

What was the life of the family like before the war?

What does it mean to be a patriot?

What influenced the decision to protect Ukraine?

What is the attitude of the family and surrounding people to it?

Chapter 4. My father (was) at the war. History of the ATO soldiers children

Do the close relatives tell about the war?

What is the attitude to the events in the East of Ukraine and in the Crimea?

How did you manage to keep in touch?

In what moments did you feel the absence of a person?

What would you like to tell the readers?

Defender of the “furthest” check point

Roman Tybur
Lviv

My name is Roman. My father, Volodymyr Tybur, was at the war... Yes, it is the war, because the events in the east of Ukraine – are not Anti-Terrorist Operation, but a real bloody war, the damages from which are counted in hryvnias, dollars, euros, but not in human bodies and souls...

2013 year... The usual, planned life of my family. My mother is a medical specialist, father – a joiner with “golden hands”, sister Khrystia is in kindergarten and I am a student of the 4th grade. However, our plans for the holidays without borders were broken by Mr. Yanukovych, who said “no” to Eurointegration. At that time I understood those difficult words little, but already in February 2014, when my mum packed bandages, pain-killers and was preparing to leave for Maidan, after the first cruel beating of the meeting participants and the murder of Nigoyan, I became afraid for the first time. When in those days when people were shot in Instytutaska street my father went to Kyiv – I was terrified. I suppose that maybe then I started to grow adult.

What is patriotism for me? Am I a patriot? Yes, I can state it clearly and confidently being 13 years old. My great-grandfather Stepan Oliynyk at 17 was already a prisoner of the NKVD for helping the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, his whole big family was convoyed to Siberia in Kemerovo region, and he received 25 years of the concentration camp with strict regime. My great-grandmother Maria-Kazymyra Kacherovska, Polish by nationality, together with her family where there were exclusively girls, also was sent to Siberia, for keeping an underground shelter in the stable, where the partisans hid. After that she had to go to the coalmines, tree felling, building work... These stories about my great-grandmother and great-grandfather have been handed down in our family as the stories of formation of faith in the radiant future and freedom. Mother always tells us them as a good example of unbreakable spirit. Just because of it I can only have patriotic upbringing.

And now my father. Father, who never shouts at me and always helps me, one day simply leaves home for those places where people are killed...

2014 year, August, mother cries and clings to father for some reason. We did not know yet that some piece of paper would take our father away from us for such a long time.

I will always remember father’s words: “Children, you should be polite, obey your mother, because I go to fight in war for you”. He said that he would leave a trace on the earth after himself, that children of 18-20 should not be killed. I did not understand it then. Now I am proud of him!

October 14, Pokrova holiday. A usual goods train is taking the 4th battalion of the 24th brigade to the place of war. Mother does not cry any more. When she is near us, she always smiles and says that father called when we were sleeping, said that he missed us and loves us... Now I know that it was not like that: mother cried at nights and father did not call whole weeks. We did not know where exactly he went. Father did not tell. One day he called and told that journalists visited them and they would be shown on television.

«24 channel», reportage of Artem Lysak “31st check point. The last fortress”. My father smiles, says hello to us, and my mother weeps. Why? I did not know then. Here is our father! Now I understand that it was the “furthest” point, “the way of death”, blockade... We still watch that reportage. Tears still run down my mother’s face. The tears of joy that father returned alive.

The second travel to the East was to Avdiyivka. The town for which still fierce fightings are carried out. The town, around which tripwire grenades are and in which population with pro-Russian attitude lives. Then again to Luhansk region: Smile, Frunze...

During the period of father’s rotations I missed him practically always... New Year, Christmas, Easter, birthdays, my primary school leaving party, my sister’s kindergarten leaving party... When he had possibility, the father called us, asked about the school, my behavior, whether I obey my mother, always stressed that I was the only man in the family and I grew more mature, as mother said, very quickly.

The war is the phenomenon which is always present in the discussions in our family. I like very much when my father’s comrades come to visit us. I always listen to them “with my mouth open”, understanding that all of them are Heroes, because they were not afraid to go, did not bribe officials to stay at home, but firmly and determinedly rallied to the defense of Ukraine, their and my home.

