

*How did the delimitation line pass through the city/town?*

*How has the population met the changes of recent years?*

*Why did some families decide to stay?*

*What does the everyday life in the “grey zone” look like?*

## **Chapter 5. On the verge of civilizations: life on the line of confrontation**

*Are there mine fields beside?*

*What is the attitude of inhabitants to the antagonistic sides?*

*How do the media cover the events at the frontline?*

*Is it difficult to be a patriot of the country in the conditions of war?*

*What do the inhabitants of the region dream of?*

## Childhood during the war

Mykyta Ferchuk  
village of Mayorske (Donetsk region)

Three years ago I was sure that peace in our country is forever. But the year 2014 has ruined all our hopes for the careless future. The war suddenly came to us.

In July, when our settlement of Mayorske and the surrounding territories started being shot, it was very terrifying. We were sitting in the cellar for days on end and there was neither electricity, nor water. We prayed for our lives and hoped that our house would stay safe and sound, and a mine will not fly to our yard. And in the autumn our house turned out to be on the line of fire.

That 2014 year started a new counting of time in our life. We suddenly grew mature, understood what trenches, shellings and death were. Today we are situated on the firing line, because there is a check point in the settlement, behind which the territory of the so-called “Donetsk People’s Republic” begins. That is why we are compelled to live according to the rules of war: when darkness falls, we do not go outside, switch off the light, put a “survival kit” with the necessary documents and things near us and quietly go to sleep.

I suppose that I have become stonger and more courageous. Only one question never leaves my mind: “When will the war end and I will not have to hide from the shellings and startle from the smallest noise?”. Once there was a very strong shelling. When everything was quiet afterwards, we went out into the street and saw that on some of the neighbouring houses there was neither roof, nor windows, some houses were still burning, and people were frightfully crying from pain and fear. Earlier I could see such scenes only in the films about a war. I wanted to weep from all the things seen. Later on some of the buildings were renovated, the window panes were inserted, but there are still windows, covered with polyethylene or veneer, and many remain stuffed with wooden planks or bricks. But now even that is not the most important – worse is the fact that people live in constant fear for their lives in the conditions of constant threat. It all causes uncertainty in the future, unwillingness to build plans for the coming day.

The war continues for the fourth year already, and we somehow adjust to such a life, but it is impossible to get used to it finally. Because the greatest problem remains – the safety of human life. It seems to me that the fear of losing a close person is much stronger than fear for one’s own life. During the summer holidays our settlement was constantly being shot at. One day there were strong bangs around, everything thundered, the whole house was trembling. It was extremely frightening. I have somehow got used to the

explosions of mines and the whistling of “Grads”. Every day in the streets of our settlement the military vehicles drive, even near our house the tanks stood for some time – it was a little scary. Now I know that the shells whistle when they pass over one’s head and lie down not far away.

Military actions are still constantly going on in our settlement, there are shellings both in the day and at night. Once when we with my younger brother were playing in the house (because we go outside very rarely), the shelling began. Mother was working in the yard at that time and father was at work. At first it was shooting temperately, but later a terrible shelling began – everything was trembling and roaring. We were all very terrified, mother came and took us and then we crept to the cellar. Mother hugged and comforted us, all the time repeated “Do not be afraid, I am with you”. Frankly speaking, I was very terrified then. There were very many such cases, when we were hiding from shellings in the cellar, in the larder, in the corridor. That time I understood that our mother can not only cook, tidy up, wash clothes – she is a real guardian angel for her children. I know that when I grow up, I will never offend or upset my mummy and all my relatives. I want very much all of them to be healthy, happy and only be glad for us, because I love my relatives endlessly. I also want very much that these terrible days of war end, the real peace begins, and all children could quietly go for walks, study, enjoy life and be happy.

When there was no war yet, in winter we went to a hill and made snowmen. But I enjoy even such a childhood – childhood during the war. In summer, when it is quiet, we pluck flowers, without going to the forest, and also we play in the yard until evening, when there is no shelling.

Now the favourite play of our children is war. In every yard there gathered tens of toy weapons. And when you ask children, what for they need so many weapons, some of them answer that they want to become a military man, to defeat all evil people and make so that there was no war.

