

Ep8 – "Captivity Is Ten Times Worse Than Mariupol": Ievgen Malik on the Fall of Mariupol and Russian Captivity (Part 1)

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On April 9th, 2022, the Ukrainian garrison in Mariupol attempted a mass breakout. Around 400 men were killed in a single night.

Speakers on this Episode:



Rob Lee

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Ievgen Malik

Senior Sergeant of the Marine Corps



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Episode Summary

In this gripping episode of the Ukraine Military History Podcast, co-host Rob Lee sits down with Ievgen Malik, a senior sergeant from the 36th Marine Brigade, to recount one of the most harrowing chapters of the war in Ukraine. Malik shares the brutal reality of the Siege of Mariupol and the fateful day of April 9, 2022, when he and 400 fellow Marines attempted a desperate breakout from their encirclement. Facing overwhelming odds and devastating casualties, Malik details the agonizing, life-or-death decision to surrender, initiating a dark, two-and-a-half-year journey into Russian captivity.

The conversation dives deep into the grim progression from the ruins of Mariupol to the notorious Olenivka prison, and eventually to high-security facilities on Russian soil. Malik provides a chilling, first-hand account of the transition into the prison system, where Ukrainian captives were immediately met with brutal violence, false accusations, and systematic psychological terror. Listeners will gain an intimate, unfiltered look at the terrifying daily routine of interrogations, the extreme physical torture endured by the prisoners, and the haunting, constant sound of screams that filled the corridors.

Beyond the raw fight for survival, this episode explores the ideological warfare waged behind prison walls. Malik details his captors' obsessive hunt for "Western ties" and the aggressive use of state propaganda as a weapon to break the spirit of the captured soldiers. This profound and agonizing testimony serves as a stark reminder of the immense human cost of the conflict, offering listeners an essential, deeply personal perspective on what is at stake for Ukraine and why its defenders continue to fight so fiercely for their freedom.

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Chapter 1: The Siege of Mariupol



Samuel P.N. Cook [0:00]

Hi, it's Sam Cook, the founder and co-host of the Ukraine Military History Podcast. Welcome to the second in a three-part series of our interviews with Yevgeniy Malik. This interview was conducted by Rob Lee, our co-host at the Ukraine Military History Podcast, and it starts with a very intense moment in the war. On the 9th of April, 2022, Yevgeniy Malik, a senior sergeant, and 400 other Marines from the 36 Marine Brigade attempted a breakout from where they were surrounded in the Battle of Mariupol. And Yevgeniy Malik tells the entire story of how they went through this, took a huge amount of casualties along the way, and how he made the personal decision to surrender himself and the soldiers under his command, which started a two-and-a-half year period of captivity. This is, again, the first in a two-part series with Rob Lee conducting this really in detail and excruciating story, which Yevgeniy thankfully shares for the world to hear about exactly what is at stake here. For Ukrainians, losing their country or surrendering territory to Russia has very real consequences, and I think the story of Yevgeniy in captivity should give all of us an object lesson, a very personal one, in what the stakes are for Ukraine and why they continue to fight until they get a just and lasting peace. I hope you enjoy the first of this two-part series with Rob Lee. Yevgeniy Malik, his story going from the attempted breakout, the decision to go into captivity, and what that initial period in captivity really was like, and what that means for all Ukrainians and for us who are observing this war and the decisions that we could make based on this information. Before we start this episode, I just wanted to make a quick word to mention our sponsors. I'm gonna give you a brief introduction for our sponsors, and then at the end of the show, we'll do a longer discussion about each sponsor and what we're offering so that you can get right into the content. This podcast is funded by the Borderlands Foundation. The Borderlands Foundation is a foundation that I established to make sure Ukraine's heroes are never forgotten, and we have two main centers that are, in effect, the sponsor for this podcast. The first center is the Ukraine Military History Institute. It's an -speaking and -speaking center, and our mission is to translate Ukraine's history from into for the world to consume and learn from. Ukraine has a lot of allies who've supported it. Almost all of them, the common language of military officers, military historians, and professionals is , so the Ukraine Military History Institute created and sponsors this, and I'll tell you all about our programs and how you can support the institute at the end of the episode. The second sponsor for this podcast is the Ukraine Center for Traumatic Stress. This is also part of the Borderlands Foundation. It's a center dedicated to research and raising awareness and helping to bring in to Ukraine cutting-edge therapies, treatments, protocols, and education related to post-traumatic stress disorder. The heroes of Ukraine that are fighting this war, whether they're Ukrainians or foreigners who've come in to fight side by side with Ukrainians, they're writing this history, which creates the stories, which creates a strong future country, and those memories have costs, so we're dedicated to helping advance the research, treatment, and breakthrough that all soldiers, veterans can have dealing with and overcoming post-traumatic stress disorder and mental health that arises from their service. And then finally, our last sponsor is the Borderlands Group. This is a for-profit

Samuel P.N. Cook (continued)

company that donates the money to fund the Borderlands Foundation and all of our programs. I'm also the founder and president of that organization, and we do military advisory, advisory for defense companies working inside Ukraine and consulting and software development and technical work for both governments and military defense companies. With that, that's our sponsors. At the end of the podcast, I'm gonna tell you a lot more about each sponsor if you're looking for ways that you can contribute to the Borderlands Foundation, our two centers, or if you'd like to work with myself, Rob, and other contributors for this podcast. I'll talk to you about how you can get in touch with us through the Borderlands Group for that.

Chapter 2: The Choice to Surrender



Rob Lee [4:39]

Hello, everyone. I'm Rob Lee. I'm a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute's Eurasia program, and I have Yevgeniy Malik with me right now to do a podcast about his experiences. Yevgeniy was a Marine in the 36 Marine Brigade. He fought in Mariupol at the beginning of the war. He then spent two and a half years in captivity, and I plan on doing probably two separate podcasts on his story, and this one is going to focus mostly on his time in captivity. I think it's quite timely because there's still many soldiers who are in captivity right now, so his story about how he was treated is quite important. It's also quite important given the talk about negotiations and about the next step of this war, about what it's like to be in captivity, what it means to be under the occupation. I think it's quite an important story to be told about what the situation is right now and what it means to many Ukrainians. And it's great to have someone who's there to explain this in detail. Yevgeniy, could you introduce yourself and maybe tell us a little about what you did in the war and when you joined?



Yevgeniy Malik [5:46]

Yeah. Thank you, Rob. My name is Yevgeniy. I'm 32 years old. I joined the army in July 2018, and since that time, I served in the First Separate Battalion of the 36th Marine Brigade.



Yevgeniy Malik [6:08]

Till the very end. I met this war in the Mariupol direction, February 21st, the year 2022. And yes, I got into captivity in the middle of April and spent there two and a half years. I came back to Ukraine on September 14th, the year 2024. And since that time, I got rehabilitation for half a year because the injuries were really hard, and half a year is the minimal time you need to spend for yourself to recover your health, at least to the minimal level.



Rob Lee [6:58]

We're going to do two different podcasts, one about the battle and one about captivity. We're going to talk about captivity right now. The situation, to basically begin with, on April 14th is the day your unit surrendered.



Ievgen Malik [7:14]

Yes, exactly.



Rob Lee [7:15]

And to give some background, you were a sergeant, so you were a squad leader when the war began. But by this time in the battle, you had about 90 people under your command.



Ievgen Malik [7:24]

That was at the very end, because I got the position I was responsible for. That was a position called Charlie on the factory, or Azov Factory. I was there since 16 March, the year 2022. At that position we had 30 people, 30 guys, marines, and soldiers from the 56th Infantry Brigade, and three guys from the National Guard of Ukraine, the ninth regiment from Zaporizhzhia City. But due to the commands and due to the situation, our brigade surrendered on 12th April. The battalion surrendered on 13th April, but not all people wanted to surrender and go into captivity. They tried to escape by themselves because we got an order that everyone is free to do what he thinks is more suitable for him. The majority tried to surrender because before this, on 9th April 2022, we tried to break the ring in Mariupol. And with all our brigade, we tried to get to our troops in Zaporizhzhia, but we failed, and we got plenty of casualties. I think approximately 400 guys were killed in the battle during the night. And that's why I stayed with my guys on my position. And during these couple of days, soldiers who tried to escape and failed came back, all of them. They were coming back to the factory, and they found the only position which existed at the time, which was my position. That's why all these people were coming to our position because we controlled that small part of territory, approximately two square kilometers. At the end, we got 90 people and, yes, due to the papers, due to the order, I was the commander of the position, but there were plenty of officers. We got even the commander of our airborne company of our battalion there. It was like that. Yes, I was a squad leader, sergeant, and still I am. [laughs]

Chapter 3: The Encirclement of the Factory



Rob Lee [10:38]

To give the context, at this point, President Zelensky had already signed an order for people in Mariupol to surrender, or he said if you need to protect lives, you're allowed to surrender. Was that right?



