

Just a brief report on a field trip I made this week. As you know, my charity "In The Trenches Ukraine" www.inthetrenchesukraine.org has been buying various useful items for military units defending this country against the Russian invaders. Things like large electrical power banks, tires adapted for Ukraine's rough back roads, and medical supplies like tourniquets and chest seals to keep wounded soldiers alive until they're (hopefully) evacuated to hospitals.

We've also been supporting drone units, and Tuesday visited one such group just outside of the front line city of Kherson on the Dnieper river in southeast Ukraine. Accompanied by my brother Paul and a brave Ukrainian named Andrei, the drive from Odesa takes about 3 1/2 hours. We pass small towns like Posad Pokorovska which looks like the set of dystopian sci-fi movie, its empty homes, shops and gas stations riddled with bullet holes and rocket blasts. At one point, a sign indicates the turnoff to Melitopol, a town of 150,000 souls, occupied by Russia for over two years now.



We meet my contact Nikolai and his two comrades at the Kherson bus station. Nikolai is short and skinny with dark intense eyes; the others are brawny, their biceps decorated with militaristic tattoos. Do we want to visit their outpost? After a brief consultation, our group agrees and we follow their beat-up sedan several miles down gravel roads and finally pull into the driveway of a suburban house.

As is so often the case in these situations, we remark on the absence of other people and wonder what they know that we don't.



Inside the house are hundreds of assembled drones and stacked boxes full of drone components. There are also piles of grenades, mines, artillery shells and RPG rockets – all of which are destined to be strapped to these children's toys and sent skyward to attack Russian tanks and trucks. Some recovered Russian drones sit on a table which the team examine to better understand what the enemy is using. Video monitors track Russian positions just across the river, literally a couple of miles away. In the bedrooms, clothes are scattered about, and AK-47s lean against the walls.

As we listen to Nikolai explain their operation, we periodically glance skyward trying to detect if we're being observed by enemy drones. The team moves locations often we're told, because a place like this drone factory would be a juicy target for the men just across the river. And while it was quiet while we were there, the Russians spitefully bombard Kherson most days, as revenge for having been forced from the city by the Ukrainian army in November of 2022.

This obscure suburban house, staffed by a handful of ordinary guys, is an essential part of Ukraine's efforts to keep the Russians at bay. Alone it's not much, but there are hundreds of tiny units like this scattered along the front, doing critical work in dangerous conditions. Like all soldiers, they complain about military incompetence and



poor logistical and supply support from HQ. But it's clear that being visited by a couple of Americans was a treat for them, a reminder that they're not forgotten. Perhaps it was more valuable than the tires and binoculars our team delivered.