If only I were adult, I would protect all my relatives, I would protect them even now, but mother says I’m still small. I know very well what is war, that is why, like all children in Ukraine, I want peace and wait for it very much. Those people, whom war has not touched, I think will never be able to realize to the very end, what evil it is. I cannot understand why it is not possible to live friendly, peacefully, so that mother and father are near, and over the head – clear and peaceful sky. Children who will survive war, will never forget it. I dream of good future, about big and small victories, but I believe firmly that these victories should be only peaceful. Let there never be war again in Ukraine! I do not lose faith that Ukraine will win and the peace will come to Donbas. I am proud of my country!

## **The evening, when I saw for the first time how “Grad” shoots...**

Oleksandra Sevriukova  
Bakhmut (Donetsk region)

It is possible to speak eternally about certain topics which will never be boring. Politics, personal life, dissatisfaction with the government, complaints. We can for ever complain to each other, how bad are people around us and how they interfere, but there is also a new topic which belongs to such “evergreen” ones – the war. How many shows, interviews, videos, photos, reportages, stories, programs, proposals. So many things broke out momentarily! So many excessive, pathetic, unnecessary things. Only one thing is demanded of you – tell about it. Speak to somebody about it, blame someone. It is as if one had a sticker on the forehead: a “resettler”. One is loved, and hated, and pitied, and scolded, and they can not even know you. But was it always like that?

Recently I often remember the peaceful times. I went to school by train every morning and returned by the same train. For me the city ended somewhere beyond the territories of the musical and secondary school, sometimes the hospital. I lived then at home, with my parents. Every Sunday we went to my granny, in order to help her. My uncle came, I went for a walk with my friends. On Saturdays we went to Horlivka, sometimes on business to Donetsk. I was looking with admiration at Donbas-Arena. I dreamt how I will live and study there, how I will bring presents for my parents, how they will visit me. In 2013 we started making repairs in the house, to which we dreamt to move: it was near my friend’s house. Everything was so quiet that even in a nightmare I could not imagine, what could happen quite soon.

I often watched films about war with my father, I was afraid, but he comforted me that I will never see it in my life. I remember that morning when the connection of local trains to Sloviansk was cancelled “because of political circumstances in the country”. I can recall how several days later I heard the explosions quite near, when I woke up at home alone. I had holidays, my mother was in the city, father at work and my windows were trembling. I simply clutched the blanket and tried to call somebody – it was the beginning of the worst summer in my life.

Those shots were somewhere near both in the day and at night, and where? Where did they come from? Where are they directed? How soon will they hit us? One has nowhere to go to or flee from them. It was quite bad in Horlivka and Artemivsk. The struggle for power or shootings in the centre of the town took place there. Here at least parents were near, although they did not allow to go for a walk. And again these shootings, movements of heavy

vehicles. Now one cannot go out without documents, because no one knows what could happen.

Once, I was allowed to go for a walk. It was the evening when I saw for the first time, how “Grad” shoots. I managed to get home, but quite soon the answer to “Grad” came. Since then, the parents started putting all things to the cellar. My brother and me even argued, which of the parents prepared better. They carried down there a blanket, torches, food preserves, a spade and buckets. They opened the cellar for the night, kept near the door the “survival kit” with medicines and important papers. Later, at school in every classroom such a kit will stand.

Every night. The shellings roared every night. At 14 years old I could distinguish by hearing different weapons. After “Point-U” there was a nice white trace left in the sky, which reminded of a trace from the comet. Because of tank traces it was difficult to ride a bicycle on the road, that is why one had to walk the most of the road. I remember how I saw fighter planes for the first time. They were flying very high, but from the noise of their engines perspiration appeared on one’s skin. Those volleys blinded us and I was afraid that they will drop on us at any moment. We were having a walk when we saw them. The telephone connection disappeared, and I was far from home. We fled as far as possible with my friends, although, if those volleys had been directed in our direction, we would not manage to flee.

Only then I understood such a notion as “grey zone”. It is the territory which can find itself on the other side of the border in any moment. It is a part of land where the shells drop which do not reach the adversary. There is no power here, no help. One does not even know, to which God to pray.

