

# Hostomel is remembered only by me [INTERVIEW]

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**MACIEJ SZOPA** 07.04.2024 11:30



*Author. Michał Lipski*

**What did the war in Ukraine look like in the first dramatic months, when was the time of hope and what does it look like now? An honest conversation without embellishments with Michał Lipski "Lipton", a participant of the war in Ukraine, whose trail began in February 2022 in the OPFOR special battalion (the so-called assault spetsnaz) and lasted until the spring of this year.**

**Maciej Szopa: What were the circumstances in which you found yourself in Ukraine and why did you decide to go there?**

**Michał Lipski:** I've been in the military all my life. The war had begun. Where is the soldier's place? Yes, "following the instructions" - he is at war. I've always had this desire to test myself, to do everything that I've wasted the best years of my life on. However, this is only one reason.

The second one is more, let's call it, high-sounding. It's about understanding the geopolitical situation. The simplest way to explain it... We are next in the food chain. They're done with Ukraine, they're going to come to us. Well, maybe not directly, but they will come to the Balts. And we'll be stupid enough to be the first to run there to help. And NATO does not know – only the future will verify... So it's better to fight here, it sounds bad, but with someone else's hands - than with your own.

**That's also the motivation of many other people I've talked to. And in which specialization did you serve in the Polish Army?**

In Poland, I had previously served in the 6th Airborne Battalion in Gliwice, where I was a company commander.

**How did you get to Ukraine and to which unit?**

It was a little easier for me than for others. Back in 2021, we went on a training mission from the unit to the Yavoriv training ground in Ukraine. And I worked with these people there, I made contacts. When the war began, they were getting ready to go to Kiev. And since I knew their company commanders, battalion staff, battalion commander – I agreed to go with them.



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**So it was a line unit, it wasn't a volunteer battalion?**

This is a special battalion, a special purpose battalion. (214th Independent Special Battalion OPFOR, a unit formed in 2016 from ATO participants - ed.).

**The Ukrainian army is similar to the Russian army in that these special purpose units – Spetsnaz – are of different specializations. What special purpose unit are we talking about in this case?**

Yes. Our unit is an assault unit, and the assault units here are heavy units. There are also those like typical commandos, lightly equipped. But most assault units are mechanized infantry, heavy infantry.





**Why didn't you decide to go to international units?**

They started to form this legion, but I didn't really want to go there.

**Why?**

In the army, we have been cooperating with the Americans and the British for a long time. And these are not guys you can go to a full-scale war with. You can go on a "safari" with them in Afghanistan or Iraq. There, you have everything and your opponent has nothing. These are people who hold on to the book very firmly. Without any flexibility. Not my cup of tea. I've always preferred to come up with something myself, to improvise. The book is meant to help you, but it's not like you have to do everything according to a template. When you do after a template, then your opponent is prepared for it. The Anglo-Saxons don't know how to do it, they kill it in their army.

Besides, somewhere in the beginning, before I left for Kiev, on February 24 or 25, I met Americans and some other volunteers from abroad. I showed them that they couldn't do anything. There was a guy there, "three years in the Marines." He wanted to teach something, to go and fight. We stand in a 2-3 storey block of flats and talk. I asked him, "What if you walked through that door?" The moment he showed me, I told him, "Dude, you're not going to survive. You can't do anything." To go with such people, ignorant people, who think they can... poor idea.

**So the Anglo-Saxons are used to having good logistics, support, and everything in accordance with the regulations?**

Yes. In Afghanistan, a company was on the move, supported by an artillery battery, aviation, helicopters, and a medical evacuation was on standby. The helicopters appeared five minutes after the moment of the injury.

Here, maybe it works the other way around – the enemy has artillery, we don't always, etc.

**Does this mean that you in the Polish Army had habits more similar to those of the Ukrainians, that this comfortable situation does not exist?**

A paratrooper takes the house with him on his back. One: you are limited by the volume of your backpack. Two: its weight. When you go even to the training ground, you decide what you will take and what you will not. For example, you can take a sleeping pad and a sleeping bag, but you have 20% of the backpack left. You can't take everything. If you take everything, you have a 50-kilogram backpack. Well you don't want that. Here we have always worked on a compromise, so we were used to these worse conditions.

**So it's more a matter of airborne troops?**

Yes. A great example was when we went to Kharkiv for an assault. For two days. We were to retake the village, fortify ourselves there, and hand over the position to someone who was following us the next day. We occupied one village, they changed us and "forward" the next one. And so 12 days. We got to the point where around the ninth or tenth day we stopped our own tank (Ukrainian) and we were pulling water from it, because there was nothing to drink.

