Russian Captivity: A Freed POW and a Coerced Interview

Various Authors

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An interview with former POW Aiden Aslin giving a first-hand account of Russian captivity, torture and release. The other is a much stranger glimpse of Australian POW Oscar Jenkins being interviewed in a Russian prison by a pro-Russian propagandist. It raises questions about the psychological toll of torture & imprisonment, what the propagandists are trying to achieve, and how fragments of truth can be woven into a story designed to deceive.

I was a British POW tortured by Russia

Subtitle: This is how Ukraine can win — World of Trouble
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Preview

Sam Kiley: You come here, you volunteer. Do you go straight into the Ukrainian Marines?

Aiden Aslin: The recruitment officer was just bewildered and he was like, why? Like, you're British. I was like, I want to try and help...

Do you want a beautiful death or do you want a quick death? I was fully expecting to be murdered at that point...

There's a lot of things that are showing that Russia is becoming a lot more destabilized.

Interview Begins

Sam Kiley: Welcome to the World of Trouble with me, Sam Kiley.

Now I'm talking to you from Eastern Ukraine and during the course of these broadcasts, we're going to be occasionally bringing you podcasts from the field itself and there's nobody who spent more time in the fields, particularly on the battlefields, of both northern Syria and of Ukraine than Aidan Aslin.

What on earth made a young lad from Newark decide to go out, first of all, to volunteer to fight ISIS in northern Iraq and then ended up here in Ukraine?

Aiden Aslin: I'd probably say, especially like this is like going back like 10 years now, like back then I was when I first went to Syria, I was 21.

I wasn't ex-military and I'd probably say a lot of it was frustration with the geopolitical scene of the world at the time, especially with the situation that occurred in Iraq after the US and NATO allies pulled out and the space that was just left over.

for ISIS to gain as much power as it originally did and then we obviously saw the repercussions of that later on when the events in Sinjar with the Yazidis.

Sam Kiley: And then this is the mass murder mass rape.

Aiden Aslin: Yeah so like the mass atrocities that were committed by ISIS and I remember at the time I was just a civilian working as a support worker.

I had been following this Syrian civil war since 2011.

I'd never had any interest in going to Syria, but it wasn't until the images, especially from Sanjar, started to come out and it was the video from ITN's news crew when they went on the helicopter to the top of the mountain to try and report and there was just hundreds of Yaziz that were like trying

to escape from ISIS and I'd probably say it was a defining moment like in my journey where I decided that I could either continue to stay at home or stand by my belief and moral philosophy and actually do something when other people won't do something and the main reason was I felt there was a sense of injustice that the West wasn't doing enough to try and prevent the atrocities that were being committed.

I would definitely say like when I look back at my experience of going to Syria when I was 21, I look back and see like a naive like young kid.

Yeah.

I mean, again, it's like 10 years ago, but still feels like it was yesterday for me.

Sam Kiley: And you ended up fighting with the Peshmerga, the Kurdish forces in Rojava, north-eastern Syria, against the world's most brutal terrorist organization, ISIS.

you must feel lucky to still be alive just from that experience.

Aiden Aslin: I definitely feel lucky in that sense and I mean, we did have a few, like, situations where we narrowly avoided, like, not being able to continue our lives.

Sam Kiley: When did you first come here to Ukraine?

Aiden Aslin: Yeah, so when I came in 2018, At this point, I'd like, I left Syria in 2017 because I was just exhausted with just the way you have to be over there.

I was exhausted with just the mental strain of that sort of like conflict like has on you and so I returned to Britain again, similar to how during my time with wanting to go to Syria, My moral perspective was that if there's a war in Europe and no one knows about it, but it's still going on, then again, my same principle is that he's going to go do something if no one else is willing to do it.

I mean, I know.

Sam Kiley: But by then you were a combat veteran.

You were a completely different creature.

You come here, you volunteer.

Do you go straight into the Ukrainian Marines?

Aiden Aslin: The recruitment officer was just bewildered and he was like, like, why are you like you're British? Yeah, I was like, I want to like help, try and help and so he was like, okay and we started the process.

It was probably about a three-week, four week process because you have to go through a security check and you have to go through a medical and psychological.

I started my two months basic training with my class of I think about like 30 other people that had just joined.

All of them were Ukrainians and I think they were taken aback that there was a British guy that wanted to join them.

So I'd probably say I was the curiosity amongst them in our training class.

By the end of it, we then took our oath to Ukraine where we get sworn in officially and then finished training and I got sent to my battalion.

So I did that for about four years.

Like I did my parachute jumps with my company and I owned the Ukrainian Marine Beret.

which is like, if I remember, it's like a six or five kilometer, just obstacle course of like death, basically.

Sam Kiley: Was that a proud moment when you got your, I'd?

Aiden Aslin: Say it was, I mean, myself and like some of the other foreigners, I did it alongside, like, I would say it was a proud moment because we, we were like the first foreigners that received the Marine Beret and again, we were like the first foreigners that received all like Ukrainian wings.

So I'd definitely say it was a proud moment.

Sam Kiley: So where did you find yourself in February 2022?

Aiden Aslin: So in February 2022, I was based in Pavlopol, which I'd been based in for the past like three years.

So I knew the town and village and the surrounding area.

areas like very well.

It's literally just probably 20 minutes down the road from Mariupol.

We initially deployed to the front line the, I think it was the three months prior.

Sam Kiley: And when it did happen, what did that feel like?

Aiden Aslin: I'd probably say it was kind of a relief in some sick, twisted way because In the buildup to it, you've got all this anxiety because you know it's coming, but you just don't know when it's going to happen and I would say it was a kind of relief when it did happen, but at the same time, it's also, you know what's happening and like, I don't think we've seen anything of this scale.

Sam Kiley: Not since the second world.

Aiden Aslin: Yeah, since the second world.

Sam Kiley: I mean, what did it look like? Did it all feel like to you to see these? the Russians are all about mass, about sheer weight of numbers, weight of artillery.

Was that what they used, tried to use against you and you guys stopped them?

Aiden Aslin: Just the constant sound of the front line.

It's just the sound of constant like artillery like battering away with the drones and especially in regards to like the grad, the...

Multiple rocket 21, Brad rocket launcher.

Hearing the sound of that was very terrifying, but at the same time I'm very amazed by the sound because it's just such a sound that's so terrifying but beautiful in a way, which sounds weird, but you'd understand if you hear it.

Sam Kiley: I've heard it a lot.

I've never found it beautiful.

I've only ever found it.

Aiden Aslin: I mean, it's terrifying.

I absolutely hate it, but there's like a sort of...

Sam Kiley: What do you like about it? The incoming screech.

Aiden Aslin: I think it's more crunch of the exposure.

Sam Kiley: I think it's just blown by dozens more.

Aiden Aslin: That's like the best way I can describe it.

sounds like drums and I think that's what I find interesting about it and for the next like two or three days, we ended up doing like a sort of like tactical like pepper pot retreat.

until eventually we arrived at the steelworks in Ilicha in Mariupol.

It was probably within a few days that the Russians started to slowly advance and probably by March 10th that's when we got told that we were now encircled because at this point not only did we have to deal with the Russians coming from us from the original frontline we were based on.

They'd also pushed through from Crimea, which was and I knew already that that's what would happen because it's just the most logical sense.

So I knew we were going to be in that situation and so March 10th comes by.

the Russians come, they reach Mariupol from both sides and there's like a corridor and it's just like slowly being closed and I remember when I spoke with my commander and he told me that like Russia has now completely encircled us and I remember the dread that I was like thinking to myself like Like when I was in Syria and like I remember we would encircle ISIS like in the cities and I was kind of like humorously comparing it to that.

I was like, now I know what ISIS feels like.

Sam Kiley: Did you at some point think, this is definitely not for me.

I want to go home.

Aiden Aslin: Luckily when the invasion started, that didn't happen because as we've seen, like Ukraine has proven to a lot of people that like judged them and said otherwise that they would roll over.

Sam Kiley: Were you surprised that Ukraine held on in those?

Aiden Aslin: Yeah, I would say I'd say I was definitely surprised.

I was quite surprised at like how well we did and I was also surprised at just how incompetent and disorganized the Russian military actually were compared to what I had viewed them before the invasion.

It definitely took me by surprise with how well Ukraine did.

I mean, I would say the first month was chaotic.

It took a bit of time for units to get organized and to get themselves sorted.

Obviously, we were in Mariupol.

We were cut off.

But I also know that because of our situation, it basically bought time for the rest of the country to get organized and set the defenses up well.

Um, because at the main time, at that time, like Russia was taking a beating in Mariupol.

Um, so it allowed the, the country to basically fight back and help basically.

Sam Kiley: So how many were you, do you know now surrounded in Mariupol?

Aiden Aslin: So in Mariupol, I want to say, I would say the official figures like roughly around maybe 10,000, maybe and that's between like the National Guard, police, like Marines and all the other units and volunteers.

I know in when, when we surrendered, um, it was probably around like 2000 or was that surrendered in the HHR still works and I remember when, when it came to that point, like this, like, that is like one of the scariest moments in my life.

Like when, when, when you're told like, The day before I had to make the choice, we had been battered into oblivion by artillery.

All our ammunition and supplies had been destroyed the day previously and basically we didn't have any means to continue fighting.

We couldn't fight because we had nothing to fight with.

We had mass casualties, people that needed urgent medical attention and it was just building day by day and I knew from my research and my experience with just reading about Russian history and their treatment of POWs, like I knew if I surrender, it's not going to be any, like there's going to be no Geneva Convention.

It just doesn't exist when it comes to captivity with the Russians.

But I also knew that they weren't ISIS to a degree, because I know when we were in Syria, like surrender wasn't an option.

We carried a bullet or we carried a spare grenade because ISIS are the one people you do not want to get captured by.

But I knew with the Russians, a lot of it would be political, especially considering the fact that I am a foreigner.

Um, but I also didn't know if I would survive it and I, I, I stacked my odds at the time at like maybe, maybe like 75 to like 80% chance they just decide to shoot me.

Or there's that small percentage chance that they don't, I get tortured and beaten and everything that I'm expecting to happen.

But.

At some point I go home and get to see my family again and I remember when we went to the surrender point company by company with those that remained, it was like the most dreadful feeling, like the people that you've been fighting like for the past like four years and now you finally come face to face with them.

So very peculiar feeling and terrifying feeling and I would say everything that I'd learned about Russian captivity in regards to their treatment of POWs in Georgia, especially like stuff like Syria and then also Transnistria, I would say it's 10 times worse than what I read.

But I think the The best part is just that I got out of it.

Sam Kiley: Before we come to what happened to you in Russian captivity, where, of course, one of the first things that happened to you is you got sentenced to death for being a foreign mercenary.

But how many weeks had you been fighting in the steelworks by then? And can you describe what that was like?

Aiden Aslin: So we arrived to the steelworks probably 1st of February and we surrounded on the 11th of April and at this point I was in the HQ helping with our company with getting the ammunition to the guys and I'd say the fighting for the guys that were in the positions was very heavy guys were going out to position in very cold temperatures.

