How freed Ukrainian soldier changed Sydney family's lives with five words

On the eve of the second anniversary of the bloody Russian war on Ukraine, a Ukrainian soldier has given his Australian-based family a huge surprise after being captured by Russian forces.

[Charles Miranda](#), February 23, 2024, **News Corp Australia Network**

Exclusive: With just five words, the lives of one Australian family changed forever.

"I'm back, everything is fine," a gaunt but beaming Alex Sinitsky, draped in the Ukrainian flag, says in a video sent to his two children and his parents living in western Sydney.

The Ukrainian Territorial Army soldier was captured by Russian forces on the battlefield in east Ukraine in the early days of the war in 2022 and little had been heard of him since.

Alex Sinitsky was captured by Russian troops very early on and spent more than 500 days in a Russian gulag. He has just been released in the last few weeks and reunited with his kids (via zoom) as he remains in a hospital/hospice in Ukraine. Picture: Supplied

Now, on the eve of the second anniversary of the [bloody Russian war on Ukraine](#), the 33-year-old has been released as part of a formal prisoner swap.

"We didn't believe it until we saw him with our own eyes," his father, also called Alex, said of that moment he saw his son on video taken minutes after he arrived on Ukraine soil.

"It is indescribable. With all my capacity to talk, I find it difficult to find the proper words, it was a mix of many emotions."

On Saturday it will be [two years since Vladimir Putin rolled his tanks into Ukraine](#) to unleash hell and suffering that rightly remains condemned by most of the world.

More than 10,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed, twice that many injured, with four million others displaced internally and another 6.3 million living as refugees overseas.

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Two years of war

Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, 2022 expecting a swift victory, instead it is embroiled in a lengthy war of attrition.

54% of occupied territory has been recaptured by Ukraine

18% of Ukraine is still occupied by Russia

Our yellow and blue flag is in Ukraine, and this is our main victory.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy

Military cost

190,000 - Ukrainian soldiers killed or wounded

315,000 - Russian soldiers killed or wounded

US Intelligence assessment as of Dec 2023

Reported US estimate as of Aug 2023

Active personnel

900,000 Ukraine

1,320,000 Russia

Impact on civilians in Ukraine

Verified civilian deaths in January 2024 were 42 per cent higher than in November 2023.

10,378 killed

19,632 injured

3.7 million – internally displaced

6.3 million – fled the country

14.6 million – require humanitarian assistance

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Mr Sinitsky and his wife Evgenia migrated to Australia almost 17 years ago, joining the then software development boom in the early days of iPhone camera tech. They have since become permanent residents.

When the war in Ukraine broke out, their Kyiv-based web developer son joined the territorial army and, with the capital under constant shelling, his children were dispatched to Australia on three-year humanitarian visas to live with their grandparents.

Alex Sinitsky and his wife, Evgenia, with their grandchildren Yaroslava, 13 and Nikita, 9, who came to Australia after their father joined the fight for Ukraine. Picture: Richard Dobson

Then Alex was taken captive for the next 556 days with little news, except for a very brief scrawled letter sent in the first six months.

"That one piece of text just said 'dear mum dad, I'm fine, I'm okay I will see you soon', really neutral text without any details," Mr Sinitsky said.

"For us we were monitoring day by day a couple of Telegram channels devoted to running lists of the missing and dead and praying we would not see his name there.

"This was pretty much holding us up on a very thin thread. It is a very big question though what is worse, bad news or void of news."
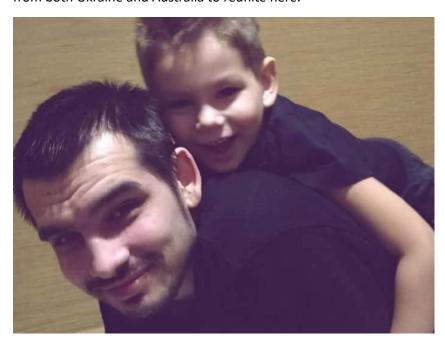
Alex Sinitsky was captured by Russian troops and spent more than 500 days in a Russian gulag. This was the video message to his parents taken straight after his release. Picture: Supplied

Then last month a 3am call told them their loved one was alive, recovering in hospital, having lost 15kg and needing a knee operation but in good spirits, then they saw the video.

"I couldn't believe that had actually happened because I had almost lost all my hope and like everything thought 'well it is what it is' but then we heard this," Alex Jr's 13-year-old daughter Yaroslava said, speaking with a slight Aussie twang.

She and her brother Nikita thought they were just coming for a quick trip to visit their grandparents but have since embraced Australia, learning to speak English and being fully enrolled in school.

Now they hope their father, who they speak with every second day, will get the right permissions from both Ukraine and Australia to reunite here.

Alex Sinitsky with son Nikita. Picture: Supplied

Alex Sinitsky with daughter Yaroslava. Picture: Supplied

"We are very proud of him (Alex Jr) because his brothers in arms, his mates, not all survived this ordeal, did not manage to withstand this as our son did," Mr Sinitsky said.

"We were told the health condition of people sitting in the cell with him was much worse … he told us it was a great deal for him to know that his kids were in safety and he said 'that removed half my worries and I realise whatever happens to me at least the kids will live'. Knowing also that we were all waiting for him and doing everything that we could within our powers, to release him to see him again, was what was holding him."

Australia has committed almost $1 billion to Ukraine, more than $750 million in military aid but many believe without greater support, particularly from NATO and the US, Ukraine will fall.

Putin has vowed to continue his war with a vision to recreate the former Soviet Union of nations under Kremlin control and/or the Russian Empire pre-1917 under his sole dictatorship.