

The New York Times

**From the Trenches in Ukraine,
We Know Our Enemy Is in Shock**

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By Yegor Firsov

An infantryman's least favorite weather is a temperature of 35 degrees Fahrenheit and pouring rain, when the trench floods with knee-deep, near freezing water. Surviving in such conditions is truly an art, and it's at these moments in particular that a trench has a special energy. Here people fight for their lives, for every manifestation of it. Here communion with God is sincere and more frequent than in any church.

Near the front lines everyone fits up his trench like it's his little home away from home. There are sleeping bags, ammunition and food, of course. But people also keep books and affix drawings by their children to the walls.

Sometimes enemy forces are close enough that we can see them without binoculars. Sometimes they're a few hundred feet away. Our task is to "hold the fort," and in this common expression lies the main idea of war: not to yield your land to the enemy. So when shelling starts, a soldier cannot just take cover; he must also make sure the enemy does not move forward. As a rule, that's exactly what happens: When the enemy begins to shell, its infantry starts to advance.

One day our positions were bombarded with 120-millimeter mortars for several hours. When the barrage started, it was terrifying. First, there was the sound of the exit — as the projectile flies out of the launcher. Then there was the wait of a couple of seconds and the vibration of its arrival.

The trench shook.

Soil fell from above.

The sound of the explosion deafened us for several seconds.

If you felt all of that, it means that this time you were lucky. The bomb landed at least 30 feet away. You cross yourself. The next exit may be yours.

With each explosion, fragments of steel scatter like sharp darts in all directions. A large fragment of a 120-millimeter mortar round is about half the size of the palm of your hand, and heavy. It can punch through a bulletproof vest.

But the small, almost invisible pieces of shrapnel that get into the body are worse. That's why we — I am a medic as well as a rifleman — have to carefully examine the wounded and palpate them all over, so as not to miss an insidious shrapnel wound that could cause internal bleeding.

If a large caliber projectile hits near the trench, soldiers can get buried and a comrade nearby must dig them out before they suffocate. An explosion felt from underground feels even more unpleasant than on the surface: The blast wave creates a vacuum and it puts pressure on the ears. It feels like a slight concussion. We are taught to sleep with our arms around our machine guns. If you get buried, you'd better have it in your hands when you crawl out from under the ground.

The shelling can go on for several hours, and by the time it has finished you no longer feel fear. The body gets used to it. You think that maybe now you are immune to it. You leave the trench and the sun is shining and birds are singing, as if you dreamed these horrors.

Then you hear another barrage being fired and there's the fear again.

At the front line, emotions run the gamut. The adrenaline makes the eyes of some of the men almost glow. In others, the life seems to fade away. They stop being afraid but they also stop rejoicing. I've met soldiers with nothing but emptiness and indifference in their eyes. Soldiers in the trenches care deeply for one another, but the level of tension is so high that usually nobody cries when someone is injured or killed.

Image

But these are extremes. For the most part, humans are creatures that get used to everything. Often during the shelling, the guys make jokes and tell funny stories. Humor is very helpful for dealing with stress.

In peacetime, “courage” and “bravery” are empty words. Here, those words reveal their true meaning. Anyone can be afraid. But the courageous master their fear and do not let others give in to it.

Our front depends on such people. They inspire confidence and faith in victory. Quite often these people are unremarkable — some skinny young guy or an older man. Not supermen. In civilian life, such a person could sit across from you on the subway, come to fix your plumbing or lay tiles on your floor and you would not even notice him. Here, he suddenly reveals his full potential.

We know our enemy is in shock. We hear it on the radio intercepts. “How come? We hit them with everything we can, burn everything clean and their infantry is still holding out?!”

For a people who will burrow into the ground to survive, freedom is even more important than life.

Mr. Firsov is a medic and rifleman in the Ukrainian Army.

The Huffington Post

**I Left My Old Life Behind To Fight For Ukraine.
Here's What Trump Isn't Telling You.**

By Sergii Gavryliuk

March 12, 2025

Before the war, I was a printer in Kyiv. I had traveled the world, met my wife and started a small business making advertising materials and T-shirts. Like many others, I had plans for the future and dreams of a peaceful life.