Sam Kiley: So they were coming out from underground and manning.

Aiden Aslin: Yeah, so they were like the first line around the territory.

Sam Kiley: Because most of you were in the tunnels, I mean in the bunkers and stuff underground, right?

Aiden Aslin: Yeah, I mean a lot of it, like you lived like mice there, like you stay underground as much as you can.

try to avoid going above ground because of the aviation and artillery.

But I remember in the first initial weeks of the encirclement, we had a lot of artillery that we were shooting back at with Russians and then obviously as the encirclement continued and the territory started getting smaller, it got to the point where we didn't have anything to shoot back with and by the first week of April, One of the neighboring units that was to our right flank, they had ended up surrendering without telling us anything and it just exposed our entire right flank and once that had happened, it was pretty much gradually the end of the defense for that place because they took a really important part of our defense and they ended, I mean, I don't criticize them for it, but because of that, like it allowed the Russians to gain their advantage on our area.

But I remember a few times we would be in the bunker and Russia, the aviation, they would drop a like a fab like 500, which is like a 500 pound bomb like above us and the shock wave from it would just like come straight through the bunker.

like knock everything out like the off the walls or panels on the, on the ceiling.

So it always like wake you up.

What I do know is that during my reupal, like from, from my friends and whatnot, who, who would return to collect supplies and stuff, the, the, the Russian infantry that were attacking them, they just resorted back to the the Soviet mentality of just send people to a position, they fail, send people to a position, they fail, just keep sending people to a position.

Um, and it's, it's a very inhumane method to fight a war like that.

But the, the thing is that people need to understand.

Russia has the manpower to keep throwing bodies at a position, so they don't need to use tactics like how we try to conserve casualties or losses in the West.

With them, they can just throw bodies at a position until the position is exhausted and it's captured and then obviously once we got disconnected, it was just a matter of time until we all ended up being overwhelmed.

But when I look back to Mariupol, I definitely see it as like, not, I don't see it as like a sort of like honor sort of way of thinking.

I see it more of like we bought Ukraine time.

Sam Kiley: Well, I think it's a very important strategic understanding that it wasn't just a sort of die-hard pointlessly brave thing.

There was a strategic I was in Ukraine throughout this period and of course, it did mean that the Russian resources were focused there and not elsewhere.

So inevitably it had significant, I think, strategic effect.

But on a personal and tactical level, you then find yourself a prisoner of war of Putin's army.

You must have thought they were gonna shoot you on sight.

Aiden Aslin: I mean, initially, when I went to the surrender point, I was expecting them to shoot me.

I had like this small glimmer of like chance that I would survive it and I remember we got taken to a filtration point just east outside of Mariupol, one of the towns that we had previously been to when we would be on our rotations and would get our supplies and post.

I remember when we were there, we were being filtrated.

So they were taking us and they put us into stress positions, started taking down all the information and obviously when they realized I was a foreigner, I was obviously the one that was interesting and I remember I got beat a few times, but it wasn't anything at that initial moment, it wasn't anything too drastic, like just rough handling.

Um, and I was, I took it under the chin.

I was like, okay, it's the front line, like whatever and it wasn't until that I was taken out for filtration.

I was then taken to, uh, to Donetsk and as I was being taken out of the, uh, the filtration place we were in, they put me in handcuffs and put me in an SUV and they didn't, they didn't put a cover on my head for some reason.

They were like very quiet and normal with me.

It was like really off-putting and I remember as we were driving out the compound, one of the guys in the car turned to me and said like, oh, now we're going to take you to be shot.

He said it in Russian.

I just like stayed quiet and just processed it and I was like, okay, like I was like thinking about my family and at the time my ex fiance and just processing everything.

I was like, okay, like This is how, this is how it happens and then it wasn't until like an hour into the drive, I was like, you don't take, you don't drive for like an hour to take someone to be shot.

If they were gonna shoot me, they would've just shot me outside the town we were in.

So then I realized like we're now going somewhere else to the next stage of captivity.

I kind of like expected that I was going to be tortured at some point.

So for me, because of my research, it kind of helps in a way prepare for it, if you can call it that and I remember like the two hours that we were driving, I just kept telling to myself, the next step we're going to is going to be very violent and it's going to hurt and I don't know how I managed to like do it.

I was just like dead silent with myself.

It was like, repeating over to myself, it's going to hurt, like just try to focus and I remember when eventually we got to Donetsk, I got taken out of the car.

The guys took the handcuffs off me and I immediately put my hands behind my back as like to be obedient because I didn't want to anger them and this guy in a blue Russian uniform He said something to me in Russian and he had the thickest accent and stank of alcohol and me being me, I politely asked him if he could repeat what he said because I didn't understand and as soon as he said that, as soon as I said that, he then beat me with a police baton.

Initially I got hit across the forehead, I think first, and then I fell to the floor.

beaten a few more times and then I felt myself getting hit on my left shoulder.

But at the time, I thought he had hit me on my left shoulder, but it turned out he'd actually stabbed me.

Sam Kiley: He stabbed you.

Aiden Aslin: Yeah.

Sam Kiley: Was it like a frenzied attack? That sounds frenzied.

Aiden Aslin: I think it was more just like a welcoming, like.

Sam Kiley: Really.

Aiden Aslin: Yeah.

So he beat me and then he dragged me into this building and put me into this like side room.

Soon as I got into there, they, they started asking me like who I am and I, I said like, I'm Aiden Nazism, British citizen, like I'm serving in the Ukrainian military since 2013, uh, 2018 and then they, they would beat me and then they would, again, they would ask me like, uh, like Like, what do I do?

Why am I here? Um, and they never, they never asked me about like, about anything like related to Mariupol.

It was just about why I'm here and it would drag on.

But every, every answer I would give, they would beat me regardless and then I remember they asked me to, to strip and show my tattoos and I've got the Ukrainian trident tattoo on here and they beat me for that obviously and then I had like a, I've got the happy days tattoo, which everyone would have seen when we were being paraded on propaganda and they said that I was a sniper because of the reticle that's on it and now I've got a YPG tattoo.

Sam Kiley: That must have taken some explaining.

Aiden Aslin: So, so they, they pointed like, they were beating me like after each And then they pointed to that and they're like, what's this? And I was like, I was like, okay, I know what's coming next and I was like, Syria and he's like, oh, Syria and beat me more and then they brought another guy in who they said was in Syria.

He pulled out his knife and held it up against my ear and then he was asking me to tell who my commanders were in Syria and I was like trying to explain to him, I says, I don't know, it's like five years ago.

Um, and I was like, I kept repeating like Kurd, Kurd, Kurd, like Kurdistan, Kurdistan and then eventually one of them realized, cause initially they thought I was like fighting with ISIS and the FSA, which is even worse.

So I thought, um, and then eventually one of the guys understood Kurdistan and he realized I was with the Kurds and I remember there was like this sort of like dumbfounded, uh, like moment where this is, oh, no, it's with the Kurds.

But then with the Americans, another excuse.

So they beat me harder for that and then eventually it stops and by this point, I've been knocked unconscious.

I've been I've been stabbed.

I can feel myself like losing consciousness again and the beating just wasn't stopping and eventually.

Sam Kiley: Did you do something psychologically to kind of, was there a way you could step away from that pain?

Aiden Aslin: Well, when it was initially happening, it sounds really weird.

I don't know why it played in my head because I hadn't seen the film in like over a year.

But the film Goodfellas, for some reason while I was getting beaten, There's the quote by the main character where he's getting beat by his dad and he says like every once in a while you have to take a beating.

I suppose it was like my subconscious, like just trying to help.

Sam Kiley: Did it help?

Aiden Aslin: I mean, when I think back to the beating, like it was probably the best beating I've taken in my life.

There's also a part of it that's like the adrenaline is helping to a degree, so it doesn't hurt.

I mean, it hurts, but it's not as, it's not as painful like when you think of being tortured.

You would only understand it if you went for it.

I mean, it might be different opinion from other people, but for me, it was terrifying and it was probably just my inner subconscious just trying to make a grasp of the situation and to basically help me in some psychological capacity and I remember I could feel myself losing consciousness again and eventually one of the other Russians came in and told him, I remember very fondly he came in and said, stop, stop, you're going to kill him and it stopped and mind you, the guy who's been beating me, like he, he probably loves his job because now he's getting to be a foreigner and at one point, like he stopped, he was having a cigarette and he asked me like, do I know who he is? And I was like, no and he says, I'm your death and he asked, like, do you want a beautiful death or do you want a quick death? And obviously I wanted a quick death and he said, no, you're going to have a beautiful death and I was

fully expecting to be murdered at that point and obviously when this Russian came in and said, stop, stop, you're going to kill him.

I knew it must have been bad if he, if his superior had to stop him and when he stopped him, he says, okay, why do you want to talk now? And I was like, yeah, yeah and took me into the room next door and sat down and he was like, he looked at my stab wound and looks just like, don't worry, like we'll have a medic like check you over, which never happened.

Um, and basically none.

We went from the beating to now the autobiography where basically I had to tell about my entire life history, how I ended up in Ukraine.

I don't know.

Remember he asked me, um, like, are you SAS? And I, I just basically said to him, I was like, dude, like, do I look like MSAS? And he was like, okay, good point and this is like, are you working for MI6? And I was like, again, like, I'm a private in the mortar company as an assistant corner.

Like, why, why would I be in this position if, if I'm intelligence? And then the next morning I was taken out to see the, uh, prosecutors that were investigating me.

They, the basically the way they were pushing it was that I was like, here for mercenary activities that I was the organizer of bringing foreigners and whatnot.

Everything that the Russian propaganda said about me, like they make me sound like, like this, I don't know, this super soldier and flattering.

Yeah, it's flattering to me because like, if all my friends like if they if they read that and they they they saw that like what the hell like this is this is Aiden so yeah and then obviously as it as it goes on we I get taken out to be brought in front of like various like journalists the more infamous one especially for people in Britain is the Graham Phillips one.

Sam Kiley: Graham Phillips is a fake journalist working for Russia.

Aiden Aslin: And again, like I remember when the Graham Phillips happened because I'd done, I knew a lot about the conflict in Ukraine.

I researched it a lot and I'd followed it from the very beginning and I knew fully who Graham Phillips was and I remember when I was sat in that room and I heard people in the hallway And I heard his voice.

I was like, oh God, not this guy, because he speaks in such a, he speaks Russian, but the way he speaks it is like very, he has a very heavy British accent and obviously he came in and again, he went straight into the propaganda narrative of like how I'm a mercenary and he then added the comment of like, since we're all nice people, we're going to follow the Geneva Convention rules, which I thought was ironic at the time, because like literally, we were in a place where people were being tortured and he knew.

Sam Kiley: Did you know of anybody dying under torture? I mean, could you hear other people going through the same?

Aiden Aslin: Like in my cell, like it wasn't just military.

You had civilians you had at one point we had a disabled man who who probably probably didn't have the capacity to be able to live independently or do anything himself.