Morning, tender summer sun is shining. We with my parents were drinking mint tea in the street and there were new flashes in the sky, in one and the other direction. And after the flashes came the singing of birds, chirping of insects in the grass, noise of the trees. One gets accustomed to the war, when one cannot do anything else.

Soon I have to go to school, but how can I get to the city? Buses started driving, and I moved to live at my granny’s, who lives at Artemivsk. Only at the weekends I went home. How many resettlers there were in the classes and how many friends and teachers have left. There were its own horrors in the city, and all people asked me how I felt myself. I was sick and tired from those questions, I hated them all for that pretended sympathy. They have rumours, talks, interest – and I feel as if electric current beats me when I hear some roar. I was afraid of sharp sounds, I jumped out of my skin from the sudden door slamming, and all people wondered why.

That autumn a children’s bus was not allowed to pass the check point, because there was a suspicion that a battle will soon start in the settlement. We had been standing in steppe for two hours and did not know what to expect. It was frightening to go home, frightening to stay on the road, and

nowhere to return. Then all the people from the settlement, who had cars, and whose children were not even in the bus, drove there to take children home. After that the bus was driving all the same, taking children, and everything was quiet. But if one did not sleep at night, it was possible to hear the shots sounding far away which reminded of the war.

So the time passed. Battles, shellings somewhere close and I went to school. At that time the rows of desks were taken from the window, the cellar was opened and training evacuations were carried out. We had to wear badges with our names and surnames, contact data of our parents and blood group. Certainly, we all were afraid and did not do it, but it was frightening even to imagine the situation when these data could be necessary.

Then winter came, and the shellings continued. At the New Year night all people had only one wish, which quietly came accompanied by shootings beyond the window. And nobody was astonished, nobody tried to find out where those sounds come from. Not here, and it is good. When they will be closer – we'll start fleeing.

At the end of that month I came home at the weekend. When I got out of the train, the shelling started. Explosions came from all sides, people in panic ran to their homes. We with father reached home, when those explosions got louder and closer. Our telephones were bursting from the calls of relatives, then the connection disappeared. In that shelling my uncle was killed, and three more men with him. The house, where my parents were having repairs, was damaged. The neighbouring buildings were completely destroyed and the railway was damaged again. Then only one evacuation train was going not according to the schedule, and it was using not electricity, but a diesel engine. Then the biggest part of the village, who did not even have relatives in the city, fled. Some people went to Artemivsk, some with a transfer to Kharkiv and others – to Russia.

How strangely for me those destructive days passed. Having got used to it, I felt myself ten years older, or even more. It was quiet, and sometimes battles began. I went to school, and sometimes we were allowed to go home from the last lessons. It was as if everything was like before, and suddenly everything became very grey and alien. All people became different from whom they were even yesterday. It was not that city, and not those people, they were as if covered with a grey film. As if they knew that any moment could be their last one.

But everything did not stop at that. The war continues, and shellings sound on and on. I can see at last the real friends, and can see just acquaintances. It is as if everything stood upside down. I live at home no longer, and when I come for a visit on holidays, I hear again that terrible echo that reminds of the past. I see those empty streets where my friends lived before. I see those shattered buildings, and my childhood in them too.

Who would have told me that it would be like that. I swear, I would get up every morning and thank that I am alive, that I am at home. That I have future, that I am just such a person, like others. That my recollections are not closed for ever in my heart. I would thank for being alive. Why did not I do it before? Now I do not believe any more, that peaceful life existed before. I only want to believe that it will come in future.

## **My usual Happiness (Schastia)**

Tetiana Kolesnikova  
Schastia (Luhansk region)

It is painful.. to remember what was in the past.. My life has turned into a nightmare. I woke up and went to sleep with the same dream – about the end of the war. I remember the day when it all started. On May 25, 2014 I was going home by bus with my granny from the school leaving party. I fell asleep on the way, but when the bus stopped I woke up, thinking at first, that we have arrived. No. I went out of the bus and saw a convoy of cars. All the people were saying that the bridge had been mined and it was impossible to pass it. I remember I started trembling. In my head thoughts were running that I would never see my relatives again. My father called and said that he would rescue us. It was hot outside and I was very thirsty. Father asked the military men to pass me some water, or even better – to let us go. 20 minutes passed and the cars started moving. When we reached the end of the bridge, the first thing that I did, - rushed to my father with the words:

- I love you very much!