**Did you pick water from the tank? Like this?**

On tanks, they carry water as one more layer of armor, sometimes it extinguishes some small fires when hit. A HEAT shell pierces these bottles, or some shrapnel pierces and even if something catches fire, the water dampens a bit. We used to tear it off the tank when it passed us, because there was nothing left to drink. We knew that if they send us for two days, we won't be there for a week and we prepared for that. But even this week has passed, and here it is, forward, forward, forward. There was no water or other means of obtaining it. No wells, no watercourses. The locals said that in order to dig into the water, a well sixty meters deep was needed, so no one had a well. And we had been liberating the occupied territories for three months, so the water that was in the barrel was green. It was not drinkable.

**And you didn't have filters (e.g. straw filters)?**

We mainly relied on bottled water. At the beginning of the war, there were many problems with the supply of equipment. To this day, we have collected much more equipment than we had back then. In the beginning, there were problems with thermal imagers, there was not much night vision. There were other problems as well. Over

time, they were solved. Anyone have any contacts etc. And so, gradually, after a year, we reached a reasonable level. We completed the equipment by the end of 2022.

**And even though you were a special purpose unit?**

This war showed some errors in reasoning. Because you've got this full-time technique – you've got BMPs, some BTRs. And they don't solve all problems. You don't want to go everywhere with a truck either. And that's how the "fashion" for pickups began – smaller, quieter, more flexible. You can bring something, bring something, transport people, and it is not as important a target for the enemy as military technology.





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**Does it blend into the civilian background?**

That's not the case. The pickup is quiet. How far away can you hear the car? 200-300 meters. When it comes to technology, we are talking about kilometers. So you can secretly drive up.

**Where did you end up after arriving in Ukraine and having these conversations with the Americans?**

Straight to the unit in Yavoriv, which is what I had agreed right away.

**To this unit that has previously exercised with NATO?**

Yes.

**And they immediately threw you to the front? What?**

One by one, to all of them. Kiev was the first one, because the capital needs to be protected. Hostomel there, then Petrivki, which is the north-western area of Kiev.

**What was your role there?**

The first was Hostomel, for obvious reasons. When things calmed down in Kiev, they shifted us to a counterattack, more from the direction of Zhytomyr, west of Kiev. We turned off the Zhytomyr route there and walked, let's say, in the direction of Chernobyl. After retaking two or three villages behind the Zhytomyr road, they retreated us. Someone was still attacking Chernobyl, and we regrouped and got a new task: to retake Hostomel.

**To the same place again?**

The area was already familiar to us, so it made sense to send us there again.

**Was your first contact with Hostomel in the first days of the war? Did you fight with this already famous avant-garde of WDW?**

Yes.

**This is a key battle in this war.**

Crucial, not crucial. That's just how it turned out. She hit a stone with a scythe and from that moment on, it rained down on the Russians. They were on their way to a parade and someone was shooting at them.

**As far as we know today, it was the WDW elite who landed there. It first cut into the territorial defense, and then the Ukrainian special forces came and began to push them out.**

Yes

**Was that you?**

Yes

**What more can we say about this clash? Is this avant-garde of WDW really that elitist?**

You know, they were just as elitist as, let's say, we are elite in Poland. In peacetime. Not under fire, without experience. They didn't fully understand where they were going, they behaved as if they were on a training ground. And suddenly: here they shoot, there an RPG grenade launcher...

Neither in our country nor in their country had any combat experience. It's just that at least we had these trenches and garrisoned buildings. And they go down the main street on these BMDs (transporters of the BMD family) as if to a parade, like on a training ground. And all hell breaks loose for them, and their bodies start falling off these transporters. They did not yet understand where they had gone and what they had to do. That it's a real war. They hadn't figured it out yet, it was still early. It's quite different now...





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### **What happened after Hostomel?**

We recaptured Hostomel, spent two weeks in Kiev and were transferred to Kharkiv. There, the same procedure: acclimatization, reconnaissance, and forward. To the east of Kharkiv – the villages of Tsyркuny, Ruski Tyshky, Cherkassky Tyshky, to the east of Staryi Saltiv and up to the border with Russia. It was May...

Later, someone thought that we were fighting on enthusiasm, but all the time on the structure of time P (peace-ed.) That's how they threw us to Kiev in February. So they took us back to Kiev to complete the game.

