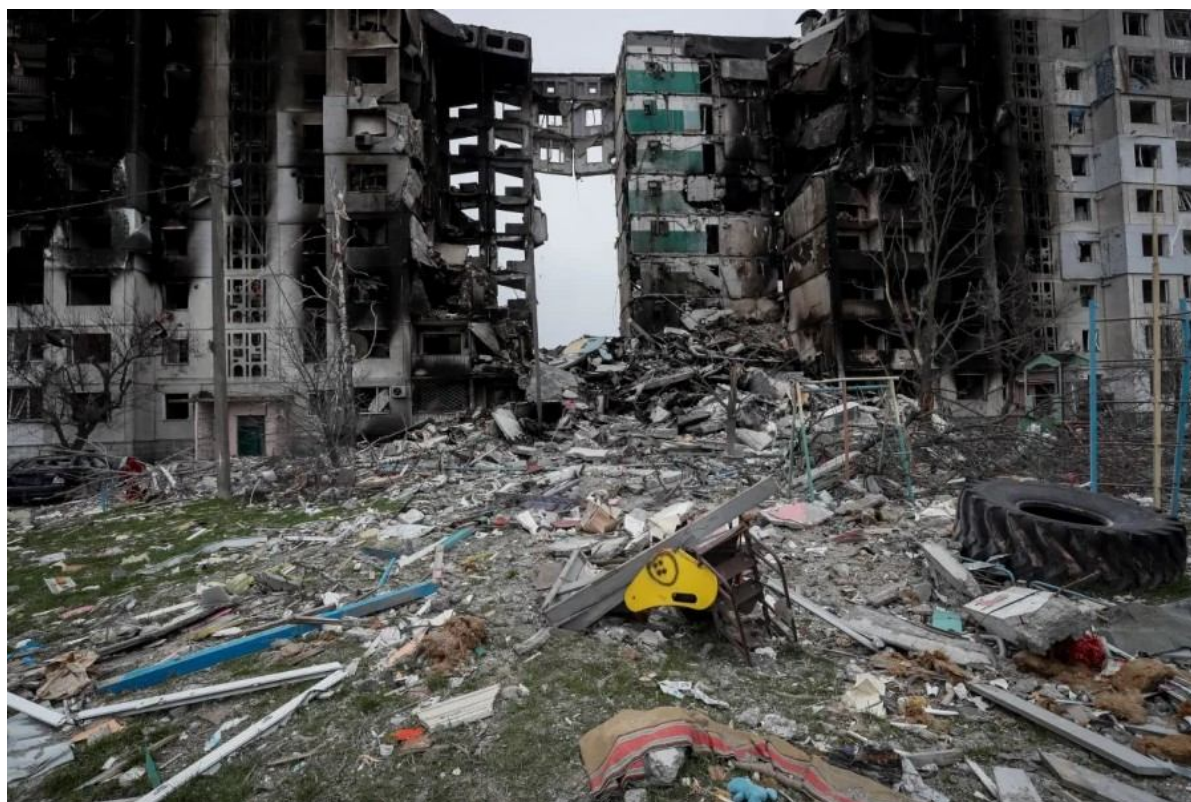
Resembling cubists' pictures, the angular shaped ruins of the neighboring building at Tsentralna Street, 359, shown in photo 22, are no less shocking. Both houses were constructed of ready-made panels, hence the nature of destruction. Russian propagandists were also forced to react to the popularity of these images. They tried to pretend that the Russian army had nothing to do with it and called it all a "stage scenery". The commanders of the units newly arrived in Borodyanka began to tell their personnel tall tales about terrible "Ukrs", who hated Russians so much that they destroyed their own town themselves at the retreat. Many Russian soldiers took it for real and passed the myth on to local residents.

At that time, it was ordered to hold meetings of local residents in all occupied settlements, to warn people: *"Don't mess with us, and we will leave you in peace! Otherwise we'll destroy you!"* It was also ordered to confiscate SIM cards from people's mobile phones. In reality, Russians were taking not only SIM-cards, but also the phones, or smashed them before the eyes of their owners. The next day after the invaders retreated, I found a small pile of smashed phones in my own garden (photo 32).



The invaders took these phones from local residents and stored them in their headquarters which was in the nearby "Kazka" kindergarten. Retreating, they simply threw the phones over the fence to my garden. By that time the confiscation of phones was a step taken too late and caused only additional resentment, since Borodyanka had already been out of electric power for several days as a result of intensive shelling. Most phones were simply discharged, and there was no Internet connection and almost no mobile coverage. The only place where there was a chance to catch a cell phone signal was at the roof of the nine-story building, where only the bravest dared to go.

Borodyanka 'Peoples' Friendship Arch' again sparked interest after the town's de-occupation. Reporters from almost all the world's leading mass media visited it then. Of course, they did not waste an opportunity to make soul-piercing shots of these apocalyptic ruins. This photo below, taken by Gleb Garanich from the REUTERS news agency, is one of the most frequently published (photo 33).



So, the ruins of these two panel mid-rise buildings, and the Taras Shevchenko's bust sculpture opposite of them, punctured with large-caliber bullets, sort of became must-see exhibits for visitors of numerous foreign delegations. Scary but at the same time convenient, because of their proximity to Kyiv. That's why the square with the Taras Shevchenko bust and the neighboring section of Tsentralna Street, with the above-mentioned mid-rise buildings' ruins, were among first to be cleared of all debris, broken glass and rubble. But soon, the famous 'arch' was demolished with the help of construction cranes. It was necessary to start raking through the rubble in search of dead bodies. By the way, the President

of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelenskyi, read his address on the occasion of the 77<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the victory over Nazism standing against this symbolic building.

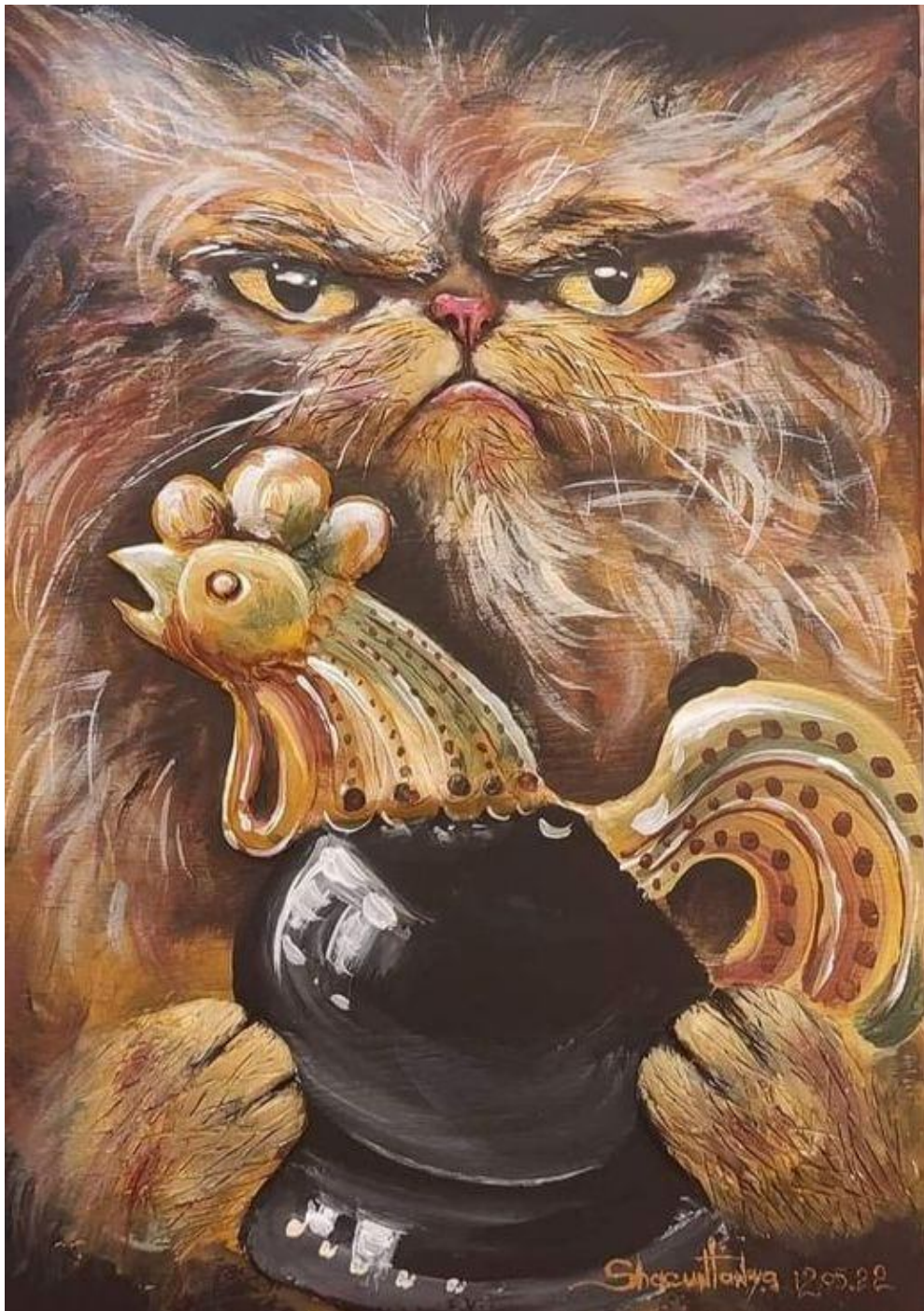
A majolica rooster, a Motanka doll and a Christ's likeness icon were few objects found unscathed in Borodyanka's ruins. They were also seen as symbols of Ukrainian people's indomitable spirit (photo 34).



