

BRITISH BROADCASTING CORPORATION

RADIO 4

TRANSCRIPT OF FILE ON 4 – “UKRAINE: WAR STORIES”

CURRENT AFFAIRS GROUP

TRANSMISSION:	Tuesday 15 th March 2022	2000 - 2040
REPEAT:	Sunday 20 th March 2022	1700 - 1740

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PRODUCTION TEAM:	Jim Booth, Annabel Deas, Nicola Dowling, Hayley Mortimer, Mick Tucker
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PROGRAMME NUMBER:	21VQ6400LT0
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ACTUALITY ON STREET

KENYON: It’s exactly three weeks since I arrived in Ukraine - flying into Kyiv, not knowing quite what to expect. Then, it felt like any other busy European city - people enjoying lattes on fashionable Khreshchatyk Street, cosmopolitan restaurants, champagne at the National Opera House. We went out to eat on 24th February with rumours swirling about an imminent Russian attack. It seemed unthinkable, and yet the war was just six hours away; Kyiv would never be the same again. All that feels like a lifetime ago now, when cities like Kharkiv and Mariupol were hardly known outside the country. Huge areas of those cities have since been reduced to rubble and many of the residents have either been killed or have fled. Those left behind face a battle for survival. File on 4 has been speaking to many of those affected - people from all over Ukraine, who have been recording their daily struggles on their mobile phones, people sending us audio diaries which capture the true horror of war. Our story begins 18 days ago, on Friday February 25th in Chernihiv on the border with Belarus. It’s the day after the Russian invasion.

MARGUN: I live in Chernihiv. Chernihiv is, if you know, it's like the border of Russia and Belorussia, and we are kind of the portal of the Russian military.

KENYON: Mari Margun is a model and dancer. Today though, she's been watching columns of Russian tanks rumble through her city. Unlike most of her neighbours, she's decided to stay, using social media to share her story with the outside world.

MARGUN: You know, some of my friends say I am brave, some friends say that I am crazy, but I don't have a fear, I don't have a panic. I just wanted to show people what is going on. I go on the street today, I was filming what's going on in my city. I was filming and streaming the bombs and this and this. Right now, I need to make all my stuff, which I can with electricity, which I have right now, to cook for me food, because we don't have any open restaurants, pharmacies is not working, nothing in supermarkets. I don't know, from one side it's a reality; from another side, like, what the hell? Is this really happening?

KENYON: Being so close to the border means Chernihiv is one of the first places to experience an attack. For the first time in her life, Mari finds herself in the middle of a war.

SOUND OF EXPLOSIONS AND SIRENS

MARGUN: Do you hear those? Oh my God! Oh my God! It's so scary. My God, there it is, do you see the light, the light on the sky? You will hear now the bomb again. You see this flash and the sound will come like lately, so it's been ...
[EXPLOSION] Oh my God! It's not in the city. Oh my God! Crazy.

KENYON: After the heavy shelling, Mari heads out to capture evidence of the damage close to her home.

CONVERSATION IN UKRAINIAN

KENYON: And then, out of nowhere ...

ACTUALITY OF EXPLOSION AND BREAKING GLASS

KENYON: A missile. Mari is one of several civilians who narrowly escape with their lives.

MARGUN: I'm just hiding right now, but it's just something crazy is happening. There is a lot of bombs and it's just, just so scary here.

ACTUALITY OF EXPLOSIONS

MARGUN: That's what's happening right now and it's scary. We need to stop it. Please, we need to stop it [CRYING].

KENYON: The fearless spirit, gone in an instant. The next day she's breathless, apparently still in shock.

MARGUN: I am helping for the soldiers. Yesterday was a hard day, but right now when I was making a, a, a leave, the bomb was next to me and I would jump and there were a lot of glasses just, just whoo! I text you soon, okay, I need to give help for the soldiers, because I was all morning helping them buying all the food.

ACTUALITY OF AIR RAID SIREN

KENYON: A hundred miles away in Kyiv, Geoff Dowey walks through the neighbourhood he's called home for the last five years.

DOWEY: A city in fear, a country in fear. All you see in the street now is families, backpacks, bedrolls, a few possessions. Running for a Metro station to try and hide in the underground. It's like living in some dystopian war movie. I never actually thought that I would be standing in the centre of a civilised modern country, its capital, listening to air raid sirens.

