

Convoy4Ukraine - June 2026

Driving more than 2000 miles to the far side of Ukraine in five days entails early starts and long days behind the wheel. However, we are in good hands as our team leaders, Paul Parsons and Anthony White, backed by Archie, our chief mechanic and Oleh, our essential Ukrainian, have made eleven such trips and everything is ready for 34 of us to climb into our 18 vehicles and make a very prompt departure from Northamptonshire on a glorious June morning. By mid-afternoon, having negotiated customs at the channel tunnel, and stopping only to refuel and swap over driving, we are crossing the border into Germany and our first night's halt in Dortmund. A good dinner, an early breakfast and we are off across central Germany passing signs to Paderborn, Munster and Hannover, names familiar to those of us who served in the British Army of the Rhine during the Cold War. A few more miles and we are crossing the old inner German border and into what used to be East Germany. Then it's a long but fast drive across the plains and into Poland for our second night and dinner in Gliwice. Monday finds us approaching the Ukrainian border and here we have to wait as each and every vehicle and passport is closely examined, a process which takes three hours to see us all through. Then it's onwards, now in a tight convoy, to Lviv, but at least this gives us time to spot stork nests on the telegraph poles.



Lviv, formerly Lemberg and capital of ancient Galicia, is a beautiful City, with a long cultural heritage. We dine in a Viennese restaurant and are serenaded by a wonderful violinist who plays beautiful pieces from Brahms and Strauss as well as haunting Ukrainian folk songs; we are entranced, it's a memorable evening. Afterwards, Louise and I stroll down to the Opera house, and enjoy the street music and watch the young promenading as they might do in Paris or Berlin; can this really be a City at war? Tomorrow will be different.

En route to our first visit, the prosthetic and orthotic department of the Unbroken Rehabilitation Centre we stop and along with the rest of the City get out of our cars at 9.00 am, for one minute`s silence, to honour the fallen; in Lviv this happens every day. The Unbroken Centre (www.unbroken.org.ua) is a Ukrainian humanitarian charity supported by organisations as far afield a Korea and Japan. C4U has been supporting Unbroken since its beginning, trying to match specific needs with specialist equipment sourced in the UK. Truly, we are witnessing a society doing its very best to ensure its young men, women and children are looked after both mentally and physically; quietly one wonders what efforts the Russians make (if any) to look after their own physically and mentally damaged soldiers. Then it`s onwards through the City to the Lviv centre for Services to Combatants, another organisation which helps to rehabilitate soldiers back into civil society. In Lviv alone this Charity has supported 62,000 ex-combatants with legal, psychological, career advice and training; another example of the amazing efforts Ukraine puts in to looking after its veterans.



Now it's time to visit the military cemetery at the Field of Mars. We stand silent, aghast to see how many more graves there are since our last visit only a year ago. In fact the cemetery is now full and we move on to the Hill of Glory where we see graves of soldiers killed only a few weeks ago; how many more? Fittingly, our next stop is at the Church of the Blessed Virgin, dedicated to Pope John Paul II, who did so much to help bring about the collapse of the old USSR. We join in the Mass, after which in front of the congregation, Fathers Orest and Vasil bless both us and our vehicles with holy water in appreciation of our support and in preparation for our drive to the east. Lunch follows with numerous presentations and speeches of appreciation by the soldiers present. As it's our third trip, Louise and I are presented with a wonderful flag, now flying proudly

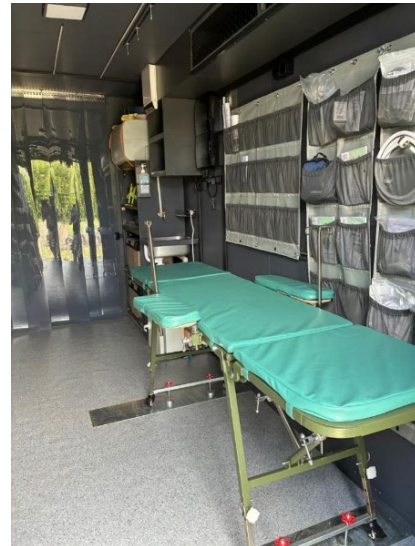
from our flagpole at home. It is here that much of the medical kit, along with some of the vehicles are handed over. Then back to the hotel for two more presentations, including a rather sobering teach in on how to put a tourniquet on your own arm or leg; let's hope it's not needed. That evening we say goodbye to those who are not travelling beyond Lviv.