After that I did not leave the city any more. Every day explosions became only louder.

I remember: it was about eight o'clock in the evening. The strong shelling began, so that the house was shaking. We with the family went down to the cellar. Our neighbours already had been there. I have a little brother, he was six months old then. I took him in my arms, hugged him firmly and started telling him a fairy-tale. In my head there was only one thing – to survive. After the fairy-tale the little brother went to sleep, and I started praying to God quietly asking that it all ended. I was afraid not for myself, but for my family, and the most – for my brother. He is so small yet, he has not seen the world, has not made the first step yet. He needed a special mixture for feeding, which was difficult to find in the town. That is why the father left the town under the shelling in order to buy it.

It was January 2015. We with mother and brother went to the town of Kreminne. We lived there for five days. The father called us and said that a shell flew into our house. We with mother were shocked. Father said that everything was untouched in our flat, only the cellar was damaged a little. We understood that we should not return at that time. Then we with my mother and brother went to Truskavets, where we lived almost a month. We missed our house, the father and the dog very much. Soon we decided to return home.

The first year of the war has erased from my memory the seventh grade. I do not remember even what we learnt then. When we were in Truskavets, I kept in touch with teachers by phone, they said what I should read or fulfill.



Then I also studied in the musical school in the fourth year. I cannot remember anything either. Because of shellings I was there only three times. It influenced badly my knowledge and my voice.

During the two years of military actions the town began reminding the exclusion zone. People did not walk along the streets, children did not play on the play-grounds, even birds were afraid of flying there.

The everyday life our our family does not differ much from the life of others. In the morning I go to school, my brother goes to the kindergarten, father – to work; after school I have lessons in maths and Ukrainian language, sometimes I go to musical school, because I finished it in spring. In the evening the family returns home. We cook the dinner and sit at the table together. After that I do my homework. At ten we all go to bed.

There are no mine fields near my home. But they are in the forest that is behind the road.

I have always loved my country and will love it, even during the war, I do not stop believeing in its better future.

It is 2017 already. The houses are repaired, children study, adults work, the life is gradually filled with happiness, joy and sun. Sometimes we hear shellings, explosions, but they are not so strong as before.

The war has influenced my world outlook very much. The thing, which I did not appreciate before, has become the most precious for me – peace. I hope that there will never be war on our land.

## **I saw the face of war...**

Inna Filipova  
Toretsk (Donetsk region)

What war is, I learnt in my childhood from the accounts of my great-grandmother, school textbooks and films. In the summer of 2014 I saw the war with my own eyes. On July, 21 I woke up at 4 o'clock in the morning from the terrifying shots of heavy weapons. One could hear whistles and explosions of shells. It became clear for my family that our own cosy town was being bombed. We quickly changed our clothes, took a mobile phone, documents, medicines and went down to the cellar of the neighbours. It seemed that explosions lasted a whole eternity. I was very terrified. From the phone talks to our relatives we learnt that the center of the town was on fire, the town administration had burnt, the transport did not drive and people were sitting in the bomb shelters. The building of the town administration still remains a monument of the war. Until the evening the explosions have abated and we went home. At night we were woken up by new explosions, and we again went down to the cellar. From fear I was all trembling and could not go to sleep. I calmed down only in the morning. In the morning we got to know that the town had undergone a lot of destructions, there were many killed and injured people. Then I learnt that one could live for many days without electricity and gas. Because of shellings the electricity lines posts have been damaged. A brigade of electricians drove to repair them even during the shellings. One of the electricians was killed. With the price of their own lives these fearless people returned electricity to our houses. Gas returned to our homes only in December 2015. Our town turned out to be on the line of delimitation.

