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Ukrainian non-fiction

Kill The Moth

Russian Volunteers in the War Against Putin



Non-fiction. Journalistic investigation. Manuscript. Lviv 2026. approx. 170 pages incl. glossary of individuals and terms, bibliography

The new book by the author of „Zelenskyi without make-up".

When Russia launched its full-scale invasion of Ukraine, an unexpected force emerged, one that neither the Kremlin, the West, nor the Russian liberal emigration had anticipated: Russian citizens taking up arms for Ukraine.

This book is an unflinching documentary chronicle of how a few dozen men with Russian passports, handed rifles off the back of a truck in Kyiv in February 2022 and fighting as semi-partisans, became organized combat units under Ukraine's Main Directorate of Intelligence (GUR). Today they share the same trenches: uncompromising right-wing nationalists under Denis Kapustin („White Rex"); former Russian army officers and FSB operatives; twenty-year-old Moscow students born in the 2000s; and members of Russia's indigenous peoples, among them Yakuts, Buryats, Tuvans and Mari, who see this war as a chance to decolonize their homelands.

The author neither idealizes nor spares them. The book documents their extraordinary readiness to sacrifice, from Vovchansk, Avdiivka and Kupiansk to raids into Russia's Bryansk, Belgorod and Kursk regions. It documents just as sharply their existential isolation. At home they face life sentences, torture in custody, and FSB pressure on their families. In Ukraine they meet deep distrust from a society in no hurry to build them monuments.

The author had exclusive access to figures who remain out of reach for most Western correspondents: Kapustin, commander of the RDK; Vasily Kiryushchenko („Cardinal"), the corps' chief ideologue and son of the director of Servant of the People; former FSB officer Ilya Bogdanov; „Caesar," leader of the Freedom of Russia Legion; Alexander Sergeyev („Goga"), a Baltic Fleet saboteur; and „Borghese," the Ukrainian commander of the GUR special unit „Bratstvo."

The manuscript runs up to the autumn of 2026. It covers the reported FSB-orchestrated killing of Kapustin in January 2026, with a $500,000 bounty on his head; his much-discussed interview with Yury Dud, in which he showed his birth certificate and revealed his Jewish roots (April 2026); and the Kyiv power struggle between the SBU and the GUR over the Stepan Kaplunov case (August 2026).

Above all, the book asks what no one in Moscow, Kyiv or Washington can afford to ignore. What happens inside Russia if Putin's „vertical of power" weakens or collapses? Who takes control of its nuclear warheads? And why might the West's bet on an unarmed Russian emigration prove a strategic mistake?

THE AUTHOR

other translations
25 languages

sample translation
English

other titles
Zelenskyi without make-up
Battle for Kyiv
Anatomy of Hate

Sergii Rudenko was born 1970 in the Sumi region in Ukraine. He is a publicist and television journalist, author of a weekly author column for Deutsche Welle and anchor man at „Espresso.TV". He worked for the Ukrainian service of Radio Svoboda, was the editor-in-chief of the editions „Now", „Gazeta 24", „Glavred". He is founder of the book portal „Bukvoid". For over thirty years, he has reported on politics in Ukraine and Eastern Europe, the Kremlin's networks of corruption, and the Russo-Ukrainian War. He became famous by his quite critial political biography about President Zelenskyi translated into more than 25 languages.

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Long Synopsis

Preface
The emergence of an armed opposition to Putin in Ukraine (RDK, Legion "Freedom of Russia", Siberian Battalion) and the end of the monopoly of exiled intellectuals on the future of Russia.

Chapter 1. Strangers among their own (February 2022, chaos in Kyiv).
The first hours of the great war, seen through the eyes of Denis Kapustin and his comrades-in-arms in Kiev. The deadly danger of showing a Russian passport at checkpoints; first battles in the south under the "pirate flag"; months of bureaucratic struggle for official status; finally the incorporation into the 98th Territorial Defense Battalion "Azov" on the border between the Zaporizhzhia and Donetsk regions.

Chapter 2. The Sword That Torn the Darkness (Denis Kapustin / White Rex).
A biographical portrait of the founder and commander of the RDK: the move from Moscow to Cologne, the founding of the clothing brand and the MMA tournament series "White Rex", the move to Kiev, the entry ban for the Schengen area and searches by the Ukrainian secret service SBU in 2019. The establishment of a closed unit based on the model of an "order", the criticism of the Kremlin's pseudo-nationalism and the vision of a nation-state instead of one empire.