Now my father is a student of the Land Forces Academy. His “children”, as he calls his platoon, where he is the head – these are the boys about five years older than me. For me they are an example, which I want to follow. They say that they receive more information from my father than from some lecturers, who know about the war and military actions only from books.

My father is a real example for following, a man who at 35 years old decided to devote himself fully to the army. I still miss him a little. Sometimes I feel jealous of his students, but I am very proud of him!

I would like to say to my peers: “Let us value and love our father and mother, because when they are every day with us, they simply are, but when they are absent – we really need them!”.

Bloody “Crimean Spring”

Yana Driomina
Mykolayiv

“War is when absolutely innocent people die for the interests of others”
Winston Churchill

In the history of each country, sooner or later, difficult times (revolution, crisis, etc.) come. But the most terrible thing that could happen to a country is a war. Just such times our country has to survive, when the neighbouring country has encroached on our territorial integrity, freedom and independence. I would like to tell my story about what bitter recollections this war will leave in my life...

The roots of my family have origin in Zaporizzhia region. Just there I was born, as well as my mother and father. Since 2002 (when I was 1 year old), our family has moved to the Crimea, to the settlement Novofedorivka of Saky district. It is such a small, cosy corner in the west of the peninsula (which will be later closely connected with the war). Although we did not have there either relatives, or acquaintances, we quickly adapted to the new life. My parents became military men, doing their duty of representatives of the Armed Forces of Ukraine with dignity. During the 12 years of life on the peninsula we felt ourselves its indigenous population. I had many friends, I was studying in a prestigious lyceum and my parents have achieved certain success in their military service.

But in February 2014 the armed aggression of Russia put a stop to our peaceful and careless life. Russian invaders came, who openly, boldly and taking no account of the international law, conventions and friendly agreements between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, took away Ukrainian lands. We were together with mother, at that time my father participated in the operation “Ocean shield”, from autumn 2013 until spring 2014 he was in navigation on the flagman of the Naval Forces of Ukraine “Hetman Sahaidachnyi” under the aegis of NATO. He and his colleagues learned about what was happening in their own land of the Crimea from the correspondence with relatives. They could not even imagine how serious it was. Me and mother, being without our own male protection, supported each other as well as we could. Those were frightening times, when I had to go to school, and mother to work past the armed “green men”. Those were terrible sensations which it is impossible to express: one goes to sleep not knowing what will happen tomorrow. We were looking forward to my father’s return, which was planned to be in March. He and his colleagues had to be met in Sevastopol with honours, like heroes. But, from my father’s words, when the

ship started approaching the Ukrainian waters, they were made clear, that for their own safety and for the flagman's safety, it would be better to make the landing in Odesa port, and from there, without drawing attention to themselves, to get to the peninsula.

At the same time, the peninsula itself, or to be more precise the majority of its population, supported the occupation. Everywhere the Russian tricolours were hanged, the meetings with slogans "Crimea is Russia" were taking place, the Ukrainian television was cancelled. Even in my lyceum the teachers, who taught us to be real patriots and said: "I will bring up such patriots of you, that you, standing on your knees at 00:00, together with radio will sing the Ukrainian anthem with the hand on your heart!", - started to give up their pro-Ukrainian positions. Once all the students were gathered in the gym and asked to treat the situation with understanding, the lyceum was made to say good-bye to the Ukrainian symbols.

But the Ukrainian military men remained with quite other mood. They, like real patriots, did not give up and defended to the last their military units, often without any weapons, simply by covering with their own bodies the flag of their country. Even the Russian invaders treated with respect the tenacity of the Ukrainian army. Novofedorivka has distinguished itself by the fact that on the first day of intervention our Saky sea aviation brigade literally at the gunpoint of the occupants managed to take the aviation vehicles from the peninsula to the mainland, without the permission of the highest military leaders for that.