The icon was handed over to a church at a military college, and the majolica rooster went to the Museum of Revolution. Meanwhile, my colleague Lyudmila unearthed two of such roosters from the ruins of her burnt-to-the-ground house in Potashnia village (part of Borodyanka's community) (photo 35).



They survived miraculously after half of the village had been burned down with incendiary phosphorous missiles, launched by Russian *Grad* multiple rocket launchers on March 21. Another miracle happened a bit later, when rescuers saved a kitten, Gloria, stuck on the seventh floor of a destroyed Borodyanka residential building. She was nicknamed Shafka (meaning ‘a cabinet’) since that’s where she had been hiding. Gloria spent a month and a half in the remains of the ruined apartment and survived truly miraculously. She was fed, washed, pampered and made into a TV star. Gloria's images soon appeared on postage stamps, and the only intact wall on Taras Shevchenko’s square in Borodyanka was soon boasting a collage by Tetyana Shakun, showing both the rescued cat and the majolica rooster (photo 36).





Apart from foreign delegations, various Kyiv performers started frequenting Borodyanka with charity concerts. Shock waves blew out all the windows and doors of the Palace of Culture, which used to be the venue for such events before. So now performances are held in Taras Shevchenko square, against the now world-known ruined residential buildings as a background (photo 37).



It seems local residents no longer pay much attention. However, when Borodyanka buries yet another victim of this war, who maybe used to live in one of the ruined houses, the horrors of the occupation unwillingly come to your mind again (photo 38).



So it's hardly a coincidence that Banksy, one of the world's most mysterious street art artists, chose the wall of the ruined 'arch' nine-story building for one of his graffiti (photo 39).



It shows a young gymnast girl. Probably it's Katya Dyachenko, an 11-year-old resident of Mariupol, a talented girl who died under the rubble of her own house, hit by a Russian projectile. Her tragic story hit the world's media.

Another Banksy graffiti adorned the wall of a half-ruined boiler house of the "Buratino" kindergarten, not far from the Kyiv-Kovel highway (photo 40).



BBC columnist Adam Durbin reported on November 12, 2022 that it *“depicts a man who looks like Vladimir Putin, who is thrown to the floor by a boy. Both are dressed in judo uniforms. It is known that the Russian president is fond of judo.”*

Both works created on October 30, 2022. While working, the artists eagerly talked to local people, through an interpreter. On returning to England, Banksy confirmed on his Instagram page and on Twitter that he is really the author of both works.

Time will pass and names and faces of tens of thousands of Ukrainians killed by Russian monsters will gradually fade away, even from memories of their relatives and friends. But even 20, 30 or 50 years later future schoolchildren, now yet unborn, will remember them looking at these symbolic relics on textbook pages or at museums.

## Story Two: Stories of Rescue and Survival

### a) Stories of Rescue

As a rule, at war, people praise as heroes those who stand up to defend their land with arms in hands. But those who, at the behest of their hearts, fight their own wars to save their fellow citizens, neighbors and wards, equally deserve the name.

#### The Nursing Home

Borodyanka's psychoneurological nursing home facility is located on the town's eastern outskirts. When Russian troops came in the morning March 26, the institution housed 350 patients with chronic mental disorders or elderly people, many of them bedridden. And that's not all. When shelling began, several hundred Borodyanka residents found shelter in the nursing home basement. The "liberators" immediately set up a roadblock at the entrance to the town, and their armored vehicles were positioned on the little plot in front of the nursing home. After just three days of constant shelling the eastern part of Borodyanka was completely out of electric power. Consequently, the pumps stopped pumping water and boilers stopped working. The only way to cook food was to make campfires under large grills (photos 41-42).





People were filling large canisters with water from the nearest well and transporting them to the place by a wheelbarrow. But soon a Russian armored personnel carrier fitted with a large barrel also started coming for water to this well. With their powerful motor pump Russian soldiers would pump out all of the water from the well in a matter of minutes. So now the inhabitants of the nursing home were left with the only option: they took water with buckets from the nearby pond. There was not always enough wood or time to boil this water, so, as a result, a dysentery epidemic broke out among the patients. The facility quickly ran out of clean linens and a real nightmare began. It's also worth mentioning that staff was short, since only the personnel having no families and residing permanently in the nursing home remained, because it was no longer possible to commute between work and home on a daily basis. And that catastrophic situation didn't evolve into an even bigger calamity due to the efforts of institution's headmistress Maryna Hanitskaya. For the time being she had to forget about her own family, living some 20 kilometers away from Borodyanka, and devoted herself completely to her work (photo 43).



On March 6 a detachment of Chechens broke into the nursing home. They drove all the wards outside and threatened to shoot them. They grabbed the headmistress by her long braids and dragged her around the yard, threatening to kill her and to blow up the entire nursing home. Soon a Russian colonel arrived and ordered Ms. Marina Hanitskaya to make herself presentable so she could be filmed. During the filming she was required to personally thank Putin for the ‘liberation’. But instead the woman burst into tears and asked not to kill her or her wards. When the Russian colonel understood that he wouldn’t get the required footage, he left. But the Chechens remained. Meanwhile, the supplies were quickly running out. The only rescue was milk from the nursing home’s farm. Patients started to die from cold, diseases and lack of medicines. The bodies of those who died were buried right there, on the territory of the nursing home (photo 44).



In the morning of March 13, according to the previous agreement with the Russian command, several school buses drove up to the facility, to evacuate the patients and staff. The buses came from the Zagal'tsi village side, along the ring road. The Chechens again threatened to shoot everyone, and it took another five hours of talks before they allowed the convoy to leave.

In a couple of weeks another seventeen patients died, in addition to those thirteen who had been buried on the territory of the nursing home. Four died right away, during the evacuation, and others – a little later. They never got over the stress they had experienced. However, the self-sacrifice of Mrs. Maryna Hanitskaya and her staff permitted to avoid a much bigger number of deaths. Later Mrs. Marina Hanitskaya cut off her pride and joy – her long, gorgeous hair. It's easier without it at war.



The entire world could read about Mrs. Marina Hanitskaya and her wards on New York Times pages. But theirs is only one of many rescue stories.

### **The Circle**

The western end of Tsentralna Street meets the M-07 "Kyiv-Kovel" highway. Borodyanka dwellers call this place a 'Circle'. It was here that on March 1, at 4 p.m., Russian SU-25 combat aircrafts destroyed the first two residential buildings. You saw them already in photos 16-17. The only place in the neighborhood where you could hide was a gym under the still standing five-story building. Roughly 50 women, children and elderly people found shelter there after the passage of the "savage division". But after the airstrike, the number of people there increased by 3 to 4 times. Another thirty people came to the bomb shelter from the partially destroyed building from photo 16.

The manager of the gym, Serhiy (son of one of my good friends), immediately faced several problems. People had to have something to sit on, to have some water and food, and access to at least some medications. At his request, employees of the local *ATB* supermarket and *Shara* pharmacy brought these necessities to the gym, as well as to some other storage places, by their private cars, and also delivered some medicaments to the local hospital. They had understood that their businesses would surely be looted. So before the Russians blocked Tsentralnaya Street with checkpoints, in the intervals between passages of enemy convoys, they had had time to make seven trips.

Serhiy knew that people had to be evacuated from Borodyanka as soon as possible, so he asked help from local public officers. At dawn of March 5, several passenger cars driven by local residents pulled up to the gym through narrow nearby alleys, picked up bedridden and disabled people and took them to the nearby Kachaly village. Those who could walk went on foot to the town's north outskirts, in small groups of 10 to 15 people. Then the same cars transported them from there, little by little. Among those who were rescued through this method were my friend, Serhiy's father, his daughter-in-law and his grandson. Thank to the help and efforts of those many caring people they soon managed to evacuate to Germany. As for Serhiy himself, he continued to take care of war victims in Vinnitsa city, and later back home, in Borodyanka, as a volunteer activist.

### **The Palace of Culture**

Immediately after the war began, more than fifty women and children moved from their homes to a small gym located in the basement of the Taras Shevchenko Palace of Culture at the very center of Borodyanka. Among them were residents of the already world-famous nine-story panel buildings from photos 21-22. On February 28, after the passage of the "savage division", and on March 1, after the first bombings, they were joined by many more residents from the surrounding houses. On the morning of March 2, after the airstrike, they, like everyone else, rushed out into the street in a panic, huddled together and did not know what to do.