### **So you fought in those first months partially squad?**

Yes. After completing it, they threw us further. In Yavoriv we were a two-company battalion, and in June we were sent to Donbas as a single entity. We ended up in the western Donetsk region, in Bakhmut. At that time, it was still 100 km from the front line - it was not so fashionable yet.

### **Did you take part in the Kharkiv operation?**

About a month after a month of fighting in the Bakhmut area, they moved us to the north, completed us a bit and we went to Balakliya. From Balakliya literally for a week to Kozacha Lopan, north of Kharkiv to the border. There we were on defense, nothing interesting at all. Later, we returned to Bakhmut, the champagne factories, and then they threw us to the assault on Yampil near Lyman. Later, again around Bakhmut and Soledar at the end of 2022. Of the 93. Brigade... Then they moved us to Kliszchivka, where we stayed for a month and a half. At that time, the "magnificent" 47. The brigade lost Soledar. In Klishchiivka, we were later replaced by the Azovs from the "3. Not the assault one", Tik-tok of the army...

### **Tik-tok army? Isn't it only the Kadyrovtsy who are called that?**

They took over the position from us, our carriers led them in, showed them, our infantry left... But when we were leaving, Azov's cars were overtaking us. They gave away the village in one day, which we had been

holding for 1.5 months. They laugh at the Chechens, but they are no better. They have everything because they have their own brand. Advertising is a leverage of trade. Everyone knows everything, but robots don't. They escaped from Klishchiivka, and the command turned us back. But it was too late. We lost only three or four men killed and up to ten wounded. We didn't go into the trenches, we just had to do reconnaissance by fighting.

**Did you also defend Bakhmut?**

Yes. and until the end of Bakhmut we were... at least elitist in their own mind. Now I don't see that elitism – it's over.

**Because of losses?**

Yes, because of losses. And sort of... incompetence of the higher command. A use in many moments not quite as intended. On May 20 or 21, Prigozhin announced that they had seized Bakhmut, and we left Bakhmut one day later. Where the monument to the plane was, there was our last position. Bakhmut showed the inflexibility of the high command, which demanded defense at all costs.

**That's what they say, that the elite troops were used there like regular infantry...**

It wasn't that bad to defend it. The rain doesn't drip on your head because you're sitting under the concrete. But the worst part is that they have prepared most of these nine-story blocks to blow up. They planted 100-150 anti-tank mines in each block. Do you know how much they blew up? One. Just to see if that many mines are enough.

And then they gave away all the other blocks intact. Why? Because we had to defend ourselves to the last. It was not possible to make a planned departure from the quarter. At night, cars would drive up and take 50-70 percent of the personnel. Sappers would check that the wires were working. If so, the cars would take the rest of the people and boom! And we would be waiting for the next positions.

But no: you had to fight to the last. It's best if we blow ourselves up along with the buildings. Something that was prepared for a planned retreat was not used at all. That's where our elitism died, and then it was finished off by the 17th. Armoured Brigade, to which we were later assigned. For four months without rotation, we held the last hill in front of Bakhmut before Ivanivsky.





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### **So another battle of attrition.**

This hill was as high as the fourth or fifth floor. And those unblown up 9-storey blocks of flats just towered over us. For four months we had a problem with snipers. The hill was also easy to fire at from tanks and artillery. And this 17. The brigade, as we laughed, was "tankless". Because she has tanks, but none of us saw them, and she used us as ordinary infantry to hold the section.

During those four months, they completed us and after two or three days of training, they immediately threw these new people into positions. We had a lot of wounded and killed. The composition of the company changed two or three times. What kind of elitism can we still talk about? Of the old people who still remembered Klishchyivka, there are still those left... three in the company. And let's say me a fourth plus one officer. Well, there are five of us left.

### **But Hostomel, the first battle, how many remember?**

And Balakliya remembers us two... We exhausted these four months with the 17th "tankless" and we were moved closer to Bogdanivka. Up to 42. Brigade. There's a repetition of the entertainment, but at least a little better positions. We're not that under sniper fire.

### **So you're also covering the positions of a unit?**

Not anymore, because we're almost gone. At the moment I have 19 men in the hospital, vacancies let's say similarly and 17 cases of leaving the unit on my own, where I have 60 infantry people in a company.

### **But isn't that too much of a risk?**

I'm no longer pushing myself under crutches like I used to. I work more as an instructor. This war is different... How it used to be and with whom and why, now it is more about luck than skill.