Ievgen Malik [10:53]

The order was from Zelensky, as we know for sure. The order was from Zelensky and Zaluzhnyi to make everything possible to save the squad, to save soldiers. And each commander did as he thought was better for the squad. Someone decided to give up, to surrender. Someone decided to try to get to our troops. I know the whole company from our battalion which did it managed. And they came back to Ukraine. That was, I think, some kind of heroic part of this war because there was approximately a 180-kilometer zone around Mariupol which was controlled by Russians totally. And the company, with

Ievgen Malik (continued)

battles, managed to get to Zaporizhzhia, and they got, I think, 60 people. And there were two officers who commanded them, the commander of a platoon of the first company and the commander of the first company of our first separate battalion. And they managed to get to Zaporizhzhia, and that is something unbelievable, because I didn't believe that was possible. But we have to understand that a lot of our guys who tried to do this didn't manage, and they are dead.



Rob Lee [12:36]

To give you context, your brigade was holding the front line east of Mariupol when the war began. You fell back, and we'll cover this in the other podcast. Your 36 Marine Brigade fell back to the Ilich plant in northwest Mariupol. And then



Ievgen Malik [12:53]

Just north, because Mariupol was some kind of triangle. And we were on the top of it, so that was the north part of Mariupol. Even though the city wasn't there. The city was 30% of the territory, and 60% was factories and all of this. We were on the factory, the northernmost part of the city, of the whole territory.



Rob Lee [13:22]

The 36 Marine Brigade was in the Ilich factory. Azov Brigade was in the Azovstal factory to the south. And then as the battle progressed, the Russians cut off those two factories between themselves. And then, at this point, I think the city had been encircled since early March. Resupply, logistics, all these things had become an issue, and ammunition had become quite a big issue too. As you're saying, after President Zelenskyy gave the order to prioritize saving lives, your brigade command post, I think, broke apart, right? Then the battalion, and then it was basically you, where you were not getting orders from anyone above you, and that's the time when you started to negotiate with forces to surrender.

Chapter 4: The Capture of a Hostage



Ievgen Malik [14:09]

The situation was like this: the Azovstal factory was on the south of the city, and our factory, Ilich, was on the north. And between them, there was a city. The city was held by Russians in the middle of March. Well, the second part of March maximum. On 26 March, we didn't go to the city at all, because that was the one-way ticket. We were cut off, even from the Azov regiment. About the ammunition and provisions from the mainland, there was not even any talk, because we didn't have it from the very beginning. We were surrounded on the 3rd of March. We were totally surrounded. And yes, as I said, on 11th April, we got a command, the last command from our officers, that that's it, that the majority want to surrender just to save people, but whoever doesn't want to may make any decision they like. We tried. We didn't make anything fast. We wanted to just see what was going on and what kind of chance we had. We had seen attempts of our marines to surrender to the Russians, just soldiers, there were no officers there, there was no one. And those were soldiers with a weapon, a PKM machine gun.



Rob Lee [16:00]

Machine gun.



Ievgen Malik [16:00]

They tried to kill the marines, our marines, and we understood that we would not do this. On the 13th of April, at the very morning, we caught a soldier. Because I knew that the battalion and brigade didn't exist anymore, we made a decision together with all our troops on this position. Because I couldn't decide alone for all 95 people. That is impossible. That is silly. When we got negotiations with the Russians, there was some colonel. He said that he was a colonel of the security service of the Donetsk Republic. I came back and said that we got a chance to surrender to them, and they won't do anything with us, because their interest is to stop this fighting. Because if they do, there were 100 guys from our side and 400 guys from their side. And for them, yes, sure, they would destroy us for sure, because they had everything. They had planes. They had tanks. They had heavy, big artillery systems, et cetera. And we had just AK-74, RPG, and PKM, so they probably wouldn't even try to assault us. They would just bomb us. But I relied on that he was a high officer of their side. And his interest was to bring us to his command and say, "Look, I got almost 100 captives." I relied on this, and yes, they didn't do anything to us. We just surrendered and went further to further locations.



Rob Lee [18:22]

In the context, there's a soldier you captured the day prior, on April 13th. You, and



Ievgen Malik [18:29]

13th



Rob Lee [18:29]

He had a cell phone, and you asked him to call his commander



Ievgen Malik [18:32]

Yes.



Rob Lee [18:33]

And then you talked to his commander on the phone.

Chapter 5: The Negotiation on the Bridge



Ievgen Malik [18:34]

The situation was that he was a 19-year-old guy. He came in a white civilian car, Niva, that small Jeep, Slovenian Jeep. And there were two soldiers. There was a little fight, a little assault operation. One of them just ran away, escaped, and this one we captured. He surrendered to us. And when I saw him, I said, "How did you get here?" And he said, "My commander said that there is no one here." Well, of course, [laughs] the commander wanted this guy to get in our hands because he understood that in these two square kilometers, there are plenty of marines, because that was the only position, the only sector they did not control in the whole factory. That was pretty dangerous to go there with a platoon, for example, because probably we could kill all of them. He just sent this guy. He said, "Look, just take that position. There is no one there." And I saw he was crying so much [laughs]. And at that time, his wife, if a woman loves you, probably she can feel something. She wrote a message to him, and I saw that his cell phone worked. First of all, we said, "Call your wife and say that you're okay, everything is cool, you are with your guys, with your friends," just to make her calm. That was his first call. The second call was from his commander. He called him, and he was asking, "Where are you?" That was my first negotiations. No one touched me. [laughs] I didn't know how to do this, so we decided to make a meeting on the bridge. Everyone knew where this bridge was. A month ago they tried to assault our position in that sector, so they really knew they got plenty of casualties there, more than 30 people. They knew where this bridge was. I had four or five guys with me, and this colonel came with a tank, T-72, and approximately 50 of this special force, SOBR. Yes, we had the negotiations. My opinion was that, because I knew at that time that they had more than 10,000 soldiers in Hostomel surrounded, I said to him, "Look, I can make a call, and let's just make an exchange today on the front line. You just take us, 100 guys, and bring us back. You will get 300 or 400 of your soldiers for us." "Just let me make a call." He looked at me and said, "No one goes from Mariupol." If we were in Kherson or Kharkiv, we could do this, but for Mariupol, he said no. And I didn't know why. In the nearest future, I discovered why. We will speak about it.



Rob Lee [22:16]

You met up with this colonel, you negotiated with him, and you brought five guys to provide cover for you. Then after you talked, you went back to the group. The context here is that before this, your brigade had tried to break out once. They took heavy casualties doing so. Then one of the battalions had already surrendered. At this point, there is no battalion staff. That doesn't exist anymore.



Ievgen Malik [22:41]

No, there was no



Rob Lee [22:42]

There's no brigade staff



Ievgen Malik [22:43]

company staff. No one.



Rob Lee [22:43]

You're on your own. You have a group of about 90 people with you, and you had 90 with you because these are guys who tried to escape, and then they



Ievgen Malik [22:53]

And they failed



Rob Lee [22:53]

couldn't make it out, and so they came back.



Ievgen Malik [22:54]

They survived, and they came back to our factory, and we met each other. Others who failed stayed in the field.



Rob Lee [23:04]

But as a sergeant, you now are basically in charge of almost a company of people, where you have that much responsibility.



Ievgen Malik [23:09]

Oh, yes



Rob Lee [23:09]

...and you're the one negotiating on their behalf. You talked to this colonel, and you returned to your group, and then what happened?

Chapter 6: The Sabotage of Military Equipment



Ievgen Malik [23:17]

Yes. I came back and I said, "Guys, there is a chance to survive. If you are someone who wants to survive, I will surrender." Firstly, approximately 40 guys said, "We will not do this. We will die, but we will not give up." I said, "Yes, guys, I really respect you. This is your choice, and give us 30 minutes, we will go out, and then you do what you think is better for you." But probably in five or 10 minutes, this group of people came back because one of them was a guy from that part, and he told them what he had seen, and they changed their decision. They changed their mind, and they came back in probably five or 10 minutes and said, "We'll go with you." And that was the finish because before that, I gave a radio station to this colonel and said, "Give me 30 minutes. I will tell you our decision, and we will continue our cooperation." I remember that time, 14:40 PM, we

levgen Malik (continued)

came to the forces, and we gave our AK-74s without any bullets, without anything. Before that, we broke all our cell phones. We broke all ammunition, Archers, Harris, everything we could break.



Rob Lee [25:24]

Archer is a thermal optic, and Harris is a-



levgen Malik [25:27]

A US-made



Rob Lee [25:27]

...a US-made radio system.



levgen Malik [25:28]

Yes. We broke everything, all the machine guns. Everything that could be broken was broken. That was the story.



Rob Lee [25:41]

And you angered the Russians when you broke all of your equipment, right?



levgen Malik [25:45]

Especially for the Archer. I thought that this guy was going to shoot our knees for that because we were smoking, and he came back with the broken Archer, and he said, "Who did that?" And he was really angry. [laughs] Because the Russians at least at that period of time didn't have such technical stuff, so that was a problem. But indeed, that infantry... We were infantry. They were infantry. And they were really glad that that was the end, that they didn't have to assault our position, and that they would survive this day 100%. That's why they were glad. They gave us cigarettes. We were speaking with them. There was a moment when I even started to argue with some of the sergeants in some political theme. But very quickly they reminded me of where I was, what was going on, and that I had to be calmer. [laughs]



Rob Lee [26:54]

You surrendered at the bridge, right? That was northwest, I think, of the Ilitch factory. Is that right?