My neighbor, Alik, lives in a private house right next to the Palace of Culture. He opened his garage gate, drove outside in his minibus and invited terrified women and children to jump in.

Only a fraction of those who wanted rescue fit in his car. But Alik promised to come back for those who remained. He was shocked when he saw a woman with five children. As it turned out later, two kids were hers, but other three were standing by the road crying and saying that their parents had died. That woman couldn't leave them alone. Alik does not remember how many trips he made exactly, but he finally took everyone he could to Zagaltsy and Novaya Buda (photo 45).



He never returned to Borodyanka and settled together with other refugees in Nova Buda. Alik immediately took on the duties of a food caterer. Each morning he would go by small forest dirt lane to Piskivka, where from he would drive by the highway all the way up to Radomyshl. He would buy some bread there, and then go to a local marketplace to find something cheap (money was scarce).

On March 8, at lunchtime, the owner of the house where Alik stayed received a phone call. After it he told Alik to grab all 'his' refugees and leave

immediately. Two hours later, the Russians shelled the Nova Buda village with *Grad* MLRS.

Alik left two dogs back at home. He calls them affectionately his 'Little Bells' for their faithful watchdog service. While he was away, they emaciated severely. So immediately after the de-occupation we, Alik's friends, rushed to feed them with various goodies. And when Alik came back both dogs greeted their master with joyful barking.

There are many more similar stories of escape of Borodyanka residents from Russian "liberators". Here is just one more. My friend Volodya lives near Tsentralnaya Street, next to the destroyed residential buildings. When he could bear daily shelling no longer, he decided to flee. The matter was complicated by the fact that a few days before his sister had experienced a shell shock from a blast and could not walk. Volodya called to an acquaintance in Zagaltsy and arranged for shelter. Then he borrowed a wheelbarrow from a neighbor and loaded it with essentials. In the evening of March 6 a strange procession set out through back alleys. Mulya, the poodle, ran first. She was followed by Volodya's sister's daughter and son-in-law, pushing a bicycle with a concussed woman riding on it. Volodya was the last to push the wheelbarrow. They went by smaller alleys and rested often. They covered the eight kilometer distance to Zagaltsy by morning. And all this time Mulya, the poodle, who is usually quite "talkative", never gave a single bark.

But rescue was still far away. The neighboring villages, where residents of Borodyanka fled in large numbers, were soon out of food, firewood and medicaments. While the occupiers were busy 'clearing' Borodyanka, volunteers from Ukraine's western regions managed to evacuate most of the fugitives from Kachaly, Myrcha, Zagaltsy, Nova Buda and Piskivka villages. In particular, Serhiy Ilchuk, Mykhailo Suprun, and Ivan Vedernikov from Rivne started bringing food, medicines and clothing from the first days of the war, first to Borodyanka, and then to Zagaltsy, Kachaly, and Myrcha. And before these villages were also occupied by the Russians, they managed to evacuate to Rivne more than three hundred Borodyanka residents. Those who were ill were at once admitted to local or Lviv hospitals. On March 11, 2022, their cars with red crosses and white "Evacuation" inscriptions across the windshield were shot by the occupiers at the entrance to Mircha. Mykhailo Suprun died immediately, and Serhiy Ilchuk, who seriously injured, managed to turn the car around, escape and warn Ivan Vedernikov about the danger. He was later operated on twice, but still could not be saved. He died on March 17 in Rivne. Mykhailo and Serhiy, parents of six and seven children, respectively, could go abroad with their families and wait out hard times there. Instead, they sacrificed their lives saving other people.

On August 29, 2022, a memorial sign was erected at the site where volunteers' car was shot, by efforts of a local deputy. The Borodyanka residents whom they had rescued and the mayor of Rivne, Oleksandr Tretyak, expressed their gratitude to the hero volunteers. Sons of the heroes opened the memorial (photo 46).



## **b) Stories of Survival**

### **In the Basement**

The first night there were four of us in the tiny cellar. My wife and I spent that night sitting on chairs. The next day we stayed there alone, because a neighbor put the housemistress's mother and her friend in his car and drove them to a neighboring village. I was left to take care of Barney, the dog, and thirty nutrias belonging to that neighbor. For the first five days, while there was still electricity and the pump pumped artesian water, everything was tolerable. I even slept a couple of nights upstairs, on a new mattress, and took a shower. On March 6, I went to my own apartment for medicine, food, warm clothes and shoes. A strong draft and a complete mess inside were horrifying. Wearing gloves (because there were shards of broken glass everywhere), I packed my bags, hid the computer's system unit under the sofa, took my bike from the garage and drove off. On my way back, I saw a truck stopping nearby on Tsentralnaya Street. A group of bearded Chechens in black clothes wearing white bands poured out of it and began to set up a roadblock.

On the morning of March 8, the International Women's Day, I knelt down in front of my wife and handed her three flowers. The day before, I plucked them from a flowerpot in our apartment. The blast wave knocked a curtain over it and that's why it didn't freeze. My wife was speechless and burst into tears. Every year on this day at seven in the morning she used to sit near the kitchen window and enjoy the annual show of women honoring. We have a flower shop under our

windows, and from the very morning of March 8 men used to rush there. Some would arrive in expensive cars and then leave carrying proudly bouquets of roses; others would come in tattered Zhiguli cars and buy just three tulips. There were also completely inconspicuous personages coming on foot. They were leaving the store carefully pressing to the chest a single flower bought probably with the last coins.

Our walk down the memory lane was rudely interrupted by gunfire from a tank not far away. Then Grad MLRS joined in and so it went on. Later I learned that that was how the Russians tried to push the outposts of the Ukraine's Armed Forces away from the northwestern Borodyanka's outskirts. The aggressors did not know exactly where these were, and therefore shelled at wherever they could: at Zagaltsy village, the breeding farm, the excavator plant, and at Borodyanka town in general. As a result of that shelling many buildings in different parts of the town were set on fire. Thick clouds of gray smoke were rising everywhere. Many fires lasted for more than a day. Enemy's armored vehicles, burnt by partisans and our military forces, were giving plumes of stark black though short-living smoke.

Machine gunfire, in rounds or single shots, could be heard almost daily. After all, the "liberators" had to have some fun. The BBC reported on how they actually did it in one of the stories. On March 17, 2022, Roman Gerasymenko, a 57-year-old Borodyanka resident, left his house and disappeared. Late in the evening he came back, covered in blood, and hoarsed: "Girls, I let you down. I was shot...". He still had strength enough to tell what had happened. Leaving the house, Roman ran into a military patrol. The Russians treated him to some cigarettes, and when the man was already leaving, they shot him in the back. Roman did not remember how long he had been lying on the ground. A dog licking his face helped him come to senses. He died by the next morning (photo 47).



On March 24, occupiers started shelling Bucha and Irpin from Grad MLRSs, hidden among Borodyanka's residential buildings and, apart from ruining these two towns, they also set fire to the dry land in the valley of the Zdvizh River and the forest behind it. After all, missiles manufactured some forty years ago often missed their immediate target and fell around, or did not work at all. That day, the entire horizon was painted in an ominous gray color. I could see it clearly from my apartment's windows on the second floor. I took the picture of the fire on photo below with my camera on March 31 at 1:42 p.m. (photo 48).



Those fires started when retreating 'liberators' blew up two bridges (the old and new ones) across the Zdvizh River, as a farewell.

But let's return to the events of March 8. In the afternoon we heard two explosions, quite nearby. We heard the already familiar ominous sound of glass shattering. As I cautiously peeked out from the basement, a dazed but surprisingly unharmed Barney rushed up to me and started licking my hands. Before that, he had been locked in his outdoor enclosure. Now the earth next to it was a smoking shell crater (photo 49).



Everything around was pockmarked with shrapnel, and glass flew out of the first floor windows and doors. "Well, you're a lucky bastard!" - I thought about Barney and scratched his ears.

But the trouble did not end there. After yet another explosion, in the vicinity of the transformer substation, happened what I dreaded the most: the electricity went out, and so there was no more water and heating in the basement. I remembered that in the neighbor's yard I saw a big brazier and, cursing the "liberators", trudged over to get it. At this time, two huge dark-green mean-looking attack helicopters, flashing big red stars on their fuselages and carrying rows of missiles on the consoles, flew over my head with an unbearable roar, in the direction of Zagalysi. Another K-52 rotorcraft accompanied them from above. I looked at them in helpless rage. That moment I really wished I had something like a *Stinger* or *Igla* MANPADS on my hands (even though I have no idea how to use them).

Back in Soviet times there was a popular but macabre joke about awarding Lavrentiy Beria with the Stalin Prize for cultivating a particularly frost-resistant species of Jews in Siberia. After the invasion in Ukraine, Vladimir Putin can also claim it, for breeding a particularly frost-resistant species of Ukrainians under occupation. This spring was one of the coldest for the recent decades. At nights, the temperature dropped to minus fifteen degrees Celsius and water in buckets froze through (photo 50).