The referendum was held, according to which the Crimean peninsula was considered the territory of the Russian Federation. But it did not become the final end of this story. On April, 8 the Ukrainian military men, who remained loyal to their Motherland, had to leave everything and, not knowing their further destiny, to go toward the new life. Two days before the departure there was a conflict between the Russian occupants and two Ukrainian servicemen (who were friends of our family), which resulted in the first victim of the unproclaimed war – the murder of the officer Stanislav Karachevskiyi. Although the officer tried to escape, he was followed by the armed Russian serviceman. The pursuit was ended with murder, by two shots point blank, on the 5th storey (which is two storeys higher than our flat), several steps from his family. The late officer was a good friend, a father of two children and a deserving serviceman. The other friend hid from pursuit in our flat, but some minutes later the armed Russian servicemen broke in, and took him away. Even several days later no one could learn about his precise whereabouts. People said he was taken for the interrogation to Sevastopol. We and his family hoped for the better.

Back then it all reminded of a nightmare. We had to say good-bye to all the things we've got so accustomed to. Friends said: "Politics divided us only territorially, but we will all stay friends, despite everything!", – and only now

we understand, that those were only warm words, which we wanted to hear at that moment.

I had to live for some time separately from my parents in Zaporizzhia region, with my grandparents. I finished the 6th grade there. At that time my mother and father were in Mykolayiv, busy with searching for a new dwelling, new school, did everything possible so that when our family reunited again, we had a calm and careless life.

We have been living in Mykolayiv for 4 years already. I was not met warmly in the new school. It seemed to me that teachers with pro-Russian views persecuted me, and the peers were not glad to meet a new member of the “class family”. After a year of studying there, my parents, having asked my opinion, decided to change the school.

It is difficult to express, how hard it was back then. All those events, the frequent abrupt changes in life were taken in a difficult way by me. It was hard to understand that I was not the only one, who lost her home, friends, classmates, beloved lyceum. My parents also were deprived of all these things and it was not easy for them either. We all consoled us, that such is the life of military men. Earlier they only lived in such a way. One should perceive things in life the way they are and hope for the better. There is an appropriate time for everything.

Now I study in the 10th grade of Mykolayiv law lyceum, have classmates and I can call my friend almost everyone. At last, I have come across the teachers who bring up patriotism, love for one’s own land, state, mutual help and understanding in their students.

The hard times have not come to an end. The war has been continuing for several years on the territory of Ukraine – now in the East of Ukraine, which the Russian occupants are trying to invade. Fortunately, we have people ready to defend their own land. These are people who consider it the cause of honour and dignity almost daily to do heroic deeds, risking their lives for the sake of the state. They all are our fathers, children, brothers and sisters, friends. They are from different regions of Ukraine, of different age, calling, but nothing of that prevented them from leaving their families, cozy homes and rally to the defense of quiet and peace, not fearing for their lives.

My father is just like that. For some time I was with mother at home without father. The head of our family could not stay at home when there is war in the east of the country. It is also one of extremely troubled pages of our life. In the phone calls he did not tell us much: one can understand him – he did not want us to worry. Because one feels very sad when one imagines how in the cold winter nights or hot summer days the real heroes have to guard the peace, so that the war does not come to one’s home and does not take it away.

“Wars are cursed by mothers”, said Horace, and, without doubt, he was right. Innocent people die for the sake of other people’s interests and the most

terrible thing is that everyone is helpless here and can change very little. We, certainly, are very proud of those who defend our Motherland to the last. Thus, everything we can do – is presenting our love and support to those who defend our peace and believing that the war will end soon, all of the heroes will return home safe and sound, and the Ukrainian blue and yellow flag will be waving under the peaceful sky.

Forgive me, daddy...

Yulia Konstantinova

Lviv

I can bet that to each of us, who remembers the school years, is known that trembling sensation when the holiday of the farewell bell comes: a little sad, sweetly-victorious and light. For me that day has always been special, because after the celebratory assembly, as an award for the academic year finished with “excellent” marks, I received from my mother a walk of my dream: merry-go-rounds, plays, balloons, and, of course, a great deal of ice-cream. But the greatest joy for me, a small blue-eyed girl with fair-haired plaits was a holiday walk with my father. Whole my conscious childhood he spent at earnings abroad, that is why our partings were long, and those several days which we managed to spend together were extremely emotional, warm and cheerful.