He couldn't walk and they just threw him in with us and he basically just laid in the corner, like under the bench, like urinating and desiccating on himself and there's not much that we can do to try and help him over then when, uh, when they would tell us that they'll come out the cell so they can clean it, we would have to carry him.

But again, like we're in this situation where we can't help someone that obviously needs help.

Um, so that they, they, they don't, the, the best way I can describe the justice system is like barbarism.

We didn't realise at the time, and we had one guard who was incredibly sadistic.

He just loved terrorising or beating like the prisoners and he would come on shift, like we nicknamed him 3 to Terry, which is free fall and in Russian, 3 to Terry is like, three, two, one and he would come

on shift, then he would shout, Preach Terry, and every time he shouts it, everyone on the block has to start singing the Russian anthem.

Or he would come on shift and he would just randomly start shouting Selensky, and then everyone would have to say like Pideras, which is a derogative in English.

It would say Putin, and then President of the whole world, we would have to say in Russian and it wasn't until June when we went to court in the so-called people, Donetsk People's Republic, closed court obviously, pretty Soviet, underground basement, no press and me, Sean and Ibrahim, we won this case and It got started and the judge decided to ask us, since this case may carry the death sentence, would you like to bring on two additional judges because of the severity of the punishment you're saving? And we kind of figured, okay, sure and then suddenly they had two judges that were just ready for us, which obviously wasn't planned and we initially tried to defend ourselves using logic.

We brought up, I said to Sean and Ibrahim, let's mention international law, the Geneva Convention and I remember we pleaded guilty to the terror charge that they put on us because Because we went to military basic training, that was terrorist training and then they said we were attempting to overthrow the next constitutional republic.

That was another charge which carried the death sentence, but we didn't think it was that severe and then the other charge, which was the mercenary charge, which carried a sentence of seven years, like we pled not guilty on the mercenary charge because we knew legally, like we have the protection, we have the evidence to say we're not mercenaries and so we pleaded not guilty to that.

We'll plead guilty to the first two and as soon as we did that, like everyone in the courtroom sort of like, you could see they were disgruntled and were like confused and we asked if we can speak to our like advocate, like who wasn't really, he wasn't really a lawyer.

He just seemed to go along with whatever was going along.

And, uh, he came over to us just like, why would you say that? Like, why did you say that? This is like, we're not mercenaries under international law, like the Geneva Convention and he says like, international law doesn't exist here and then as soon as he said that, that's when we realized like that there's no point trying to fight this, like they we're not going to win.

Like there's, there's no, there's no, There's no way we can win this because they're saying one thing regardless of like everything.

Sam Kiley: And how soon before they convicted and sentenced you?

Aiden Aslin: So we initially went there like for the first two days where we talked about the whole case and it was on the third day that they gave us our sentencing and then as soon as I heard that they were sending it source to death, I was like totally like lost my, I, I didn't know how to process it.

Cause like the, I was trying to use like Western logic with the way they think and it just threw me off completely and now that I been sentenced to death, I, I figured that they would have to do it if they didn't want to look weak having committed.

actions against the constitutional order of the Donetsk People's Republic and attempting to overthrow the government by force, it is justified and objective to hand down the highest possible punishment, the death sentence.

I was hoping the sentence would be a lot better judging the circumstances in which I helped the investigation and also because I surrendered to the Donetsk People's Republic.

I wish it could be different, but God will be the one that would judge me when the time comes.

Sam Kiley: Your emotional state had started to go downhill in those last days just before you were sentenced.

Aiden Aslin: Yes.

Sam Kiley: How badly?

Aiden Aslin: I mean, just before the court had happened, three or four days prior, I witnessed a POW in my prison be beat to death.

Once they charged me and I was getting ready to go to court, I was then sent to a place called Dinetsk Sizzo, like Sizzo, like in English is like pre-trial detention center.

So at this point I was like, okay, like maybe, maybe it's normal here.

Maybe we've got past the tough part and we then got placed into like a small holding cell to be taken to our prison block and I remember they eventually came for three of the guys that were in the cell with me they came out they put bags on their head and then the door closed and then all you hear is like the guards like shouting at them like lay on the floor and then you start to hear them get beat and they were then being shouted at to follow the commands and they basically had to crawl and while they're crawling you can hear them being beat Weird.

Yeah.

Um, and then eventually they, the, the screams disappeared and then they came back and opened the door and then they, they said to me and I was like, oh **** I've got, I've got to be beaten next.

Um, they, they put a bag on my head.

As soon as they put the bag on my head, like they, they do the same process.

They, they shout at me to lay down and he asked, do you speak Russian? I was like, yes and then he like started beating me and started like giving me directions.

So you had to like crawl on in prone and he was like saying period like forward and just followed it and as he's saying, it's like he's beating, beating me in the back with like a police baton and because I had heard what they were going through the first time I kind of like like was like really quick like trying to do it because I didn't want to end up getting into a situation where I I make them more angry so I was trying to do exactly as they say and I remember we went down a sort of like stairway F.

I presume it was like some sort of tunnel of the prison complex, but I remember I went downstairs and then upstairs, but again, this is going back to my like probably coping mechanism with being in that sort of environment as I was going down the stairs.

I had like this random like fall as I was being beaten because he kept beating me like on my back and but mostly on my *** and I had this like random thought that just popped into my head.

I was like, it's a good thing I like BDSM.

So again, it's like, it's my way of like coping with the situation and then we get to the top of the stairs, he tells me to stand up and then puts me into like a, from what I know, it's called the dolphin position.

It's like, you like hunched over like really far off balance and They take me to, they take me forward and then they stop me.

They open a cell door and in the cell it's like literally four meters by four meters.

There's two beds.

I lay down.

I can tell we're in like a basement sort of like isolation cell and then another guy arrives and then another guy arrives and then another guy arrives and now we have like four people in the two men cell.

The guards then say, they tell us the schedule.

We wake up at 6 a.m.

You stand up.

You're not allowed to sit down.

You're not allowed to lay down on the bed.

If you get caught, you're going to be punished.

Um, and then they also pointed to a piece of paper on the wall with the Russian anthem.

They said you have two day, no, for, for the Ukrainians, they said they have till tomorrow to learn the Russian anthem.

With me, they, as nice people, as much good people they are, they gave me like a week to learn it.

Sam Kiley: So is this what led to the murder of this prisoner? Who was the prisoner?

Aiden Aslin: So, so when, when we, so as, as I mentioned, we when we arrived to this prison everyone gets beaten like on this like sort of gauntlet to your prison cell um and then we heard him being beaten like starting the gauntlet and we we then realized that the beatings has been going on now for a lot a lot longer than it should have and it just continues and now it's probably like more than like

30 minutes 40 minutes and from the processing area to our cell block, it's like probably less than like 200 meters and we realized something's wrong and eventually you can start to hear him getting closer and closer, but his like voice is getting weaker and eventually they open the cell door next to us and he goes in and I remember he the guard like said to him, was telling him the rules, like he says, telling the guys there to help clean him, clean him up.

like tell him like everything that he needs to know and then he says like, do you understand? And then there was no response and then he said, um, like, what are you sleeping? And then started beating him and then when he started beating him, there was just like, no, there was no like, uh, uh, there was no like response from like grunts or anything.

So at that point we knew something was wrong.

Um, and then after like probably like 20 hits, like he stopped and he told, told the guys like clean him up and the door closed and it just like went silent and then we're just like, tried to do what we normally do, just sat thinking about stuff and then probably like 10, 10 minutes went by and then all of a sudden you just hear banging on the door from the cell next door and they're shouting for the Dijoni, which is like the chief of the prison block.

We're terrified because the one thing you never do there is you never try to get the attention of the guards.

You try to just keep that contact minimal as much as possible and they're now banging and making all this sound like we know something's definitely wrong and then maybe after like 10 minutes, the guard comes back and asks him like, what's wrong? And then we hear him say that he stopped breathing and they needed a medic and he says, okay and then he went away for like 10 minutes and probably like 15 minutes went by.

Eventually the prison medic came and they took them out of the cell.

moved them into another cell and then we were like trying to listen to what the medic was saying and then eventually she went into the corridor and she asked one of the prison guards what the time was and she said like time of death, like so and so and then we realized like obviously he died.

So when I went to the court, I just witnessed that like my mental state was already going down the pan and then I got sentenced to death and that just took away all like all like full of like logic and everything else and I remember when I got back to the prison after the call, I was in my cell and I so desperately wanted to cry like I was trying to force myself to cry to just like let some emotion out.

But because we were, I was too terrified in that place, I wasn't able to cry and for out the next like five and a half months of captivity, like I never cried once.

There was moments where I wanted to cry, but I just physically couldn't because I was both like mentally exhausted and it just wasn't possible for me and one of the mistakes that Russia did was they tortured me, like beat me up and put me on camera the next day and then there was like international outcry about it and I think there was some sort of order placed by the, uh, FSB guys that kept coming with the propagandists like that was placed on me.

Like, like don't rough him up too much.

I mean, I still got beat.

But it wasn't like it was the first time.

My other guys got it a lot worse than me.

The only reason they didn't beat me as much is because they need me to like look healthy.

I was mentally exhausted of like doing this like propaganda, like saying stuff that I know is like false.

So by this point in late August, I got taken out of the cell with the Ukrainians and placed into a separate cell.

Originally by myself, they moved me on a Sunday when there's normally no movement and it was late at night at like 9pm.

I was completely terrified because I thought maybe like, oh, they're preparing me to be shot the next day or something.

So I was on my own and then the door opened and they threw in another foreigner, Prebik, a Croatian guy who was in my battalion and we were trying to figure out like, why have we been put together? And we, we had no clue about what's going on.

We had like all sorts of like thoughts about, are they planning for an exchange? Are they planning to like execute us or stuff like that? And we would later learn because, um, we realized that when we were being given off food, They had to make a call for a special person to come and give the key to unlock our food tray.

So the guards on our block didn't have access to us like they would normally.

So we figured something was going on and we then realized that a order had been placed on all the foreigners that were in captivity to basically keep them in protective custody so that nothing happens to them.

They would still get beat, at least the others when they went out of their cell, they would still get beat sometimes.

But there was a protective order on us that nothing can happen to us because it was around that time, a few days prior to Prebick coming to my cell, that there was a British citizen, Yuri Paul, who was a NGO.

humanitarian that was working in Ukraine to help evacuate people.

He ended up getting captured by the Russians after accidentally driving down the wrong road into a Russian checkpoint along with another British citizen and during his time in captivity, he was repeatedly tortured and then eventually he died because of those injuries.

So as soon as that happened, there was some sort of order on all foreigners being put into protective custody and what was ironic for me is because we didn't realize at the time, and we had one guard who was incredibly sadistic.

He just loved terrorizing or beating like the prisoners.

I'm very, very like down depressed and I ended up finding a razor in the bars of the window that we were in and I would lay on my bed at night, like for the next couple of nights, just like just staring at the top of my bunk, like just trying to argue or contemplate, like I should just, just like slice, slice my wrist and end it because I was tired of the propaganda, like BS.

