

Report from Kyiv, Independence Day 2023

Julian Knysh, reporting for the AFUO, August 2023

Leading up to Ukrainian Independence Day 24th August, the mood in Kyiv is tense as an increase in attacks is expected. People are noticeably tired of war and reserves of resilience must be mustered as people have been coming to terms that this will go on for a long time yet and what this means for the future.

Sociologists conducted a survey among Ukrainians in the lead-up to Independence Day. The results showed that the majority of citizens are proud of their country and want to see it independent and free in the future.

The main emotion respondents feel when thinking about Ukraine is pride (75%).

A survey published in June by the Kyiv International Institute of Sociology, demonstrated 84% of Ukrainian citizens would not accept any territorial concessions, even at the price of a protracted war.



It was announced there will be no official events in Kyiv this year.

However, the country's largest national flag was raised on the territory of the Memorial Complex "National Museum of the History of Ukraine in World War II" in Kyiv.

"Our flag is our tribute to all the heroes of different times who defended our land and gave their lives for Ukraine and Ukrainians," the President of Ukraine said at the ceremony.

President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the audience honoured the fallen soldiers with a one-minute silence. Finally, the President of Ukraine quoted Levko Lukianenko former dissident who wrote the Declaration of Independence in 1991 and said: "I have raised the blue and yellow flag of struggle. And I have to carry it as long as I can. And then someone else will pick it up and carry it on. It doesn't matter who I am in this chain. All that matters is Ukraine, its freedom and independence, its victory and its life."

Ukrainian defenders have signed the flag.



"This flag was at the positions of our soldiers from Chernihiv to Odesa. Along the entire defense line of Ukraine. In various combat brigades and units. In hospitals where the wounded are treated. In the hands of volunteers. This flag will always preserve the memory of many Ukrainian men and women. But it will certainly be replenished and enriched with new signatures of our soldiers," Zelensky said.



Kyiv's famous Khryshchatyk Street has been closed to traffic and a Parade of captured russian tanks and equipment form a line to remind us of the victory of the Seige of Kyiv, what continues in the east and the enormous sacrifice that continues.



The number of flags placed by families of the fallen into the grass at the end of Maidan is tragically more than ten times the number from when I arrived here



Shahed drones attacked Odesa for over 3 hours.

Today a russian strike on a school in Sumy Oblast killed 4 people and injured 4 more.

4 days ago an attack on Chernihiv theatre killed 7 injured 144 including a six year old girl.

Ukraine is carrying the cost of this war for the whole world.

Australia has derived a direct economic benefit from russia's war on Ukraine through a boom in commodity prices. Australia was the largest Non-NATO supporter of Ukraine but then slipped to 7th place.

30 more Bushmasters fit out one battalion. Australia has some of the most experienced and best de-mining personnel in the world. Aussie teams could be training Ukrainians in Poland or Romania. Land mines are the biggest humanitarian legacy issue facing Ukraine and will take decades to clean up. Australia's humanitarian and military assistance to Ukraine is vital.



While I am writing this we are under air raid siren. Alerts say that russia launched groups of kaliber missiles.

I was initially expecting to be in Ukraine for 3-4 months to complete one project. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of my supporters over the last 15 months. Without you I would not have made as much progress in my aspirations or been witness to these truly

historic events that affect the whole world.

I have been based in Kyiv, arriving when it was still empty after the siege of Kyiv, as the only Australian media person with a permanent base in Ukraine, experiencing the same conditions as all Ukrainians. People were leaving Kyiv as I arrived.

Most of my contacts were one way or another involved in the defence of Ukraine and therefore I had no choice but to put my main documentary film project "And the Blind Shall Sing" on hold, and respond to immediate needs.

There is too much to write about here, more will continue through my dispatches and reports. Apart from newsgathering, here's just a very brief summary of some highlights:

My work has been used by Channel 7, ABC, The Daily Telegraph,, The Australian Financial Review.

I provided **assistance to George Gittoes OAM & Hellen Rose** by way of research, cultural attunement, contacts on the ground and feedback.

Their documentary "Ukraine Guernica - Art Not War" will open this year's Sydney Underground Film Festival at the Dendy Cinemas on the 7th September 2023. It's a unique and heartfelt creative response to war. It recently premiered at MIFF - Melbourne International Film Festival. It will be aired on Australian television nationally and will have an active life internationally at film festivals which will provide overseas exposure.

Gittoe's project has generated associated media spin off for Ukraine on ABC, radio, local newspaper articles , magazines and various blogs.