ACTUALITY OF EXPLOSIONS

DOWEY: The daily sound of Kyiv. It's typical, it's started. Some people trying to run a business and this is what happens – looters. Everyone hates fucking looters. Absolutely ridiculous.

KENYON: Alexandra Arkhrery, a 28-year-old language teacher, is also in Kyiv. But her mum and dad and the rest of her family live in Mariupol, 500 miles away.

ARKHRERY: Last time, when I heard my mum, she was talking from the basement, it was about half a minute, and she told me to be strong and not to worry about them. If they disappear like for one or two days, there would be no connection, but that was before I understood that the bombing that's not like just some central parts and so on, they're just covering all over everything. Our city is full of like dead bodies, it is like hell on the, like in the life.

KENYON: Mariupol is roughly the same size as Bristol. It's in the south east, forty miles from the Russian border. The city has been bombed relentlessly - residential buildings are now piles of rubble and burned-out cars litter the streets. Alexandra doesn't even know if her mum and dad are alive.

ARKHRERY: I can't sleep normally at night and when I was sleeping, I saw my parents. I hugged my mum and hugged my dad. I think, even through the dream, I realised that they wanted that so much. I woke up crying, realising that I have no idea what to do. I still try to hope, I try to believe. I know that my parents are really very worried about me, but I feel guilt every time when I can buy something. I want just to send it all to them. I try to work. I'm a tutor and work with people. I forget what is going on. Like maybe I just block it in my brain, in my mind and try to be distracted. But when the lesson finishes, the reality returns.

ACTUALITY OF EXPLOSION

KENYON: Ukraine's second city, Kharkiv, came under heavy attack from the beginning, but five days into the Russian invasion, rocket strikes hit civilian areas, leaving nine people dead and dozens injured. Marina Golodnikova is in the city with

KENYON cont: her six-year-old son Emil. Marina is from Kharkiv, but now lives in Dublin - she just happened to be visiting her mum when the war started.

GOLODNIKOVA: There are regular bombs, there are fires happening very, very close to us, so we're not going anywhere for the next couple of days at least. We are staying at home. We are not going to the subway to use it as a bomb shelter, because we're on the ground floor and it's supposed to be pretty safe here. We took some precautions, we put some stickers on the windows so ... Hey Emil, are you okay?

EMIL: Mama [SPEAKS IN UKRAINIAN]

GOLODNIKOVA: [RESPONDS IN UKRAINIAN] There you go, he's fine. He was a bit scared yesterday, asking all the questions on who's going to win and why Russia is attacking us. I never thought my son will have to used to sound of bomb and start asking me if the war is over yet or not, and it's pretty scary.

ACTUALITY OF EXPLOSION

EXTRACT FROM NEWS REPORT

NEWSREADER: This was a strike right at the heart of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second city under devastating fire.

MUSIC

KENYON: Two days later, Kharkiv's Freedom Square is hit by missiles. At least ten people are killed and dozens injured. It's the cultural centre, home to an opera house and a theatre. After the attack, Marina records her diary for File on 4, as Emil watches cartoons on his iPad.

GOLODNIKOVA: I finally broke down and I cried, I sobbed, because for me this square means Kharkiv. For me this square means my life in Kharkiv. We had so many New Years in it, we had so many concerts in it. This is the essence of Kharkiv, and when I saw that bomb hitting it, I just couldn't hold myself up. It's so weird, you're getting

GOLODNIKOVA cont: the power back and you feel cheerful about it, though there's nothing really to cheer. The hospital was hit in Kharkiv. So many dead civilians.

ACTUALITY OF EXPLOSION

KENYON: As the bombing gets closer, Marina desperately tries to find a way to get her family out. There's a lifeline - but then it's snatched away.

GOLODNIKOVA: A dear friend of mine found me a volunteer who can get us to the railway station, and then an hour later she sent me a message saying, 'No, actually we cannot make it anymore because their car got hit.' Oh my God. It can be you. It can be anybody. Like, you're trying to get to the railway station and your car is hit on the way. I don't know what to do, everybody's pressuring, you have to leave, the other people are saying no, you have to stay. We have a plan, we will try to leave on 5th March and we will hope they are going to stop hitting the streets and we will be able to leave safely.