A sheepskin coat, which I'd found among the housemaster's belongings, and warm boots were saving me from the piercing northeast wind. We were also very lucky to have a thermos which kept the water hot until morning, and a supply of pine wood. The majority of Borodyanka residents were in pretty much the same situation, without usual amenities. Or even worse, since a working stove and a



supply of firewood are a rarity in modern times. Cold weather sent my wife and me into a kind of semi-hibernation. We got up quite late, around eight a.m., and went to bed early – at about 6 p.m. Of course, we slept fully dressed and under several blankets. At lunch and dinner, we had a mandatory drink: a bit of cognac or vodka or a cup of hot tea with raspberry jam, from our hosts' supplies. And we never fell ill! We probably understood subconsciously that falling ill in that situation would mean death. Of course, all that has taken its toll with us later. Although it is already summer now that I'm writing this account, the electric heater in our bedroom is always on. We still cannot warm up properly.

The next problem was lack of food and water. In recent years, the groundwater level has dropped significantly and many wells have dried up. Therefore, to fetch water many Borodyanka residents had to go to the well near the Rudka River every day. But even that well was usually dry by lunch.

From time to time Dmytro, our neighbor and brother-in-suffering, was suppling me and my wife with some water, potatoes, and even meat. All windows in his apartment in the building near "the Circle" were blown out, same as in ours, so he had to move to his son's private house. There he and his wife also gave shelter to three more people left homeless. His help was especially priceless after March 15, when the terror of the aggressors intensified and they began to grab men in the streets, torture and kill them. Like my neighbors, I grilled sort of pancakes instead of bread on the outside brazier. Pavlivna, my wife colleague, saw this and cooked us a pot of delicious soup (she had a gas cylinder).

All that time my wife and I lived with faith in, albeit unbelievable, victory. We hoped that our poor house with our ruined flat would somehow survive. With God's help, we will repair it and live again as before...

Some people were absolutely not ready for the situation when there are no shops, and money turn into just pieces of cut up paper. After the de-occupation my neighbor Mykhailo told me the following story: when the center of Borodyanka was ruined, one very well-off couple of pensioners came to live with him. As people of statue, they brought a jar of red caviar and a bottle of vintage brandy. The man also had a small leather suitcase, which he always put under his head instead of a pillow. Within a week Mykhailo's refrigerator was empty, and the esteemed guest began to go around the neighborhood begging for something to eat. One compassionate couple from the neighboring household had some hens which brought five eggs each day, three of which they were giving to Mykhailo and his guests. But as Mykhailo learned later, that leather suitcase, which the esteemed guest never opened, was stuffed with wads of hundred-dollar bills.

Lack of information was no less painful than the lack of food. The neighbor's electricity generator was the method to quench the information hunger. Since gasoline was scarce, the generator was turned on for an hour or so to recharge phones and to listen to Ukrainian radio news. Then we'd have a discussion on the news, in which I always had a part of an incorrigible optimist.

## War Organ

March 23, Wednesday, the 28<sup>th</sup> day of the onslaught. It was quite warm at night and in the morning I decided to make a bold move - to put on fresh underwear. I couldn't do that before because it was very cold and I was wearing sneakers and underpants in addition to my pants.

Outside it was a beautiful, bright morning. I went outside and was greeted with the birds chirping. But then the idyll was shattered with a sudden shot from a tank. It was very close. The tank was in a nearby street where I'd bought a can of milk and a dozen eggs the day before. The tank went on shooting in short bursts of 2 to 3 shots. With a characteristic buzz shells flew over my head in the direction of Zagaltsi village and exploded in 6 to 12 seconds time (depending on how high the muzzle was raised). It seemed that the tank gunner was doing it just for fun. Besides, the projectile changes its tonality depending on its speed. It was a sort of a primitive organ of war... Perhaps it was a source of delight for that music lover in the tank, but not for me and not that day. Meanwhile, the tank pounded and pounded. "Poor cow. God forbid, it may stop lactating!" I thought. Finally the engine roared and the tank crew went to probably have some breakfast. But the silence did not last long.

- *Bastard! Idiot! Shit! You tore down my lamppost! Screw you!* - the cow's owner shouted on top of his voice.

## Complaint to God

March 27, Sunday, the 32<sup>nd</sup> day of the onslaught. At four in the morning we were awakened not by a rooster's song, but by a now usual cannonade. Grads and tanks were pounding in unison. They shelled in the direction of the ill-fortunate Zagaltsi village. Outside it was again a classic Putin's winter. A gusty north wind drove sporadic snowflakes. Barney was breathing out gusts of steam after an unsuccessful attempt to catch a pigeon. It took me quite a long time to start fire with raw firewood. Then I fed the nutrias, talked a bit to the neighbors about what was going on, and filled the thermos with boiling hot water. All in all it took some time. When I came back down to the basement, my wife was crying and saying:

- *I was prepared for everything. I was even prepared that you would leave me, a cripple, alone... But as for the war? I couldn't even think of such a thing ...*

Without a word I opened the last can of canned fish, poured the remaining brandy into two cups and pushed one of them closer to my wife.

## Barney and Sparrows

After the two shells nearly missing Barney's enclosure, I let him run free. For days he was running around along with his girlfriend Nika, a neighbor's dog, eight times smaller than himself. When exhausted Barney fell to the ground, Nika, bouncing on her hind legs, rested her forelegs on his body and barked, forcing him to stand up. At night Barney made a habit to visit a nearby chicken coop, taking

advantage of the fact that its owners fled from Russian "liberators". I felt sorry for Barney's first victim, a beautiful speckled hen, and shouted at him. Barney felt deeply offended and went upstairs the next night. There he tore open the garbage bag (I was hiding it from him there) and scattered the contents around. Among the children's toys, Barney found a plush dog, looking exactly like him, and did not part with it for days (photo 51).



Another Barney's delight was chasing sparrows. A pair of sparrows (probably not for the first time) settled in a nest on a plum tree, next to the Barney's enclosure. In Barney's absence, the sparrows could now fly in and out the open door of the enclosure as if it were theirs, and pecked at crumbs. That made Barney very angry and he tried to catch them, but in vain.

When my wife saw it, she almost cried. She remembered our own apartment and the sparrows there. Every winter they gather in large flocks and look for food. For the past twenty years every morning, while it was still dark, I used to open the kitchen window and scatter some ground corn (their favorite food) on the tin outer window sill. At dawn sparrows would fly in, sit on the nearby branches and wait. A leader of the pack was the first to start the meal. After that, the rest would join in and a real hubbub began. At first, the sparrows happily peck at the tin with their beaks, but when there is not enough room, they would start quarreling and pushing against each other (photo 52).



My wife and I would sit, listen to the clanking and smile.

But back to the war. It has made Barney's senses much more acute. He instinctively began to feel approach of a real threat and behave cautiously at such moments. That is how he survived.

### **Uninvited Guests**

On the evening of March 10, I was boiling water on the brazier when I heard Barney's soft squealing. Khaki-colored figures were scrambling through a hole in the fence with a nearby estate. Barney was jumping in front of them and wagging his tail. "What the hell?" - I was surprised. "If Barney doesn't go after them, things are serious." Meanwhile, the figures came closer and pointed their machine guns at me. All of them were short and still very young. "They must be just conscripts," I thought. The elder one ordered me to raise my hands and to stand against the wall. After learning from my passport that I was over seventy, he relaxed and said that there were burned armored personnel carriers with the bodies of their comrades in the field behind the highway. So they needed to search the house. I calmly explained that they were wasting their time. The owners of most of the houses in the neighborhood had fled, and only a few were still inhabited by homeless pensioners, such as my wife and me. One of the Russians went down to the basement to see my wife, and I showed the house to the others. When they saw windows blown out by shockwaves and only partially plastered walls inside, they realized that hardly anyone lived in the house. Therefore, they searched it perfunctorily, then advised us to destroy our phones and left. I went down to the basement.

Later my wife told me that at first she had seen large combat boots under the lower edge of the blanket we hung in the door frame to keep out cold. Then the boots' owner appeared: he was merely a boy in a baggy jacket, but armed with a large machine gun. She was really frightened. Therefore, when they asked her about me, she said I was her me 'father' instead of husband. They must have thought she was very ill and asked if she needed any medicine (the Russians knew already that volunteers took all available medicaments from pharmacies to the local hospital, as they were going for treatment there too). Of course, my wife said no.

My other neighbors were less fortunate. Many lost their SIM cards or mobile phones, while others were kicked out into the street and interrogated while their houses were being searched. Young conscripts were comparatively loyal to the local population, and contract paratroopers from Pskov were the cruelest.

Next time Russians came on March 16 and it all went much in the same manner as the first time. Seeing the shell craters, the 'guests' noted gleefully: "This is work of your army." But when I told them that it happened on March 8, they were taken aback a bit. I will never forget the third and last visit. On March 22, in the gap between the ground and the gate plate I saw two pairs of legs wearing ordinary, not combat, boots. "So, not the military," I thought. Uninvited guests began to pound at the gate to get it.