Chapter 3. An FSB officer against Lieutenant Colonel Putin (Ilya Bogdanov)
The story of a former senior lieutenant of the FSB Border Guard Directorate from Vladivostok, who defected to the Ukrainian side in 2014, defended the Donetsk airport, survived at least five assassination attempts by Russian secret services, took part in raids by the RDK (Russian Volunteer Corps), discovered his Ukrainian roots in the "Green Wedge" region (Selyony Klin) and went to Ponomar in the spring of 2026 (altar helper) of the Orthodox Church of Ukraine.

Chapter 4. The Bryansk Shock (The raid by volunteers on the Bryansk region near Lyubechane and Suzhany)
A chronicle of the first border crossing into the Russian Federation on March 2, 2023 by a group of 45 RDK fighters. The recording of a video manifesto in front of a rural medical station, the withdrawal without any casualties, the paralysis of the Moscow security authorities, propaganda lies about "Young Fedya" and an emergency meeting of the Security Council of the Russian Federation.

Chapter 5. The breakthrough near Belgorod (attack on the Belgorod region, border crossing "Graivoron")
The first full-scale operation by volunteers on May 22, 2023 using tanks and armored vehicles. The destruction of a Russian border post, the capture of a BTR-82A infantry fighting vehicle, the taking control of villages near the border and the emergency evacuation of Russian nuclear warheads from the "Belgorod-22" depot.

Chapter 6. Armor for "Mogila" (Pawel Kuznetsov)
The story of a native of Kazan with a congenital heart defect who lived in Kiev since 2011 and refuted the Kremlin's lies about the "oppression of Russian-speaking people" by his own example. As the commander of an armored unit of the RDK (Russian Volunteer Corps), he captured a Russian armored personnel carrier in Graivoron; In addition, in the winter of 2024, he evacuated around a hundred wounded fighters from the Ukrainian armed forces from an encirclement near Avdiivka with an M113 personnel carrier.

Chapter 7. The gray area near Shebekino (Novaya Tavolshanka, Belgorod region, prisoners)
The fighting in June 2023 in the Belgorod region. The occupation of the town of Novaya Tavolshanka, which lasted more than a week, the artillery shelling of its own towns by the Russian army and the public request by Russian volunteers to Governor Vyacheslav Gladkov to come to a church for negotiations in order to hand over captured Russian military personnel there.

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Chapter 8. Dress rehearsal for the uprising (raids triggering Prigozhin's mutiny).
An analysis of the causal connection between the raids of Russian volunteers in the Belgorod region in May and June 2023 and the armed uprising of Yevgeny Prigozhin on June 24, 2023. How the RDK and the "Legion Freedom of Russia" proved to the leader of the "Wagner" group that the power structure within Russia is hollowed out and the path to Moscow is open.

Chapter 9. The Cross and Diamond of "Caesar" (Maximilian Andronnikov).
A portrait of the deputy commander of the „Russian Freedom Legion": his participation in conspiratorial military operations in Kovrov (2007) and Yekaterinburg (2009), the exposure of the Kremlin's secret control of Russian patriotic movements (namely by Vladislav Surkov), his family's departure to Ukraine, his deployment in Donbass and his fundamental refusal to accept a Ukrainian passport.

Chapter 10. Foreign banners and desk leaders (The break with the former Russian Duma deputy Ilya Ponomaryov)
The story of the failed attempt by the political emigration to co-opt the armed resistance—the RDK, LSR, and Sibbat—for their own ends. It covers the scandal surrounding the „Irpin Declaration" (August 2022), the founding of the self-styled „Congress of People's Deputies" in Poland, and the ideological chasm between the fighters in the trenches and the opposition politicians in exile.

Chapter 11. Death in the Oak Trunk (Vasily Kiryushchenko, nom de guerre „Cardinal")
The paradoxical fate of the son of Alexey Kiryushchenko—director of the series „Servant of the People"—who became the primary ideologue, strategist, and manifesto author for the RDK. An analysis of his philosophy regarding the destruction of the Chekist state via the „lumberjack method," the psychological screening of recruits, and a life spent in the crosshairs of FSB assassins.

Chapter 12. The Curse of the Taiga and the Uprising of the Colonies (The Founding of Sibbat)
The formation of the „Siberian Battalion" (Sibbat) within the structures of the Ukrainian military intelligence service (GUR) in the autumn of 2023. It details how representatives of oppressed indigenous peoples from Siberia and the Far East (Sakha, Buryats, Tuvans)—led by former GRU officer Vladislav Amosov—joined forces with Russian nationalists to advance the decolonization and collapse of the empire.