I'm tired of being forced to do all this stuff that I don't want to do and I was so close to doing it and the only reason I chose not to do it was because I was afraid of what would happen to my friend Patrick because he was in the cell with me and my logic was that if I do this and then he wakes up and sees me lying there dead, then not only is it going to be bad for him, but then what's going to happen to him when the Russians find out that they might turn around and say to him, you were in the cell room, you should be responsible.

So he was the only reason I chose not to do it, thankfully and I'm glad I didn't have the balls to do it because if I had done it, I would have, if there is an afterlife and I was able to observe everything after.

I would have regretted it so much because a week later we got taken out to be exchanged.

Sam Kiley: Wow, was it a week later? What was it like that moment when you were exchanged and you realized you were actually free of the Russians?

Aiden Aslin: I mean, initially when we got taken out, I thought I was just being taken out to go do propaganda.

Again, while I was in this place, I would get taken out like three to four times a week.

I've memorized the entire layout of the prison from where I'm taken to the room where I do it and the processing areas and they took us out, go down the same path that I've walked a million times and as we get into the turning where we should go for the propaganda stuff, we walk past it and this is when I start to panic because I've never been down this path and like, now I'm getting really scared because I don't know what's coming next and we'd always heard people like screaming, being tortured.

Aside from the beatings that they get when they arrive, we heard, we heard what sounded like people being electrocuted, um, with the tasers and stuff.

So we presume maybe we're being taken there now and they, they took us, then they placed us into like this small cell, sat down and then they, they brought us out one by one and he took me around the corner and got his phone out.

Um, and basically said like, uh, like we've, we've given you water, we've given you food.

Like we've not, we've not, uh, we've not, uh, committed violence against you.

I was like, yeah, yeah, yeah.

This is September.

It was just shortly after the queen died.

We get taken out to sign some paperwork and I'm signing some paperwork and one of the guards, like that attitude at this moment had completely changed from, you could never look at the guards.

You always had to keep your head down.

If you looked at the guard, they would beat you and at this point it completely changed.

They were super relaxed.

Like they were telling us to follow them.

It wasn't like before where they were like guiding us.

Um, and signing his paperwork and one of the guards like looks at me and says, uh, like, Mike, did you hear about, uh, the queen? And I was like, uh, yeah, like I heard it, we had it on the propaganda radio and I said, like, I heard about it and he didn't say anything back.

Like I was expecting him to say like some sadistic, you know.

Some derogative comment, but he didn't say anything.

So that got me confused and eventually we get taken out.

Uh, they put bags on the head.

Um, we get ushered out and we, they take the bag off.

There's like this guy in series, like with a list and he's like asking us our name and whatnot, takes a photo.

Um.

They take the bag off and then we go to the back of this truck.

I can see one some sort of highway and then we arrive to an airport and I know it's an airport because I can hear it.

I just can't tell if it's a civilian airport or if it's a military airport and then I realize it's a civilian airport because I see civilian passenger planes.

We drive onto the territory and once we go into the airport terminal, They, one by one, the military police started cutting off our duct tape that we had and I remember they cut off my one and even though I could see like a little bit, like I haven't been able to see properly for like the past like 20 hours and I remember when he took it off, like this bright glaring light and just this like Russian guy in a balaclava, like just looking at me and I'm like, okay, like what's going on? And then they told us to get in a line.

We got in a line again and in submission, like just with like one hand file, they took us out to the tarmac and we got onto a like airport transfer bus, got on our knees and we're driving over and I'm at the front and the military police is like saying, like when we stop, like you do exactly as I tell you to.

If you don't do otherwise, you're going to get tasered and as we're driving, we're driving around to this like airport that's just to this airplane that's on the tarmac and we can see it.

So like we realize we're being exchanged at this point and then once we clear like Russian airspace, we're going to fly to Iraqad in Saudi Arabia and then you'll be taken to a hospital and then we can organize like reuniting you with your families later and I think it was probably one once we were in the air and we realized that like we're going home.

That's like when I realized like it's over and it wasn't until when we took off that I realized we're no longer where we were like literally 24 hours before, because as we were taking off, we could smell people smoking cigarettes and I jested to the security guy, like, do you have cigarette? And he was like, oh, cigarette? And then he just gave us and then as soon as he pulled out the cigarettes, like everyone

spotted the cigarettes and like now he's like giving cigarettes out to all of us and we started like smoking on this like Saudi like airline, uh, on this plane.

Um, and I remember they came in with a bag with like fresh clothes and toiletries.

Um, and I, I went to the, to the toilet to just try to just clean myself a bit and just have a like a bird shower.

Um, And I remember looking at myself in the mirror and just like thinking to myself, like, it doesn't feel like reality, like I just see a void and I think it was like I realized it was over, but it still hadn't fully set in.

I was probably in a state of shock at this time, which ended up lasting for a couple of weeks.

But I remember when we landed in Rihad, we got taken off the plane, we got taken to go given emergency like visas and at that point I was by myself with the foreign representatives and I met the foreign office people and I remember sitting down and I think like after like six months of like not being able to cry, I just like broke down.

Like when the reality like set in that like no longer where I was and it was like, I think it was like such a relief for me as well because like, it was the first time I was able to cry and there was no fear of being beaten or anything and it was, it was like such a relief, like emotionally and physically because it, it's something I've been wanting to do for such a long time and now I can finally do it.

Sam Kiley: Did you feel human again? Yeah.

How long did that take before you started to feel you were really free?

Aiden Aslin: I would say for the next like three and a half weeks, like my mind was still in a state of shock.

Everything didn't feel real.

It felt sort of like a bubble.

It took like three and a half weeks for it to slowly go away.

Sam Kiley: And how long before you decided to come back to Ukraine?

Aiden Aslin: Um I first came back to Ukraine oh I first tried to come back to Ukraine in in October literally less than less than like three four weeks after I got back to Britain because at this point mind you I've lived in Ukraine for the past like four years before that.

Sam Kiley: Yeah time for you I.

Aiden Aslin: Guess yeah I had I had a house then whatnot.

Sam Kiley: So when did you actually go go back and rejoin the military.

Aiden Aslin: In June 2023, I drove over from the UK and came back to Ukraine in June and I remember when I crossed the border, I remember crying again, just because I remember the emotion of the last time I was being in Ukraine was when I was in captivity.

Sam Kiley: But what you've seen of the Russians, what I've seen from the Russians, I think they can be beaten.

Aiden Aslin: I think they can be beaten.

I think we have the means to exhaust the economy, which we are seeing now.

Obviously it's not going to be overnight thing, but at some point it's going to give.

Sam Kiley: So you think there's a fragility in the command?

Aiden Aslin: Yeah, the grasp is weakening.

There's a lot of things that are showing that Russia is becoming a lot more destabilized.

They will end up in my personal wishful thinking scenario would be they just collapse.

Boy, I think realistically they will find a way to get out of this and save face within their own internal population.

Sam Kiley: Well, let's hope you're right.

Aiden, it's been a pleasure.

Thank you.

Aiden Aslin: Thank you.

Oscar Jenkins Coerced Interview

Title: Oscar Jenkins: The Australian They Left Behind | Full Documentary
Source: <www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CzAbGT_2yA>
Note: The author of the video linked above is a pro-Russian propagandist, don't give him any more views than I already have done by clicking on the youtube link. People can watch the same video by clicking the link below and going to the 59 minutes and 40 seconds mark:

- `https://archive.org/details/russian-captivity-a-freed-pow-and-a-coerced-interview`

Shithead Mark Lowe: My name's Mark. I'm Australian, but for the past few years I've been living in Vladivostok in Russia's Far East.

It's a long way from Australia, but there's something about Vladivostok that still feels familiar. It's a coastal city surrounded by the sea, and like home, it gets plenty of sunshine.

In a small way, that helps me stay connected to Australia and even though I'm living on the other side of the world, I still take a keen interest in what's happening back home, particular at this time when the world is changing so rapidly.

Last year I came across a news report about a young Australian who had ended up in Russian captivity after fighting on Ukraine's side.

He was subsequently sentenced to 13 years in prison for mercenary activities.

His story stayed with me.

I wanted to know who this young Australian was, what had brought him to Ukraine, and why he had made the decision to go and fight in a war on the other side of the world.

So I decided to go to Lugansk to meet him face to face.

Getting there took more than a year.

Eventually I was given permission by the Russian authorities to speak with him.

What followed was a remarkable conversation with a fellow Australian, a young man who is close enough in age to be my own son.

This is the story of that journey to Lugansk and my conversation with a compatriot, Oscar Jenkins.

What was he looking for? What did he expect to find? And what did he actually experience when he got there? So I decided to make the journey myself.

From my home in Vladivostok through Moscow and eventually towards Lugansk, I knew that the journey would take me a long way from home.

But I also knew that if I wanted to understand Oscar's story, I had to go and ask him myself.

Vladivostok was where the journey began.

Moscow would be my first major stop.

From there I would continue south, travelling thousands of kilometres towards Ligansk.

But as I prepared to leave, one question kept coming back to me.

Why? Why would a well-educated Australian man with a life and opportunities far from the battlefield, choose to travel to the other side of the world to enter a war.

I had read everything I could find out about Oscar Jenkins.

I had read the reports about his capture, his military service and his journey to Ukraine, but none of it really answered the question.

I wanted to understand what could drive someone like Oscar to make that decision, and there was only one way to find that out.

I had to asking myself.

Moscow, a city thousands of kilometres from where my journey began.

After a long flight from Vladivostok, I found myself in a city that was not quite what I had expected.

Clean streets, an efficient transport system, modern infrastructure and surprisingly strangers who were quick to smile, offer directions and were simply exchanging.

friendly word.

But there was little time to stop and take it all in.

Moscow was only the beginning.

Ahead of me was another gruelling 15 hours on the road, travelling south by bus towards a city that for more than a decade had been at the centre of a war few people in Australia truly understood, Lugansk and that was where I was headed.

We've been 3 hours on the road and we've just stopped for something to eat.

We've stopped a little roadhouse to get something to eat and something to drink.

Another 12 hours to go.

Through the night I continued S from Moscow heading towards Ligunsk.

The road was modern and busy, a constant stream of buses, trucks and cars travelling in both directions.

Every so often we slowed for toll points, with petrol stations lining the highway to service the endless traffic.

As the sun rose, the scale of the country became clear.

For hundreds of kilometres, farmland stretched towards the horizon, seamlessly endless.

But while I watched the landscape pass by, friends back in Vladivostok were becoming increasingly worried about my safety.

Only a month earlier, a bus had been struck by a drone, killing people on board.

They asked me whether the journey was really worth the risk.

For me, there was only one answer.

I had to find out myself.

As we entered the Ligansk region, the landscape began to change.

Years of conflict, economic isolation and neglect was visible in the condition of some of the towns and homes we passed.

Further on, the signs of war became impossible to ignore.

Tanks had been turned into monuments decorated with flowers.

Buildings stood scarred by fighting, while others had been abandoned altogether and somewhere at the end of that road was the man whose story had brought me all this way.

A young man, a young Australian, thousands of kilometres from home, caught up in a war that had changed the course of his life.

