

Two russian anarchists in the Ukranian army

Good Night Imperial Pride

January 21, 2023

We talked to russian anarchists who fight in Armed Forces of Ukraine about the front, life before a full-scale invasion and what it's like to be a russian in the Ukrainian army. We asked both guys the same questions and they answered independently of each other.

Guys are marked with names J. and V. as we can't say their real names.

You are anarchists. What were you doing before the full scale war and why did you decide to go fight?

J.: Before the war, I did the social media for a workers' rights initiative. And I was part of a cool fundraising co-op. Because I lived in Ukraine, I was aware that russia could escalate the war. I knew that if this happened, defence would be needed. I used to go hiking, I knew quite a bit about weapons and tactics, so it wasn't hard to adapt.

Russia is terrorising civilians, destroying Ukrainians' homes and infrastructure, it wants to annihilate a whole people's culture and identity. The only way to fight russia is by taking up arms. I'm glad to see that a lot of anarchists are realising this today.

V.: What was I doing before the war?

I rented out a flat on the outskirts with friends, I worked in IT, I was saving money to open my own falafel stall... And obviously, I was furthering the anarchist movement and preparing for the war :)

Armed resistance to the Russian regime is nothing but the next consistent and logical step in the political struggle which, for me, began around 2010–2011. On the 24 February, it was like getting to the final lap. I woke up and thought: right, it has started, let's go. I thought: so I had to leave the country a few years ago, okay, but now this shameless filth is trying to reach here as well, now this is getting too far!

This state has systematically repressed all opposition, murdered and tortured those who were protesting, broken the lives of thousands of honest people who had nothing to do with anything. After it has terrorised and brutalised its own people, it's decided to reach to the neighbour.

To defeat the Russian Federation and most of its security agencies the regime is propped on, this is a rare chance. Would be a shame not to use it.

And of course, I was feeling responsible. I mean, how could we let that happen? Trying to leave Ukraine or just wait it out on the sidelines — I didn't even consider those options.

What are you doing at the front?

J.: Right now I'm a volunteer paramedic, we work with army brigades in various areas.

V.: My job is a paramedic. But I don't work in a crew or at a stabilising station: I'm assigned to a specific detachment. I look after 2 units of fighters, more or less. So aside from directly providing help to the wounded and handing out pharmacy to all who need it, I also have all the tasks of an infantry fighter: fortification of operating sites, working at observation points, fire cover, participating in any attacks or clearing operations.

You are russians on Ukraine's side. Do you have problems because your nationality?

J.: Compared to life in totalitarian russia, here I feel a lot freer. Yes, there are some issues with the migration office and my legal status, but almost all of society is on my side.

V.: No, there are no problems when it comes to interacting with people, especially in the military, especially at the front. Ukraine isn't fighting russians, Ukraine is fighting occupiers and tormenters. But an honest russian is not an enemy to the Ukrainian people, the honest russian takes to the forests by whole villages to escape mobilisation, sets fire to military recruitment offices, sabotages the railways, shoots military commissaries, or simply fights in the ranks of the Armed Forces of Ukraine.

Russia's imperial politics did not begin with Putin and is not ending with him. In your opinion, how can we beat an empire?

J.: The empire must be not only beaten but destroyed. I hope after Ukraine's victory russia's peoples and regions will stop obeying and paying tributes to moscow. Autocracy must be replaced with decentralisation, democracy, and self-governance.

V.: For a couple of centuries, the average inhabitant of Russia has been effectively taught alienation from politics, society, and the state. "It's none of your business, don't meddle with it, there are clever people up there, they'll figure it out, all has already been decided anyway, etc." A favourite and often most radical Russian form of protest is isolation, withdrawal, living by the motto of "I couldn't care less." Until people learn first hand that those who couldn't care less are the first to be burnt, until they learn it the hard way, it's their silent approval that will be ensuring that natural resources are pumped out of the richest regions and national republics, that those who oppose the authorities are tortured and imprisoned, and neighbouring countries are invaded.

When the hardships and deprivations of this war touch every family and every person, people will realise: non-resistance to evil only breeds greater evil, if you don't care about politics, then politics will sooner or later take care of you, and denying and dismissing the problems won't solve anything.

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