Chapter 13. The Truth from the Trenches of the „Siberian Battalion": A Welder and a Surveyor (Nikolai and Yuri)
Documentary accounts and testimonies from two ethnic Russians from the border regions of the Russian Federation—a 27-year-old laborer from the Voronezh Oblast and a 40-year-old land surveyor from the Bryansk region—who fled to Ukraine to escape forced conscription and are now fighting on the front lines in the Zaporizhzhia region as part of the „Siberian Battalion."

Chapter 14. The Ashes of Sacred Groves (Nikita „Zergut" from the Mari Republic)
The story of an entrepreneur from the Mari El Republic who relocated to Ukraine as early as 2014. He draws parallels between the centuries-long Russification of the Volga region and the war against Ukraine; he joined the „Siberian Battalion" and severed all ties with his own brother—who fought in the Russian occupation army and was killed at the front.

Chapter 15. The Vengeance of a Powerless Empire (FSB Terror Against Families)
An account of punitive operations carried out by the FSB in Buryatia, Tuva, and Sakha against the relatives of „Siberian Battalion" fighters. These actions include nighttime house raids, the freezing of bank accounts, the intimidation of mothers, and pressure exerted on Buddhist lamas and shamans to perform „cursing rituals" directed at the volunteers.

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Chapter 16. The "Traitor Factory" and Stalinist-Style Prison Sentences
This chapter explores the contrast between Russian propaganda outlets (such as RT and NTV)—which mock the volunteers—and the Russian judicial machinery as it functioned between 2023 and 2026. It details prison sentences ranging from 15 to 25 years handed down to individuals including prominent nuclear physicists from Sarov, legal professionals, and ordinary workers—often for actions as minor as making cryptocurrency donations or posting critical comments. It also examines the FSB's creation of a network of fabricated Telegram bots.

Chapter 17. The March Ultimatum (The Incursion During the 2024 "Putin Elections")
A coordinated offensive launched in March 2024 by the RDK (Russian Volunteer Corps), the Freedom of Russia Legion, and the Siberian Battalion in the Kursk (Tyotkino) and Belgorod (Kozinka) regions. The operation included the destruction of a Russian Su-34 fighter-bomber, the evacuation of civilians, the disruption of the presidential "elections," and the tying down of a 20,000-strong Russian military contingent.

Chapter 18. Targeting Home Soil ("Blanche")
The story of a 22-year-old commander of an assault unit within the Freedom of Russia Legion, originally from Moscow. At the age of 19, he abandoned his university studies, crossed the border near Belgorod illegally, and transformed from an underground activist into a battle-hardened frontline commander.

Chapter 19. The Ashes of the „Serpukhov" (Alexander Sergeyev, „Goga")
A reconstruction of the special operation „Fishing" (April 2024), carried out by the Ukrainian military intelligence service (GUR) and the „Freedom of Russia" Legion: A professional soldier and radio operator in the Russian Baltic Fleet—whose own brother is an officer in the FSB—handed over secret documents to Kyiv, set fire to the small missile ship „Serpukhov" in Baltiysk, and fled to Ukraine.

Chapter 20. Lilacs on a Body Armor Vest (The Muscovite „Chaika")
A portrait of a 24-year-old preschool teacher from Moscow who initially helped Ukrainian refugees secretly leave Russia for Europe, and later joined an assault unit of the „Freedom of Russia" Legion—dreaming of returning after the fall of the dictatorship to help rebuild a free Moscow.

Chapter 21. Children of a „Zeroed-Out" Era (The Generation of 20-Year-Olds under fire)
A sociological and psychological analysis of the generation of Russians born after the year 2000 (including "Blanche," "Chaika," and "Truman"). They grew up under Putin's rule, yet rejected the lies of state propaganda, choosing armed resistance over submission.

Chapter 22. The Concrete Hell of Vovchansk (The Aggregate Plant, the death of "Krest")
A chronicle of the grueling urban combat and the defense of the aggregate plant in Vovchansk during the summer of 2024—under constant bombardment by guided aerial bombs (KABs). It covers the death of Andrei "Krest"—one of the founders of the RVC (Russian Volunteer Corps) and commander of an assault company—as well as the evolution of the Corps into a regular assault unit.

Chapter 23. The Last of the First (The death of "Tourist")
A war of attrition in the frozen forests along the Oskol River, in the Kupyansk sector of the front, during the winter of 2025. The death of RVC deputy commander Anton Zyryanov ("Tourist") marks the near-total loss of the Corps' original, "founding" membership.