- Go away! Or I'll let the dog off leash! - I shouted, went to the gate and peeped through a crack. A carbine's muzzle was pointed right at me. The young man in a semi-military uniform glared at me, then turned away and left. He was accompanied by two unarmed fellows. "Marauders, and their bodyguard," I thought. By that time, most abandoned houses in the neighborhood had already been looted. But this trio still wanted to find something to steal.

## **Marauders**

After hearing dozens of stories about the visits of the "liberators", I caught a clear pattern: well-to-do people almost always evoked in Russians (especially in mercenaries) wild envy and rage. On the other hand, they treated poor and, especially, socially unadapt people quite leniently. Here is just one story to illustrate the pattern. My friend Mykhailo told it to me with a trembling voice when we first met after the de-occupation. At one time he had worked in a good position, built himself a decent house and stocked it with every necessity. As soon as the "liberators" came to his house and saw a spotless clean house with good furniture, and then spotted framed appreciation letters signed by the Kyiv mayor on the living room wall, they hated the owner immediately and set out to sweep the house doggedly. No weapons or anything suspicious was found in the rooms, so they ordered to show the attic. Going up the steep stairs, Mykhailo lost his balance and grabbed the railing. The "liberators" immediately racked their slides. Hearing that sound, he turned around and said angrily: "*Damn you! I'm already 65, I've lived my life... Shoot!*". After that the uninvited guests calmed down a bit.

The explanation of this phenomenon is quite obvious. Men from the depressed, poorest regions of Russia, with a high level of crime, alcoholism and drug addiction, enroll as contract soldiers in the Russian army. There is such a level of poverty there that many of them have no idea what a flush toilet is. That's why they poop anywhere. So people who managed to build and furnish a nice house are for them "bourgeois", and there's nothing wrong with robbing them.

The brutality of Russian military personnel towards civilian population and indifference to people's suffering came as a shock to Ukrainians and the entire civilized world. However, as it turned out, the Russian senior officers treat their subordinates not much better. They provide their troops in Ukraine with ammunition only. Everything else is lacking catastrophically. Looking from my window, from February 27 to March 2, I saw up to a thousand Russian military vehicles passing in the direction of Makariv. There was only one medical aid vehicle among them, and not a single field kitchen.

Russians sought medical help at the local hospital, and field kitchens came only two weeks after the onslaught start. At about that time "liberators" were breaking garage gates and doors to flats in residential buildings around the town at a mass scale. My own garage (like many others) was robbed of canisters and a gas cylinder, and my apartment was missing all the pasta packs and canned foods, and also a pack of 12-veg seasoning, and a large stainless steel pot. Looks like Russian servicemen were fed up with dry rations and pearl barley porridge from field kitchens and started cooking for themselves. The Buryats were the first who switched to the "self-provision" method, stealing several dozen pigs and more than a hundred chickens and ducks from local residents.

The Russian command could have used just a few electric generators to renew water supply to the nursing home, to restore work of its bathhouse and kitchen and provide their own soldiers with three meals a day ration and a bit of comfort. But no one cared enough to do that. Instead, the Chechens trashed all the rooms they lived in (photo 53).



There was one more thing that grieved "liberators" really much: their combat boots. In fact, they are very heavy, and Russians I saw were mostly short and tiny in stature. Local residents like to retell a story about a pair of combat boots found next to a partially destroyed Russian tank, abandoned somewhere near Zagaltsi. Looks like the surviving crew member suddenly felt himself very uncomfortable in his boots, so he jumped out of them and ran away barefoot.

To 'compensate' their servicemen for the mentioned 'grievous inconveniences', the commanders allowed them to loot everything they could get their hands on. The Russians completely stifled any resistance in Borodyanka by March 12 and immediately immersed into their favorite pastime - looting. On March 14-15 they ransacked consumer goods outlets at the local marketplace, breaking in each and every goods container. And shoes were of primary interest for them. They put on footwear that fit them (mostly sneakers and trainers), and left their boots by the shops. These boots stood there for about a week until local marauders claimed them.

Then the "liberators" decided between themselves who would loot which apartments in damaged, half-ruined residential buildings. Our neighbor Nadia carelessly closed her front metal door with two locks. The lower lock the "liberators" knocked out with a sledge-hammer (same as it was with my door), and the upper one – shooting it from a machine gun (photo 54).



From our apartment, in addition to food supplies and a cooking pot mentioned before, the Russians stole gold chains from my late mother's pendants (while leaving behind exquisite semi-precious stones), my wife's jewelry, an old camera, five pipes, tobacco for these, our marriage certificate (?!), diplomas of higher education (?!), the bulky 1954 copy of the "On Delicious and Useful Food" book and, of course, all of the alcohol. Perhaps, thanks to the alcohol, they did not shit on our bed, like they did it in the apartment of our neighbors from the third floor, and refrained from scattering our underwear from the closets all around the place.

After residential buildings, the Russians switched to abandoned private houses. The "liberators" often knocked metal gates protecting yards down with their tanks and armored vehicles. However, they made the most profit looting local businesses and merchants. Someone leaked the "liberators" information about significant stocks of diesel fuel and gasoline in the warehouses of the local agricultural company. The warehouses were immediately secured with guards, and invaders began to drive briskly around Borodyanka driving armored vehicles, stolen cars and motorbikes. In 'gratitude' for the stolen fuel, during their escape the "liberators" shot and set on fire all agricultural machinery of the company.

The Russians had visited the auto parts store located next to my and my wife's basement even before that. The owner of that store made a grave mistake. At the beginning of the onslaught he did not listen to his neighbors' advice and did not take down the "Auto-pharmacy" sign from his shop. Russian auto mechanics have looted his shop for spare parts eight times and the last time was on March 30. That day, they shot the rest of the locks with automatic weapons, broke into all of the rooms, and loaded their truck full with boxes of spare parts for passenger cars. The "liberators" were preparing to escape.

But there were also few exceptions in this nonstop barbaric looting of epic proportions. Take, for example, my own age-old shack in the very center of Borodyanka (I use it as a storage for all kinds of junk). It did not interest the



Russians in the least. I guess they have plenty of such junk back in Russia. Or another remarkable story: when owners of one of the houses returned back home after the de-occupation, they were very surprised. Although the front door was intact, several pictures and dictionaries were missing from their house, and there was a "Sorry" inscription written in felt-tip pen across the glass of the china cabinet. Taking a closer look, they realized that the "guest" had carefully removed a windowpane from one of the windows and got into the house through it. Then, having "stocked up", he just as carefully put the pane back in its place.

After a month of occupation, the word "horde" became the most used signifier for the so-called "liberators". Because they acted very much like Tatar-Mongol hordes of ancient times which had only weapons on them in their conquering campaigns and lived by plundering conquered peoples. Most often this definition, horde, can be heard from Russian-speaking Borodyanka residents, because before the invasion they hadn't considered Russians enemies. When my neighbor Oleg saw his ransacked apartment, which he had been tending for years, he reacted with the following little verse:

*Putin, Putler, Führer,  
The damn terrorist!*

But Putin did not personally destroy and loot Borodyanka, nor torture, kill or rape its inhabitants. According to sociological polls, the vast majority of Russians want to conquer, punish and rob Ukrainians, and other European nations after that. The peoples of Eastern Europe, who used to be parts of either the Russian Empire or of the so-called "social camp", understand this well. As the Prime Minister of Slovakia, Eduard Geger, said: *"Ukrainians are now dying for us, for Bucha not to happen here, in Slovakia, or in Poland, in the Baltic states. Russian hordes will come here if Ukraine loses"*.

Vladimir Putin's statements and actions constantly strengthen this fear. Here is an excerpt from his speech on June 9, delivered on the 106<sup>th</sup> day of the onslaught: *"Just now we have visited the exhibition dedicated to the 350<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Peter I. Almost nothing has changed, it's strange, but you come to this understanding. Peter I had been waging the Northern War for 21 years. It would seem that he fought with Sweden, rejected something. He did not reject anything, he returned it, yes, it is... Returned and strengthened. Apparently, we also had a mission to return and strengthen. And if we proceed from the fact that these basic values form the basis of our existence, we will certainly succeed in solving the tasks we are facing"* (photo 55).