ACTUALITY OF SIRENS AND BABY CRYING

KENYON: Also in Kharkiv is Yuliya Balashova, but she can't leave the city. She's in hospital and heavily pregnant. As the air raid sirens wail, she and the other women from the maternity ward - some with newborn babies - are told to make their way to the relative safety of the basement. Yuliya is due to give birth any day now. She struggles down several flights of stairs before settling down on a makeshift bed.

BALASHOVA: I am in the basement right now with, and actually the whole hospital is in the basement now, because the fighting is very close to us and they're somewhere extremely close, because the last time we saw it was lightning in the windows, so it was extremely dangerous. And now here we're safe and I'm surrounded with women with newborn babies, and the conditions are quite challenging, let's call it.

MUSIC

KENYON: In Kyiv's children's hospital, doctors vowed to stay put until their patients were evacuated. But they're struggling to get some of the sickest children - many of them with cancer - to safety. And now they have new patients - those who've been injured in the war.

CHEERNYSUK: My name is Serhiy Chernysuk. I'm medical director of Central Paediatric Clinic in Ukraine. The most important goal for us is to evacuate our patients to safety place, especially oncologic and patient with chronic kidney disease, it's not easy. Yesterday we admitted a family, two adults and one child with injuries. They tried to evacuate from Irpin, it's a small town in Kyiv region, and Russian soldiers shot, it was blown up, and metal parts injured this family.

KENYON: In Kharkiv, Yuliya says her maternity hospital came close to being hit. She's been able to share some happier news though.

BALASHOVA: On the 2nd March was my surgery and now I have cute baby daughter [BABY CRYING]. We had serious bombing attack, and last night I spent in the basement because it was shooting, but they fire in the windows, you see this constant blinking, and it's really scary, because you realise that it's very close to you, especially when you have one-day baby.

ACTUALITY OF EXPLOSIONS

KENYON: Civilians all over Ukraine are taking up arms - men and women of all ages, from all walks of life, joining Ukraine's Territorial Defence Force

CHIRENCHENKO: My name is Andre Chirenchenko and I am 23 years old. Before war, I was a film director and my life was about cinema. I had a really good life, really full life. It was amazing. But then, at the end of February, I decided that I'm a man and I have to protect our country, our people. I never holded a weapon before, never. But our job is to fight against Russians and to help citizens to run away, to bring them food, to protect them.

BUSHINGSTA: My name is Alona Bushingsta, I'm 32, and I'm a make-up artist, and now I'm holding a weapon, protecting my country and my city, my family, my friends. Now I'm in Territorial Defence, it's a civilian organisation. I didn't use other weapons, and I don't know how to use them, and actually I very hope that I won't use it at all, but I know how to use exactly this one - it's AK 74, small bullets. Boys say it's like your girlfriend, you sleep with the gun and if you hear some alarm, you just wake up and stand up with the gun immediately.

ACTUALITY AT STATION

KENYON: While Andre and Alona and thousands of civilians just like them stay behind to fight, crowds of exhausted, frightened women and children descend on Ukraine's railway stations to try and board trains that will take them to the West - and safety. It's chaos - too many people and not enough carriages. Marina, who's in the increasingly dangerous city of Kharkiv with her little boy and her mum, has had better news though.

GOLODNIKOVA: We're going to leave tomorrow, that's the plan. Through a friend of a friend of a friend, we have a vehicle who comes to pick us up tomorrow hopefully. The driver is a military, I think it's the IT community in Kharkiv which organises evacuation. For us it's the safest route, so I'm feeling so grateful and so lucky to have so many people caring about us.

MUSIC

KENYON: Alexandra Arkhrery has decided to stay in Kyiv. She can't bear to leave Ukraine not knowing what's happened to her mum and dad, who are in the heavily bombed city of Mariupol. It's now been a week since she's heard from them.

ARKHRERY: Today is 9th March 2022. I don't want to count how many days I haven't heard my parents. It's more than one week. I miss them so much. I feel so in pain. They are just wiping our city from the world.