I had come to hear his story from him.

Behind me is the maximum security prison where Australian Oscar Jenkins is serving his 13-year sentence for crimes against the Russian Federation.

I want to thank the Russian government and the prison authorities for allowing me time to interview and discuss topics ranging from his childhood to his time in China and what motivated him to go to Ukraine.

We also discussed the other foreign mercenaries currently fighting in Ukraine.

It was an interesting insight into a world that very few people understand or have any concept of.

I hope you enjoy them.

Today, Oscar Jenkins is a prisoner in Russia.

He has been sentenced to 13 years.

The Australian Government says that he is a fully serving member of the Ukraine Regular Armed Forces and therefore a prisoner of war.

Russia's position is different.

He's a mercenary.

The official statement from the Australian Government, as a full serving member of the Regular Armed Force of Ukraine, Mr.

Jenkins is a prisoner of war, states Penny Wong, 17th of May 2025. As you will see, this statement is far from accurate, according to Oscar's experience in Ukraine.

But before we argue over the label, there's another question. Why did Oscar Jenkins go there in the first place?

Oscar's background (1:07:20)

Oscar Jenkins: I was born in 1992, Melbourne, into a good family. Father a dentist, mother a nurse, I'm the youngest of five.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Awesome.

Oscar Jenkins: Yep, they all went to private schools, Melbourne Grammar, Melbourne Girls Grammar, Geelong Grammar.

But the age gap was quite big.

I think the older siblings thought that I got given a lot of stuff, and I probably did, from sporting equipment to time and attention.

They maybe didn't have as much of.

No, I wanted to be a policeman or a sportsman when I was younger.

Things changed with time, but I graduated from Melbourne Grammar, had a gap year in England, where I worked as a sort of a GAP student, but an assistant teacher, and then travelled Europe, which I had already been from family holidays earlier on.

Travel had always been a big part of my family. I'd call my mum a bit of a Francophile. The family ancestry comes from France and Britain, but I'm not sure she knows a lot more about that than I do and after that I decided that I'd go through with my university, study biomedical science, which is sort of like a liberal arts for medicine.

It's not really a degree you can use after graduating and then after, so after those three years I decided I wasn't going to do further studies and honours or a master's degree, but I would I don't know, quench my thirst for travel or adventure on the bicycle.

I'd saved up a little bit of money working as a barman and sports referee umpire, odd jobs.

Willing to give it all away, willing to let it all just be. I decided I was going to, I planned my route and then ended up in Hanoi, where I was staying with a couch surfing host, just sort of a website that allows people to stay at someone's house.

For 10 weeks I was there and I did some English teaching with the students there and found it was really interesting.

I would have been happy to stay there, but I decided to look for a job in China and then I took that opportunity, flew into China from there, that ended the bicycle trip.

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): Nothing in this story immediately points towards a battlefield. Oscar describes A conventional Australian upbringing, education, sport, travel, and a growing desire for adventure.

Shithead Mark Lowe: You also coached.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, a lot of coaching eventually, yeah.

There's the club, Toorak Paran Cricket Club, was the main sort of community centre.

Shithead Mark Lowe: As it was in Australia.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, well, the same with the football club, Paran Football Club. Mum was president there, dad did...

Shithead Mark Lowe: At the cricket or the football?

Oscar Jenkins: The football for a couple of years and the my parents were very involved in that.

My brother, older brother, who's 15 years older than me, he went there when he was young for a bit, cricket.

For me, sport was obviously, I don't know, an outlet or a thing to do on the weekends, better than partying or something that I found.

No, yeah, sport was just a part of the culture, before from my parents' generation and then I think just with my own situation.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Who would have influenced your life during that time at cricket?

Oscar Jenkins: Coaches, yeah, a lot of my dad's aged men, slightly older as well, sort of older brother mentor figures that I played with when I was young playing in an older sort of age group. People from the community, I don't know, I'd never asked too much about what people did or took that much interest. If I asked, I might not have realised that I was asking personal questions or something.

But yeah, everyone played with police, played with people that I went to school with, played with people who had been to jail or went to jail, everywhere, all walks of life.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah, cricket and football are like that.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, it's good.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yes. Yeah, it is. What did you do in cricket? Were you a batsman, a bowler?

Oscar Jenkins: I tried to do everything.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So you were all rounder?

Oscar Jenkins: Tried to, yeah, but yeah, batting, batting all rounder.

Shithead Mark Lowe: A batting all rounder. So where did you bat? Where was the lineup?

Oscar Jenkins: Three or three or opening, yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: You never bowled? I couldn't bowl. I kept...

Oscar Jenkins: Every team needs a keep.

Yeah, bowling, no, tried to open or first change, but it depends on the standard.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah, fast or will you spin?

Oscar Jenkins: Medium, fast.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Medium, okay, medium pace.

Oscar Jenkins: Ever express?

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah, no, interesting.

Did you play football? Because there's no information about you playing football.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, played lots of football, played with a lot of guys who played AFL.

When I was young, I was big and Vic Metro under 15s was going to, that was sort of the goal and then it didn't happen. But I didn't grow when I got bigger. I just focused on sort of running after that and cycling. But football was like cricket. Summer and winter. Most of us did that.

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): Sport gave Oscar structure. It gave him competition. It gave him community. But after university, the conventional Australian path didn't hold him.

Buddhism & bike touring

Oscar Jenkins: In 2015, I'd done my coaching, I thought, Melbourne, I don't know what else I'm going to do here if I finish my university and not going to work or research.

Then the bike, something that I'd watched on my gap year, it was an idea that it sprung up cycling and travelling and living on the road.

I eventually planned and built up enough courage or confidence to just do it.

So I left in March 2015 not knowing where I was going to end up, but I ended up in China. Maybe I got corrupted because of the money or the job idea.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Corrupted by whom?

Oscar Jenkins: I don't know. Maybe it comes back to the Buddhism and trying your best. But yeah, I took a job in China.

I mean, China's a big country. I thought maybe I could ride across No, it doesn't take that long. After taking that job, the job was fine, the lifestyle was fine. It was for me very easy.

It was interesting intellectually with a different language and different culture. It just became more and more Chinese for me and then my mum eventually, when I came back to Australia before going to Ukraine, she thought I was a spy.

Shithead Mark Lowe: A spy for whom?

Oscar Jenkins: That's the question that I asked, a spy for whom, China or Australia?

Influences (1:14:30)

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): China became more than just a stop on his journey. It became Oscar's home for much of the next 8 years.

Oscar Jenkins: It's hard for me to say who was influencing, because I was spending a lot of time on YouTube watching that YouTube channel...

But also interacting with students every day, perhaps less and less.

Being very social initially, in 2017, when I was teaching in Tianjin at a college there, being five years older than the students myself, there was a lot in common.

Hanging out, eating a lot of food together, going out seeing the city. Just understanding their life, their problems, my own problems.

But the people around me influence me and then just...

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): Oscar discusses YouTube, technology and the people around him influencing his thinking. The interesting thing for me, on day one, Oscar talks about who he should fight for, Russia or Ukraine?

Oscar Jenkins: ...about denazification, there was a Russian flag in the corner, with a guy, a journalist interviewing a Russian local guy talking about the situation in Ukraine. I thought, okay, Russia, Ukraine, I'm either with Russia or Ukraine, I'm just going to go with Ukraine. Because for me, I guess I'd had an interest in war, but never thinking it was good.

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): On my second visit to see Oscar, we go back to visit this same question.

Shithead Mark Lowe: You briefly mentioned about why you were against the Russian SMO into Ukraine.

What formulated that thought? How did you formulate, do you know what I mean, your opinion?

Oscar Jenkins: Media consumption.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah. What were you consuming at that stage?

Oscar Jenkins: Western media.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Just mainstream.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, just BBC, New York Times, VH.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Are you in China at this stage?

Oscar Jenkins: Yep.

Shithead Mark Lowe: What about the Chinese media? What was it saying? Or you didn't watch it.

Oscar Jenkins: A little bit, a little bit. It's still harder for me to understand it. But no, it's more just like, why is America doing this? Not heavily anti-America, but pro-Russia. Yeah, also.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So in China, you were consuming BBC?

Oscar Jenkins: New York Times, The Age, as well as Chinese media on Baidu is the Chinese Google.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Okay.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Is that a non-government one? Because I don't understand Chinese media, so I'm just trying to...

Oscar Jenkins: I just assume it's all quite controlled by the government.

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): In the beginning, Oscar was debating which side he should support. Russia or Ukraine? The decision did not come from nowhere. It developed through consumption of Western media, and eventually he chose Ukraine.

Although this story is about Oscar Jenkins, and my thoughts before the travelling to Lugansk were focused entirely on him, I found it impossible to leave the city out of this story.

Lugansk was a place I had never seen before. I was told I was the first Australian journalist to visit the city since the conflict begun and it was not what I expected.

I'd imagined a small, run-down city, damaged infrastructure, neglected streets and buildings bearing the scars of years of war.

Instead, I found something quite different. A city that was vibrant. Wide streets, well-maintained pavements, shops, restaurants and people going about their daily lives.

But the scars of war are still there and this war did not begin in 2022. For the people of Lagansk, it began in June 2014.

Years of conflict had clearly taken its toll. The people are tired. But they are not broken. Their resilience is everywhere and as I walked through the city, I found myself asking a question I couldn't ignore. How did these people survive? In 2014, the Ukrainian army surrounded Lugansk cutting off vital supplies including water and electricity. The city was isolated and under attack. So how did these people endure it? I wanted to understand what happened and to do that I had to go back into history.

Oscar Jenkins: Much more interesting in the future.

It led me to go back home and and I was going to do my master's degree and use whatever family connections were left after my dad had already died in 2023.

I thought, okay, this is a safe life, stable life. I can just do medical research or something and during that time of setting up the university, at Monash doing a master's in biomedical science, which I deferred for two years because during that time I decided, no, I'm going to go to Ukraine because the war here was interesting and then took the plane ticket, said bye-bye, no more stuff at home. Over the next nine months engaged in some...

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): He had another option, a master's degree, a career, a life in Australia. Instead he bought a ticket and headed off to a war.

Oscar Jenkins: Bought her, I had a couple of bags and a question and I said I'm just here to volunteer and I was let in.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Okay, and so you get to Lvov and what do you do? You put a sign up and say, I want to be a...

Oscar Jenkins: Almost would have done that.

The idea of the sign didn't pop in, but yeah, asked, where can I join military base? No, go to Kyiv, went there, no.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So who did you ask?

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, the guy was waiting for the bus in military uniform.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So there was a military bloke there.

Oscar Jenkins: But I'm official or just like mobilised, mobilised people.

They'll probably just mobilise people.

The Irishman, he said, go to another place called Ternopil, a small town not that far from Lviv.

Bus to there or train bus, I guess a bus to there and then there they had a recruitment office with plenty of Americans, French Colombians, working with Ukrainians.

there for a month, paperwork, processing time, and then going to the front.

Shithead Mark Lowe: This is where Oscar's life starts to change forever.