Ievgen Malik [27:00]

Yes.



Rob Lee [27:00]

Once you brought all but 90 Marines and soldiers with you.



Ievgen Malik [27:08]

Yes.



Rob Lee [27:08]

What happened from there?



Ievgen Malik [27:11]

Buses came. We got inside. And from this factory, we came to Sartana. That was the first place we got to. Sartana is a small village on the east side of Mariupol. And they gathered all the prisoners from Mariupol. At that period of time in that position, nobody touched us, not even a finger. But guys from Britain and the USA, I think one American guy was there also, they started beating them up already there. That is the position of Russians. As we say, everyone is equal, but even among the equal, there is someone who is the most equal. The same as here. Russians, they don't like anyone. They don't like any of their neighbors. But among all of them, there is someone whom they don't like the most. That is Americans. Of course, Americans. I'm speaking about the Americans. I'm not speaking about Mexicans. They don't care about Mexico. Most of them don't even know where it is. I'm speaking about the United States, Canada, Britain. For them, that's all the same. They call all of you Anglo-Saxons and consider you a natural enemy. That's why in the year 2024, they captured all Europeans on the battlefield. But when they got this Australian guy, they just shot him immediately. They didn't even bring him to Russia. Because for them, all these native speakers, they don't want to see them alive. At least these troops, for sure, and we experienced that in captivity in prison.

Chapter 7: The Ruin of a City



Rob Lee [29:16]

So they take you to Sartana. This is still in Ukraine, right?



Ievgen Malik [29:19]

Yes. That is the Donetsk region.



Rob Lee [29:21]

And you drove through the city, so you saw the city was entirely destroyed, Mariupol, at this point.



Ievgen Malik [29:26]

Mariupol was destroyed completely, totally. There is a funny story. In the very beginning of March, the first half of March, we got internet sometimes. And sometimes we got the news. My friend had a cell phone. He read the news, and he started to laugh. I said, "What's going on?" And he said, "Listen, news from Kharkiv, the situation is critical, the most critical in the country. Russians attacked the city with air forces, bombed it 10 times a day." And we were laughing because Russians bombed Mariupol 10 times while he read this story. They were bombing the city every 15 or 20 minutes. And that was during one and a half months. Just try to guess what happened to the city. It was destroyed completely.



Rob Lee [30:27]

Sure. So when you got to Sartana, you said that there was no real abuse there except against the British and American



Ievgen Malik [30:35]

Yes.



Rob Lee [30:35]

Marines. These are British and Americans who joined the military and were serving before the war?



Ievgen Malik [30:40]

Yes. They were usual professional soldiers. They got contracts and they were serving, they served the same as me and others, no matter the nationality they had. Some of them were also trying to get a passport. The majority of them served in an airborne company because at the period they signed the fluently. Even better than me. So the majority of them were airborne.



Rob Lee [31:22]

And then from Sartana where did they take you?



Ievgen Malik [31:25]

To Olenivka. And that was the beginning of our harsh trip because when we came to Olenivka... No, that was, for us that was, we didn't know what it is, how it is to be a prisoner in your own country not even as a prisoner or military prisoner. So we didn't know any rules, we didn't know what will happen. We didn't know anything. So when we came to Olenivka, there were approximately 830 soldiers. And when we came there, they started just to beat us up, all of us, each of us. So the bus is coming to the entrance, and all soldiers had to go out one by one. There was a man, he had to check your documents. Any documents you have. And he asked, "Who are you? Your troops and your..."



Rob Lee [32:50]

Like your rank.



Ievgen Malik [32:51]

Yes.



Rob Lee [32:51]

Your position.



Ievgen Malik [32:52]

Exactly, yes.



Rob Lee [32:52]

And then what service you're part of, right?



Ievgen Malik [32:54]

Yes. So the higher position you got the higher rank you got, the more beats you got. The worst was for the guys from National Guard. Everything what is connected with the national in Russians' opinion, that is Nazism. National Guard in Ukraine, that is Nazism. National Guard in Germany, that is Nazism. National Guard in the United States, that is Nazism. So everything what got the word national that is, for them that is awful. And guys from National Guard, they got really hard times because I've seen, I had some friends, some of them were my friends, and I've seen what happened. For example, if they beat me four times with the baton, police baton my back and probably five times my legs, for the guys from National Guard that was much harder. They beat them up, probably 10 minutes each of them, with the dogs and et cetera.

Chapter 8: The Transit to Olenivka Prison



Rob Lee [34:14]

So you were, when you come off the bus one by one, right? And then there's an officer there who asks your rank, what service you're part of, right? And then from there you go to the barracks. Before you get there, that's when the beatings occur.



Ievgen Malik [34:28]

Yes. So there was a yard between the barracks and there was a corridor made of guards. While you are going through this corridor they are beating you with batons. At that time that was just batons. And Olenivka was not so crucial as other places. So that was just the beginning. And we didn't know what is going on. So we came there. They put us into the barrack, and there we got nothing. No water, no medicines. We got nothing. We were waiting. They feed us three times a day. Breakfast was 300 milligrams of tea and a piece of bread. The supper was the same, and the meal was tea, a piece of bread, and maybe 200 grams of porridge.



Rob Lee [35:48]

Porridge.



Ievgen Malik [35:48]

Porridge. Yeah. Different kind of. That's it. So I spent there four days and then they made us fill some blanks. I read that it was said, "has to be shifted in Taganrog." Taganrog, that is Rostov region territory. We decided that it's gonna be an exchange through Russia, but that was a mistake.



Rob Lee [36:21]

You thought that was gonna happen.



Ievgen Malik [36:22]

Yes.



Rob Lee [36:23]

You thought you were gonna be



Ievgen Malik [36:23]

Yes, yes



Rob Lee [36:24]

be



Ievgen Malik [36:24]

That's why I got the group of my friends from my Marines. We were together in our position, Charlie. We were together in Sartana, in Olenivka. We tried to be together all the time. And together we just wrote all those blanks and went to territory. That was on 19th of April approximately. 19th of April, 2022.



Rob Lee [37:03]

And you said when you got there, they... So you had to take all your clothing off.



Ievgen Malik [37:08]

Yes. So we were totally naked. They check everything. We couldn't have any metal, any sticks, anything with us any fires. And so they just checked us. While that was going on, they beat up all of us. Mostly they beat up guys from mortars, artillery divisions, tank operators, and something like that.



Rob Lee [37:45]

And snipers too, you said.



Ievgen Malik [37:46]

Snipers, you'd better not give up if you're a sniper. Our sniper from our battalion, they broke his fingers in Olenivka. But that was the last time I've seen him at all. So as I know for snipers that is even worse than for the infantry.



Rob Lee [38:09]

Okay. And you said some of the National Guard guys, they beat them till they're unconscious, right, at this point?



Ievgen Malik [38:14]

Yeah, but still these guys, I know my friend was with me till the very end.



Rob Lee [38:21]

And there's no water, there's no toilet, right?



Ievgen Malik [38:27]

Yeah.



Rob Lee [38:27]

You also mentioned, when you were at the factory, because it was cold at times, some of the guys were wearing the factory uniforms, right? Because

Chapter 9: The Threat of False Accusations



Ievgen Malik [38:35]

Yes, that's true. Because we came there on the 1st of March, we were on the factory already. And because that was cold and we retreated, we didn't have enough clothes. Some of us didn't have even military shoes. So we found some uniform on this factory that was quite warm, and we used it. And some guys gave up wearing this uniform. And when these guards in prison saw this civil uniform from this factory, they said that these guys stole it from people that probably they killed some civilians and took this uniform and came here. So they were beaten up much more than others. So that was obviously ridiculous. The uniform was from the factory. There were thousands of such uniforms. And when we came on the 1st of March, the factory was closed already and there were no workers there. Because everyone knew that the war began, four days before the war began, so everyone escaped. But for them, that was just the reason to explain why they are doing this. Even a ridiculous explanation was better than if you don't have it at all.



Rob Lee [40:20]

And Olenivka, this is also where the Azov prisoners were killed later



Ievgen Malik [40:25]

Yes, the



Rob Lee [40:25]

I think in June,



Ievgen Malik [40:25]

Olenivka, that is the prison. That is true. The prison where Azov soldiers were killed. They said that was HIMARS, which is also ridiculous. I've seen videos from Olenivka. I've seen these barracks and I have witnesses, our marines, who can tell that these guys from Azov, they were just fired in one of the barracks by Russians. Because Russians, they hate Azov. They just hate it. They don't want... If you ask any guard, he would say that they had to be just shot and forget about the living, and that's all.



Rob Lee [41:17]

So how long were you at Olenivka for?



Ievgen Malik [41:22]

Four days, I think.