So, the war from Sloviansk came also to us. When the same events were taking place in Sloviansk, I sympathized with people who live there, but I could not understand fully the whole horror of that situation. Later we began getting accustomed to the explosions, whistles and stopped hiding into the cellar. In such moments most of all terrified was the great-grandmother, because she survived the war in her childhood, and in order to distract her, I read aloud books to her. Also our dog Bim was very much afraid of the explosions. He was barking, yelping, hiding in the kennel, howling. So, with the explosions, the whole summer passed. The time came to go to school. On the First Bell holiday many parents were present, because they worried for the safety of their children.

Then the days of study began. The lessons were disrupted endlessly. Quick meetings in the school corridors, studying in cold classrooms, distance learning. Disregarding the endless shellings the studies in the school №7 did not stop. The headmaster O.Holovatyι defended the school and it was not

closed. The teachers tried to recreate the peaceful life: held competitions, open lessons, holidays and concerts.

The life on the line of delimitation is very difficult. Those people, who had money or where to move, certainly, left the town. There stayed only those people, who had nowhere to go. During the last year people started coming back gradually. There is almost no work, out of five coalmines only one, “Central” mine is working. People live thanks to the pension and the aid of charitable organizations: “The Red Cross”, “Fund of Rinat Akhmetov”. The volunteer organizations help with small repairs of the damaged dwellings, there are no costs for the renovation of the fully destroyed buildings. 164 buildings suffered in the settlement of Pivnichne, 12 houses have been partially ruined, 2 houses were fully destroyed. The schools and kindergartens, medical institutions, which were damaged by shellings have been fully renovated, all of them are functioning. The schools and college which suffered from shellings were renovated in a short period of time, and the studies there began on time. The local inhabitants feel themselves abandoned and want that the war ended soon.

Since 2014 on the territory of the town 26 civilians were killed, 45 were wounded. Out of them in 2015, 16 civilians were killed, 29 were wounded. At the moment about 8,5 thousand people live in the settlement Pivnichne. Since 2014, 5 people were wounded in the settlement.

One can hear the shelling even now, but I am not afraid any more. And it is the most terrible thing, when one gets accustomed to the shell explosions. I have fully rethought my life. The best present for me would be not the next smartphone, a tablet or notebook, but peace and silence.

The connection of our town with the outer world is carried out through the town of Kostiantynivka. Between Toretsk and Kostiantynivka there is a part of the road that is called the “Way of life”. It is the only way, by which the medicines and food are supplied to the town, passenger buses drive. The problem with the railway transport remains unchanged. The station Magdalynivka was closed in April 2014. In order to go to relatives one needs to travel hundreds of kilometers and wait for many hours at the check points over the line of delimitation.

I love Horlivka very much, and also like Donetsk. I dreamt that after finishing school I will study in one of those cities. Now it is impossible for me. Many of my childhood dreams will not come true. I have changed and will not be like I was before. I’ve had to become adult prematurely and to acquire education, while it is possible.

The lack of drinking water has been a big problem. Thanks to the actions of maintenance men the damage of water pipes has been removed. Big thanks to the people working on the pump station of the water service company “Siverskyi Donets – Donbas”. In spite of the difficult situation with

shellings and uneasy way to the place of work, they do not stop the water supply not only to our town, but also to the neighbouring towns.

Out of the industrial objects the biggest destructions has undergone the coalmine "Pivdena", which is until today in the zone of regular shellings. The mine creates the danger of ecological disaster and flooding of the whole town. The break of a dam on the phenolic plant also threatens with catastrophe, 33 tons of liquid waste can pour on the settlement Novgorodske and get into the river of Siverskyi Donets which is the source of drinking water. The "Artema" coalmine has been flooded, the emission of methane and gas contamination of the cellars in premises takes place – it can cause suffocation of people and burning of the gas, explosion.

The children of our generation have been deprived of childhood and carelessness. Every day is like lottery for us, will it not become worse? Sometimes it seems to be a nightmare.

In our town on any holiday people wish each other "peaceful sky over the head". These are not empty words, but hope of people that this horror will soon end. I would wish nobody to feel the war on oneself. I want that peace comes to our town as soon as possible. I believe that our future generations will not live through such things as I experienced.