
СПРАВЖНІ ГЕРОЇ

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**VITALIY
MARKIV**

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UKRAINIAN BLOOD



May 2014 was really a hot month for Ukraine. During those warm spring days, Eastern Ukraine was witnessing intense military development, while the city of Slovyansk located in the northern part of the Donetsk Oblast became an epicenter of the warfare.

Since April 12, 2014, the city was under the control of the pro-Russian forces and the militants of the self-proclaimed “Donetsk People’s Republic” who had joined Russian terrorist units.

In order to restore control over the city and the northern part of the Oblast, Ukrainian authorities started an anti-terrorist operation on April 13. Since that time Ukraine is engaged in an undeclared hybrid war conducted by the Russian Federation. Meanwhile, the Russian Federation doesn’t acknowledge its presence on the territory of Ukraine but supports pro-Russian terrorist groups with arms and people.

For three months in a row, before Slovyansk liberation from the occupants, the city outskirts had been shuddering under the ongoing explosions, while Ukrainian volunteers and soldiers and officers of the Armed Forces were learning how to fight an enemy that was always considered to be a brotherly country.



The fact that war was inevitable in Ukraine was clear during the events of Euromaidan protests, during those terrible February nights when the peaceful Revolution of Dignity turned violent and when protesters were shot by the riot police.

Vitaliy Markiv was there, on that Kyiv square too back then, a simple Ukrainian person from Khorostkiv, Ternopil Oblast. At that moment Vitaliy had resided in Italy for over ten years already. His mother, Oksana Maksymchuk, got married in Italy in 2004. She brought her son and daughter with her. Vitaliy was fifteen years old back then. As he was a minor at that time he was granted Italian citizenship automatically, in accordance with Italian law.

Calm and peaceful Italian life would seem so much better than the hectic life in Ukraine full of troubles at that moment. After ten years Vitaliy spent in Italy he learned the language and knew the country well. Some people would wonder: why would he want to come back to Ukraine when this country was facing more and more troubles due to the Russian influence that became even stronger after the Ukrainian government had decided to decline the Association Agreement with the European Union? Why would he want to come back to the country that was plagued by corruption and criminal schemes?

“It would seem that everything was fine once we moved to Italy. My kids were with me there, we had our new life. But if you’re still connected to your roots and if you still have that deep love for your country in your heart it will hurt when your country goes through the turmoil, and it will hurt a lot unless you reach the victory in your struggle,” says Oksana Maksymchuk explaining her son’s decision to go to Kyiv and join Euromaidan protests.

Mrs Oksana Maksymchuk says that her Vitaliy – and she doesn't give him any nicknames and always uses his full name – has always been like any other child, growing up with his own “positive and negative” moments. However, since his very young age, Vitaliy has already had these strong, sociable, and at the same time leadership character traits. All the other kids would be following him, and he would be always organizing and leading something, Mrs Oksana Maksymchuk recalls.

“When I went to Italy he was already eleven years old,” Mrs Oksana Maksymchuk goes on saying. “At this age kids usually don't like sharing their interests and troubles with their moms. But I saw that he had a good company of good boys and girls and that they were always together. And I've heard from many other kids that my son was always very sociable. Even now, his fellow soldiers tell me that they miss Vitaliy a lot as he would always organize and plan anything they would need and he would always try to resolve any issues they would have. His character was obvious since he was a little boy, and it hasn't changed since he grew up,” his mother Oksana Maksymchuk adds.

In an interview for the volunteer project “If there was no war” in 2016 Vitaliy said about himself: “When I was a child I was a classic troublemaker and I would always make my mother nervous and worried about me. I remember when I was at the kindergarten I would always carry a toy gun and a service cap and would tell all our neighbours that I was off to the army.”

Almost all boys play “war games” as children, however, Vitaliy was never thinking about military service as his career.

In Italy, Vitaliy enrolled at the technical college and successfully graduated. He tried different jobs and he was also working on wood carving, working on various wooden buildings, such as summer pavilions, gazebos, garages, and balconies. He also had experience working as

a mechanical engineer. In addition to that, he was always very passionate about sports: volleyball, basketball, and others. He really liked team sports. But he was especially fond of bodybuilding.