Rob Lee [41:23]

Okay. So four days. At this time, mentally, were you... So at this point, it's been about two months since the war began. A month and a half was in Mariupol under constant bombardment. And then now you've spent four days in captivity. What's... And you said at this point, you still think you're gonna be exchanged, right? You thought that



Ievgen Malik [41:41]

Yeah



Rob Lee [41:41]

you'll be exchanged in the near future.



Ievgen Malik [41:43]

Everything was obvious in the next location we came. That was prison number two, Riazhsk, Ryazan region. Actually



Rob Lee [41:59]

Before, you went to Taganrog first, right?



Ievgen Malik [42:02]

Yeah, but we were there just, we came there to the airport to the plane. And we came to Riazhsk by plane. So we came from Donetsk to Taganrog by buses. Then SOBR, I think that was SOBR or OMON. That is police SWAT in Federation.



Rob Lee [42:23]

Yeah. Yeah. So SOBR is a SWAT team. OMON is riot police who also do guard duty.



Ievgen Malik [42:27]

Yeah. Also they got the military police. That's not special force. That's just the militaries, but they work with us also. So this SOBR, they got us. They closed our eyes by scotch. And then that scotch



Rob Lee [42:48]

Like tape or-



Ievgen Malik [42:49]

Yes, yes. And they put us to this plane. There were some funny stories. We hoped that that's gonna be an exchange, that we are flying home. But when they... One of us, one prisoner asked this SOBR guy to give him a cigarette. That SOBR guy said, "What did you say? Are you crazy? You don't understand where you are?" And he beat him up, and I understood that this is not an exchange for sure. That we were going somewhere further. And we came to Riazhsk. I don't know where this airport is, because our eyes were closed. They put us into these special trucks for prisoners. Each country got such trucks, so we were in these trucks.

Chapter 10: The Transfer to Russian Soil



Rob Lee [43:53]

The AvtoZak.



Ievgen Malik [43:55]

Yeah. It is called AvtoZak. We were going to the prison. We were going so long, and at that time I remember I was scared so much because I just... Just then I realized that I am here in territory. The biggest country in the world. I'm in Russia. They are leading me somewhere. No one, just God knows where I am right now. And a couple days before, I was shooting these Russians, I was fighting with them. And this is Russia. This is not Canada. There's a little bit of difference. And because Russians are cruel, and I understood that the situation is not just horrible, that that is something unbelievable. And I don't know why I mentioned the film with Mel Gibson, the shooter.



Rob Lee [45:02]

Lethal Weapon.



Ievgen Malik [45:04]

Yes. There was an episode when some criminals got him, imprisoned him, and they were beating him up. Just giving some questions to him, and they beat him up with a shocker as well. I don't know why I mentioned this film. I don't know why, but the captivity was exactly like that. That was truly like in that film, or partially. We came to Riazhsk.



Rob Lee [45:39]

And so Riazhsk is in the Ryazan region of Russia.



Ievgen Malik [45:42]

Yeah.



Rob Lee [45:42]

So you flew there on an Il-76 aircraft most likely.



Ievgen Malik [45:46]

Yeah.



Rob Lee [45:46]

And then you've been told nothing at this point, right? So you know you're in Russia



Ievgen Malik [45:50]

Yeah



Rob Lee [45:51]

but no one has told you anything.



Ievgen Malik [45:52]

Yeah. No, no one. Since that time, they did not say any kind of information because we didn't have a right to have any information. We didn't know where we were. We didn't know the location. We didn't have to know even the date, even the time of day. So nothing. They tried to do this, but of course, we got thousands of prisoners, so someone heard something from that place. Someone heard something from another place, from another guy, and we got some information. We came to this Riazhsk. And the thing is about this prison, what you have to know, each time you change the prison, you change the location, you come from one prison to another, they organize... the prison guards organize some kind of meeting for you to make you understand where you are, who is the chief here, and that was pretty strong.



Rob Lee [47:06]

Because you had that in Olenivka. You got off the bus. Then before you get to the barracks, the guards... You walk through a gauntlet of guards. They hit you with batons.



Ievgen Malik [47:13]

Yes.



Rob Lee [47:13]

And then this happened again. This time



Ievgen Malik [47:16]

Yes, but more crucial, because as I said, Russians are crucial. That is the thing you have to



Rob Lee [47:22]

Yeah. Cruel.



Ievgen Malik [47:22]

cruel. Yeah, I'm sorry. Cruel. They are cruel. That's their type of nature. I do not know how to say this. In this situation, for example, a British or Japanese guy will not do anything to you. The soldier, he will beat you. When we came to this prison, first they made us pray, and then the guards took each of us one by one to some place. We didn't know. We just heard some screams, and that's it. You just hear the screams all the time.



Rob Lee [48:08]

And when you're on the drive there, in the AvtoZak, in the prison vehicle, you have your individual container, right?



Ievgen Malik [48:16]

Yeah.



Rob Lee [48:16]

So it's solitary confinement almost. It's a three, four-hour drive to the prison. You're not told anything. You get off the-



Ievgen Malik [48:22]

Nothing



Rob Lee [48:22]

So you get off the bus-



Ievgen Malik [48:24]

Closed eyes. They open my eyes just inside some room. So from the very beginning, I didn't even know what this place was. I discovered that this is a prison in Riazhsk much later.

Chapter 11: The Arrival at the Prison



Rob Lee [48:37]

So when you get off the bus, if you could describe it to us. You're blindfolded, right? And then you're made to bend over the entire time, right? So you're walking with your hands behind your back. You're bent over. Is that right?



Ievgen Malik [48:51]

Your hands are in front of you. It's



Rob Lee [48:54]

Zip tie on it, so they're bound.



Ievgen Malik [48:55]

You got this zip tie. Your eyes are closed. Just two guards, they take you and lead you inside. Then they put you on your knees, take off all this stuff.



Rob Lee [49:12]

Zip tie.



Ievgen Malik [49:12]

And they just make you... You are standing on your knees. They put your head on the floor so you can touch it. And you just hear all the screams that someone is being beaten up. And you hear these different commands. They're crazy about these national songs. Katusha, Devushka Smuglanka. They made you sing this. They can make you sing Russian national songs, and so on. You are doing this until another guards take you and lead you to some other place. They lead me to the second... No, that was the first floor. They just bring me out from the room to the corridor, made me take off all my clothes until I was naked. After that, what is going on further? First of all, they lead you to the cabinet with the doctor. The doctor has to check you, your health. She's just looking at

levgen Malik (continued)

you. She looks at you, and if she sees that you got some broken bones or something else, she makes a movement like, "Don't touch him." But if you are okay, if you look okay, then she makes a sign that you can work. Then they bring you to another cabinet. They lead me to the cabinet with the documents. And what you have to know is that since that time, we stand and we walk self-bent. All two and a half years. Self-bent.



Rob Lee [51:14]

You're bent over basically.



levgen Malik [51:16]

Yep. So I came there. Because you are self-bent, again, you don't see anything. You have to walk with closed eyes. That is the order of the guards. You can't look at their faces. You can't watch their eyes. That is denied. So I came inside the room, and I saw the table with the documents. There were passports, military passports, IDs, all of this, credit cards. And some men in blue uniforms who are well known as FIN. That is the federal institution of prison.



Rob Lee [52:13]

It is, exactly.



levgen Malik [52:15]

They got the blue uniform. And the military and police squad, they got the black uniform, or something like multicam. The guard who was leading me, who was with me, he had the black uniform, so I think he was from SOBR or something like that, or maybe military police. And the guy inside the room asked me, "Do you see any of your documents?" And I had just my military passport with me, just so I would have an official document which represents me, who I am. And I said, "Yes, I can see." And he asked my rank. I said, "Sergeant." And the guard then asked me, "You're a sergeant. Are you a squad leader?" I said, "Yes." He said, "Did you shoot at our troops?" At that time, I still didn't understand what was going on. And I was a little bit braver than later. So I said that I was fighting with your soldiers, as usual, because I'm a squad leader of marines.

Chapter 12: The Outbreak of Brutal Violence



Rob Lee [53:34]

You're giving honesty.



levgen Malik [53:34]

Yes, obviously I did. And he said, "You're done." Well, that was not as polite as I said right now. Of course, in their language that sounds another way. And he led me further from the cabinet to the corridor. But I didn't see anything. And then he stopped, turned

levgen Malik (continued)

me to the right side, and then I heard, "Hey, guys, this one shot our guys, our troops." And I thought, "What kind of guys?" I put my head up and I saw the corridor with the Special Forces, approximately 10 soldiers. And I am alone, and all of them are watching me, and I thought, "God." And he led me through this corridor. They beat me up, my head, my legs, everywhere they could. He put me on a chair in some room, and there were prisoners. They were working in this prison. And a prisoner tried to shave me with a shaving machine, to make me bald. But while he was doing this, these guards were beating my face, so he couldn't do it properly. At some point, he had to shave me, and the Special Forces wanted to beat me up. And they wanted more, so they made him wait to go out from the room. They stood me up and started to beat me. I made some block, and—



Rob Lee [55:24]
[laughs]



levgen Malik [55:24]
They didn't like that. They said, "Stand still. Put your arms down." I did it, and they just started to beat my face, beat my head, beat my liver, and so on.



