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ARTS & LETTERS PRIZE FOR FICTION

SEARCHING FOR BILOHORIVKA

In the months following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, Internet volunteers from around the world found themselves following troop movements and tracking military radio broadcasts. They did this using freely available photos, videos, satellite imagery, and software radios. These groups catalogued transmissions, mapped ongoing battles, and warned civilians about incoming attacks. While some details in this story, such as Buran-30's transmissions, Lynsey Addario's photograph from Irpin, and the systems for warning Ukrainians of incoming missile strikes, are real, all other names, usernames, and specific incidents are fictionalized.

Stacey, in Springfield, had stalked the Russian 126th Coastal Defense Brigade all the way from Voskresenske. She watched them lose thirty or forty at the berm before Kalynivka, the dead in white in the drone thermals. She followed them as they maneuvered north, barely taking bridges, routing the Ukrainian Territorial Defense Forces at Nova Odesa, getting ambushed and picked apart and shot in ditches. Two or maybe three battalion commanders were dead already. Most of the starshinás. She knew they were using cell phones and text messages to relay orders up and down their axis of advance, and that grandmothers with Mosins were shooting at them from every other garret.

Stacey watched missile after missile keep dropping on them unwarned from the cloudless skies. A moment smiling in expeditionary enthusiasm, bright faces of boys, victory soon, they were sure, and after the moment's flash they were dead or dying, dismembered, shouting, screaming, crying quietly in ditches. Over and over, an armored personnel carrier would stop at an intersection and, in the crosshairs of the drone, explode. As they climbed from the wreckage, she watched the partisans kill them with grenades. Even now, one was still alive, limping for the treeline. A Ukrainian