Chapter 24. Return Through the Fire (Anatoly Safonov, "Truman")
The story of a 22-year-old from Irkutsk—the great-grandson of a Ukrainian who fell victim to Stalinist repressions in 1937. In 2023, he fled to Ukraine via Kazakhstan, served on the front lines in Avdiivka and Vovchansk as well as on Snake Island, obtained Ukrainian citizenship, and lost a leg in an FPV drone attack near Kondrashovka in April 2025.

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Chapter 25. Declared dead on paper (an FSB special operation to „liquidate" Kapustin)
A detailed reconstruction of a counter-operation by the Ukrainian military intelligence service (HUR) around the turn of 2025/2026: the staging of Denis Kapustin's death on the Zaporizhzhia front, the receipt of 500,000 US dollars in cryptocurrency from the FSB for the supposedly „carried-out murder"—and the public appearance of the living RDK commander alongside HUR chief Kyrylo Budanov on January 1, 2026.

Chapter 26. The birth certificate on the table (Kapustin's interview with Dud)
An analysis of the widely noted interview that the RDK commander gave to journalist Yury Dud in April 2026. During the conversation, „White Rex" placed his Soviet birth certificate on the table and spoke about his Jewish grandfather, Yefim Karpmanski—thereby debunking the racist myths propagated by Russian neo-Nazis and Kremlin propagandists.

Chapter 27. Handshakes in the Shadows (Warsaw, Contacts with Western Intelligence Services)
The evolution of the stance taken by the U.S. and Europe: from the scandal surrounding the use of Western-supplied armored vehicles in Graivoron (2023) to secret briefings in Warsaw and Kyiv, during which Western intelligence agencies began to view Russian volunteers as an effective tool for weakening the Putin regime.

Chapter 28. A Wolf Among Dogs (Confessions of "Borghese," Battalion Commander of the "Bratstvo" Unit)
A candid account from a professional Ukrainian military intelligence (HUR) officer and commander of the "Bratstvo" battalion, who fought alongside the RDK (Russian Volunteer Corps). He describes the instinctive distrust Ukrainians feel toward Russian volunteers at the front, the fanatical self-sacrifice of the Corps' fighters, and their tragic, existential isolation.

Chapter 29. The Line of Distrust (The Chasm Between Ukrainians and Volunteers)
An analysis of the moral and psychological rift between a Ukrainian society traumatized by war and these armed Russian citizens. It explores why no monuments are erected for them in Ukraine, and why their struggle serves, first and foremost, as a personal act of atonement for the crimes committed by their own state.

Chapter 30. Combat in Berezniaky. A War Within One's Own Camp (The Kaplunov Case)
An examination of a sharp confrontation between Ukrainian intelligence services in Kyiv in August 2026: the clandestine arrest of Stepan Kaplunov ("Slavyan")—chief of combat operations for the RDK (Russian Volunteer Corps)—by the SBU's counterintelligence division on suspicion of working for the FSB, followed by an exchange of fire between fighters from the HUR's "Timur" special unit and SBU operatives during an attempt to free him.

Chapter 31. Advance on Moscow (The Military Strategy of the Volunteers)
An analysis of the RDK's operational plan for the moment Putin's vertical of power collapses: a lightning-fast advance by mobile armored units along the M-4 and M-3 highways within the first 48 hours of the ensuing chaos, the establishment of military command posts, the immediate dismantling of the FSB, the creation of a national tribunal, and a comprehensive lustration process.

Chapter 32. Parade of Ruins (Scenarios for the Disintegration of the Russian Federation)
A geopolitical forecast regarding the disintegration of Russia following a military defeat: a "parade of sovereignties" in the Caucasus, the Volga region, and Siberia; wars between the private armies of oligarchs; the risk of losing control over nuclear warheads; and the mission of volunteer units to secure the nuclear arsenals.

Epilogue. The price of the decision. An assessment of four and a half years of armed resistance by Russian volunteers (2022–2026). The cost of a "one-way ticket," the memory of fallen comrades-in-arms, the final collapse of the myth that Putin enjoys broad popular support, and the inevitable end of the Russian Empire.

Glossary. Sources. A systematic index of individuals, military units, geographical locations, special operations, and sources (materials from the GUR, the SBU, and Western intelligence agencies; rulings by Russian military courts; reports from human rights organizations; and investigative research).

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