### **Artillery, drones...**

Artillery has always been there, the problem is mainly with FPV drones. I remember in August 2023, we were sitting in front of Bakhmut with a sniper rifle, 600 meters from Bakhmut. A drone flew in, one of our people got a little accosted. His hands were injured by shrapnel, but he could walk. We said: dude, go it yourself, you can do it. He had 600 meters of forest to cross. Such a strip of forest, several trees wide, stretching for 600 meters, in Ukraine is called posadka and stretches along the field. The guy is walking, the second drone catches up with him – he runs into the post. The drone caught on a tree – approx. He walks on, and there's another drone. He ran into the field again, the drone hit a tree – approx. And after the posada we still had to walk 1.5 km through the field. There was nowhere left for him to hide. A fourth drone killed him. Four drones per guest... I don't even know what to call it.

He didn't stand a chance and if they have what they have to do with it, they'll chase you, even if you're the only one. We're always trying to teach people not to walk in groups, to walk at great distances from each other. This reduces risk and minimizes losses. For normal artillery, they will be an uninteresting target. But the Russians don't care about resources. For example, these two guys can walk within 50 meters of each other and they will still start firing at them with a mortar. Because it is.

Two FPVs per soldier can be released. This is not a problem for them. The resources are sufficient for them to afford it. We are trying to minimize our losses, but they will still hit. The point is that the Russians are doing something that doesn't make sense. And you can't plan to act against something that doesn't make sense.

### **But the available recordings show that the Ukrainian side does not spare these FPVs and also attacks individual Russian soldiers with them...**

Only this is a slightly different situation. Because once the drone with the payload is released, no one wants to take it back. Its charge is unstable, it can explode on landing. So once the drone has flown it, it's lost anyway and this one soldier can even be chased around the wreckage. You catch up or you don't catch up.

But for us, the real goal is technology – tanks, transporters. And the Russians are deliberately pounding on the infantry. There were situations when their FPV drones hovered over the intersection of one road to Bakhmut all the time. The drone was flying, and if nothing passed at that time, it hit the road and exploded. A second one came – and it hangs and circles again. Without a reconnaissance drone, the so-called "Mavic", just the strike one. They had so many drones that they could control this intersection at all times. Finally, a car will be driving, and it will be destroyed. And in the meantime, they're going to lose three drones just to be in control of it.

### **So they have a lot of potential, and it is said that Ukraine has the advantage in drones...**

The Russians are the same as always: they start the war weak, stupid, and then they learn and develop. They had missile reserves, they had equipment, and they had ramped up their production capacity. They produce missiles and drones. And these are full-time drones, the Russian army orders them from their industry. And in our country, just as there was a hurricane of optimism, we are riding on this hurricane of optimism. Because the volunteers will buy, make strike drones, and the West will give missiles. It is as if the state does not take part in the war. Let him open factories, even abroad - in Poland, Romania, Spain. Aren't there Ukrainians who could make these drones and send them in containers? Are. That's all you need money for.

It is absurd that there are no artillery shells at all, and Ukraine has not bought a single shell since August, because they are waiting for someone to give it for free. People are losing, the rate of losses is increasing, because there is no artillery support. We have come to a situation where, as we laugh, a small Soviet army is fighting a large Soviet army. Because in our country everything is now made human.

### **So now you're serving more as an instructor than a commander at the front?**

I've been involved in training all the time, because I have experience in it and some knack for it. And the methodology learned from Polish. While still in Kiev, I was teaching people before our assault on Hostomel. "Quick" training, e.g. how to storm buildings – through these corridors, rooms. To teach them, or to remind them. Later, during the completion process, when new people came to us, they also fell into my hands. Now I'm mainly preparing them here. Previously, I had reconciled this in parallel with combat operations. When a unit is in combat, it doesn't come to completion, so there are no new ones to be taught. And when they pull a unit out of battle, then there are new ones and a second job. Now I'm more of a trainer, but there are new problems here as well...





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**What?**

There is a big problem with the quality of training and the quality of the people who come. The basic training that is on the training grounds is so low that people come to us a month after being called. Sometimes they don't know they have a sight on their rifle. There was a situation, for example, when I put a guy down to shoot through the automaton and at 25 meters he didn't hit the target at all. I say to him: shoot again. He shoots again and nothing. An A4 sheet of paper from 25 meters!