KENYON: When she hears there's to be a ceasefire to allow the city's residents to leave safely, she clings to the hope that her family may finally get out. But the so-called green corridors to allow safe evacuation aren't safe at all.

EXTRACT FROM VIDEO, WOMAN CRYING

KENYON: When video footage of the aftermath of an attack on a maternity unit and children's hospital in Mariupol is beamed across the world, Alexandra is inconsolable.

ARKHRERY: The university where I spent four wonderful years of my studying is destroyed now. There are just ruins. Russian army even destroyed the hospital, hospital for kids, hospital for pregnant women. I feel that, with each day, I am more and more empty. I just want to see my family, my parents. Today I talked with my friend. Her family is also there. I was trying to calm her down, to help her. As a result, we were crying together on the phone. Both of us just want to hear our mums, to hug our dads. We are hoping that they will do the decision to leave the city. There is no city anymore. I can hear air defence nearby my house. I have learnt how to recognise the different sound of different bombings. Sound of different techniques, machines. That's not normal skill. I never wanted it. Every single day, all I can do now is just hope and believe. Hope to hear at least one word, word from my mother, alive.

ACTUALITY IN CAR

KENYON: Marina and her family are finally on the road. Remarkably though, as they and hundreds of thousands just like them head West, there are others travelling in the opposite direction, desperate to fight, take aid - or to get their loved ones. Among them, 34-year-old Liam Livingstone from Southampton, who's about to drive more than 800 miles from a city near Krakow in Poland to Kyiv. He's taking much needed medical aid supplies, but he's also desperate to rescue his Ukrainian wife Lili, a professional violinist.

ACTUALITY WITH VAN

LIVINGSTONE: I'm just loading up the van now, just have a load of medical supplies. You can see there's some medication, bandages, a few more boxes to go and then I should make my way to ... I'm going to go get some fuel, and once I have some fuel I'll probably buy some, I don't smoke, but buy some cigarettes on the way to hand out to our troops or other people.

KENYON: Two days into his journey, Liam finally reaches the border.

LIVINGSTONE: The queue was enormous. There were many, I mean, cars, we're talking kilometres, kilometres and kilometres. It was heartbreaking seeing all these, seeing all these families and kids. Yeah, it's really tough, really tough. These people, they're waiting there for days. As we were driving along and there were loads of people that were on the sides, they had makeshift tents, gazebos, fires on the side of the road where they can cook food, heat up water. So, this journey is not what I expected. It's not like it is on TV. It's quite heartbreaking, and it's really tough to deal with, but I need to get to my wife and get her to safety, because I can't, I can't leave her there. Sorry. Yeah, I need to just get to her and make sure she's safe. I know how much she means to me and without her, you know, this is not much else, so for me the family is the most important thing.

KENYON: Marina, her son, her mother and their two cats are among those caught up in the traffic heading in the opposite direction. They've been travelling from Kharkiv for three whole days. Their destination is Dublin. First though, they have to cross the border into Hungary.

GOLODNIKOVA: I drove from 6am to 11pm. We didn't make it that far. So much traffic, so many people leaving Ukraine. It's depressing. Many questions that don't have answers. Oh my God, I've never been this exhausted in my life. I'm proud of myself for making it this far, but also I don't know how I am going to get up tomorrow. I'm fine, guys, many people are not. Now I need some sleep.

MUSIC

KENYON: The capital, Kyiv, is a city now preparing for the worst. The Russians are getting closer and those left behind are getting more nervous by the day. Among them, Serhiy Chernyshuk, Medical Director at the city's children's hospital.

CHERNYSHUK: It's most difficult in this situation, waiting for something bad. At 7am, I'm walking through the street near our clinic, usually it's one of the busiest streets and usually huge traffic of cars and people, and it was a terrible feeling that I was alone on the street in this moment, and I never saw this street without people and cars. It's something strange situation. The most important thing that we all ready and all waiting huge Russian attack, everybody talk about this, that during next day it's very possible maybe it will be attack by invasion and rocket, because it's very difficult to take so big city like Kyiv by land operation. Usually if Russia can't take the city, they try to destroy it, but who knows?