Oscar was no longer simply travelling.

He was attempting to enter a war.

Oscar Jenkins: I still watched the YouTube, tried to learn Ukrainian, a little bit of Russian, tried to understand the situation, spoke to the people I was living with who had already spent time in Ukraine or they were ex-military from the Western countries, learning a little bit about Ukrainian culture, getting a sense that things weren't quite right, but actually that was fine, the situation there in Western Ukraine was fine, other than the mobilization of people going into vans and all that while I was prepping for my own position as a machine gunner, I was told I was going to be a machine gunner on the front.

We got our little proto-NATO group with some people with no experience and some people with quite a bit of experience, I think.

Pro-NATO group.

Pro-NATO.

Maybe it would be classified with successful missions becoming more and more of an official thing.

But we were a part of the 66th Battalion of the Ukrainian 3rd Mechanized Brigade of the Ukrainian Army, but it felt very unofficial and separate.

We had a British commanding officer, he was 24 years old, he'd had some experience fighting in Bakhmut before But things felt a little bit hodgepodge, not a lot of resources to work with, but enough to get to the front and just sort of get yourself in a hole and maybe just hold the line if possible.

There was a drone team, but money was an issue.

I tried to give as much money as I could.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So you gave them money?

Oscar Jenkins: I gave them my Ukrainian money just because I couldn't get my Australian money easily transferred.

I think, or I didn't think about that at the time, but I gave them the money I'd been sent with Ukraine because many people in that company, the rota of the company, weren't getting paid.

Shithead Mark Lowe: This distinction matters.

Oskar describes a group as connected to the Ukrainian military, but he also describes it as informal, separate and improvised.

He discussed a young British commander and the limited resources.

The ambiguity would become central to what happened to him.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So you're living for a month and what is it? It's just learning how to, what are you doing there for the month?

Oscar Jenkins: Preparing, getting right equipment.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Where do you get the equipment from?

Oscar Jenkins: Well, they have shops.

Shithead Mark Lowe: You go and buy it.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, you go buy it.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oh, really?

Oscar Jenkins: Markets and shops, yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So you, or we had a shopping list and you go and buy it.

The government didn't give it to you.

Oscar Jenkins: We eventually got given stuff at the front because you don't need all your gear.

We got given gear and then people bought gear because they just thought it was not good.

Yeah, we got given and bought.

Shithead Mark Lowe: One question kept coming back to me.

Why were foreign fighters being asked to buy their own equipment when Western governments had committed billions of dollars in financial and military support to Ukraine? We have repeatedly been

told that equipment including helmets, body armour, uniforms and other military supplies were being supplied into Ukraine.

So where did it go? If this equipment was supplied to supply a war effort, how much actually reached the foreign fighters who were on the front lines? An even more difficult question, was any of this equipment being diverted, sold or otherwise ending up back in the hands of those who were expected to purchase their own? These are not questions I can answer simply by looking at the numbers, but they are questions that deserve answers and perhaps governments providing billions of dollars in support should be asking them too.

Returning to the Australian government's official stance, one needs to question what they say and what they know.

Russia's position has and will always be that these foreigners are mercenaries.

This legal argument over those descriptions continues.

But Oskar's own testimony gives us something more revealing.

What life inside the organisation actually looked like, and later, what he himself thinks he is.

Travelling to meet Oscar, we were constantly conscious of the threat posed by drones.

Some of the places I'd planned to visit were simply too dangerous.

One was a university dormitory on the outskirts of the city, which had been struck during the night, killing 18 students.

But now, with the front line more than 100 kilometres away.

The nature of the threat had changed.

For the people of Lugansk, the sound of war had become part of everyday life.

Even air raid sirens go largely unnoticed.

Shithead Mark Lowe: I'm currently just outside the administration building that was hit in 2015 and in the distance you can hear the Sirens for drone attacks.

No one is panicking.

See if you can hear it.

yeah no one's panicking no one's really taking much notice cars are still going around people are still sitting it's kind of an eerie feeling.

Shithead Mark Lowe: After more than a decade of conflict, people have become accustomed to living with the possibility of attack.

Some people here would rather face the threat.

They can hear and see coming a drone overhead than artillery that can strike without warning.

Yet despite The threat.

Life continues.

People go shopping.

Children's play.

Cars move through the streets and for those people, life goes on.

Shithead Mark Lowe: How many in the group were not getting paid?

Oscar Jenkins: For the foreigners, it felt like 90% weren't getting paid.

Really? Yeah, 30 people, maybe 25 would get paid or 20 would get paid or something like that.

It's quite high.

40 people, maybe 35 get paid.

Shithead Mark Lowe: And yet you got that you got paid.

Shithead Mark Lowe: For whatever reason, people came to Ukraine.

Money became a dividing line.

Oscar says payment problems contributed to the group breaking apart.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So you found the Ukrainian instructors more friendly than the Western...

Oscar Jenkins: Not more friendly.

No, because I sort of felt like I could empathise with whatever issues.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah.

Oscar Jenkins: I might not have done a lot of drugs, but I might have had the thought of doing a lot of...

drugs or having that kind of lifestyle, rock'n'roll party, gung-ho, mercenary kind of lifestyle.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So did you find a lot of them had that sort of lifestyle?

Oscar Jenkins: Either they had it or they talked about it.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So it was discussed.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, people talk about making money and what people do with the money or At the same time, they were very into helping Ukraine or giving their all.

I think it was just a part of their character.

Yeah.

It wasn't.

Shithead Mark Lowe: But do you think they would have been there if it wasn't for the money? Like you were there, you were there and the soul.

Oscar Jenkins: For sure, definitely.

Shithead Mark Lowe: What sort of percentage? Because you're an unusual one that you went there, you didn't care about the money.

Oscar Jenkins: No, but I have money.

You know, I come from a family.

I've worked in China for a long time.

Some people are looking after a family.

I decided when I was younger, I knew I wasn't going to have children.

Part of that reason is selfish, Yeah, No, the percentage that were there for the money, higher for the Colombians, much higher for the Colombians for Europeans.

So I don't know, maybe 30 or 40, 30%.

If they weren't getting paid, maybe 30 or 40% of the people would have stayed, maybe 60% would have left.

Yeah, maybe.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So the money paid a significant part.

Oscar Jenkins: Well, that's what happened with the group as a disintegrated part of the organisation process that they had problems with was the pay they weren't getting paid until they left.

Shithead Mark Lowe (Voice over): Once finishing the four weeks getting organised, purchasing their own equipment, they finally began training up near the front.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So then you've got some stuff together. You go to the front. How do you learn to fire a machine gun?

Oscar Jenkins: They had training a few days a week, let's say day on, day off with people who knew how to do it and instructors, Ukrainian and some foreign.

Movement through trenches, movement up into position.

The original idea was to assault a trench, to be an assault brigade.

learning the fundamentals, the sort of basics.

Shithead Mark Lowe: This is up at the front.

Oscar Jenkins: About 25 callers.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So yeah, you're like second, third line training.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, I guess.

Shithead Mark Lowe: To then get ready.

So how long did that last for?

Oscar Jenkins: That was about six weeks.

Yeah.

People lost some, people went away and then the group sort of got less and less Ukrainian with time.

Sorry, less and less foreign with time.

More and more Ukrainian.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So in that six weeks, some of them said, fuck it, I'm out of here.
Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, they were impatient for whatever reason.
They thought this is not enough action or this is unprofessional or they want to change.
They weren't happy with the choice they made.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Were they getting paid at this stage?
Oscar Jenkins: No, that was all still getting organised, which was an annoyance for some people.
My daily work was more like just making sure things were fine on the base and language learning.

Payment (1:32:10)

Shithead Mark Lowe (Voice over): Oscar himself was different. He says he had money and had been working in China for many years. But for others, payment was important. Foreigners started leaving with payments still withheld by the Ukrainian government.
Oscar Jenkins: ...The God delusion, you might think.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Well, did you see any God delusion?
Oscar Jenkins: Well, it depends... if your goal was to depopulate the earth, then you wouldn't give me food.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Yes, yeah.
Oscar Jenkins: And you might see that as just in line with your goal.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah.
Oscar Jenkins: You know, but obviously.
Shithead Mark Lowe: But did you see any of that sort of corruption in Ukraine or not? Or your own?
Oscar Jenkins: I mean, it's moment to moment. There was a French soldier who... he wasn't getting paid. He said, okay, I'm leaving right now or I'll do another journey...
Okay, so the first mission they did, there was a group of 6 to 10 French, 6 or 8 French people with a couple of other foreigners. They did a very dangerous mission, taking a Russian trench. They took the trench. The trench eventually got taken back.
A guy died from Argentina and a lot of people got injured on the mission. They felt the organization was terrible. They felt there was no support.
I was waiting in the manhole a few kilometers back, waiting for the call to get support. But at the same time, I was interacting with Mazard, also saying, because I really wanted to go on that mission and I wasn't allowed because of my inexperience. I contacted Mazard saying, I'm not on this mission. I don't care what happens. Like if someone dies, it's just... And then I felt a lot of guilt because of that, because I felt like it was my fault that someone might have died. Being egocentric, but also that's just how I felt.
After that mission, the guy, one of the French guys said, you know, I'm not doing another mission, [it's] stupid. We're not even getting paid here. You know, I have a house that's costing 400,000 EUR or something. Is that corruption or is that just him being realistic? He was a paratrooper in France.
Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): [For] one French fighter, the equation had changed. He had risked his life. People had been killed, others had been wounded, and the money that he was promised was not arriving. He decided he would not go back. We then continue the conversation leading on to how much Each soldier was to be paid. As you'll see, it was quite difficult to work out exchange rates, but we got there eventually.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Well, if you sign on to a contract and they say, okay, I'm going to give you, sign a contract, I'm going to give you, how much was it a month?
Oscar Jenkins: 120 or with bonuses maybe 170 on the front.
Shithead Mark Lowe: 170 what?
Oscar Jenkins: Agreement.

Shithead Mark Lowe: One 170, 1007.
Oscar Jenkins: Usually it's 120, 120 with submissions there a month.
Grieven, one per month.
Shithead Mark Lowe: You've lost me.
Talking Australian dollars?
Oscar Jenkins: Australian, Australian dollars.
God, I don't even remember that.
It's 200 and.
It's 240,000 rubles, isn't it?
Shithead Mark Lowe: I don't know what a grieven is.
Oscar Jenkins: It's Ukrainian.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah, well, I don't know what the conversion is.
Oscar Jenkins: One grieven is 25 Australian, I think.
Shithead Mark Lowe: 25 Australian. Okay. So how many grieven?
Oscar Jenkins: 120. So 4,000, 4 to 5,000.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Per.
Oscar Jenkins: Per month.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Per month. $4,000 a month.
Oscar Jenkins: That's a lot, isn't it? You don't think so? I think that's a lot of money, but I worked in China for a while.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Not to die.
Oscar Jenkins: The money thing is not an interest.
Shithead Mark Lowe: I know. You're an unusual case because I don't think there was many people there who had the same mindset as you.