I took his rifle and fired, he takes a little low. I tell him this, I tell him to shoot again – nothing. What did it turn out to be? He shot aiming with a front sight, but without the use of a rear sight – and bullets 1-2 meters above the target. No one told him how the sight on the rifle worked. At the training center, no one told him for a month!

**And what is the motivation of the new ones?**

There is no motivation. Motivated, they are already lying in cemeteries.

**So those who just forced them to come?**

It looks little by little like a Russian captive from the time of the uprisings of the 19th century. Somewhere, they catch people on the street and bring them here, to the front. This is not a planned mobilization, because everyone is afraid of this word, but there is a round-up.

**Is it like the Russians?**

Worse. They used to laugh at Russian conscripts that they were "mobbins, moths", etc. Ok – from the end of 2022 to the beginning of 2023, this was indeed the case. The Russians didn't have enough manpower and they sent some of them without any training. But today, in the worst case scenario, the Russian "mobik-mobb" has 96 days of training somewhere on Russian training grounds, plus 1-2 weeks already here in the zone, in the frontline training centers.

Most of their brigades and battalions have their own fields where they shoot, run, and you can work out certain behaviors with these people, adapt them to your standards. So this mob has a total of, let's say, 100-110 days of preparation before it goes into battle. And this is the worse variant for him.





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The better variant is that after the first 96 days, it is transferred to a unit that is replenished after being withdrawn from the front. Because the Russians rotate the entire army. If a mobik goes to a division that has gone for half a year to complete, train, rip, he has another six months to do it. And then he undergoes a total of nine months of training in the best variant.

All in all, the mobik now has three and a half to nine months of preparation. And in our country, a conscript has a month and, if he is lucky, three weeks in the frontline zone. So two months, let's say. And in the worst case, there were situations when guests who had completed basic training would come, we would come with them to the training ground, we would shoot them with rifles and they would take them away from the training ground right away. "Because there's no one."

So a "moth-moth" can have nine months of training, and ours has 35 days, and he doesn't know that he has a sight on his rifle.

### **So it turns out that the Russians are gaining a qualitative advantage...**

Of course it is. There was always an advantage - also in terms of artillery. She hesitated. At the beginning it was 17:1, at the peak of NATO aid it was about 3-4 to 1 and now it has gone to over 10 to 1 again. In drones, they are starting to have the upper hand. Why? Because these drones are made by the state, the factory is state-owned and no one cares about the costs. And we have to raise money for this drone, so there is a problem. Especially since there is no such enthusiasm as in the first year of the war. It used to be that you could save up for five pickup trucks in two weeks. And now you have to wait a month for this "mavic" and then you can lose it right away...

### **But there are a lot of FPV drones being produced, in Ukraine and other countries...**

Yes, but it's all enthusiasm, volunteering. It's not coming from the top down. Ukrainian operational-strategic drones that attack refineries deep inside Russia, etc. "This is indeed state production. But these suicide drones on the front lines – that's enthusiasm. There are problems with this. Each drone is different, each has its own nuances, because it came from a different hand. The preparation of ammunition for this drone is also a problem. There is a factory in Ukraine that produces RPG missiles. They can't switch the production a little bit to make RPG missiles specifically for drones. And the soldier has to take pliers, a hammer, a screwdriver and rework every time. Undressing, tinkering, wasting time and risking your health. And there is no guarantee that it will work, because a soldier can make a mistake. It's been a year since FPV drones were used and there are no full-time warheads. It's better for the soldier to sit down, watch YouTube about how to do it and try to disassemble the warhead.

### **What else can be said about the Russians? What kind of opponent is it and how has it changed?**

Depends on who you come across. When we came across Luhansk, they are not motivated. They're more trying to escape. And the Donetsk or zeki (prisoners) are mostly under the substances. To work or not to work... I don't know what to call it. That's what motivates them, unless they're giving the guy a preparation and he doesn't even know where he's going. But it goes.

There are worse and better prepared units. Where the Russians care, they use the mixture. Poorly prepared units - or, let's say, "superfluous" ones - are used at the beginning to exhaust us, to use up our supplies. Then come the actual units.

### **What are redundant units?**

Militias of the occupied territories – Luhansk and Donetsk. There are almost no men there anymore, as far as our diagnosis says. There are also those from all these republics that are part of Russia – Buryats and so on. All those who have the potential to threaten the authorities. Because when these people come back, trained and with combat experience, maybe they will smuggle weapons and start an uprising somewhere in their country. The Russians don't need that. They prefer to destroy them.

