



PHOTOS BY JOE GLODE

# A fighting chance

*A Ukrainian soldier gives Portlanders a glimpse into war, and honors those who supported the troops from afar*

**BY EMILY GREEN**  
STAFF WRITER

In the backyard of a spacious, upscale home tucked away in Portland's rolling West Hills, an outfitted soldier showed a small gathering of local Slavs snapshots of army life in war-ravaged regions of their homeland.

"At the time, I was in Kiev working for a very big company," Leonid Maslov told his audience as he flipped through the slides. A photo of himself in full military garb cast across the projection screen. "I finished work at 6 o'clock, took off my suit, my tie, and put on all this. So did many of my colleagues."

Before he was dismissed in September, Maslov was a member of the Ukrainian Army's 92nd brigade, which became known for its capture of two Russian officers who were later exchanged in May for jailed Ukrainian pilot, Nadiya Savchenko.

The officers, it was reported, were Russian servicemen fighting alongside separatists. Maslov had uploaded a cell-phone video of one prisoner's interrogation. Posted May 15, the video has been viewed on his YouTube page 1.4 million times.

He and his colleagues were all volunteers — many in their 40s and 50s, he said. Initially they were told they were too old to join the army, so instead they donated blood to support the effort.

Later, as the war escalated, former Soviet Army soldiers such as Maslov and his comrades were welcomed despite their age,



he said.

"The uniforms lacked the proper everything," he continued, as he showed a photo of a soldier wearing a 12-pound 1960s-era combat helmet. "Almost like guerilla fighters. Terrible, terrible ammunition, clothes, they use the running shoes."

As Street Roots first reported in April 2015, members of Portland and Vancouver, Wash.'s Slavic community banded together after the war began to send shipping containers full of medical and military supplies to Ukrainian soldiers fighting against Russian-backed separatists in the Donbass region of Eastern Ukraine.

The barebones Ukrainian Army depended

largely on the donated supplies.

The Ukrainian Association of Washington had flown Leonid Maslov, along with volunteer medic Victoria Milutina, from Ukraine to the U.S. to share their stories from the front lines with donors and members of the Ukrainian community who have been supporting the resistance against Russian separatists from afar.

Maslov visited Portland, Seattle and the San Francisco area in recent weeks, attending local Ukrainian gatherings as the guest of honor along the way.

That evening in the west hills, Maslov presented military-issued civilian medals to Portlanders Michael Zaslavsky and Mikhail

Left, Leonid Maslov shares stories from the front lines of the war in Ukraine with members of Portland's Slavic community in the backyard of a West Hills home. A lawyer and mathematician, Maslov volunteered to fight with the Ukrainian Army against Russian separatists.

Below, this military medal for civilians was awarded to Portlanders Michael Zaslavsky and Mikhail Mitkov-Baklanovsky for their role in supplying the Ukrainian Army with equipment and medical items. Leonid Maslov explained that it depicts a civilian using a tire and a handmade shield as a symbol of the fight for freedom.

Mitkov-Baklanovsky for their role in supplying his brigade with equipment and medical items.

Street Roots first met Mitkov-Baklanovsky last year when he showed us his extra room filled with a stockpile of supplies he was getting ready to ship to Ukraine.

Although the war has stagnated as it enters its third year, the ceasefire is largely ignored each night after European ceasefire observers leave for the day and the death toll continues to rise each week, The New York Times reported in late July.

According to the U.N., the Ukraine conflict has taken the lives of nearly 10,000 people since it began.

Whereas before battle involved heavy artillery, machine guns and tanks, Maslov said now it's limited mostly to rifle fire. "Shells and rifles are different," he said, "but journalists give the same news."

"The need for other medical supplies is still enormous," said Mitkov-Baklanovsky. He continues to ship dressings for open chest wounds, bandages, tourniquets and other first aid items.

"Due to inflation, the Ukrainian people is very impoverished and has less ability to help," he said. "People have no money. They are tired of war. But they are faced with deaths and injuries every day. It is very hard."

Maslov's visit to the U.S. was very important to the Ukrainian community here, said Eduard Dudar, Ukrainian Association of Washington board member. About 70 Ukrainians and friends attended Maslov's presentation in Seattle on Aug. 1, three days after his evening in Portland.

"The longer you stay away from Ukraine," he said, "it fades with time. So when people describe the war, and that it's still going on and people still need help, they feel more connected and willing to help."

During Maslov's presentation in Seattle, he also awarded Pavlo Pylypenko with a civilian medal for his contributions to the war effort, said Dudar.

American media coverage of Ukraine's conflict, like most conflicts, had become less frequent as the war continued, said Dudar.

"It went up again with Trump — everyone is talking about it again, but it will fade. It's obviously very sad for Ukraine. It's a great tragedy and we must try to help them," he said.

He said his organization plans to continue working with politicians, seeking help from Congress and reminding people of the crisis in Ukraine.

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump's campaign chairman, Paul Manafort,

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