

# He proved his love in deeds, not words

**EXCLUSIVE**  
By Lord Ashcroft

**H**E WAS quiet, thoughtful and charming with a gentle smile and, every time we met, we would exchange affectionate hugs. Above all else, he was a man of huge integrity who was fiercely patriotic. Even in his challenging wartime role as deputy mayor of Odesa, he felt he was not doing enough for his country.

So, despite being just months away from his 50th birthday, Sergiy Tetyukhin resigned his civilian role shortly before Christmas in order to enlist in the Ukrainian Army.

There was only one unit he wanted to serve in – the Odesa-based Tsunami Assault Regiment commanded by his close friend, Lt-Col Olexandr “Alex” Gostyshev.

Sergiy had to embark on military training which he completed only weeks ago. After joining up with his new Tsunami comrades, he messaged me, full of enthusiasm for his new role: “So we are getting ready for new assignments in three to five weeks. We have been expanded. A lot of missions in Ukraine with Alex. Gotta be 100 per cent ready.”

Sadly, the new recruit and his commander will never go on those missions.

Both men were killed by a Russian missile strike on their home city in the early afternoon of last Friday. At least 19 other people were killed and some 70 more injured.

Typically, Sergiy, Alex and Dmytro Abramenko, Alex’s deputy, were all killed after they had gone to help the injured and dying who had been hit by the first missile which landed close by just minutes earlier.

This horrendous “double-tap” tactic involves firing one missile, waiting several

## Collaborators

minutes and then aiming a second at the same spot to kill and injure the rescue team. Intelligence sources in Ukraine suspect the Russians deliberately targeted the temporary military base and suspect collaborators of giving them its location.

It is believed around 10 of the dead were members of the regiment. The strike, which also damaged civilian buildings, used Iskander ballistic missiles fired from occupied Crimea. President Volodymyr Zelensky described the assault as “vile” and promised retaliation. So this is the article that I hoped never to have to write: a posthumous tribute to my dear friend, Sergiy Tetyukhin.

I first met Sergiy in September. While still deputy mayor, he had visited the Tsunami regiment near Kramatorsk, close to then heavy fighting in nearby Bakhmut.

Because Sergiy spoke good English, he was asked to accompany me for two days while I reported from close to the front line.

At one point, I spent a couple of hours with Sergiy and Alex in a top-secret command bunker. Six large electronic screens displayed clear images of a battle raging 15 miles away. Dozens of drones were streaming live images of the battlefield at Klishchiivka, near Bakhmut.

We spent that night in a “safe house” near Kostyantynivka, a small front-line city where earlier that day a missile strike had killed at least 17 residents and injured dozens more. There, the sound of crickets mixed with the noise of out-going Ukrainian artillery fire.

Later, and far more alarmingly, the sound of incoming Russian artillery fire was so much louder and our two-storey building shuddered. “Don’t worry. It is in the hands

Despite being nearly 50, Sergiy Tetyukhin quit as deputy mayor of Odesa to fight at the front. He was killed last week in a missile strike. Here, Lord Ashcroft pays tribute to a dear friend who embodied embattled Ukraine’s defiant spirit



Kit... Ashcroft, centre, with Tetyukhin, right, and Dmytro Abramenko

of the gods [who lives and dies],” joked Sergiy. Today that comment of his is all the more poignant. Alex, the unit commander, was an impressive figure too.

During the heat of battle, he remained calm and authoritative, delivering orders over a secure internet service or an equally safe mobile phone service. I never met Alex again but I mourn his loss too.

It was Sergiy with whom I remained in close contact, and over the months, he became a loyal friend. In October last year, I joined a British aid convoy that was delivering equipment and goods to several locations in Ukraine. One of those to benefit was the Tsunami Assault Regiment which received winter uniforms and medical goods.

At my invitation, Sergiy joined us for dinner one night at a restaurant in Odesa and when, the next morning, we delivered the supplies to the regiment, he came to thank the team from Macclesfield Ukrainian Aid and the Ukraine Freedom Company for risk-

ing their lives to help his country in its hour of need. Then in late December he messaged me: “I resigned from Odesa City Council and decided to join Tsunami. I passed all the necessary selections, passed the physical training.

“I am waiting for my appointment at the beginning of January and will move to [be with] Alex. See you. Merry Christmas.”

When I asked whether his wife and family were concerned by his decision, he wrote back: “The family is worrying but completely understand my decision.”

In early January, I wished Sergiy a happy New Year and asked whether I might write a newspaper article about him and his decision, at 49, to become a soldier in order to defend his homeland.

Typically, he did not want the spotlight shone on himself, replying: “Maybe later. I am sorry but I think it’s gonna take time. This is a new experience for me and I want to focus on it as there is nothing more impor-

tant right now [than fighting the Russians].” Since the war began, I have made six visits to Ukraine. My most recent one last month came just days after I was personally sanctioned by Russia for writing numerous pro-Ukraine media articles.

