

Vinnytsia Update #2

Today, Sunday, is my free day. I decided I wanted to go to the cemetery... it just felt like the right thing to do, just to make sure I never forgot why I was here. And while reading my local news on my Telegram channel I learn that the public is invited to attend Oleg Andrushko's and Serhiy Tarasyuk's funerals and burials today. I pause to make sure of my intentions, and decide to trust myself that it is ok to go - to Oleg Andrushko's memorial. Of course, I never met Oleg, but I hoped I could hold him with all the other Defenders I never met. I trusted that my going would deepen my connection to all the Defenders I have worked with. I imagine that some of them have also died in battle since I had my hands on them. I hoped it was ok to honor Oleg Andrushko's service. I will walk carefully. I go.

I get an Uklon (like our Uber) to the first address. The crowds are large and I am dropped off at the beginning of a street strewn with flowers. I walk with everybody ... and realize that we arrive at his home. The casket is brought out, everybody kneels, and I follow too, and then slowly walk with everybody behind the procession of cars. At the big street the procession turns left and speeds up and I lose them. I walk to the bus stop and befriend a woman who was at the house. I ask her if this bus will take me to the service at the Transfiguration Cathedral. She tells me yes, and that I should get off just after it crosses the river. She asks for my phone number. And she tells me that anybody in the public can ride in either of the two large buses behind the procession, and that I should have gotten a ride. On my way to the Cathedral she calls me to make sure I am getting there ok - this is how the Ukrainians are. (Her name is Louda, and she still calls to see if I am ok.)

The Cathedral is large, very large - and yet the sorrow and respect overflow the space.

After the service I did follow the public, and rode at the back of the last bus. As we drove along the main boulevard of town to the cemetery all the people in the street stood or kneeled as we went by. All the cars stopped, people got out of their cars and stood on the street. Shop keepers came out. People at outdoor restaurants stood too. The buses and trolleys stopped and everybody inside was standing. Some with their hand over their heart, some with a fist over their heart, many were kneeling. All the little children too ... block after block until we reached the cemetery.

Oleg Andrushko had served in the 211th pontoon-brigade, and later as a grenadier in the 35th marine infantry brigade. He died near the village of Adriyivka. He was 46 years old.

At the cemetery, there were further rituals, ... the casket carried to the gravesite, rifles fired, the national anthem played, blue and yellow flares lit. And then in silence, other

than the hollow thuds from the clumps of dirt thrown into the grave by the family, everybody stood in reverence.

In time, the grave diggers arrived with shovels and filled in the rest. Everybody left for the "last dinner", but I stayed at the gravesite. I wanted to remember where it was so when I came back, I could find it again. And with everybody gone I took a picture.



It wasn't long before yet another Defender was being buried alongside Oleg:



It is hard to grasp the size of this cemetery, and also do justice to each of those fallen.

Below is a collection of more pictures from the cemetery. I just want you to know how many have died. So very many. Too many. Somehow this war and all wars have to stop.



Graves as far as the eye can see.