Rob Lee [55:34]
This was a baton, right? A police baton or—



levgen Malik [55:35]
No. At that time, no baton. That was the very beginning. When they were tired, yes, they started to use the baton. But at that time, they just did it because the Special Forces, all of them are sportsmen, so—



Rob Lee [55:51]
They're punching you with their fists.



levgen Malik [55:53]
Yeah. They were just having fun with that. Then they put me in another cabinet. There was some detective, I think. He started to ask questions.



Rob Lee [56:07]
Like an interrogator.



Ievgen Malik [56:09]

Interrogator, yeah. With the balaclava, of course, because all of them were with the balaclava. So he started to ask me questions, fast questions, like my rank, my second name, my military name, and my position. He showed me the map and asked me a couple of questions. I showed him, and he understood. I think he understood that I know the map. That I can— explain something on the map. That is pretty important to know the map. And he made some plus, and then... And all the time I was answering his questions, and at this time, guards were beating me. There was blood everywhere. And then he showed the guards that that's it, you can take him. He led me to the corridor to continue all this game, and at that time another guard, I think that was an officer, he took me and said that's enough for him. And he led me to my room. And he said, "Indeed, that is good that you said that you shot."



Rob Lee [57:36]

That you shot at Russians, that you were honest about it.



Ievgen Malik [57:39]

Yes. That you were honest. And the thing is, you have to understand in prison, in captivity, you may tell a lie, but if they discover it at least once, then they will... They are cruel, but that would be much worse after that. So in case you can tell the truth, at least about yourself, that is your truth about yourself, not someone else, but about yourself.

Chapter 13: The Legacy of the Empire



Rob Lee [58:17]

About what you did, and just that honesty was the best option.



Ievgen Malik [58:20]

You're better to be honest because indeed they respect honesty. And they disrespect lies. So be honest. But if they want you to sign some document, you will sign. If they want you to tell the truth about yourself, you will tell the truth. The question is the time and the amount of punches you will get.



Rob Lee [58:50]

But at some point you'll break, and you will just do whatever they want.



Ievgen Malik [58:52]

They will break you anyway. Don't even dream that... The experience is that they will do everything they need from you, and you have no chance there. Because this is the story of all this empire, it was built on the prison. We were, as I will tell further, in Mordovia, we were in a prison which was built in ancient times for foreign prisoners.



Rob Lee [59:31]
[laughs]



Ievgen Malik [59:31]

In a very small village. The village was approximately 5,000 people, and there were two prisons in that village. And just try to guess, what were all these people who lived there doing? They worked in these prisons. Their fathers worked in these prisons, their grandfathers. And since Yekaterina, they were there. So they know what to do. They are the best in this. The story of these jails is even longer than the story of the United States. So just try to guess. They will make you sign any document they want. That's just a technical question.



Rob Lee [1:00:14]

So they take you to a room, right? And that's the room you were staying the rest of your time at this prison, right? And it was you and six other POWs with you, right?



Ievgen Malik [1:00:23]

In my first room there were six prisoners. And that was the 20th of April, I suppose. We didn't know where we were. We didn't understand anything. I just saw a window with these iron—



Rob Lee [1:00:42]
Iron bars, yeah.



Ievgen Malik [1:00:43]

And we didn't even know that that is a prison because we are military prisoners. What are we doing in a civil prison? But the next day we understood what was going on. And I understood why soldiers from Mariupol don't go anywhere. We heard from the very morning, at 9:00 or 10:00 AM, they started to come inside the rooms. They just named one surname and put that man somewhere else. No one knows. And we started to hear the screams. And then some guy in my room said, "Don't worry guys, in one month we will be at home." And I said, "Which month? Are you kidding? You don't understand what is going on?" In Mariupol, tens of thousands of people were killed. They were killed. By whom? And he said, "Well, what do you mean by whom? By the Air Force. Didn't you see they were bombing this city one and a half months?" I said, "Yes, of course. You will go to that room, to the interrogators, you will say the same things, and we will see what is going on, what will happen to you next." And that was the truth. So all the interrogation, we were there 10 months in Ryazsk. All the interrogation was about criminal orders of our command and all the military criminals—



Rob Lee [1:02:31]

They were asking you because they assumed you had received criminal orders.



Ievgen Malik [1:02:36]

Exactly.



Rob Lee [1:02:36]

And they assumed that basically there was a lot of criminal actions occurring, and they wanted you to confirm what they thought was occurring.

Chapter 14: The Routine of Daily Interrogation



Ievgen Malik [1:02:44]

Exactly. Exactly. But again, you have to understand how it is going on. You come inside the room. There is one interrogator, and there are one or two guys from SOBR. What are they doing there? They are with the batons, they are with the shockers, and so on. And the interrogator asks you, "Have you ever heard a command to kill some civilian?" Of course not, because in this factory there were not even civilians. That is ridiculous. What do they do? They are one and a half months in the biggest factory, like a city. You don't have any food there, you don't have any water there, you don't have anything there. What are you going to do there? So of course not. And after that you got this SOBR work. They start beating you up with shockers and so on. And—



Rob Lee [1:03:48]

A shocker is like a taser, but they also have a baton that has a taser at the end of the baton.



Ievgen Malik [1:03:54]

Yes. They got different ones because, look, they got the special ammunition. And ammunition they bought because this is governmental ammunition. If you break it, you have to write explanations and work with plenty of papers. Why do you need this if you can just buy it for yourself and use it how you like? So, from the very beginning it was like that. But then further when they got, for example, they were making a source and they chose some people, I think that was probably a third of all prisoners, whom they truly tortured. That was something special. If they want you to sign some document or to tell something they want to hear, they bring you to the room and you sit down. They—



Rob Lee [1:05:03]

Zip tie



Ievgen Malik [1:05:04]

zip tie your—



Rob Lee [1:05:04]

They bind your hands.



Ievgen Malik [1:05:05]

Yeah. Zip tie your hands and zip tie your legs, and then you see the table. On the table there are needles. That's for your nails. Then you got a shocker, the hand shocker, and—



Rob Lee [1:05:22]

Your taser, I guess you'd call it.



Ievgen Malik [1:05:23]

Your taser. And then that's some kind of special shocker that has a box where you can control the power.



Rob Lee [1:05:32]

The voltage.



Ievgen Malik [1:05:33]

They put some links to your ears.



Rob Lee [1:05:35]

We would call it electrocution. So they're electrocuting you.



Ievgen Malik [1:05:38]

Something like that. Then you got a police baton, but also you got some kind of plastic baton. That's all the same, like you can buy it in some building shop. A very, very strong thing if you want to harm someone.



Rob Lee [1:05:58]

It's like a plastic tube where—



Ievgen Malik [1:06:03]

White plastic tube with probably five millimeters, I think—



Rob Lee [1:06:07]

So it's not that large, but when they slap you, hit you with it, it would have a burning sensation, right?



Ievgen Malik [1:06:13]

Yes, that's true. Look, a police baton is fat. I don't know how to explain. So when they beat you, probably they can break some of your bones, but it's not as painful as a plastic tube because a plastic tube is thin, so the power on your body is much higher than if it were a police baton. Firstly. And secondly, because of the plastic, that makes you feel a burning pain. Something like that. Especially if you don't have any clothes on. So if it's just your skin, that's horrible. That's awful.



Rob Lee [1:07:04]

And you mentioned before that they don't want to break people's bones. They're not trying to—



Ievgen Malik [1:07:10]

Yes, of course.



Rob Lee [1:07:10]

because obviously they don't want to actually create permanent injuries, but—



Ievgen Malik [1:07:14]

They don't want to work with you to bring doctors to you because that's going to be trouble. That's why they try to kick your arms and kick your legs mostly, because bones are pretty strong. But painful is not—



Rob Lee [1:07:29]

Well, there's a lot of flesh in the leg.



Ievgen Malik [1:07:31]

Yes.



Rob Lee [1:07:31]

That's why you can beat it a lot without breaking—



Ievgen Malik [1:07:33]

The worst is they beat this part of the leg dozens of times. They just got one place, and they start beating you up dozens of times.



Rob Lee [1:07:46]

The same place over time.

Chapter 15: The Severity of Physical Torture



Ievgen Malik [1:07:47]

Yes. And that is horrible because, just try to imagine, today you got an interrogation. You got 30 punches on your leg. Tomorrow you go to the same interrogation and your leg looks as if it's broken. But it's not. And they start to do the same, and you got three, four days like that. That's horrible pain. I read about the Roman legion in ancient times. They got this penalty, the worst penalty is called decimation.



Rob Lee [1:08:22]

Decimation.



Ievgen Malik [1:08:22]

Decimation. That was the way the Roman legionnaires were killed by sticks. And I thought, "Why sticks? Why not knives? There is not a lot of blood. That's just a stick." But after the prison, I understand that the stick is the worst. So—



Rob Lee [1:08:47]

So when they bring you into interrogation, right? First off, you never know how long it's going to last, right? How long does this typically last?