Sadly, on my most recent visit to Ukraine, I was unable to meet Sergiy but, when the article on my front-line experiences appeared in the Express, he messaged me: “Great trip! Great story! Thanks my friend!”

Little did I know, it would be my final message from him. Sergiy was a modest man, never championing his own achievements. Indeed, it was only after his death that I heard some of his success working for his community. Ukraine had, and still has, a reputation for corruption.

Yet, Sergiy was a beacon of integrity and dedication in both public and private.

His public service began in earnest in 2011 when he served in a senior role for the Odesa Regional State Administration, ushering in a

new era of accessibility and transparency. For the next 13 years, Sergiy’s work embodied duty and commitment.

In 2017, Sergiy switched jobs to work for the city council, first as the director of the department of economic development and later as vice-mayor and, finally, deputy mayor. He is credited with having made significant progress in the field of road safety and, during the coronavirus pandemic, he worked harder than ever to help save lives and to improve living conditions.

Among the many warm tributes to Sergiy, Petr Obukhov, a deputy of Odesa city council, said: “An extraordinary person, a true professional, honest and decent. This is a huge loss for our city

and country. To understand: when he left [his job as deputy mayor], there was applause in the session hall – almost for the first time in the history of Odesa self-government.

“Sergiy did not like publicity and did not play politics – he was, as they say, a technocrat... He was also just a good person and friend. And a patriot – that’s why he voluntarily put on a military uniform.”

Nate Mook, who has been involved in aid work for residents and pets in Ukraine, said: “He welcomed me like family in early days of invasion and helped feed hundreds of thousands. He kept me safe along with our brother Alex... who was also killed. Every single day, they never stopped helping Ukraine. I am so heartbroken & angry. We have lost too many incredible people.”

Oleksii Goncharenko, who represents Odesa as an MP, told me: “He was a very talented and very decent person, which he once again proved when he resigned as dep-

Pictures: NEWSFLASH; LORD ASHCROFT KCMG PC



## TROOPS JUST SECONDS FROM ANNIHILATION

By Mark Reynolds

**FOOTAGE from Ukrainian drones shows the pinpoint targeting of Russian tanks and troops on the eastern frontline.**

**Two enemy soldiers are seen seconds before an aerial blitz as part of a counter-offensive in Ukraine’s eastern regions of Donetsk, Luhansk and Kharkiv.**

The undated images from kamikaze first-person-view drones were released by the Ukrainian army. It said in a statement: “The ground forces continue to destroy the enemy in the east with drone drops and FPV drones.

“The video from the ‘OCHI’ [drone] unit of the 120th Separate Airborne Brigade shows the results of combat work on personnel and military equipment...The work continues!”

Meanwhile, 9,000 children will be evacuated from a Russian border region being shelled by Ukraine as Kyiv’s forces increasingly strike at targets behind the frontline.

The move was announced by Belgorod governor Vyacheslav Gladkov. Russian leader Vladimir Putin earlier told of plans for a buffer zone to protect border regions from raids and strikes.

Ukraine has used its long-range firepower to hit oil refineries and depots inside Russia. Mr Gladkov said three people were wounded in a Ukrainian attack in the Belgorod region yesterday, including a 14-year-old who had part of a limb amputated. Meanwhile, Russia used S-300 missiles to attack the town of Selydovsk in the eastern Donetsk region overnight, wounding four people.

**Targeted... Russian soldiers and tank. Inset, targets are hit with pinpoint precision**



## BONDS OF FRIENDSHIP: Lord Ashcroft and Sergiy Tetyukhin, who died last week



## Re-elected Putin is to visit China

By Mark Reynolds

VLADIMIR Putin will travel to China in May for talks with President Xi Jinping.

An international arrest warrant issued in The Hague means the Russian president risks being arrested for war crimes if he leaves his homeland.

But China does not recognise the International Criminal Court that issued it.

Western governments have condemned Putin’s recent re-election as unfair and undemocratic.

But China, India and North Korea all congratulated him on extending his rule by a further six years.

Putin’s formal presidential inauguration is due to take place around May 7.

After his re-election, he told reporters that Russia and China shared a similar global outlook.

Xi, in a call with Putin last month, said both nations should oppose interference in domestic affairs by external forces, indicating the United States.

## Desperate Nepalis go to frontline

By Mark Reynolds

RUSSIA has recruited 2,000 people from Nepal to fight in its war against Ukraine, with some claiming they are being “treated like dogs”.

Driven by poverty, many are now said to be desperate to go home.

In January, Nepal’s government banned its citizens from travelling to Russia or Ukraine for work and has asked Moscow to repatriate all Nepalis it has recruited.

Ganesh, 35, spent four and a half months fighting in Donetsk and warned that Nepalis were “treated like dogs”.

He said: “For the first two weeks of training, life was good. But once we were sent to Ukraine, we didn’t have enough food and were beaten by the Russians.”

He added: “The original Russian soldiers were behind us. On the frontline it was mercenaries.”

● Lord Ashcroft is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. Visit [lordashcroft.com](http://lordashcroft.com) and follow him on X or Facebook @LordAshcroft