His mother told in an interview that Vitaliy's willpower, aspirations, and urge to reach the goals were especially noticeable in this sport. "It's that kind of sport where one needs to have a really strong willpower in order to really achieve something," she says. "He was training a lot and preparing for the competition, he was almost ready, but then his heart called him to Ukraine, to Maidan."

Markiv also worked as a DJ. "The last two years before I decided to move to Ukraine were really very active. After my main job, I would head to the gym and work there as a fitness and bodybuilding coach. At the weekends I would go to the nightclubs where I would play music, and every Sunday I would go home, grab my equipment, and head to my parachute jumping training," said Vitaliy Markiv in his interview for the "If there was no war" project in 2016.

Later on, Vitaliy understood that he was really quite interested in the military arts. As usual, he was very determined in this matter too. He did the courses, took the tests successfully. He was preparing to enroll at the military school to continue his study. But seven-eight years ago Italy was facing a serious economic crisis, and many people were laid off in the country's military sector. For this particular reason, the Ukrainian was denied enrollment at the military school, even though he had all his papers ready.

His mother stresses out that Vitaliy was very upset when he found out he was denied a spot at the military school and that he couldn't become a serviceman. He really had this wish and was very passionate about it, he was dreaming of a military career.

But fate called him anyway, no matter what.

Vitaliy spent ten years in Italy, yet he found himself and his path in Ukraine and he was planning to live and work in his home country. When he came back to Ukraine he enrolled at the military academy there. “The idea of a military service and military education hasn’t left his mind,” says his mother reminiscing about those times. “He feels that’s what he really wants to do, and he wants to be a real professional in this field.”

“That’s Leo’s spirit in him,” Oksana goes on saying. “I am Leo myself, and we are just like this. The truth must be always on our side.” The woman also mentions that it is usually quite difficult for two persons with the Zodiac sign Leo to get on and find a common understanding, but she is always on her son’s side and she would always support any decision he would make.



Vitaliy Markiv is actually not that kind of a person who would be ready to share all their plans and ideas, he is rather a person who keeps them all to himself. That’s how his mother describes him. Maybe he didn’t want his beloved ones and friends to be worried about him, as such is the nature of almost all parents: they are always a little bit too anxious when it comes to their children and they always think that something bad could possibly happen to their kids, even when there is no immediate danger at all.

The young man was always following the events in Ukraine closely. Autumn and winter in 2013 made a very strong impression on him, as Euromaidan had just started. Vitaliy was very shocked and outraged when he heard about the students’ beating on Maidan. Thousands of people all over Ukraine joined the protest the following day in order to stand for their freedoms and rights and to protect their children. Vitaliy was in Italy during those days and he couldn’t force himself to stop watching videos and streams from Ukraine that would appear on the Internet all the time.

The fact that a real fight for freedom had started in Ukraine made Vitaliy think a lot about going back there. He decided back then that the time had finally come. He told his relatives that under these circumstances he simply couldn't remain in peaceful and stable Italy and continue following the events in Ukraine on the Internet, while the people there were fighting for their rights and freedom despite brutal beatings of the riot police.

“Every two-three years I would come to Ukraine only for a short visit sometime in summer, either during the school recess or for my vacation. I have never visited Ukraine in winter since then. My grandmother and grandfather live here. I also have some relatives who live in Ukraine, I have my old school friends as well. And I've also decided that it's been a while since I celebrated Ukrainian Christmas too,” told Vitaliy in his interview for the “If there was no war” project.

Oksana Maksymchuk also shares that for quite a long time the family didn't have a chance to gather together in Ukraine for Christmas celebration and to visit Oksana's parents and Vitaliy's grandparents. But that year her son decided to finally do it. “He just told me that he wanted to go visit his grandmother and grandfather during Christmas,” she says in an interview. “I remember I didn't really pay much attention to what he was watching at that time, what he was following online. Then there were these tragic events on Maidan. When Vitaliy left for Ukraine, I called my mother and asked her about him, and she told me that she hadn't even seen her grandson, that he only left her a short note saying, “I am going to Maidan”, and that was all.”



On 5 December Vitaliy arrived in Ukraine and the next day he was already in Kyiv, in the epicenter of the Revolution of Dignity. He admitted back then that many things really impressed him a lot, such as

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