Ievgen Malik [1:08:54]

Yes. Well, it depends. If they want something specific from you, they can work with you three hours. No problem.



Rob Lee [1:09:06]

So three hours in which the guys the entire time are basically either beating you with batons, with these plastic tubes, electrocuting you, right, in the head, other parts of your body.



Ievgen Malik [1:09:17]

Then you got—



Rob Lee [1:09:18]

You said they also put needles under your fingernails.



Ievgen Malik [1:09:20]

Yes. And that is the lightest version. That is from the very beginning. Compared to other stuff, that's nothing.



Rob Lee [1:09:30]

So what was the worst?



Ievgen Malik [1:09:32]

The stick.



Rob Lee [1:09:33]

The plastic—



Ievgen Malik [1:09:34]

The—



Rob Lee [1:09:34]

The plastic things.



Ievgen Malik [1:09:35]

Yes, the plastic. And the shocker. Well, for me, the shocker, but I think probably... I know plenty of guys, our prisoners, they were okay with the shocker. For them, that was

levgen Malik (continued)

normal. They got used to it. But for me, I don't know why, maybe that's because of psychology, but I hate the shocker.



Rob Lee [1:10:01]

But it's attached to your head, right? So they're electrocuting you from up here. Is that right?



levgen Malik [1:10:06]

No. Basically, that is because they were beating us up every day in Mordovia, and the shocker was every day. And they didn't beat your head, your ears, no. They were just beating you on—



Rob Lee [1:10:25]

But you said during interrogation they would put things onto your head—



levgen Malik [1:10:28]

Yes



Rob Lee [1:10:28]

and so there'd be electrocution that way too.



levgen Malik [1:10:30]

Yes. But that was, as I said, not to everyone. That was to the special contingent. So, guys from the National Guard, snipers, et cetera. Artillerists, mortars.



Rob Lee [1:10:45]

So you weren't getting it as bad as these other guys.



levgen Malik [1:10:49]

No.



Rob Lee [1:10:49]

So other guys were getting it worse than you.



Ievgen Malik [1:10:50]

I was lucky, as I said, I got my team. We were together until the end, and we got to this prison together. So when they were asking me some questions, I would respond, and the last question was, "Who was with you at that time?" "And who can confirm your word?" And I said, "Well, five guys here in the neighboring rooms. You can ask them."



Rob Lee [1:11:24]

So how critical was that for you to surviving this entire ordeal? You had the guys you'd been with the entire time, you knew well and so on.



Ievgen Malik [1:11:33]

Ryazk was a scout camp according to Mordva. So that was pretty—



Rob Lee [1:11:39]

The next place you were sent to.



Ievgen Malik [1:11:40]

Yes. Ryazk was pretty normal. ... that was not so bad. [laughs]



Rob Lee [1:11:48]

Well, as you were saying, basically, you thought when you were in Mariupol during the battle, you thought that was the worst thing possible. And then every—



Ievgen Malik [1:11:55]

Captivity is 10 times worse than Mariupol.



Rob Lee [1:11:59]

So when you're getting bombed every day by three—



Ievgen Malik [1:12:03]

That's nothing



Rob Lee [1:12:03]

... regiments or areaish regiments—



Ievgen Malik [1:12:05]

No



Rob Lee [1:12:05]

... artillery, everything—



Ievgen Malik [1:12:06]

You—



Rob Lee [1:12:06]

... that any day in captivity is worse than that.

Chapter 16: The Nature of Captive Fear



Ievgen Malik [1:12:09]

I would say that is two different things. You got two different types of fears. You can feel the difference. So when in Mariupol they tried to kill us, when a tank attacks you or the air force and you feel this afraid, kind of afraid that your organism tries to explain to you that you have to survive, that you have to escape somewhere. And you can make some movements, you can shift yourself somewhere. You can make some decision. So you are still, even then, you are free. But you are scared, yes, because you can die. Of course. That's normal for people to be scared for their lives. But in captivity, that's totally different. You know that you won't die. They will not let you die. But the way of life is such that you'd better die. Something like that. Right. Today I can say that, yes, thank God, I survived. Everything is perfect for me. But in captivity, every day I thought, why I didn't shoot myself? That was like that. So every day... Well, first, again, in Irketsk, that was, for me, that was normal. Well—



Rob Lee [1:13:36]

Well, it became comparatively normal—



Ievgen Malik [1:13:38]

Yes, yes



Rob Lee [1:13:38]

... compared, because it got much worse.



Ievgen Malik [1:13:40]

Exactly. Because at that time they didn't beat us up just for fun. Well, [sighs] in autumn and winter of the year 2022, they started to do this. How many? Well, maybe three, four times, they beat me up just for fun, and that was pretty cruel. Your legs become two, three times bigger, and you can see the blood under your skin. That is not the kind of fight somewhere in a bar with another guy. You cannot protect yourself. You cannot even block these kicks.



Rob Lee [1:14:35]

No.



Ievgen Malik [1:14:35]

You have just to stand and to wait when they will stop it. And, moreover, your eyes are closed, because this is the command—



Rob Lee [1:14:48]

So you don't see the strikes coming.



Ievgen Malik [1:14:49]

You don't see—



Rob Lee [1:14:50]

You just—



Ievgen Malik [1:14:50]

Yes



Rob Lee [1:14:50]

... have no clue.



Ievgen Malik [1:14:51]

So if one of them tries to punch your liver, there's going to be, even it may be—



Rob Lee [1:15:00]

You can't protect against it.



Ievgen Malik [1:15:00]

Yeah, you can't protect, and you can feel as if Mike Tyson did it. Because you didn't see, you didn't expect, and you don't need much in your body to make you suffer. That's like this.



Rob Lee [1:15:16]

So what was a normal day like in Irkutsk?



Ievgen Malik [1:15:20]

In Irkutsk. Yes.



Rob Lee [1:15:20]

From morning to evening.



Ievgen Malik [1:15:22]

At 6:00 AM, you have to wake up. You have to clean your room, to prepare your bed. Then you got breakfast: tea, a piece of bread, borscht. Then you got this morning check, from 8:00 to 10:00 AM in Irkutsk, approximately. They were checking all the rooms.



Rob Lee [1:15:54]

So the guards come into the rooms?



Ievgen Malik [1:15:56]

Yeah, exactly. And—



Rob Lee [1:15:58]

What did they do during this time?



Ievgen Malik [1:16:01]

They were just checking the room. They were checking that we didn't have any iron—



Rob Lee [1:16:09]

Okay, weapons or anything like that.



Ievgen Malik [1:16:10]

Yeah, or something like that.



Rob Lee [1:16:11]

Just basic prison guard kind of thing.



Ievgen Malik [1:16:13]

Yeah. And sometimes if someone was breaking the rules, they could beat up their room because of it. But that was occasional. It's not every time, every day. Then, after this checking up, the interrogators started to work from 11:00 AM to 5:00 or 6:00 PM. And during this time you got dinner from 12:00 to 1:00 PM.



Rob Lee [1:16:56]

Lunch.



Ievgen Malik [1:16:57]

Lunch. Yes, lunch. On this lunch you got some soup, borscht, and tea with bread. Not a lot, so just soup, 300 milliliters... Well, of course, water with potatoes. 200, 150 milligrams of borscht and 250 milligrams of tea. That's on average. But the thing is that when the prisoner starts to give you food, he's coming to the corridor. You got, for example, 10 rooms there, and you got six, eight people, prisoners, in each room. So he... I don't know what is the reason, probably they can't count, or they don't know what is this math, but they couldn't count how many milligrams you need on average for each plate. So the first room got approximately 100 milligrams of borscht and soup. And the last camera, the last room, got half a liter [laughs]. So that's like that. That is why we got some prisoners who are coming back from Russia, and they look as if they are already dead. You can't even understand—

Chapter 17: The Sound of Constant Screams



Rob Lee [1:18:24]

Very skinny.



Ievgen Malik [1:18:25]

Yeah, so skinny.



Rob Lee [1:18:26]

Emaciated, basically.



Ievgen Malik [1:18:26]

Like the fascists, Nazis did the same 70 years ago. That is the reason. So, and yes, interrogators, interrogations—



Rob Lee [1:18:44]

The interrogations should be one person at a time, right? So—



Ievgen Malik [1:18:47]

Yeah. There were four floors. On each floor we got one, we called it the quest room. So they were working, there were four interrogators working together.



Rob Lee [1:19:07]

And how many prisoners were there per floor?



Ievgen Malik [1:19:10]

I know that in the whole there were approximately 220, 230 prisoners in—



Rob Lee [1:19:16]

Okay. There's four floors, right? So probably 60, 70, something like that. And so—



Ievgen Malik [1:19:22]

On average, yeah, something like that.



Rob Lee [1:19:24]

And your room was right next to the interrogation room, right?



Ievgen Malik [1:19:28]

Yes. I've been in room number 19, and it was the next room after the interrogator room. And that was the period, the end of spring and start of summer. It was hot, and the windows were open. And we heard everything, from the very morning to the very end of the day. We heard every day during three, four months, we heard the screams, screams, screams. And now every time the door was opening in our room, I thought that I'm going to die immediately just because of this.



