

## Ordinary Friends On An Extraordinary Mission

**Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. John 15:6**

February 24th marked four years since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. (I am working on a new book that will cover this, with more information in the coming months.) Ukraine resisted the initial attack. Now, Russian forces advance slowly at great human cost. Since 2014, Ukraine has lost 20% of its territory.

In the backdrop of this war are people, Christians, who love their country and who want to serve God and their fellow citizens. In January, Pete Wooding of the UK, I, and four others drove to the Donbas frontline area. This story is about two young ladies from New Life church in Kyiv who joined us.



Andriy, Natalia, Pete, Masha and Nastiya on our way to the Donbas.

### Girls From Church Join The Ukrainian Army

Every Sunday, after four years of war, New Life Church prays for its members serving on the front lines—ordinary civilians like two friends, Masha, a beautician, and Nastiya, a former wedding photographer. We drove these two to the Donbas, where, as part of the 93rd Brigade, they work alongside their chaplain, helping wounded soldiers.

“So Masha, what motivated you to put your life on the line to defend your country?” Pete asked.

“First of all, I grew up in Donetsk, and for me it's very personal. Russians took over my house when they occupied our city. Secondly, the Bible tells us to love our neighbor. There is another verse that talks about sacrificing your life for your friends. It's about sacrificing your time, your money, everything you have. This is my commitment.”

Masha and Nastiya coordinate the transport of wounded soldiers and oversee their rehabilitation. Masha explained how Phoebe, her service Beagle, naturally starts conversations that allow her to share her Christian faith.

“During rehabilitation,” Masha said, “soldiers need rest, and hopefully can be with their families away from explosions. Phoebe makes it much easier to start conversations. At first, when you are new, they don't trust you. But Phoebe is the key because she relaxes people. We believe God has placed us here and Phoebe is a big help. Everybody loves her!”



Masha and Phoebe. She lost her family home in the Donbas. She met Nastiya at church.

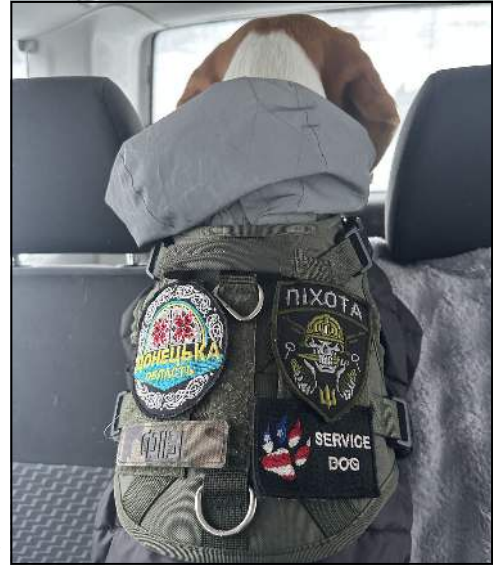
Both girls are attached to the Alcatraz unit, made up of former prisoners. We are curious about how they feel about that.



Phoebe befriends soldiers as they get transported out of the war zone.

“We chose this brigade because the guys are so nice and respectful. Other members of our church are here as well.

The guys protect us, and after an injury happens, they worry a lot and wonder, ‘Why did I live?’ Sometimes, when we’re spending time together, they start to ask questions about our faith. The guys who know us know that we are Christians. They know they can talk to us about God.”



Phoebe serves on the frontline and rode with us 8 hours to the Donbas.

### **Nastiya Lived in the Netherlands**

Nastiya, a wedding photographer before the war, uses her skills to capture images of her brigade. The first three years of the war, she and her mother moved to Amsterdam and started a new life there. Nastiya, however, kept coming back to deliver aid.

“Nastiya, why were you willing to give all that up?” Pete asked

“From the beginning of the full-scale war, I wanted to bring humanitarian aid and the word of God. And then I felt God called me to become a full-time soldier. I felt like this was how I could show His love. I gave up everything, I left my friends and mom in Holland, and moved back. I couldn’t close my eyes to the suffering of our people here.”

Now she uses her photography skills to share God’s perspective. “I take pictures of people who are not sure about themselves. In this suffering, I can capture beautiful pictures of these soldiers and show them how God sees them,” she said.

### **God Has A Purpose**

“I’m grateful that my brigade allows me to use this gift to tell their stories. They face danger every second on the frontline. They think about God because they know they are close to dying. They see death regularly and have many questions.

### **The Alcatraz Unit Appreciates Our Prayers**



“And that’s when we tell them that God loves them and has a purpose for their life.”

The Alcatraz unit, and the Ukrainian army, are blessed to have believers in their midst, called of God, to share their faith in these hard times. Pray for peace, and for the gospel to go forth. Thank you.