

Ukrainian pride at the side of SA's soldiers



Major Michael Jack, Rosie Misajlo, Michelle Gorgula and Warrant Officer Mark Manouso at the 7RAR Operation Kudu departure ceremony. Picture: Ben Clark

Zayda Dollie

For 67-year-old Ukrainian-Australian Bohdan Wojewidka, the decision to send Australian troops abroad to train Ukrainian recruits has meant the world.

"It's a proud moment for an Australian-Ukrainian," he said.

"As an Australian I'm very proud and as a Ukrainian I'm very humbled that these individuals have volunteered to go and are happy to assist us.

"I mean, they're not fighting the war but they're training Ukrainian soldiers to be able to defend Ukraine against an aggressor like Russia."

Mr Wojewidka was one of a number of Ukrainian-Australians who came out to the Edinburgh RAAF Base on Monday to farewell the 90 South Australian soldiers heading to the UK.



Andrii Hleb, 13, fled Ukraine two years ago. Picture: Ben Clark

As part of Operation Kudu, Australia has committed to deploying troops to the UK every three months to train

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Bohdan Wojewidka
Ukrainian-Australian

Ukrainian Armed Forces on neutral territory in basic infantry tactics for urban and wooded environments.

Now in its fifth rotation, this will be the first time soldiers are deployed from South Australia – previous cohorts have been deployed exclusively out of Darwin.

For Oksana Kosak – whose parents migrated to South Australia in 1949, having left Ukraine only to end up in a displaced persons camp in

post-war Germany – the support of other Ukrainians has moved her to tears.

"It's fantastic, absolutely fantastic," she said.

"Every bit helps, this is just an amazing initiative."

"I still have family on the Western side of Ukraine and close to the Polish border and it's difficult for all of us here".

Ms Kosak said as the child of WWII survivors, she would never have thought she would live to see another war.

Andrii Hleb, 13, and his mother Lesya Hleb fled Ukraine nearly two years ago after the war broke out, arriving as a family of three including Andrii's 28-year-old sister.

"I came with my mum and my sister but then she went back to the Ukraine because my sister missed her husband," he said. "My dad is still in Ukraine, he hopes that he doesn't go to the war."

As adult men, his father and brother-in-law are obliged to remain in the Ukraine.

Happily enrolled at Marryatville High, the teen said he loved Australia but their plans were to return to Ukraine, where their house and belongings still remained.

"I speak to my dad every day on the phone," he said.

"My mum said we will come to him, after the war".

Fellow Ukrainian-Australian Lawrence Ben, 31, said his grandparents knew Ms Kosak's parents, having fled to South Australia under similar circumstances.

"Today is a really important event to support and be part of," he said.

"It's so heartening to see, because the support is needed now more than ever to stand with Ukrainians fighting for the independence of their country."