Another early departure and we are soon on the E40 heading towards Kyiv and Poltava. This drive is not for the fainthearted as on ordinary roads the co-driver becomes vital to give the all clear for overtaking. Again, stopping only to refuel and share the driving, early afternoon finds us approaching Kyiv, the capital, and a huge city, which we will see more of on our return. But soon, with Louise navigating brilliantly, we are across the Dniepro, an enormous river, and after a brief refuelling stop we are off to Poltava for the night. Here we are handing over a few more of our vehicles and we get given another wonderful flag; this one with a shark on it; our granddaughter will love it!! Dinner follows and a chance to talk to soldiers straight from the frontline, lots of discussions about drone warfare keeps us old soldiers (there are seven of us) fascinated to hear directly from those actually using them; suddenly the war seems much closer. At bedtime I check our grab bag- passports, iPhones, valuables etc, in case we have to go down to the shelter. A wise move as at 12.30 my air alarm app blares out telling us to take cover, shortly followed by the town sirens. We dress and grab our bag, only to find the back door out of the hotel locked!!- I should have checked earlier. Luckily whatever was coming has been dealt with and we return to bed. At 1.30 the alarm sounds again, this time we take to the bathroom (no windows) and the sound of explosions follow; "what's that" says Louise; "town's air defences" I reply, trying to sound convincing, whilst being pretty certain it's actually missiles landing not too far away. We read later that the town has been hit by six ballistic missiles; a regular occurrence underlining Ukraine's acute shortage of Patriot air defence missiles. Two more alarms interrupt the night but this time it is drones and they are all dealt with before they get here.

Next morning a quick walk to get some fresh air shows that life goes on, the streets are being cleaned, the park looks well-tended; these Ukrainians are resilient. Into our vehicle and we are now accompanied by Andrew Brash and ex-Royal Engineer, as an ex-cavalryman I am delighted to have direct engineer support! Immediately it's clear, today is going to be different, the GPS is down (normal procedure when air attacks are imminent). Luckily we have a good old fashioned paper map, which Louise much prefers to use anyway and with Andrew as co-navigator I can concentrate on the driving. At the petrol station we get some good coffee and help a Ukrainian officer to jump start his vehicle and then we are off again on the E40- direction Kharkiv. Our destination (as always) is a pin drop from Oleh. We are looking for the Stabnets, but with the GPS down this isn't so easy, but eventually we all join up and find them. No

convoys now, dispersion is recommended, it`s best to assume Russian drones might be in the sky.

C4U has funded 2 Stabnet units so we are keen to see them. From the outside they look like a typical (but grey) portalo, that you might hire for a dance or wedding at home. Inside it`s a fully-fledged emergency operating unit. These are lifesaving pieces of equipment- and the more we can fund, the more lives can be saved.



Then we are off to meet Svetlana, whom I first met last year in Sumy when out here with our son, Oliver. Her unit has now moved to Kharkiv Oblast and we have vehicles for them, which we hand over whilst hidden under the trees, again wary of drones. After further handovers we are allocated a different vehicle and Suzanna and young Jonjo Wood join us for the last leg to Izium and Barvinkove. Jonjo`s grandparents are very old friends of Louise- what a small world. Again we drive with long gaps between us, for much of the time under drone netting, both reassuring and a little concerning. We are about 50KM from the actual front, quite close enough. Jonjo pipes up from the back saying, "its all getting a little wary" which keeps us chuckling. Concentrating on the road, trying to avoid potholes but maintain 75 mph takes all my concentration. We arrive at Izium, still under drone netting but then head west to our final handover at Barvinkove- no drone nets and time to take a breather, find a loo and share a can of beer, whilst waiting for Paul and Anthony who have been handing over a vehicle in Izium. Now the pressure of driving is over and we all pile with our luggage into an old yellow school bus which takes us to a military camp which is to be our base for the night. However, having experienced communal underground sleeping last year, I jump at the opportunity offered to Louise to take advantage of a small apartment about 5 miles away, which we go to after supper and in semi darkness, driving with no lights. Its basic to say the least, and we are met by a quiet and sad looking Ukrainian girl who has probably been displaced from occupied Ukraine and is using it as a temporary home. However, there is a shower and we are able to enjoy a good night`s sleep. In the morning we are taken to another house where we are given fresh pancakes, before being

driven back to join up with the rest of the team. I try hard not to look too smug as all the chat is about the snoring; we don't dare mention the pancakes!