It's the same with tanks. As recently as 2023, they were sending T-80s, T-90s, and now T-62s and T-55s to be wiped out. These new tanks are going to the reserves, not straight to the front. I have a feeling that the Russians will kill three birds with one stone. First thing: as far as I can see, they could easily break the front with the current resources, but for some reason they don't. They prefer hard fights of attrition. They have come to the

point where they don't just want to occupy the area, they want to destroy the Ukrainian army and population. This is a kind of genocide of Ukrainian soldiers at the front. Who does it take? Those from the republics, the "unnecessary" ones. This is the second roast. Young, strong people from the republics, who could be dangerous, are thrown into the meat grinder.

**Do you feel that the Russians are suffering more losses than you?**

There is no such feeling. Shooting buoys are rare. They boost the morale of the soldier. In addition to sitting in a trench and suffering artillery fire, drones suddenly have a sense of agency that they can do something with this rifle. He has an opponent, he can shoot him. The opponent falls or flees. You see the enemy, you shoot after him – minus 1, 2, 3. There is an effect. The soldier is glad he did his job. And if you sit in a trench for a month and just make sure you don't get killed by drones, morale is low. A wounded colleague falls here, a dead man there. You can only see our losses. There are great videos of us chasing these Russians with a drone, and we ourselves see the Russians dropping grenades on our wounded. Until they are sure that the guest has died.

**And what can we say about the civilian population? What are your observations here?**

In Kiev, in the beginning, people were very sympathetic to us. Nothing but help. When we drove through the city on IFVs, they waved, cheered, elderly people blessed us. In Kharkiv, it was no longer the case. Somewhere, from time to time, someone raised his hand and waved. On the principle: they go, they go, neutral. And in Donbas they can even show you a "faka"

I remember when we were entering Donbas, or rather Bakhmut. It was still a safe zone - July 2022. Our column of 10 IFVs was driving. I was the first one, I had a Polish flag and a Ukrainian flag on it, and behind me there were nine carts with Ukrainian flags. We drive through the village, we go up the hill and there are people. It's my bmp and they start raising their hands to cheer. But the second BMP with the Ukrainian flag is leaving, so they put their hands down. It turns out that when they saw the Polish flag on my car – white and red, at first they thought it was the Russian flag. White, red... Where's the blue?

Yes, to this day there are people who are sitting under their shelling and waiting for the Russians to liberate them. That's stupid. There was such a family in Soledar: a grandmother, a son, a wife and two children. They were sitting, and behind the house there were cassettes from Grad. A kilometer from the junction of the army line. The daughter was wounded, the medics took her, the father did not allow her to be taken to the hospital. They dressed her on the spot and they were still there waiting for liberation. Personally, I'm curious how many of these people are sitting in Poland, on welfare.

**Our whole conversation paints a grim picture of the situation. Is there any reason to be optimistic after all?**

There was optimism even before this offensive was supposed to be. There was then the memory of recent successes, of liberating territories that it was normally possible to fight. And what will happen now? In the better variant, the ATO 2.0 zone, and in the worse scenario, it is not known what.

**So, in the best case scenario, a successful defense from the east?**

Rather, it is a freeze of conflict. What could be better, there is nothing. There are no mortar grenades, no artillery shells. The fact that our tanks and IFVs are firing is only due to the fact that somewhere we managed to build up reserves on our own and they were not used for a hurrah. It was not used without an order. And there were other units that, following the Soviet example, fired even when it was not necessary and there was not much to shoot at.

**You've been at war for two years, the situation is what it is... Are you planning to return?**

Yes, I'm slowly getting myself together. You just don't really see the point of this job. We need to go back and take care of our people, so that they are at least a little ready...

**Are there any prospects for this?**

With us, the general at the top does not have the full picture of the situation. He has an image coming from below, which is distorted on many levels. In Ukraine, the situation is similar to that in Poland. A small Soviet army. We don't talk about problems. We write a report to the supervisor that everything is fine. If we write that something is wrong, they will smooth it out higher up in the headquarters.



So I'm not optimistic here either, because I know how everything works here. There is also a small Soviet army in Poland, but under the banner of NATO. The commanders don't want to change anything, because they manage to do everything during the exercises. For example, Anaconda, when something goes wrong there, it is the fault of the organizer of the exercise, not the commanders.