Once my father’s next coming to the Motherland coincided with the end of the school year. Then we went with father and my best friend-classmate to walk around the city for the first time. My father was careful and generous like never before: we went to the best amusement rides, ate the best sweets. He radiated joy. And I was overflowing with immense pride that he presents us such a special and unique children’s happiness. That I am going along the wide streets holding him by the hand. That he is my FATHER. Perhaps, it is the only bright memory, which was left for me as a memory of those careless times.

Why the only one? The answer to that question is unlikely to astonish anybody. The arithmetics of adult life is cynical and painfully easy: there are a mother and father – two of them. When somebody third appears, some of them has to be the odd one out. In our case, mother turned out to be the odd one out. Thus, automatically, these were also me and my younger sister (as always hungry, needing education/clothes/small things for girls and many other additional things). Father has found another woman. Did they love each other? As I was then in the 4th grade, I did not care much about it. Instead of it, my naïve and not ready for the cruelty of the world mind was torn to pieces with questions “why”. WHY:

- Why is mother constantly crying at night?
- Why did we stop calling father and writing him letters to warm countries?
- WHY DID HE LEAVE US?

Mother said that father evidently does not love us and will not come any more. My lack of understanding gradually turned into a deep offense and my heart was being filled with righteous wrath. Once, when father called us, I picked up the receiver and asked him to call here no more, because he had

hurt my mother. Then it seemed to me that this deed makes me a real advocate of justice, and I was proud that I could protect (at least somehow) my mother. It was our last phone conversation.

The years passed and our internal family tragedy became only an impersonal part of the dry statistics: 44,5% married couples in Ukraine divorce. Time has numbed the stormy emotions and experiences. There was only left a huge disappointment in all representatives of males and a painful scar that re-opened every time when I saw happy families of my peers, how loving fathers took their daughters home from school and how they danced with them at the school-leaving party. I became more mature. I learnt to take life as it is, reconciled with the fact (although not without efforts!) that, unfortunately, it is not always possible to keep the oath to be together till the end of one's days, that is why people often have to look for their happiness outside marriage. I was not angry any more. I only wanted that father remembered once about me, learned what person I became, praised me for my success and achievements. I was waiting for his phone call so much...

I received news about my father in August 2014. "Yulia, your father was killed in Donbas. Receive our condolences" – such was the message from my cousin in Russia. Blood became cold in my veins. I reread it once more. "Father", "was killed", "Donbas". This puzzle did not want to be put together in my mind. It seemed to be some nonsense, mistake, a bad joke. My father never was in the East and, the more so, he could not have been killed there. I did not dare to start talking with my mother about it. But then, plucking up my courage, I asked: "Is it true?". In response there were only several minutes of full silence which turned to eternity for me. It enveloped me, swallowed up, echoed with ringing in my ears and stifled my throat with tears. It was the longest anticipation in my life. "Daughter, we did not want to tell you, because we were not sure...". My world exploded and tore to million small pieces. At that moment nothing existed for me around except for terrible, painful and destructive truth – father is dead. Having received this fatal piece of news, my everyday life became a terrible dream. It seemed that time has stopped and I live in one whole terrible day. I wanted to wake up and exhale with relief, that it was all only a nightmare. But destiny has prepared a challenge for our family. We accepted it.

"Terrorists", "separatists", "exchange of bodies" – this horrific lexicon became customary in our family conversations. It turned out that my father was a soldier of the Voluntary corps of the "Right sector" and an activist of the Dignity Revolution. He went to the east almost right after the beginning of the Russian occupation. On that fatal day their group was driving for the special task – exchange of prisoners. They were not given bullet-proof jackets. Simply somewhere, in the highest military leadership, some monsters knew that their team of soldiers had to become cannon fodder for exchange. My father was a

driver of a bus for which an ambush was waiting. He was the first to receive shelling on himself.