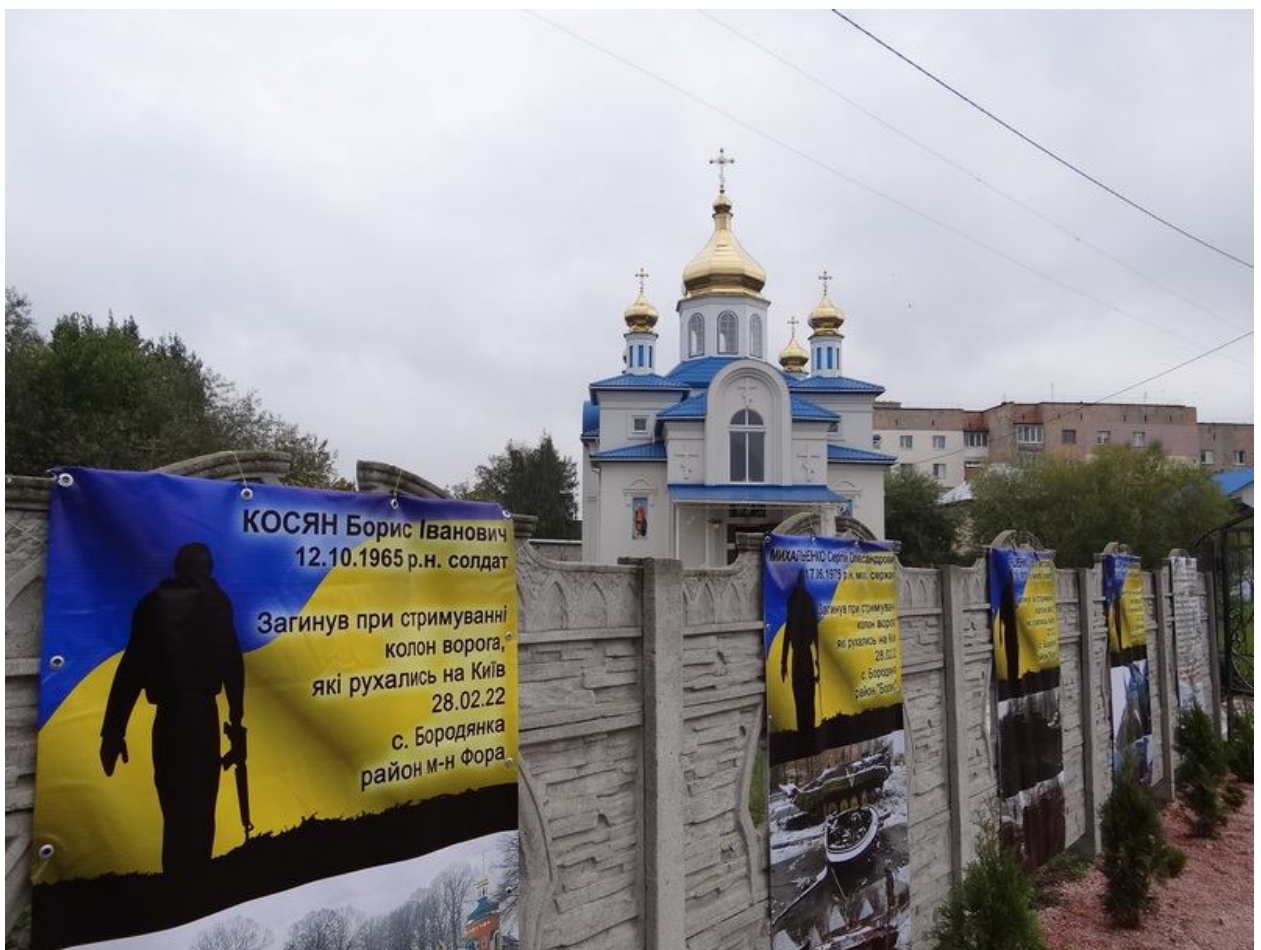


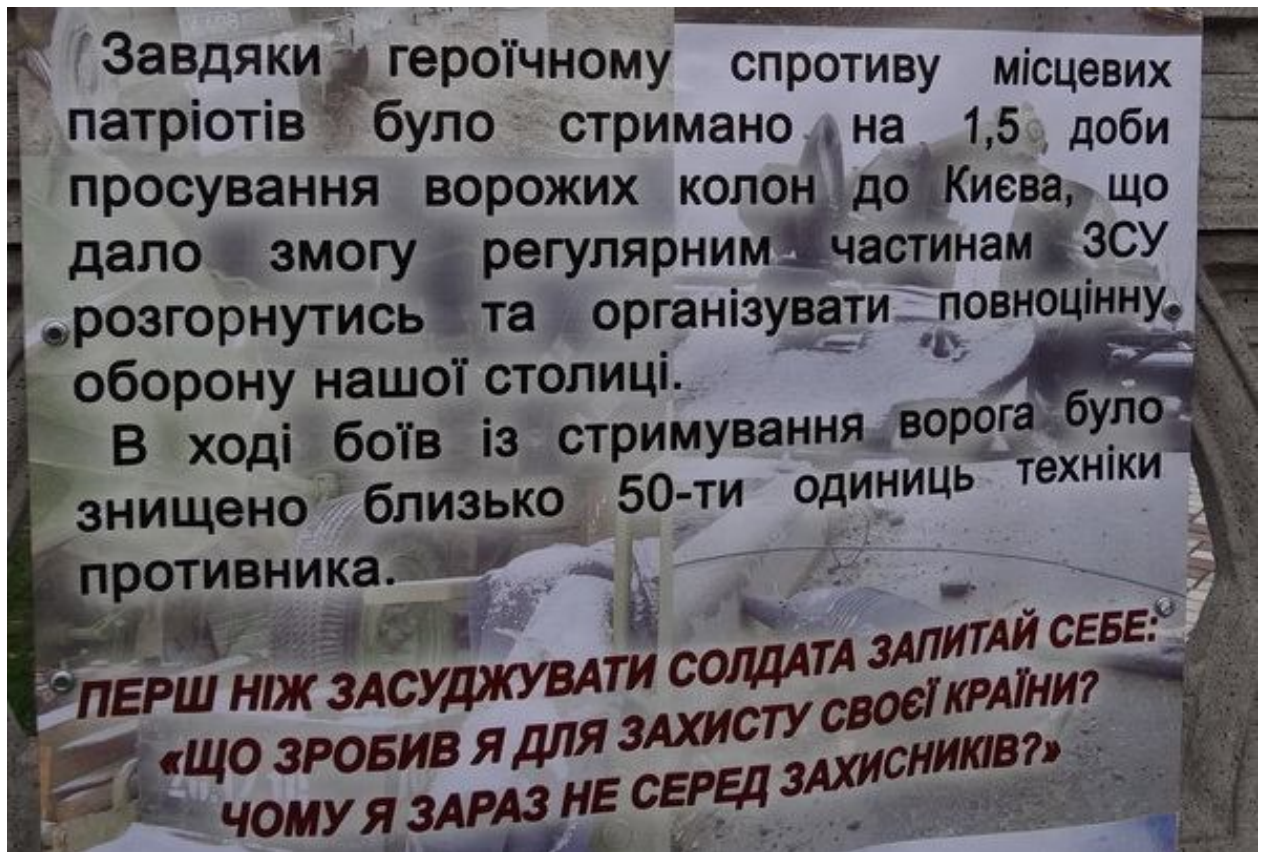
All the actions of the Russians in the occupied territories demonstrate that we, Ukrainians, are dealing not with just some "special military operation", but with a total war of extermination. And today's invaders act in the same way as Genghis Khan used to act eight centuries ago. First Genghis Khan subdued a rival Mongol clan by slaughtering all adult males. The Khan's sons spread this practice to related nomadic Turkic peoples and also mercilessly slaughtered all dissenters. Thus, one of the largest in world history army of armed horsemen was created. With its help, the Chingizids conquered almost all of Asia, Eastern and Central Europe. At that, the newly conquered Turks were the first to be thrown into a battle, and the Mongols, dressed in expensive armor, watched them from behind. We see the similar pattern today.

Today, instead of cavalry, the Russians are blackmailing the world with thousands of tanks, armored vehicles, rotorcraft, planes and missiles, many of which the Ukrainian army has already turned into scrap metal. But like the Mongols eight hundred years ago, the Russians in the occupied territories employ mass-killings of men who may pose any threat to them. And survivors are forcibly mobilized and, as slaves, are sent to the front to kill other Ukrainians.

Traditionally, Russians succeed in wars due to their numbers and indifference to losses. In this war they try to act as usual. The ratio of losses of personnel of the Ukrainian and Russian armies during the so-called "special military operation" is about 1:5, and in the battles for Borodyanka on February 27-28 it reached the staggering 1:30. The occupiers vent their rage for such huge losses on civilians, residential buildings, industrial enterprises, infrastructure and the environment. In particular, they are methodically destroying thermal power plants and substations throughout Ukraine, trying to freeze millions of Ukrainian pensioners, women and children to death.

From this point of view, the actions of Borodyanka paramilitaries were completely justified. They managed to hold back the enemy's advance as best as they could, and Borodyanka inhabitants supported them in that. Our neighbors tragically lost their children and the granddaughter under rubble of their ruined house, and their own apartment was destroyed too. But they've never condemned actions of local militia. After the de-occupation some of my acquaintances started saying that the Territorial Defense forces (local militia) should not have attacked the enemy within the town limits. Then Borodyanka would not have been destroyed, and all its inhabitants would have stayed alive. The local Teroborona were so fed up with these naïve commentaries and Facebook posts that on September 27, 2022, they hung big banners near the church in the center of the town, with the names of comrades who had died in battles, and with an explanation of their actions (photos 56-57).





The banner on photo 57 reads: ‘Thanks to the heroic resistance of local patriots, the advance of enemy columns to Kyiv was held back for a day and a half, which enabled regular units of the Armed Forces to deploy and organize a full-fledged defense of our capital. In the course of fighting to contain the enemy, about fifty units of enemy equipment were destroyed. Before you judge a soldier, ask yourself: what did I do to protect my country? Why am I not among the defenders now?’