**It's true, unfortunately this is what these exercises look like, or at least they looked like until recently.**

There is a scenario in Anakonda where 10 Russian divisions are advancing from Kaliningrad. We defend ourselves with three men for two months, we stop them, and our last division recaptures the 100 km to the border in two days.

**I remember those Polish exercises. We watched them as journalists and the scripts were puzzling, to put it mildly...**

We need to wake up. But how can there be reflection in people who are "doomed to success" during exercise? It can't be. I sometimes talk to people from my former unit in Poland. They made a brigade-level platoon of drones, let's say a reconnaissance platoon. At the brigade level! Plutonium! And here in the war, we come to the conclusion that there should be a drone company at the battalion level.

We are still two steps behind what is realistic. There is a breakthrough – and that's OK – but we have here at the brigade level, we have more of them – although it is being carried out on a part-time basis. Because here there is a platoon of reconnaissance drones in the battalion, but there is also another platoon, but not a reconnaissance platoon, but a strike platoon.

**What else do you need?**

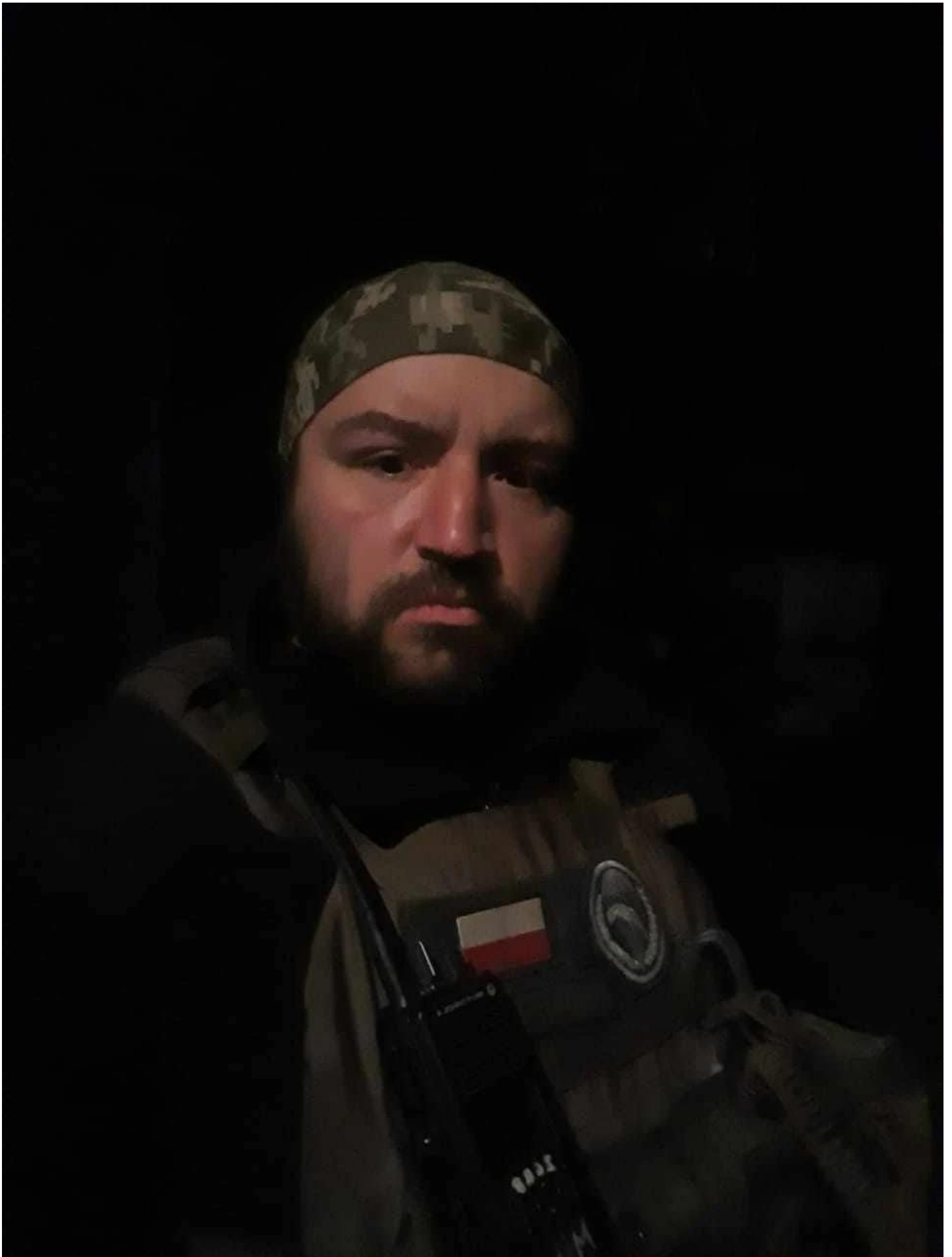
Electronic warfare platoons. Without it, the infantry will not survive. They're going to tear us apart with drones. Such a suitcase with a drone jammer costs 10-12 thousand dollars. We got it from volunteers, but not from the army.