KENYON: Mari from Chernihiv, the vlogger caught up in that terrifying bomb attack at the start of our programme, has finally been able to escape. Just like Alexandra though, she's worried about her mum, who was too frightened to leave with her.

MARGUN: I'm finally in more or less safe place. My heart's with my mum, because my mum, she decided to stay in Chernihiv. She didn't want to go because it's dangerous also to go. But I am finally in safe place, because we, for three days we didn't have a life, we had nothing. My first day, when I finally eat some normal food, I haven't ate so many days, I haven't slept so many days, but you know, I can't even sleep, I can't even think, I can't even eat because my mum is there. But I am going to wait on this craziness more or less will end and I can come back, and then, and then I will take my mum to see a normal life. This is crazy what is happening.

KENYON: There's better news from Liam Livingstone. He's managed to rescue his wife Lili and her mother from Kyiv. He spent almost a week on the road, driving more than 2,000 miles.

LIVINGSTONE: Unfortunately, when I first met Lili at the location at the fuel station, the sort of greeting each other had to come to a halt because they started to fight. We were hearing machine guns and gunshots, so we didn't get chance to really embrace each other. We had to quickly leave the area, so we unfortunately, our direction, we had to drive towards the gunshots and then done a U-turn at the nearest location and then made our way west, so we were trying to make it to Ternopil before dark, but because there were so many military checkpoints, it's almost impossible to drive that distance in a given time in daylight.

KENYON: When they finally reach the border, Liam and Lili witness heartbreaking scenes as thousands of refugees queue to get out of the country.

LIVINGSTONE: There was a man that was carrying his daughter, was it his daughter, Lili, yeah? And he must have been carrying her for kilometres, kilometres long, and he could barely walk, but they wouldn't let him through with his daughter because of the age restrictions for males leaving the country.

LILI: And he didn't have the documents to take a child.

LIVINGSTONE: Yeah, and he didn't have the documents, he had to leave his documents behind, so we saw him and we asked if he wanted some help, we gave him our blankets that we had to keep his daughter warm, and we flagged down a van that was going in the opposite direction, because he was walking back towards Lviv. Yeah, so we flagged down a van, and then luckily one of the vans stopped. They were also volunteers with supplies and they took him to the local town.

KENYON: Marina and her family have also made it to safety. A 2,000-mile journey which has taken them a week to complete.

GOLODNIKOVA: We're home. We made it to Dublin a couple of hours ago. It was so nice - lots of tears, lots of hugs. There's Emil with the cat, the cats are fine as well, and Emil is fine. They made it, so it's been surreal. I can't believe it's been only two weeks since the war started. It feels like a whole lifetime ago, and it's so surreal being here where nothing is happening, and knowing that we've left so many people in Ukraine, where

GOLODNIKOVA cont: Kharkiv is still being bombed, Ukraine is still being torn, where people continue to die. We need this to stop as soon as possible. Slava Ukraine. Together we will win.

KENYON: In the besieged city of Mariupol, there are reports that more than a thousand people have been killed. But reliable information is hard to come by. Telephone and internet communications are down. Agencies like Médecins Sans Frontières do have satellite phones though - and the limited amount of news they're able to share paints a very bleak picture.

MSF RECORDING

MAN: There is no drinking water and any medication ten days. People lost connection with their relatives, and this already lasted for more than one week, and people are really very worried about their relatives. They don't know if they're alive or not alive. We saw people who died because of lack of medication and there are a lot of such people inside Mariupol and many people who were killed, and they're just lying on the ground and neighbours just digging the hole in the ground and putting their bodies inside [COMMUNICATION BREAKDOWN].

KENYON: Still unable to make contact with her parents, Alexandra can only pray they are among those who have survived.

ARKHRERY: I learnt that that night was minus 12. Minus 12 without heating. This is survival game. We tried to call to different numbers, tried to check different lists, and still nothing. Where to look for my family? This is sixteenth day of the war, but the feeling that it is endless. We are living in nightmare. Can I just fall asleep and wake up when the war finishes?

MUSIC

KENYON: Alexandra's story is far from over. She and the millions of others still in Ukraine face unpredictable days, weeks, months, even years ahead. As for the people we've heard from in this programme. Well, Mari, who experienced that