Interviewing Oleh Sentsov.

I was extremely privileged that Oleh Sentsov, filmmaker, activist, formerly illegally imprisoned by russia for 5 years and tortured, agreed to my interview as previously he had refused offers, international and local. My interview with him was screened a number of times on Ukrainian TV. A copy of the interview was donated to the National War Museum on behalf of the Ukrainian community in Australia, with the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations (AFUO) receiving an official letter of thanks from the Museum. It is included in the museum display section exhibition and archived in the war Museum as well as being available in storage at Monash University Slavic Studies collection. An abridged version screened last year at Sydney Underground Film Festival

Australian Bushmasters

Months in the planning, I was the first to film the Bushmasters in front line conditions and the first to use drone footage of the Aussie Bushmasters near the front lines.

Footage was used to support the campaign by the Australian Federation of Ukrainian Organisations & the Ukrainian Ambassador His Excellency Vasyl Myroshnychenko for further aid to Ukraine with success. The video was featured by channel 7 as an Anzac Day exclusive.

I gave live interviews for ABC news and articles in the Financial Review & newscorp The Daily Telegraph used my information and photos.

The Good Farmer

Director Stefan Bugryn from Melbourne asked me to co-produce his documentary film. The story follows Maksym Rydnyanko from his arrest in 1932 after refusing to give up his farm during the Holodomor (Famine), his sentence to a labour camp in Siberia, his escape and the long journey Home.

The story was told by his granddaughter in Melbourne before she passed away and the history is coming back to Ukraine. The film speaks of Russia's genocidal intent through history to present day.

Interview - Maria

Recorded the life story of Maria, 92 yrs old who is living in Irpin in one of the shelters supported by Ukrainians from Australia. Orphaned through Holodomor, she survived, survived German occupation, Soviet repression and now lost everything again as her home was destroyed by a Russian missile. She is the life of the party at the IDP shelter.

Prime Minister Albanese visit and press conference.

Multiple trips to eastern Ukraine.

Witnessed **training by the Chechen volunteer unit and interviews**. They were side by side with Ukrainian Special Forces, the first in to liberate Izium.

Luba at Andriivka in Kyiv Oblast.

One out of four houses were obliterated in this village. She has returned. Luba previously lost her husband. She lost her son, in his thirties, at Bakhmut. She has been given a shipping container to sleep in but it has no air conditioning. She is rebuilding the ruins of her home and has planted a garden and is farming vegetables to feed her neighbours as they come back to rebuild their homes.

Investigated de-mining operations in Kyiv Oblast

Observed delivery of humanitarian aid by Nick Janiw and Jenny Bogatova of NGO "Ukraine Guardian Angels".

Met regularly with the children at IDP shelters at Irpin and Bucha. Their art therapy is an inspiring program.

Advanced to A2 level Ukrainian language studies!

Visiting Saint Mykolai Childrens' Hospital in Lviv with Australian pediatrician Dr John Whitehall. This is the children's bomb shelter ready in the basement of the hospital:



A historic moment of Ukrainian soldiers thanking Australia for the Bushmasters and reciting the Ode of Remembrance for ANZAC Day brought us closer together:



Work in development:

Documentary “ And the Blind Shall Sing”- Development, planning and some pre-production has been completed.

Documentary Interview “Paramedic “TAIRA” -Yulia Paevskaya”- the story of her kidnapping, being illegally held prisoner repeatedly tortured and how she now helps others.

Yulia received the International Award “Woman of Courage” at the White House and Lev Kopelev Prize “for Freedom and Human Rights”

Development ,planning, concepts and pre-production have been completed.

Documentary “ From UVO to UVO “From Ukrainian Military Organisation to Ukrainian Military Organisation the inevitable Victory or Death”

Follows company members of the 23rd Separate Special Purpose Presidential Brigade ‘ Hetman Bohdan Khmelnytsky’

Witnessed training by UVO company of the 23rd Battalion ,visited the soldiers at barracks and listened. Witnessed drone and anti drone tactics in training.

Arranged for support and delivered first aid kits and other requirements to the unit which were funded by Plast Kuryn Lisovy Chorty Sydney

Research on a book about the inseparable nature of the cultural and military fronts continues. More interviews and fieldwork are required.

On a weekly basis I am attending press briefings, conferences or workshops.

Whether at official functions or talking to people on the street, whether a week takes me to talking with soldiers, famous people, political leaders, academics or volunteers, I am constantly inspired by the resilience and fortitude of the Ukrainian people.