Then into the bus for the three hours back to Kharkiv, at a more subdued pace (max 75KPH- much to the driver`s chagrin) we have time to look more closely at the countryside. This was all fought over in 2022 and there is much war detritus, including miles of minefields, damaged buildings and other signs of intense fighting. Oleh shows us harrowing photographs of the mass graves discovered after the area was recaptured in late 2022, the Russians tortured and then shot nearly 500 residents of one town which they briefly occupied; this is what war with Russia means.

After buying some delicious strawberries from a babushka on the roadside, we arrive in Kharkiv. Despite almost nightly drone and missile attacks, the City (Ukraine`s second) is kept spic and span, with clean streets and blown out windows neatly boarded up. So as not to get to the station too early we stop at the park to have a leg stretch; the grass is mown, the flowers tended and absolutely no rubbish !! At the station, a magnificent edifice, we pass through security and our train pulls in exactly on time. Then, at the last moment everybody has to detrain and take shelter as the air alarm sounds; however whatever it is, is dealt with before it reaches the City and we pull out only a few minutes late, the start of our return journey via Kyiv, Lviv and then on to Krakow for the flight home. Its four hours to Kyiv so there is plenty of time to enjoy the countryside, look at our photographs and reflect on a very long , tiring but infinitely rewarding trip. We share our carriage with a group of school children , happily chattering like starlings and looking forward to visiting Kyiv.

Our train, modern and air conditioned, arrives in Kyiv precisely on time (BR please note) and we are met by Yaroslav, an old friend of Paul`s who piles us all into a smart minibus for dinner and a private tour of Kyiv. The restaurant is one of Kyiv`s best and specializes in celebrating Ukrainian cuisine both ancient and modern, we are not disappointed- nor by the red wine from Odessa. Only too quickly it is back to the minibus for our tour of the City. At one stage we pass President Zelensky`s motorcade

whisking him through the streets- a very special moment. We stop at Freedom square and also see the damage to the Cathedral caused by a Russian drone a few days earlier. It's another reminder that whilst we are only passing through, Ukrainians are subject to attacks almost every day. Now it's back to the main railway station, a heaving hubbub of people.

Our train arrives and we find our very comfortable sleeper berth for the long trip back to Lviv; our journey is nearly over. On the next train to Krakow we share our compartment with a young Ukrainian mother with children the same age as our grandchildren. She speaks good English and tells us she has moved from Zaporizhia to Lviv and is now taking her children to Mallorca for a holiday. However, her husband has to stay in Zaporizhia and they only see each other twice a year- a final reminder of what this war really means. Like every Ukrainian she is immensely grateful that we have made the effort to help her country; we are reduced to silence- we are going home- when will she be able to go back and join her husband in their home?

These are the words Svetlana wrote to Paul the day after our return...

Thank you for these words. Honestly, they mean no less to us than the vehicles, generators, or any other aid you bring. Because war does not only exhaust the body. It exhausts faith. And sometimes, more than anything else, a person needs to know that somewhere far away there are people who genuinely care. You come to a country where air raid sirens are part of daily life, where people have learned to plan their days between alerts, where every meeting could unexpectedly become the last. Yet each time, you choose to return. And that is what we remember most. Not the vehicles. Not the boxes. Not the supplies. The people. Those who could have stayed at home in warmth and safety yet chose to stand beside us. There are thousands of kilometres between us, different languages, different flags flying above our homes. But for a long time now, we have shared the same cause. Freedom. And the responsibility to defend it. You wrote that you return home with a feeling that there is still unfinished work. You know, most Ukrainians have lived with that same feeling for many years. Perhaps that is why we understand each other so well. Please pass on our deepest gratitude to your entire team. Every driver. Every donor. Every volunteer who raises funds, repairs vehicles, loads supplies, and gives their time, energy, and heart to this cause. They may never hear the explosions. But every day they help us withstand them. To many of us, you are no longer simply partners or volunteers. You have become part of the extended family that this war has created. And when Ukrainians say, "Please tell them thank you," believe me, those words carry far more than simple politeness. They carry lives. Saved crews. Another day of resistance. Another chance for someone to make it home alive. Take care of yourselves. And know that here in Ukraine, you will always have friends waiting for you. War has a strange way of creating families where, only yesterday, there were strangers, and we are grateful that you have become part of ours.

With great respect, gratitude, and friendship, Svitlana and all of our Wild Pack.

If the words above make you want to learn more/donate or join the next trip,
please do get in touch with me or contact Paul Parsons : Paul@convoy4ukraine.com

Michael and Squeeze Baines -June 26