Rob Lee [1:20:11]

Because they might take you to the room.



Ievgen Malik [1:20:13]

Yes. Yes. We didn't know what they wanted, and that was so scary just because you don't know what is going on, what will happen to you.



Rob Lee [1:20:21]

And it could just be a record check, but you don't know if they're pulling you out, you're going to be tortured or not.



Ievgen Malik [1:20:25]

Yes, sure. I remember one situation, a funny situation. The interrogators were working and the windows were open, of course. And we saw outside some granny was going with her granddaughter. She took her from school probably. I don't know. The girl was eight years old. And they heard the screams. The grandma stopped, looked at the prison, and she said, "They could at least close the windows," turned around and went on like this. [laughs] So I think the whole city heard and the whole city knew what's going on, that they got prisoners there.



Rob Lee [1:21:14]

Because in these towns, the prison is the main job, I think, for many of these towns.



Ievgen Malik [1:21:20]

No, I think that Ryazhsk is not a village. That is a city. A small city, but a city. And I think they have something more.



Rob Lee [1:21:30]

But in Mordovia that was—



Ievgen Malik [1:21:31]
In Mordovia, exactly



Rob Lee [1:21:32]
... where it is based.



Ievgen Malik [1:21:32]
That was—



Rob Lee [1:21:33]
The town is the prison



Ievgen Malik [1:21:34]
... the only thing you can make, or land worker, farmer, or work in prison. That's it.



Rob Lee [1:21:43]
And going back to the questioning, so the Russians, they're asking what, a few different priorities, right, in these interrogations. One was about what kind of criminal orders have you done. What else were they asking about? What kind of organizations were you part of?



Ievgen Malik [1:21:59]
There were a lot of interrogators from different organizations, and there were military interrogators. There were scout interrogations, FSB. Plenty of times. And I remember there was some interrogator from GRU. That's military reconnaissance—

Chapter 18: The Hunt for Western Ties



Rob Lee [1:22:27]
Intelligence.



Ievgen Malik [1:22:27]
They were interested in all our contacts with NATO and the USA Army. So all military studies, if we had some relatives in Europe or USA, if we had some friends in NATO armies, in the USA Army, if we had any type of contacts. They were asking us about



Rob Lee [1:23:21]
The Democratic Party.



Ievgen Malik [1:23:22]
Because for them, they know that Russia is an authoritarian state. There's no democracy in Russia. They know this, and for them, that is okay.



Rob Lee [1:23:33]
So you think they had an issue with the Democratic Party of the US because they assume democratic meant democracy, and they associate those two things.



Ievgen Malik [1:23:40]
I think the way Americans would like to see democracy in the whole world— ... the same way Russians would like to see authoritarian regimes in the whole world. And that is not just Putin's opinion. That is the opinion of even the lowest soldier— ... in the Army. They are fighting for this.



Rob Lee [1:24:08]
And you were saying also that they checked you for tattoos, right? You told me that you had deleted your social media before the war, right? So there's no online presence for you.



Ievgen Malik [1:24:21]
Yes, because they were checking out all your social media. You had to write on paper your Instagram, your Facebook, or any other type of website. But just because, I don't know why, I deleted everything, and I had just an Instagram account with the name Shrek and [laughs] no photos of mine. So I was a totally non-social person during that period of time. But guys who had, for example, some national flags on their websites, or if you had an American flag— ... that's like you're an enemy of the government— ... immediately [laughs] from— ... since this time. And this is the way they choose these victims. They have to make a statistic that, for example, 30% of Mariupol soldiers are criminals— ... and terrorists. They need to make that kind of statistics. So how should they choose these victims?



Rob Lee [1:25:37]
They— ... have a quota, and they've got to basically.



Ievgen Malik [1:25:39]

They will see if you've got some tattoos, if you've got some websites, and if it is obvious that you are a pro-Western— ... pro-democracy person. They will make you a victim. They will make you sign documents that you did something. Just because they see that you are their enemy, and they will make you... They will get some profit from you.



Rob Lee [1:26:08]

And you also mentioned before that the interrogators believed that you guys were committing war crimes, that you were killing civilians, you were—



Ievgen Malik [1:26:17]

Firstly, yes. That is something unbelievable when we first came. They truly believed that we were... Some of them told us that we were even eating children. Even that we were drinking blood. [laughs] They were so crazy that they were truly ridiculous in— ... that way of thinking. We didn't understand how they could believe in this. That is— ... enormous even to think about it. But they truly think that it is the truth.



Rob Lee [1:26:51]

Do you think that contributed to why they treated you so cruelly, that they actually believed the propaganda that you were doing—

Chapter 19: The Weapon of State Propaganda



Ievgen Malik [1:26:55]

This is the thing of propaganda. Yes, propaganda is the nuclear weapon of the 21st century. All this war is about propaganda. Through this propaganda, they made Russians believe that Ukraine is... I don't know, what could they say? That we want NATO or what else. They have non-governmental interiors and social media people— ... who tell another kind of story. They tell something even more. For example, Putin can say in official media that Ukraine is the enemy of Russia because Ukraine tries to go to NATO, and we are fighting with NATO. And someone else who is, for example, some YouTube podcaster who has two million followers in Russia, he says something more. He says that Ukraine tried to create a nuclear weapon to destroy Russia— ... which is false, of course, because we've had 10 years of this war. If we wanted to make a nuclear weapon since 2014, we would have got this weapon already. That is obvious. But we don't have it. Why? Because we don't do this. But they truly believe that that is so. And now it's just for example. I can give you tons of such examples if you want, if you like.



Rob Lee [1:28:29]

And you also, during the interrogations, they also used plastic bags, right?



Ievgen Malik [1:28:32]

Yes, that was something... For people who have this, who are afraid of small rooms, small elevators, this is—



Rob Lee [1:28:51]

Claustrophobia?



Ievgen Malik [1:28:52]

Exactly, yes.



Rob Lee [1:28:53]

Being concerned of confined places.



Ievgen Malik [1:28:55]

Yes, if you have this claustrophobia. I know one of my friends, he got this kind of torture, and he became claustrophobic. And he's crazy about it.



Rob Lee [1:29:08]

So what did they do to him?



Ievgen Malik [1:29:10]

They just tied his hands and legs, and put this bag on his head, and he couldn't breathe. And just because of it, that works more on your brain than— ... on your body. But that is even worse. So he is just... He's almost crying when he hears a plastic bag. Because that is really hard for such people to survive this, just because of this claustrophobia.



Rob Lee [1:29:45]

In the interrogation, you were saying they would beat you with plastic tubes, batons. They'd use needles under your fingernails, tasers both up on your head and also just on your body, and then they'd also use plastic bags so you couldn't breathe. And then you also mentioned they would bring a water bottle too. And what was that for?



Ievgen Malik [1:30:07]

There are two ways of using it. First of all, if you lose consciousness from the pain—



Rob Lee [1:30:14]
Consciousness.



Ievgen Malik [1:30:15]
... consciousness. If you lose consciousness because of pain, they will take you back into this world with this water because it's cold.



Rob Lee [1:30:26]
As a—



Ievgen Malik [1:30:26]
... because you got a nice—



Rob Lee [1:30:26]
... wake you back up again.



Ievgen Malik [1:30:28]
And the second way, that's another kind of torture. They put you on the floor. They put some sweater on your face.



Rob Lee [1:30:42]
Oh, and they put water—



Ievgen Malik [1:30:43]
They—



Rob Lee [1:30:43]
So they waterboard you then.



Ievgen Malik [1:30:45]
Exactly. I know one officer from our airborne company who survived this kind of torture, and that was... Everything of it is easy to speak about after all, but it is so hard to feel this when it's going on with you. Truly, needles under the nails. Your nails, that is not so

levgen Malik (continued)

horrible as this water and these shockers, electricity, and these batons— So just try to imagine how painful that is, how harmful for your psyche it is. So—



Rob Lee [1:31:40]

Did they waterboard you, or is that just other people?



levgen Malik [1:31:43]

Again, to the officers. Like the—



Rob Lee [1:31:47]

Because the officers got it worse than the enlisted.



levgen Malik [1:31:49]

Yes. That was FSB— ... who did this. With our officers in the majority of cases. So that was, yes, that was Ryazhsk. But as I said, Ryazhsk was a scout camp in comparison to Morba.



Rob Lee [1:32:07]

And so you were in Ryazhsk from the end of April until February 7, 2023.



levgen Malik [1:32:13]

Yes.



Samuel P.N. Cook [1:32:14]

So 10 months, basically.



levgen Malik [1:32:16]

Exactly.