It was a real triumph for terrorists, because they managed to shoot away a “desirable titbit” – the group which they caught, has long been well-known in the separatists’ circles as one that “was asking for trouble”. Satan’s Ball. Spectacle of cynicism. Epic of atrocity. The terrorists scattered the bodies around the bus, which looked like a sieve after the shelling and thought of nothing better than filming a mocking video and placing it in the Internet. “Daughter, better do not watch it, do not re-open your wounds”. Mother’s warnings were sensible, but I knew: I have to see it. I should make sure that it is the truth. Mutilated bodies, in which there was left little human. Whole bloody mess. But the terrorists themselves have even fewer human in them. “Such thing will happen to everybody”, - with cynical pride says one of the Donetsk People’s Republic representatives. I have watched the video to the end, but haven’t seen my father. Then I watched it for the second, third, fourth time. I look attentively into each face and every time tremble with horror. I click at the pause. Such a painfully known oval of a face. Yes. Here. It is him. My father, for whom I’ve been waiting so much, whom I wanted to hug. Now he is in the hugs of death. The separatists-monsters kept him and the bodies of other killed people in a big rubbish pit (and the temperature was about +30 then!). They did not want to give the bodies back to their relatives, because they wanted to receive a big sum of ransom for them. After the weekly negotiations with terrorists it became possible to take back the father’s body. I did not see him with my own eyes, because he was brought in a zinc coffin to our city, but the people who executed the exchange, told that in his chest there was an immense, almost through hole. What did the terrorists want to show by this? To take out his heart? Evil creatures, even if you take out the hearts of whole Ukrainian nation, you will never, NEVER, destroy our spirit, will, love for life and Motherland!..

Perhaps, the hardest thing in all this horror, was to see my 81-year-old granny, whom the terrorists called at night from father’s telephone and started offending with obscene words her, my father and the Ukrainian nation in general. I haven’t communicated with granny since the time of my parents’ divorce. And now we are sitting, hugging each other, like a small lonely island in the stormy ocean of tears. “Come, I will show you something”, - says the old lady. We are going to father’s room. “He lived with me for a long time before going to the East”. We make a few steps to the old book-case. Near the mirror there are the wedding photos of my grandparents, shabby and covered with dust, some old stamps and envelopes. My look stops at one photo. It is me in a beautiful dress. With the wonderful hair-do. Near me is my sister, we are hugging each other and smiling. It is a photo from my school-leaving party in the 9th grade. “Every day he kissed it good-night and wished you sweet dreams”. I’m looking at my granny and feel that I am covered with one more

wave of tears. A wave of pain and despair. Of the irreparable loss, of the unsaid words. Why did all those years pass so quickly? Why did we waste so much time which we could have spent together? Why did we lack spirit and courage to simply call each other and say: “Daughter, I love you dearly!” “Father, I forgive you!”? Now only wind takes away these words when I come to the cemetery to father’s grave. But I know: he hears me. He is also sorry that he could not hug me good-bye. And somewhere, in heaven, he is waiting for me, in order to go for a walk, holding my hand and to eat ice-cream, like back then in my childhood.

My father died on August 12, 2014 near the railway station Mandrykine. On the birthday of my elder sister. Together with father in that fatal bus 11 more persons were killed, including his best friend. My father and his friend Volodymyr were buried beside each other. They were the first soldiers on the Alley of Glory on our local cemetery.

Now I am 22 years old. My wedding took place a month ago. And my greatest dream on that day was that father gave me away to the altar and danced a slow dance with me. But, in fact, he gave me something more than a wedding present – it is a peaceful sky. The present worth of life: of my father and scores of hundreds other fathers, husbands, relatives and friends.

Still, I do not want it to be only the account of that war which every day and minute mercilessly takes away the most precious and closest to us people. Let it be a story about forgiveness and its inscrutable force. It makes people to discard weapons. It revives hope. It changes life.

Forgiveness makes us stronger than death.

Rest in peace, daddy...