

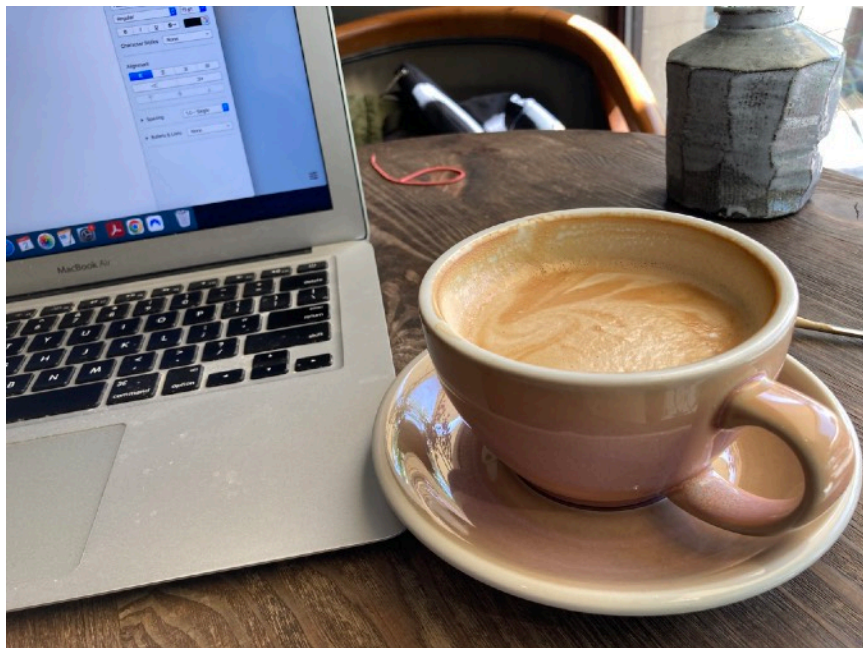
It's early morning in Odesa and because I'm utterly stoned with jet-lag, I wander in search of strong coffee, thankfully not hard to find in this city. There's a thick fog coming off the Black Sea that envelopes the streets and blurs life's sharp edges for a pleasant hour. It might also make it less likely for the Russians to launch air strikes. Maybe, maybe not. There have been air raid alerts every few hours since I arrived.

It's a treat to be here in Spring when I don't have to huddle in a heavy coat and can simply enjoy the kaleidoscope of flowers everywhere. The blossoms are a welcome but rare sign of renewal. The town looks a bit tired, unsurprising after nearly 800 days of war. Blue and yellow Ukrainian flags and banners still festoon the streets, but like the people, they seem slightly frayed and faded. But life goes on, war or no war, and folks drop their kids at school and rush to work in the morning.

Fortunately the recent US approval of military aid has given morale a much-needed boost. But Ukrainians are realistic and know that there are more days and deaths in the offing before they can reclaim their destiny.

Having found coffee I meet with my friend, Special Forces officer Oleksandr, and hand him a duffel bag containing 16 high quality combat first aid kits which I purchased (with your donations) and carried over from the States . The tourniquets, chest seals and hemostatic gauze may well save the lives of Ukrainian soldiers. Oleksandr could be back at his pre-war job as a radiologist, but this gentle husband and father wants to be able to tell his son that he did the right thing when the Russians came calling. And he asked me to pass on his thanks to my "In The Trenches" donors for their solid support. That means you.

More later!



Chris