Samuel P.N. Cook [1:32:17]

Hi, it's Sam Cook back here again. I hope you enjoyed this first in the two-part series of Rob Lee's interview with levgen Malik. As always, please remember [laughs] that this is posted both on YouTube, where there's a full video interview. If you listen to this on your

Samuel P.N. Cook (continued)

podcasting app, you can also go back and re-watch this on YouTube. And if you're watching this on YouTube and you'd like to be reminded of all future episodes that come out, go ahead and download or add us to your podcast app. Find the Ukraine Military History Podcast. And every time an episode is released, you'll be notified, and you can go back and listen to that episode or watch it on YouTube, wherever you prefer to watch it. If you'd like to download a transcript of this episode, you can go to our website, ukrainemilitaryhistory.org. You can find all of our episodes, find all of our show notes, and link to everything that we mention in this episode and all past episodes. And you can share this interview with your friends by sending them to our page. You can also sign up or contact us on the ukrainemilitaryhistory.org website. Sign up to our mailing list to be notified in your email inbox of all future episodes. Thanks again for listening. We look forward to seeing you on part three of this three-part series with Yevgeny Malik. So thank you for listening to this episode of the Ukraine Military History Podcast. I promised you at the beginning that I'd tell you more about our sponsors, if you'd like to find a way to support the Ukraine Military History Podcast, the Borderlands Foundation more broadly, or if you'd like to work with myself and the contributors, the editors, and the guests that come on this show. So this podcast is produced by the Borderlands Foundation. The Borderlands Foundation has two main initiatives. Our mission at the Borderlands Foundation, which was founded right after the war started in 2022, is to make sure that Ukraine's heroes are never forgotten. And there are two things that I'm passionate about helping Ukraine do. Number one is to build a strong future for Ukraine, for my family that I'm raising here in Ukraine, through national military history study and education. I believe that nations, great nations, are founded and sustained and grow in strength based on the stories that those nations believe together about their history. And Ukraine has had a very complicated history. It's a very old country. A lot of people don't understand that Ukraine is 500 years older than Russia, as Ukraine was around before Russia. Ukraine was founded by Vikings that moved to this part of the world in the eighth and ninth century and were traders and became rulers of the local Slavic people. So Ukraine, Kievan Rus, was an ancient and the most powerful empire in Europe. And Ukraine's history is very controversial. Through the years, Russia has appropriated it, stolen it, called it their own, and then tried to change history to make it their own, this great rich heritage that Ukraine has. So our mission at the Ukraine Military History Institute is to go back through history and reclaim Ukraine's great military history tradition because Ukraine's military history tradition encompasses almost all the great military traditions in the world. It started out interfacing and competing with the Vikings as well as Constantinople, and absorbed those traditions over the years. It became part of the military history tradition of the great Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, and then the Ottoman-Mongol, Crimean Tatar heritage of Genghis Khan's great military tradition. All fused, competed, and created this unique military history tradition inside Ukraine, which I call the Cossack military history tradition, which takes from Western military history, the German, American Mission Command, NATO Mission Command School, as well as the good things, hopefully, and leaves the bad from the school, deep battle, and a lot of the positive things that have come out of the military history tradition. And our mission is to help with the world's best military history center, studying the current war, going all the way back throughout Ukraine's history, starting with battles from World War II that were fought in Ukraine, World War I, the first independence period from 1917 through the Civil War in 1921, and back to the Cossack period. All the way back, Ukraine has a great and unique style of fighting and tradition of fighting. The first written constitution was written by a Cossack class. The warrior class wrote down the first declaration of rights in modern history, which founded the Enlightenment, led to the American declaration of the Bill of Rights, and the Polish Constitution. And a number of other declarations of rights and constitutions since then were all inspired first by Ukraine's declaration of rights with Pep Orlok after the defeat at Poltava at the hands of Peter the Great. So understanding Ukraine's military history tradition is a passion of ours. And every author who comes on this episode and publishes a written work, we're actually paying those authors. So if you wanna donate to support the authors, you can

Samuel P.N. Cook (continued)

donate to get access to anything that's been published in the Ukraine Military History membership site, which we're gonna be releasing soon, where people who write about the current war or things from the past in military history, or some military historical case study that can help Ukraine think about how to fight, win, and innovate in the current war—all those authors are getting paid by the center. I wanna encourage great scholarship by paying Ukrainians to write their own history, and paying other people who wanna contribute, to build this body of work and knowledge at the Ukraine Military History Institute. So when you donate to support this podcast, we have production costs. It helps us pay the authors we have come on and interview about what they've written or what they've done, and then also just pays for all the production costs, the social media, the distribution, and everything that you enjoy about this podcast. So that's the first way you can support the center. The second big way you can support the center is we are building a Heroes of Ukraine tour, which is gonna be a custom program that we're developing, which takes people who wanna come in and see the battlefields of Ukraine from the current war that have been liberated. We can take you to different battlefield sites, such as the Battle of Kyiv, which we've studied very well and have a lot of material from people who've studied that and can show that to you. Or if you wanna go out to other sites, battles in territory that's been liberated in Kherson or Zaporizhzhia, or other places out in Sumy or Kharkiv Province, we can take you around to those sites. This is something we're developing. We wanna launch this if and when the full-scale fighting with Russia pauses. We believe this could be a much bigger tour where people can come on a tour just buying individual seats and, over a couple of weeks, meet people from all over the world who wanna see Ukraine. But before we do that public version of the tour where anyone can book any number of seats at scheduled times, if any of you would like to have a tour of the battlefields of Ukraine that have already been liberated and are safe—we don't do war tourism to active parts of the fighting, but we do historical staff ride battlefield tours for military professionals, government officials, and business leaders that would like to understand what has happened here. You can contact us about the Heroes of Ukraine tour. So that's the Ukraine Military History Institute, which pays for and produces this podcast. The next sponsor I'd like to discuss is the Ukraine Center for Traumatic Stress. This is a center that is near and dear to my heart because of my past service in combat. As a soldier, my study of history, the history of psychological trauma that comes from serving in combat, and my personal experience overcoming my own struggles with it—this is a center dedicated to helping advance the research conversation and funding of breakthrough technologies and treatments for post-traumatic stress disorder, which affects a number of soldiers who've served in Ukraine. And we wanna make sure that they recover psychologically to become productive, vibrant leaders in the future of Ukraine. This is headed by retired Major General Vladyslav Kluchkov, the first commander of the Moral Psychological Support Forces of Ukraine under the commander-in-chief, President Valerii Zaluzhnyi. It was a new position that he created right before the full-scale invasion. And General Kluchkov has written his PhD on the military psychology of a soldier and is passionate about advancing the study and the treatment of this disorder for veterans. This is a podcast that we're gonna be releasing very soon, translated for those who wanna listen in on the conversation and comment on it on our social media. But the interviews will be conducted to advance and start the conversation for veterans, mental health professionals, and government officials who are working on this problem, which we believe is critical to solve for the future of Ukraine. So if you'd like to donate to support that podcast, to help us produce and start that conversation, or if you'd like to inquire about donating to support specific veterans going through different treatments and workshops for the treatment of PTSD, you're welcome to reach out to us. The center also has a rehabilitation through golf program where we pay for veterans to play golf and play in our annual Heroes of Ukraine Freedom Summit golf tournament, which will be held next year in Dallas in the United States in March. And this is a very important program, and you can also look at sponsoring veterans in their journey to mental health recovery. So that's the Ukraine Center for Traumatic Stress. And then finally, for those of

Samuel P.N. Cook (continued)

you who watch this podcast, where you see our co-hosts and some of the guests that come on, all of our podcasts are filmed in Ukraine. The reason we do this is I believe in talking to Ukrainians and people who will actually come to Ukraine that wanna speak about military history, analysis of the current war, defense industry issues, and all the things that we in Ukraine and our allies in NATO who've supported Ukraine need to learn to fight and win the next war against our adversaries: Russia, China, and Iran. All of the people who support Vladimir Putin are learning the lessons that Russia is learning from this war. We need to make sure that we learn the lessons from the war that Ukrainians are learning better, and implement those across the force for our partner forces: Americans, British, all the other European NATO forces, and partners out east: Japan, South Korea, and Australia. For all the countries that are supporting Ukraine, we wanna make sure that we create a community that disseminates those lessons. And we get contacted by different groups, sometimes governments and foreign militaries, that would like advisory services to help them learn and implement the lessons of this war for their armed forces. Defense companies reach out and would like to get help developing, testing, and selling their products inside Ukraine that may be helpful on the battlefield. That's what the Borderlands Group does. We advise defense tech companies. We even do forward support engineering for defense tech companies, including software development, hardware, hiring and staffing, and a forward-deployed engineering shop for Western defense companies. So for all those services, if you're looking for advisory services, custom analytical studies by Rob Lee and his team, or defense advisory services for defense companies or foreign militaries, we can put together a package for you, give you a proposal, and help you with that. So to get in touch with us, just go to the website theborderlandsgroup.com. Fill out our Contact Us form. We'll evaluate your request and get back to you through the appropriate secure communication channel if that's what you'd like to do. So thank you for watching the sponsor reads here. It's important to me that we provide value to you in every podcast episode, and these are the ways that you can support us so we can continue to afford to produce, expand, and increase the frequency of our content production for the benefit of Ukraine and its allies fighting this war, winning this war, and the next.