Buddhism and technology

Oscar Jenkins: It's the technology that's changed me. I used to care a lot about value. Maybe not about money, but I always cared about value.
If it wasn't good value, I wouldn't eat it, I wouldn't buy it and now I see a different way. That's the Buddhism thing.
Shithead Mark Lowe: So here's the question, going back to the Frenchman. If he's got a family to feed back in France, and he's been promised, he signed a contract, he said, I will put my life on the line, and you will pay me $4,000, and they don't pay it. Is that right or is that corruption?
Oscar Jenkins: I can let that go, but that's bad. Yeah.
Shithead Mark Lowe: It's not in the contract. Not for you because you don't care about it.
Oscar Jenkins: That's the Buddhist thing.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Yes, I get that. I get that. But what I'm saying is, for the average person, let's go to the average person.
Oscar Jenkins: That's not correct. If you're asking me if it's right or not, no, it's not fulfilling the contract.
Shithead Mark Lowe: Yes.
Oscar Jenkins: So if you're working in a contractual world, then...
Shithead Mark Lowe: No, that's right.
Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): This was not simply a question of ideology. It was also a question of what had been promised and what was actually delivered and for some of the foreigners, that difference was enough to make them leave.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So the instructors were Ukrainian and Western. Were they Ukrainian uniforms or were they, what were they? Yeah, uniforms, yeah, captain. Okay, so where were they from, England or the US?

Oscar Jenkins: Sorry, the instructors, you said. Yeah, no, we weren't in uniform. We tried to keep things out of uniform for whatever surveillance reasons. But the Ukrainian officers were official. The foreign unit was less official.

Shithead Mark Lowe: The foreign trainers.

Oscar Jenkins: The foreign trainers, instructors, less official. Just, here's what I found, okay, try and do it.

Shithead Mark Lowe: And they were what, mainly American or British?

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, American, British, French. We had a large group of French people there initially before they left and then Colombian more and more so, until I got captured. Yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): Oscar describes something else that caught his attention. He says trainers from the United States, Britain and France were present along with Ukrainian officers. But there was a distinction. According to Oscar, the Ukrainian officers were in uniform, while the Western personnel were not. Oscar says he had been told that it was for security reasons, but it left him with questions.

Who exactly were these men? If they were serving military personnel, why were they operating without uniforms? And as Oscar himself put it, they did not appear to be officially part of the operation.

Shithead Mark Lowe: You were talking about your instructors.

Some were Ukrainian, some were Westerners.

How did you find them? How did you find them? What were they like? How did you perceive them? The way they instructed? Were they friendly? Just what was your perception of them?

Oscar Jenkins: It got better with time.

From my own, I'm pretty anti, how can I say anti, I can say anti-narcotic, I don't know, maybe that's me shining a spotlight on people too much, but there's...

felt like an addiction, some sort of addiction thing going on with some people, just hang-ups on either food or drugs or a way of doing things.

I don't know how to explain that.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So some of them were on drugs or some of them were just...

Oscar Jenkins: There might have been pill addicts in the past.

There was one of them, but he was an experienced commander, Royal Marine, British.

soldier.

A lot of them had some injuries from the war or some sort of trauma that they were, I think, still trying to work through.

Some people got anxious easily, but then again, for life and death training, that's maybe important.

Ukraine, those are more the foreign instructors, but I was a complete beginner.

For them working with me might have been quite frustrating, especially if they didn't want to be instructing and they wanted to be in the action.

But I'm not sure how strong I got that feeling from them.

The Ukrainian instructors, they were friendly, they knew we were there to help.

Shithead Mark Lowe: It is important to separate what Oscar witnessed from what he can establish.

He describes a culture in which money, alcohol and drugs could be issues.

But he does not claim that every foreign fighter behaved that way.

In fact, he also says that some were deeply committed to helping Ukraine.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Was there any alcohol or drug use?

Oscar Jenkins: No, that was...

Heavily discouraged.

I think there was earlier on at the base and that got people into trouble.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah.

Oscar Jenkins: And then that was stopped.

Shithead Mark Lowe: By whom?

Oscar Jenkins: Kamar, I think British Kamar.

There was definitely cannabis going on.

Alcohol I think as well.

Yeah, some of the instructors and just some of the other foreign soldiers and the Ukrainian officers were also drinking quite a lot each night.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Really.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Where did they get the cannabis from? Being flown in or was it homegrown?

Oscar Jenkins: No, I don't know.

I saw plants in that area.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oh, right.

So it's homegrown.

I'm just wondering, yeah.

Oscar Jenkins: I think the legislation is quite liberal in Ukraine.

Even though it's martial.

Even though it's a.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oscar also describes a different side of life at the bases.

He says that by the time he reached the later base, alcohol and drugs had been heavily discouraged.

But according to Oscar, that had not always been the case.

He described cannabis being present and says some instructors, foreign fighters and Ukrainian officers were drinking heavily.

When I asked him where the cannabis came from, Oscar said he didn't know, but he also said that he had seen cannabis plants growing in the area.

It raises a question about the environment in which foreign fighters were being trained and prepared for the front.

During my time in Lugansk, I met twice with Anna, the city's ombudsman for human rights.

Our conversations were open and at times deeply personal.

Anna had worked as a Ukrainian police officer until 2014.

But when the Ukrainian army moved against Lugansk in June that year, she said she could no longer serve government she believed was attacking its own people.

She left the Ukrainian service and began another painstaking task, documenting what she described as war crimes committed during the conflict.

Anna said that she had submitted around 2,000 cases to the UN.

According to her, only two responses were ever received.

Then during one particular emotional conversation, she told me something I found difficult to forget.

For years, she said, she carried a pistol with her, not for protection, but in case she was captured.

She feared what might happen if she fell into enemy hands and believed death would be preferable to torture.

Yet behind the determined exterior is another side of Anna, a sharp wit and a mischievous sense of humour that emerged during our conversations.

Her story is far bigger than my journey to find Oscar Jenkins.

So I've decided to tell her story separately.

My full interview with Anna and the other stories of the people of Ligansk will form a separate documentary.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Did you then start to connect with other soldiers then?

Oscar Jenkins: Well, I mean, I was still connecting with people.

I mean, I'm not a total introvert on Miss Anthro, but I felt, yeah, from that point on, I just focused completely on that work.

Shithead Mark Lowe: But was there any connections there? Not you said you connect with the prisoners here.

Yeah.

Did you connect, how deeply did you connect?

Oscar Jenkins: Well, because I'm not on my phone anymore.

I'm just using my, just being like a normal person back in the day.

Yeah, the connections are getting stronger and stronger and I don't think we need technology for that anymore.

I think the prisoners are doing it without, it seems to be happening without technology.

Yeah.

I think of something and a person comes in or I think of there are associations with people and with work or with people and with myself.

Shithead Mark Lowe: But did you feel that in Ukraine with the soldiers or was there too much distraction?

Oscar Jenkins: There was a lot of distraction.

It's been getting stronger and stronger, but no, I did feel it a little bit in Ukraine.

Shithead Mark Lowe: What sort of things did you sense from them?

Oscar Jenkins: Okay, so for example, when I was watching the channel, There was news on Donald Trump, the assassination attempt, Donald Trump's.

That time, on that weekend, that mission, I also got something with my right ear.

I had an FPV and there was a perforated eardrum from that.

Shithead Mark Lowe: What was the mission?

Oscar Jenkins: Digging a, holding a position, a little bit of digging, but holding a position just near the front, maybe 2 kilometers from the front coming.

Shithead Mark Lowe: What do you mean digging?

Oscar Jenkins: Just with a little shovel.

Yeah.

But yeah, we were there for four days.

That was when I had to get out the American younger man because he got dehydrated.

So you had an American with you? Yeah, we had an American and three, two or three other Ukrainians.

Shithead Mark Lowe: And he got dehydrated, so he had to evacuate me.

Oscar Jenkins: By the time, I think it was the 4^{th} day, We were ready to go or we got told to leave now.

I think it was time anyway and then he was very, very dehydrated and it got worse on the way out and we tried to evac but we lost the other two soldiers because they'd left earlier.

We had to make our own way out.

It was a bit chaos.

Shithead Mark Lowe: How do you get out of there? What do you mean, you get into a car or do you walk?

Oscar Jenkins: We walked.

It was probably...

A couple of kilometres, not too bad.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oh, not too bad.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oscar and I also had a long and fascinating discussion about Buddhism beliefs and his ideas about consciousness and perception.

He described belief that thoughts, emotions and even perceptions can in some circumstances be shared or sensed between people.

Oscar told me that these experiences began while he was living in China and in his view became stronger over time.

He also suspected that AI was enhancing this ability.

But now while in prison, without any technology, he sometimes feels able to perceive the thoughts or emotions of other prisoners and believes they can perceive him in return.

On the front he also spoke about the attempted assassination of Donald Trump and the injury Oscar sustained to his ear shortly afterwards, drawing connections to some of his own ideas about perception and consciousness.

Whether you accept Oscar's interpretation or not, it was an unusually and deeply engaging conversation and one that gave me another insight into how he sees the world.

Oscar Jenkins: Expat, Vladivostok, all those things have been on my radar.

Shithead Mark Lowe: While filming this discussion about AI, an enhanced consciousness and perception.

We had an interesting moment where our cameras turned off for no reason.

Oscar and I shared some light-hearted moments questioning what may have caused this.

Shithead Mark Lowe: There's spooks everywhere.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, that's the technology.

We're talking about technology and this is what happens and people, when I was on the front with Ukraine and here as well, I get it with the guards, if there's a mobile phone in the pocket and they start talking.

Sometimes the phone will just go off and I'd feel like, oh, is that because of me? And sometimes I know it's because of me and sometimes it's just, I don't know.

Rain.

Yeah and there was a mission in December in which I got caught.

So I was there for about a month or three weeks.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So then, Ranbi, how did you get caught?

Oscar Jenkins: I was told that there was a mission coming up.

It was going to be dangerous.

I said okay, but for some reason my heart felt like I didn't want to take that mission.

This also comes back to desire and trying to get as much out of the life as I can with my knowledge that I have, probably being selfish.

So when the car came up to go out to the mission, I was doing something else.

I heard them but I didn't go up to say, okay, let's go or do you need me? Went to bed later and then after an hour or something of maybe sleeping, I was told, okay, going on the mission.

Everything was very quick.

When I got to the KSB control point before we departed close to the front, wasn't given a briefing, but that was fine.

I had everything that I normally had for the missions with a backpack full of food and ammo, whatever.

Shithead Mark Lowe: You knew what the mission was.

Oscar Jenkins: No, I never asked those questions.

I was just trying to be trusting.

previous mission we had done, this was the first mission from the new point, but the previous mission, which was quite difficult, some people got injured on it, was a medivac, you know.

So it was becoming more and more, not, it was becoming less and less assault inclined, more and more.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Pulling people back.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, but this other mission, you know, this other mission When four of us got in the armoured vehicle to go to the position, I was dropped off not knowing that it was essentially Russia,

it was a Russian position that I was in already and then when my commanding officer, I guess he'll call him, I don't know, he was the bloke that could speak some English.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So he was Ukrainian?