Now the question arises: what has made Russians the way they are and how did it happen? And maybe we should put an end to it once and for all? This will be discussed in the next section.

## Story Three: 'Carthage of Evil' Must Be Destroyed

### On Great Russian Literature, Ukrainian and Russian Folk Fairy Tales and Tolerance

Many people in the world enjoy and appreciate Russian literature, often described as 'great'. I, in particular, in my youth, was once fascinated by Dostoevsky's *Idiot*. Three years ago I re-read it and watched the TV series directed by Volodymyr Bortko, based on this novel. And something immediately caught my eye. Something, that I didn't pay attention to back in Soviet times: complete hopelessness, desperation, and the total impossibility, in principle, of changing anything in the behavior and life of the heroes. Albeit to a lesser extent, the same can be traced in works of other famous Russian writers. Mykola (Rus. Nikolai) Gogol demonstrated this hopelessness and deadness of Russian existence in the most grotesque way in his "The Overcoat", "The Nose" and "Dead Souls". At the same time, the earlier works of this writer, sketching life of a Ukrainian village, are full of witty humor and folk fantasy. Many of his heroes from those earlier works seem to be about to start singing the charming and elated "From Kyiv to Lubny" Ukrainian folk song or rush dancing *hopak*:

*I'll dance so hard  
That heels of my shoes gonna have hard time,  
And the toes too!*

Anton Chekhov, another famous 'Russian' writer of Ukrainian descent, also showed the eternal hopelessness of Russian existence. Here is just one sentence from his short story "The Student": "*And now, shrinking from the cold, he thought that just such a wind had blown in the days of Rurik and in the time of Ivan the Terrible and Peter, and in their time there had been just the same desperate poverty and hunger, the same thatched roofs with holes in them, ignorance, misery, the same desolation around, the same darkness, the same feeling of oppression - all these had existed, did exist, and would exist, and the lapse of a thousand years would make life no better.*"

The ideological chasm can be traced in the folk tales of the two neighboring nations. Favorite heroes of Russian folk tales are Yemelya and Ivanushka-the-fool. These simple-minded coach potatoes satisfy all their urges 'by the pike's power, at my whim' and don't bother with anything. Popular characters of Ukrainian fairy tales are quite different. For example, Kotygoroshko or Ivasyk-Telesyk. Like heroes of folk tales of many other European nations, they are clever and hardworking.

And there is another significant difference. According to historians, the territory of Ukraine has been a "thoroughfare" between Europe and Asia for thousands of years. As a result, many cultures left their traces in Ukrainian culture and many languages influenced Ukrainian language. These constant contacts instilled in Ukrainians tolerance towards other peoples. The peoples of Russia were in much greater isolation. In addition, for centuries the imperial authorities have been cultivating the idea of Russia's special destiny and of the supremacy of Russians (Great Russians) over conquered nations.

Some explain such a radical difference in mentalities of two neighboring nations by soil productivity of our land versus bareness of soils in Russia. But that's not true: the Russia's humus-rich chernozem ('black soil') regions have the same natural conditions as in Ukraine. So it is rather about the difference in historical paths these two peoples have followed.

### **Golden Horde, Muscovy, Russian Empire and Tartary**

For more than two centuries from its foundation, Moscow and the Moscow principality was an ulus (component) of the "Golden Horde" khanate, which it later absorbed. Population of the Moscow principality, and later the Russian empire, was raised in slavery, and the slightest attempt to limit an absolute power of a ruler through democratic procedures was punished by death. Take for example the Decembrist Revolt, Stolypin, Bukharin or Nemtsov. This absolute power was reinforced by the fact that the Golden Horde was a parasitic satrapy. It lived by robbing neighboring states and by exploiting the trade routes passing through its territory. The Muscovite Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union also added to their income sources the sale of fur, fish, precious and non-ferrous metals, wood, grain, weapons, oil, and gas.

Here's how Karl Marx characterized the essence of this formation in his work *Revelations of the Diplomatic History of the 18th Century*: *"It is in the terrible and abject school of Mongolian slavery that Muscovy was nursed and grew up. It gathered strength only by becoming a virtuoso in the craft of serfdom. Even when emancipated, Muscovy continued to perform its traditional part of the slave as master. At length Peter the Great coupled the political craft of the Mongol slave with the proud aspiration of the Mongol master, to whom Genghis Khan had, by will, bequeathed his conquest of the earth."*

After the Muscovy czardom significantly expanded its borders at the expense of the Golden Horde, European cartographers began to designate its central and eastern parts with the term "Tartary". "Tatars" or "Tartars" is an exonym, i.e. a name given to some people from outside, by another culture. It originates from the ancient Greek "Τάρταρος", meaning hell, deep abyss. The term "Tartars" was first used by the Georgian queen Rusudan in her letter to Pope Honorius III in 1224. That's how she called the Mongols who attacked Georgia. This term continued to be used in the common use language in Western Europe and North America until the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Below are two trade

cards from the 1890 "Types of Nationalities" series on display at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (photos 58-59).



After the collapse of the Soviet Union and Vladimir Putin's rise to power, the population of the Russian Federation is beginning to resemble the seemingly long-forgotten Tartary more and more. After all, the number of Muslims and other non-Slavic peoples or heterodox people (people practicing other, non-Orthodox, religion, the term widely used in older times, in former imperial classification) is increasing rapidly. In particular, according to the Chairman of the Russian Council of Muftis Ravil Haynutdinov, the number of Russian Muslims has reached 25 million and continues to increase dynamically. Instead, the number of "real" (Orthodox) Russians is constantly decreasing because of mass alcoholism and drug addiction.

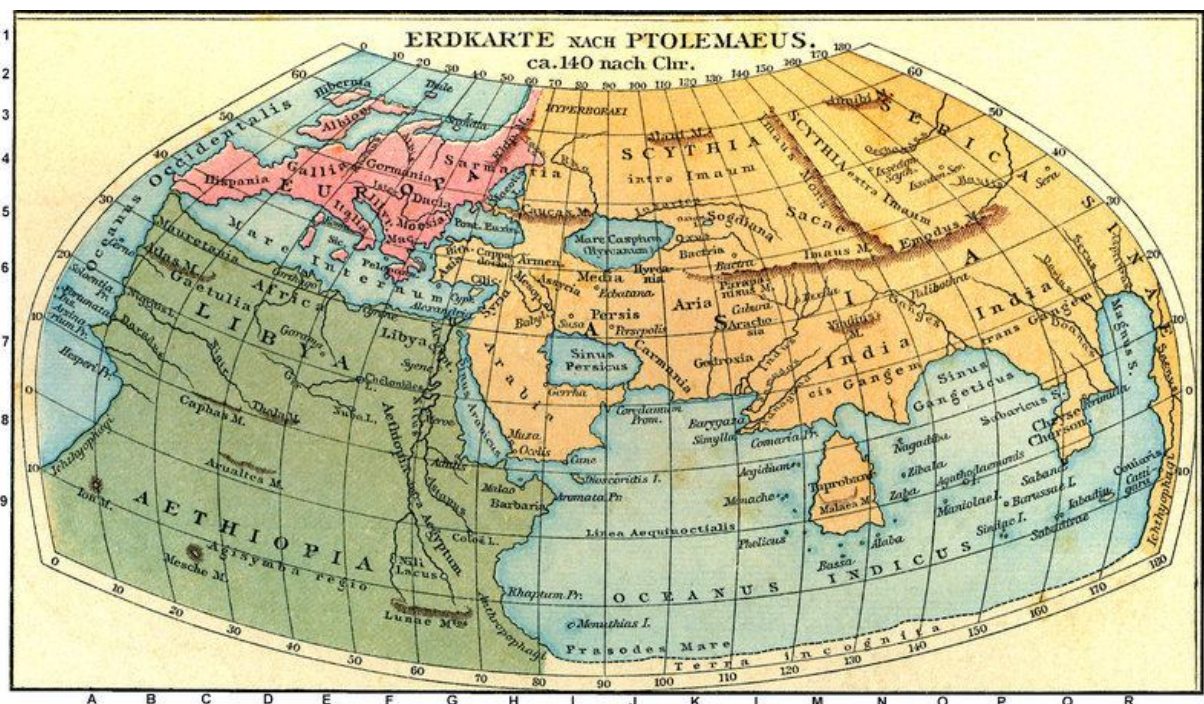
So the share of Russians who consider Russia a non-European country is increasing too. Thus, according to a survey by the Russian sociological research organization *Levada Center*, conducted in March 2022, only one in four residents of the country consider themselves European, and 64% do not. At the same time, 71% of young people aged 18 to 24 define the country as non-European.