**So you're an independent battalion and you're assigned to brigades all the time?**

Here, for example, we held the position for more than two months. No rotation. And the brigade, which has eight battalions, kept two battalions in front and six in reserve. She changed these battalions, they rotated. And we sat there for two months...

Here, for example, we held positions for more than two months. No rotation, no nothing. The brigade, which has an 8th battalion, received two battalions in the front and six in reserve. And she changed these battalions, they rotated. And we stood there for two months. Finally, the Brigade was making its shift, they didn't even say a word to us. And we were stormed and we lost our positions. Then there was an investigation in Kiev – why did we lose our position? The brigade has so far reported that it is bravely holding them. And we held them. But when a setback occurred, suddenly: "why did the battalion give up its positions?" But the fact that 15 percent of the battalion was left and that it was not being replaced, that was fine.

In principle, this is in accordance with the rules of the art of war: this is why you are assigned an element, to use it in the first place. This is what the art of war dictates: in the case of Ukrainians, Russians or Americans. But there is also a shelf life for the battalion. You have losses, and people get tired. They can't sit 24/7 in position. Especially when it's freezing, bad weather. They have to be replaced. Such an unrelieved battalion has to relieve its men anyway, and that is why it garrisons the position with half of its forces, suffers losses, and has no one to send. We are waiting for the return from the hospital, guests from various companies, from the rear units – anti-aircraft, mortars, artillerymen – are going to their positions. These are people who are not trained as infantry, but there is no one to do so. And the brigade requires. Then we have losses among such specialists.



*Author. Michał Lipski*

**That is, as an assigned individual, because as an independent person you have an extremely difficult fate?**

Yes. But this is also a problem of misuse. We perform contractual work of an ordinary mechanized, motorized or infantry battalion. One that has 3-5 infantry companies, a command, communication, reconnaissance company and drones. Alternatively, it has mortars, but mainly infantry, which is to be supported by the brigade's security elements. It's the same as in Poland: at the brigade level there is an anti-aircraft company, artillery, etc., but in fact its battalions are 80-90 percent infantry. When such a battalion suffers losses, it is the infantry that suffers them. And in our independent battalion, infantry makes up maybe 30 percent of the state. The rest are specialized sub-units. When you lose the infantry with us, it still has 70 percent of the picks on paper. In theory, it is still a ready-made sub-unit and can fight. But that's not true – because then anti-aircraft, anti-tankers, artillerymen and sappers are already fighting. This is a terrible waste of human resources and potential. And that's the main problem with higher command. Nobody goes into the details, doesn't respect it, doesn't understand it.

Another thing: is the mortar guy prepared as infantry? No, they're not ripped as infantry and I don't train them. I only train infantry and I don't get specialists. And then they die. There is a shortage of specialists and, for example, there is no one to shoot mortars accurately. To hit their target, these newcomers must first fire 20 rounds.

**I was going to ask about some anecdotal situations, but given the context, it would probably be out of place...**

A distorted sense of humor is ours... With these losses, there is no question of any human reflexes. Callousness, we are animalistic already, we do not pay attention to death. Suicides occur. Sometimes someone comes to the conclusion that they don't want to do it anymore and shoots themselves.

**Problems like PTSD are also sure...**

Yes, of course. You know, I'm amused by this American PTSD from Afghanistan. They went on safari and now they have PTSD. Here he would go out once and have more PTSD. He would see and experience much more in one day than he did in a nine-month shift in Afghanistan.

**Everyone wanted to be a peacetime soldier, this mentality needs to be changed...**

**In the last two years, there has been a certain wave of departures in the Polish Army. They could have been those peacetime soldiers...**

Because it already stinks of roasted meat. It's starting to stink. It was the same for the Russians until they crossed the Ukrainian border. Then they realized that things were not as beautiful as they thought. That the technique was out of order, that there was no ammunition, that everything that could have been prepared incorrectly.

**Thank you for the interview.**