Now, I serve in the Ukrainian army — not because I am choosing war but because the violence came to my doorstep three years ago. Since Russia began its campaign to control our country, I have had no choice but to stand and defend my home, my people and our freedom. I want to share what the invasion has taught me about the value of freedom because it is essential to peace.

But since Donald Trump has come back into office, everything has changed. Watching his meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the Oval Office on Feb. 28 made one thing clear: Trump is determined to end the war at any cost, without any concern for what happens next or the destruction it may cause to my people.

It appears the president of the United States has a different understanding of peace than we Ukrainians do, and he doesn't care what our country looks like the day after his deal goes through because he simply wants to be the man who ended the war.

He speaks about caring for Ukrainian soldiers, but he recently [blocked critical aid](#) to Ukraine, and this led to our army being less able to defend itself as [the casualties continued to mount](#).

One soldier who was killed was a friend of mine. He died in my arms in the ruins of a house — a place that was once someone's home. I held his hand as he became delirious and began speaking to his wife as if she were there with him. He told her how much he loved her, that she needed to finish their home renovations, and that they would send their son to school.

He was a builder who joined the army voluntarily in the first days of the invasion. I held him as he died and thought about how another wife is left without a husband, another child will not have a father, and another mother will mourn her son. I think of him when I hear American leaders say Ukraine is responsible for

this war.

Every war eventually comes to an end, and like every Ukrainian, I dream of the day when peace finally returns to our land. We want to live, build our future, and shape our nation — a country with a thousand years of history. But what kind of peace are we being offered?

The [recent talks between Ukraine and the U.S.](#) — and the discussion of a ceasefire — bring a glimmer of hope. But will Russia agree? I highly doubt it. And even if it does — what happens next? History has proven time and again that agreements with Russia hold no value. I have no illusions: The Kremlin will never abandon its imperial ambitions. If left unchecked, it will regroup, rearm, and strike again.

The citizens of Ukraine know the cost of Russian promises. We remember the names of people who are no longer here today because Vladimir Putin lied. Those lies mean I can't watch my children grow up. My mother's hair is turning gray from the stress of knowing her only son is at war. I don't know what the future will be for the people I love or myself. Still, I will keep fighting because I refuse to let my country be swallowed up by Russia.

Ukrainians, Europeans and Americans can't take more time learning Putin is not ready for peace. This whole nightmare would end if Russia left Ukraine. Although the war has taught me a lot, I don't understand why Ukraine — the victim — is constantly pressured to compromise while the aggressor faces no real consequences. We are smaller, but we are not lesser. The United States has never shied away from standing up to tyranny. I want to know what has changed now.

What security guarantees will Ukraine receive, and from whom, when the U.S. is retreating from Europe? Who will ensure that evil does not go unpunished, that the massacres, the destroyed cities and the hundreds of thousands of innocent lives lost are not forgotten? A ceasefire without justice is not peace — it's merely a pause before the next war.

A forced freeze of the front lines, as they are today, would not end the war — it would only postpone the next stage of Russia's aggression. Why should we surrender our land? Why should we be asked to accept the destruction of our homes and the slaughter of our people as something to be forgiven? I cannot forget. I will not forgive.

To me, this is not peace — it is surrender. It is a betrayal of the free and democratic world in the face of growing dictatorships. A rushed ceasefire, driven by political expediency, will not bring stability. It will only plant the seeds of an

even greater war, and as always, it will be ordinary Ukrainians who pay the price — lives that seem to matter to Western politicians only in their speeches.

I know that many Americans support us and are angry with their elected politicians for turning their backs on Ukraine, and I thank them.

I'm afraid of dying and leaving my family behind. I'm afraid of being maimed while fighting and becoming a burden to my wife and children. The best of Ukraine is fighting and dying. The most honorable and the most courageous are trying to bring freedom to our people.