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, he was Ukrainian.

Three Ukrainian soldiers and myself.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Okay.

Shithead Mark Lowe: And this is where the consequences Of the organisation's problems became personal.

Oscar was placed into an armoured vehicle with three Ukrainians.

He said that by this stage, most of the Westerners had largely gone.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So by this stage, all the Westerners were out of this group.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, there was four or five that were still at the base.

They didn't want to take it for whatever, they didn't want to do the mission for whatever reason, or they weren't asked to do the mission.

This guy, I don't know if he didn't have an AK.

The gun that I was carrying was given to him or I gave it to him or he took it.

He told me to lie down in English and then I lay down in position.

There was a whole bunch of drones, grenades going off from the moment we left that vehicle.

There was a lot of chaos.

Those 3 guys went away.

I heard something, blah, blah, blah, distancia.

Distancia might mean, okay, we're moving now.

Don't get closer than 5 metres to the person in front of you.

I was thinking maybe I should move now, maybe I should move now, but he's talking to stay here in English.

Do I follow? What command do I follow? So I stayed in position there.

They didn't come back.

There was a snowstorm that night.

So you're there all night? it was a morning drop off, very early morning drop off, I think.

It was a, yeah.

I had a little shovel and there was just a little hole that I made about this deep.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah, about that deep.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, a little bit deeper than that and then after that day of not dying, drones and grenades and then shovel, a little bit of digging, That night there was a snowstorm.

Things got, from my point of view, crazy.

I heard voice.

There was voices that I heard definitely from about 5 or 10 metres ahead, but I couldn't see anything.

There was a flashing light.

I didn't go uninspected.

I thought that's a bit too dangerous.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Have you got a gun at this stage?

Oscar Jenkins: No, I had my Pistol? Plate carrier, my armour and on the armour I had a grenade.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So that's all you've got.

Oscar Jenkins: That's all I had from a weapons point of view, but I had water, I had a backpack in position.

I'm not sure what's happened to those guys or where their position is because there was no information for me from the briefing, so I don't know where to go.

So that happened again.

The weather sort of cleared up and the next night I worked up the courage to move a little bit forward.

There's a lot of snow in this area and then I changed my mind.

There's nothing I can see here.

It all feels very dangerous.

Minds or am I already in Russia or a Russian position? And there was a drone, there were drones, a drone dropped a grenade, broken arm here, problem with the left leg, moved back into the same hole.

waited another two days.

So you were up to four days? Yeah, four days there.

Not much sleep, but there was food and water for me and then after four and a bit days, a guy came up and asked me, do I need a hand? He asked me where was some water.

I said, maybe it's over there.

He couldn't find water.

He came back, asked me if I needed a hand.

I said, no, okay and then we walked 5 metres forward, 10 metres forward into a blind age and there were three soldiers there.

They asked me who I was.

I said I was a Ukrainian soldier and then I got captured.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oscar was alone, in freezing conditions, with limited weapons, and by his own account, without knowing exactly Where he was supposed to go.

Shithead Mark Lowe: What did you think when you were captured?

Oscar Jenkins: It was all just survival, blah, blah, bling, bling, bling, bling.

I wasn't thinking.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah, on the video that was released, you looked very dazed, like a cat with a head in the headlights or a rabbit, a rabbit in headlights.

Oscar Jenkins: Probably.

Yeah, I was just trying to answer the questions.

Is that video in the, maybe you can't tell, but that might have been...

the next day or later on that day in the blendage.

Shithead Mark Lowe: You're at a little camp.

Oscar Jenkins: A little camp.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah, and you were sitting down, you had some tape around your hands.

Yeah and he asked me, asked your name and you said, you were trying to speak Russian, Ukrainian, English.

It was a real mix and then he asked you something.

Oscar Jenkins: Oh, okay.

Yeah, no, that was right after the camp.

Shithead Mark Lowe: That was straight after.

Oscar Jenkins: So I was captured in the early evening and then bound feet hands for the night.

The next morning there was fog everywhere.

I thought, okay, we're crossing the front or somewhere here.

Why aren't we getting bombed with drones? But it just all felt quite peaceful from that.

drone side of things, just being led away.

I had problems with my legs so it was slow for five or six kilometres, took an hour or two hours to get to, that would have been almost, that would have been like 4 kilometres into the march where that video took place.

Quick video, hands bone.

After that, got a punch.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Because in the video there's a slap to your head and he says the Russian word for ****. He says black.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, That's all, yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: And well you were in a war zone.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, exactly.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oscar was one of the lucky ones.

He had survived 4 days in freezing temperatures, drone attacks, grenade attacks and starvation.

Shithead Mark Lowe: How was the trial?

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Because in the Australian media, they say it's a sham.

Oscar Jenkins: Oh, I have no idea about the details, but I was just sitting in a pre-trial detention centre, which was just like a prison cell.

But I really enjoyed that.

That's why I want to go back.

You did enjoy it or didn't? No, I really enjoyed it.

was sort of time to myself, if I'm being honest and during that time, I had a lawyer provided for me.

There was a translator.

Everything felt basically like I was in some sort of control.

Shithead Mark Lowe: How was that interaction? Good.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, it was fine.

Everyone was fine.

You know, pro-Russian, don't do it again, you know? Yeah, I understand and then sentenced to 13 years, which for me, I thought, I didn't think of it negatively at the time.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oscar's journey had taken him from Melbourne to China, to Ukraine, to the front, and finally into a Russian prison.

Shithead Mark Lowe: So you had these people who were, their attitude was just to kill anything, to kill Russians.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Where did you have discussions with them?

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, we had discussions.

Shithead Mark Lowe: And where did they come, where does that come from within them? And they're foreigners.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, they're a New Zealander.

Shithead Mark Lowe: A New Zealander.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, his policy towards clearing up the homeless from the New Zealand, on the streets of New Zealand would be to.

Kill them.

To eat them.

To kill them and eat them.

There's a lot of that kind of humour and jokes going around.

But it was very pro-tive.

It was very anti-Russian and violent.

Although, they would do the caveat of, this is only because it's necessary, because it's an invasion, an invasion going on and we're anti-aggression.

So it's, I don't know.

where it comes from.

Yeah.

It was quite strong within the group and the Ukrainians fell.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Oscar talks about a New Zealander that wants to clean up the homeless by killing and eating them.

This is a shocking thought, even if it's in a joking fashion.

He said they all had a deep, dark hatred of Russians.

It seemed that this war Was just an excuse to.

Shithead Mark Lowe: It's confusing for me because I would think, one minute you're there and you're fighting Russians and now you're saying, well, I'm okay with it.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, I don't know why.

That's just how it's worked.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Yeah.

Oscar Jenkins: Maybe it's surrender mentality from myself.

But I've been hurt a little bit here and I don't want that to happen again and even if that means I'm a complete turncoat and complete giving up all the values that I had before when I was younger or Western, then I don't mind being labelled as a terrorist from the West, by the West, and pro-Russian, even if the Russians don't see me as pro-Russian.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Do you feel that that's the way you looked upon in the West?

Oscar Jenkins: There was a point with interactions with the YouTube site and emails where I said I was anti-Australian, but I don't feel like the Australian government really thinks I'm anti-Australian because I know that I'm also willing to, as I did for Ukraine, to do what would be needed from Australia if it came to that situation.

But likewise, I'm happy to do that for Russia as well.

North Korea.

That's the problem with mercenaries.

Maybe I'm being a prostitute for war.

Poster boy maybe, as well as not a good thing, but that's how it is.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Do you see yourself as a mercenary? Could you just use that word? I'm just trying to.

Oscar Jenkins: No, I see myself now as a prisoner.

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): That answer sits at the centre of this story, because there are competing narratives. Russia says one thing, Australia says another and Oscar's own testimony is more compelling still. Australia says he is a prisoner of war. The Australian government says Russia must treat him in accordance with international humanitarian law and has advocated for his welfare and release and adding another dynamic is Oscar, who now wants to serve out his time in the Russian prison.

Deaths & Injuries (2:01:55)

Oscar Jenkins: So it's probably like number 6.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Is that the ear?

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, FPV, bum shrapnel, a little bit of back shrapnel, ear perforated.

It was more annoying, just a little bit, not really painful or anything, it just felt like a mistake and I mentioned Eisel Mazard in conversation to the American who was in the other trench right before that happened... Yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: How many died on that mission?

Oscar Jenkins: No, we saw dead bodies, but no one, no one died.

Shithead Mark Lowe: What's it like seeing a dead body? I've seen them in prison, but I've never, it's a long time ago.

Oscar Jenkins: I saw them in university. No, for me, maybe it was just because of my desire to try and be the only person in the world.

Death doesn't bother me. My own death doesn't bother me. So the dead body was like, oh, is this a dangerous time? Is this a dangerous situation? It's not pleasant.

I don't want to see it.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Was it Ukrainian or Russian?

Oscar Jenkins: No, as we approached the Ukrainian position, it was Ukrainian.

Shithead Mark Lowe: It was Ukrainian.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah.

When I got captured, I saw lots and lots in trenches that were Ukrainian.

I think they were just left out there because they were Ukrainian, but they might have been Russian as well.

Yeah, and lots of clothes and food on the front is chaos, absolute chaos.

Shithead Mark Lowe: Most people will never see what Oscar saw.

Most people will never walk through a trench.

Most people will never have to confront the physical reality of a battlefield or the smell of death.

Oscar Jenkins: Brother, like it was more like a war with a bigger brother or a brother.

Shithead Mark Lowe: More like a family feud.

Oscar Jenkins: A family feud, which is something that I've also heard from the Russians as well.

Family feud.

Shithead Mark Lowe (voice over): Whatever conclusion the viewer reaches about the legal definition of Oscar Jenkins, one fact is impossible to escape. He was an Australian who went to a foreign war. He entered a military environment He described as impoverished and fragmented. He encountered payment problems. He saw people leave. He suffered injuries. He saw the reality of death. He experienced confusion on operations and eventually he was captured. Whatever people may think of his decision, The consequences were real.

Conclusion

Shithead Mark Lowe: Well I think I'm just about finished. I must say thank you very much to agreeing to this interview. You've been very open and frank with your views and it's filled in a lot of gaps in the Western media of What happened to Oscar Jenkins? Why did he go? There was no information about that and I was frustrated.

I see now a person that, yeah, I still don't really understand you. You're very deep and when it comes to your ideas of technology and stuff like that. I tend to not agree with you, but that's... I don't like AI. I'm not an AI person and I fear it more, whereas you've sort of embraced it.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah, yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: And you believe for whatever reason that AI has driven you to do some things that you've done.

Oscar Jenkins: Yeah.

Shithead Mark Lowe: I find that a very interesting concept. I don't disagree with it because I'm dealing with a person who gives me good justifications to say that yes, it is doing it. But you're still very complex to me and so it was fascinating to meet you. Thank you very much.

Oscar Jenkins: My pleasure. Thank you very much.

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