Maybe this growing change in proportions of population was one of the main reasons why Russia began to deliberately separate territories from its Orthodox European neighboring countries and, first of all, from Ukraine. It got to the point when aggressors began to issue Russian birth certificates to newborns in

captured Ukrainian cities, and about five million people either left or were forcefully deported from the occupied part of Ukraine to Russia since 2014. This proves the truth in the words of the former US State Secretary Zbigniew Brzezinski that *"Russia as an empire is impossible without Ukraine."*

### On Europe Real and False

It is common knowledge that from the 6th century BC., a number of ancient Greek polis colonies emerged in Crimea and the Northern Black Sea region. Later these became Roman provinces. But few people know that hundreds of ancient Roman coins of the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD have been found on the territory of Ukraine's capital, Kyiv, during the last century. Besides, unlike other Slavic languages, the structure of Ukrainian language resembles vulgar (folk) Latin. To this day, dozens of names coined after Roma (Rome) have survived on the territory of modern Ukraine. The most famous of them is the city of Romny in Sumy Oblast. According to the famous Ukrainian linguist Kostyantyn Tyshchenko, this is explained by close ties with Rome and its eastern provinces. Local farmers not only sold grain there, but were also mercenaries in Roman legions. Therefore, for ancient geographers, including Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria, the territory of Ukraine was Europe (photo 60).



Western European cartographers used copies of his map until the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Below is a fragment of the map by Gerard Mercator entitled "Eighth map of Europe", showing Europe's border. It was printed in Cologne in 1584 (photo 61).





As we see, the border between Europe and Asia divides Sarmatia and runs along the Kerch Strait, the Meotian (Azov) Sea, follows the course of the Don River and goes further north to the Baltic Sea. Thus, it largely coincides with the modern eastern borders of Ukraine, Belarus and Estonia. It is no coincidence that the toponym Ukraine, first mentioned in the Kyiv Chronicle by 1187, has two meanings: *country (land)* and *end, limit, border*. It very accurately reflects the tragic fate of our land - to be on the eastern frontier of European civilization. Today, at the cost of huge number of lives, Ukraine has confirmed its right to be in the big European family.

After Napoleon's defeat, Russian emperors, using bribery and blackmail, induced European monarchs and geographers to draw a new geographical border between Europe and Asia. It shifted significantly to the east and was now marked along the Ural Mountains, the Ural River and the Caucasus Mountains. Thus Russia became formally a proper European empire, even though these manipulations did not change its essence in the least (photo 62).



And now a logical question arises: why do we have to keep regarding as Europe the vast territory from the Don River to the Urals, if its inhabitants are against it and ignore European values?

### **How Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania and Belarus Were Forcibly Separated From Europe**

A painful question for every Ukrainian is how Ukraine, and later Poland with Lithuania and Belarus, were separated from Europe and for centuries became part of the Russian Empire? "It's already two hundred years long" song of Haydamaks (18th-century Ukrainian brigands), puts blame on Bohdan Khmelnytskyi:

*Oh, Bohdan, you foolish son,  
 You've destroyed Poland, and then Ukraine.  
 Hey, hey, ruined and destroyed,  
 For you've had too little sense in your head.*

This opinion is repeated by Taras Shevchenko, the Ukraine's messiah, in his "The Plundered Grave" requiem lamenting the lost freedom:

*...Oh Bogdan!  
The stupid son!  
Look now at your mother,  
At your Ukraine.  
She was rocking you and singing  
About her misfortune,  
And while singing she was crying  
And looking for her freedom.  
Oh Bogdan, Bogdanochka,  
If only she had known,  
She would have stifled you in the cradle,  
She'd have let you fall in death sleep lying under her heart.*

Probably one of the most objective accounts describing the causes leading to the outbreak of Bohdan Khmelnytskyi's uprising was given in the work "From People of Rus" by Henryk Litwin, a historian and an ambassador of the Republic of Poland to Ukraine from 2011 to 2016. In his opinion, the real culprits of that were Polish magnates. Employing their private armies and connections at the courts, by hook or by crook they bought or seized more and more lands at the border between the Wild Field and Muscovy. The Wild Field in Ukrainian is *Дике Поле*, or, Romanized, *Dyke Pole*, also translated as "the wilderness", a historical term referring to the Pontic steppe, north of the Black and Azov Seas. Thus Polish magnates became owners of huge latifundias. But this was not yet enough for the them. Under the pretext of a "holy" war waged against Islamic Turkey, they dreamed of seizing the lands of the Zaporizhian Sich (the semi-autonomous Cossack proto-state), and later Crimea, and multiply the size of their possessions manifold. In the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, where the nobility, and in particular the magnates, elected the king, this was possible. In 1647, Oleksandr Konetspolskyi and Yarema Vyshnevetskyi undertook military campaigns in the Black Sea steppes. In addition, the magnates, by a Sejm decision, forbade King Vladislav IV to finance the Cossacks' campaign against the Turks. In the same year, under the pretext that the Khmelnytskyi's border estate Subotiv no longer belongs to him, people of Stanisław Koniecpolski plundered the farm and beat Khmelnytskyi's son, Ostap, to death.

Henryk Litwin believes that it was a "*symbolic announcement of intentions to take over control of Dyke Pole (the Wild Field). A serious danger loomed over the Cossacks and, as it seems, among the reasons for Khmelnytskyi's rebellion, this corporate interest should also be taken into account, which drove the Cossacks to decisive actions, in particular, in alliance with the Tatars, for whom seizing of the steppes would be an even greater threat.*"

Therefore, the uprising of the Cossacks and Tatars against the Poles was a forced step. Presumably, for the time being, Bohdan Khmelnytsky still had had hope for the prudence and justice of the Polish king. This is evidenced by the hetman's flag, the 'Bohdan banner', exhibited in the Stockholm Armémuseum (photo 63).



Some experts believe that it was hastily painted after the defeat of the Cossack army near Berestechko in 1651. Golden Cyrillic letters are placed in the corners and center of the banner. This is abbreviation standing for the name and title initials: 'Б.Х.Г.Е.К.М.И.О.Б.З' meaning *Bohdan Khmelnytskyi Hetman of His Royal Grace's Zaporizhian Army*. However, those hopes were fruitless. Vladislav IV died suddenly in May 1648, and his successor Jan II Casimir Vasa failed to stop the fratricidal war with the Cossacks and eventually abdicated.

All the constituents of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth - Ukraine, Belarus, Lithuania and Poland - were gradually absorbed by the neighboring countries. And the lion's share went to the Moscow czardom, thus turning it into an empire, which then usurped the ages-old name of Ukraine and Belarus - Rus (Russian, Russia).

It's interesting that the last name of the Polish magnates Stanislav and Oleksandr Koniecpolsky was, ironically, prophetic in this tragic story, since it literally means '*the end of Poland.*'

Today's Poles and Lithuanians have corrected their historical mistake and prevented the emergence of a large oligarchy in their countries. Ukraine has only just begun to solve this problem.

### **'Carthage of Evil' Must Be Destroyed**

Russia's unprovoked attack on Ukraine is a direct threat to the global order and puts the world on the brink of the third world war. It clearly demonstrates that the further existence of such terrorist states as the Russian Federation is dangerous for all of humanity. The large-scale war unleashed by Russia hindered recovering of the world countries from the COVID crisis and returning to efforts to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The experts of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) estimate the lost opportunities at almost three trillion dollars. Poorer countries suffer the most, in particular, dozens of countries in Africa and Asia, which are already experiencing hunger. According to the IMF's report, Russia's invasion of Ukraine amid the ongoing coronavirus epidemic has already provoked a large-scale global economic crisis.

So there is little surprise that the 38 OECD countries, which produce 2/3 of the world's gross product, have finally lost patience and are actively helping Ukraine repel Russian aggression. After all, backward but boorish Russia is nothing but a tiny malicious dwarf compared to them, in economic sense. And this terrorist state, like Carthage, must be destroyed. The huge number of pointless deaths of Russians in Ukraine, harsh Western sanctions, growing unemployment, forced mobilization and a significant drop in the standard of living will sooner or later lead to a social explosion and motivate national movements in Russia itself. Besides, the surviving Russian servicemen who had been robbing Ukrainians near Kyiv, in Kherson or Mariupol, will definitely want to repeat the same in Moscow, St. Petersburg or their wealthy suburbs. Let's not interfere in this natural process of disintegration. And let's not worry too much about the fate of Russia's nuclear arsenal. New provincial leaders, not yet spoiled by hundreds of billions of dollars stolen from the people of Russia, will give these arsenals away without much resistance, for the favor and friendship of Western countries.

After that, it will be time to deal with other undemocratic and totalitarian regimes in other countries that, like Russia, have territorial claims against their neighbors and constantly threaten them with war. This is the only way to consolidate the world, stop the climate and ecological crisis and preserve man as a biological species.

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Valentyn Moyseyenko

Stories of Destruction, Rescue and Survival  
Borodyanka: from February 24 to March 31, 2022

The book contains the stories told by true witnesses of the resistance to the invaders, of the destruction of Borodyanka, of rescue and survival of its inhabitants, illustrated with documentary photos. All these stories and facts demonstrate the chasm in the worldviews of Russian and Ukrainian peoples, who not so long ago were thought to be "brotherly".

Translated into English

Oksana Bulan