I joined the army because of freedom. I want my people to live in our own home, on our own terms. Now that I've met my 2-month-old twin daughters, my only dream is for them to grow up alive and in a peaceful Ukraine. I don't want to emigrate. I was born here, and I want to raise my daughters in my country. This war is horrifying, bleak and impossible to explain to civilians who don't live it. I ask for your help and pray you never find yourself in our position.

Sergii Gavryliuk is a father, son, and before he joined Ukraine's army, the owner of a typography business. He is currently a junior sergeant in Ukraine's armed forces and a Bradley IFV commander. You can follow him on X at [@GarvyliukSergii](https://twitter.com/GarvyliukSergii).

The Independent

JD Vance's cousin is fighting for Ukraine – this is what he thinks of Trump, Putin and the VP

Story by Sam Kiley

March 12, 2025

In the mafia-like world of the White House where loyalty tests are routine and macho threats the norm, JD Vance might have hoped for omertà from his actual family. Instead, both the vice president and [the president himself](#) find themselves described by one of JD's close relatives as “useful idiots” serving Vladimir Putin.

“There were some days we went out and casualty rates were 50 per cent,” says Nate Vance, speaking from the Rocky Mountains where he is resting before returning to the fight in Ukraine.

While JD, 40, was on the campaign trail where he snubbed Ukraine's president Volodymr Zelensky, and even after he was elected, “JD never asked me anything” about the war, his cousin recalls.

Nor has the vice president been in touch after the disastrous meeting with Zelensky in the Oval Office when the world witnessed a drastic shift against Kyiv by the US.

“I was angry, let's be honest I was angry. Even if you removed my connection to the vice president and you removed my connection to Ukraine, and this was just some neutral issue where a president invited a foreign leader to the White House... it was a really weird thing to me.

Speaking to The Independent, Nate Vance said he was angered by the furious row in the White House between Trump, Vance and Zelensky (Sam Kiley/The Independent)

“The perception is that that was pre-planned and to kind of put pressure on somebody seemed like an attempt to make Zelensky look small. What it looked like was an ambush.

“I think that Trump does not understand that region of the world as well as he likes to pretend he does. He almost views it as two adolescent boys roughhousing in the living room and he's going to walk in like the Dad and say ‘Ok guys knock it off it's time for dinner’.

“And they’re going to be like ‘OK’ and then go back to being friends again and that is nowhere near what is going to happen.

“They’re starting to look like Putin’s useful idiots. I’m sure Putin’s laughing his ass off behind closed doors at all these concessions that are being made, knowing he’s not going to do what the current administration wants him to do.

“Any concessions you make to him will come back to bite you. They will,” Nate Vance insists.

Why has JD taken such a strong anti-Zelensky view?

“There was a campaign promise made to end the war quickly and when those two [Trump and Vance] are looking at ‘who can we bully into stopping’ they see that Ukraine is in a position of weakness. It was a simple calculation on their part that ‘we can’t really push Putin around necessarily so we’ll push Zelensky around,’” the vice president’s cousin says.

Nate Vance served as a Marine, then went onto oil and gas consulting in Texas. Growing up he spent summers with his cousin JD.

Most of the Russians were killed or wounded but three made it back. Vance says he watched from drones sending live images to his group who were mostly Ukrainians.

“So the Russians go back to their friendly positions and NCOs (Russian non-committed officers) step out of the tree line and kill those guys”.

“They will eat their own. If you don’t think they will eat you... these guys, they have no qualms in betraying their own people. So betraying a foreign government is nothing. Especially a foreign government [like the US] who has effectively removed themselves and removed all levers from the conversation.”

He says that his fellow Americans who had volunteered to defend Ukraine, like him, all feel betrayed by the Trump White House. By his own family.

Nate Vance, who spent summers as a child with JD Vance, is a US veteran who volunteers to fight alongside Ukrainian soldiers on the frontline with Russia. He tells World Affairs Editor [Sam Kiley](#) in Kyiv that his first cousin is only serving Putin by abandoning Zelensky