

zones. There were reports that the Russians were recruiting from prisons, and there was a lot of work trying to determine the scale of such efforts, where they would be sent, if it would make a difference on the front lines which were, even now, hardening. The liberation of Snake Island. The retreat from Mykolaiv. The collapse of the Chemer salient.

It brought hope, too. Someone in the Project, working with the #Signals weirdos, had made an app that would broadcast warnings whenever the Russian strategic bombers were taking off from Engels Air Base. They used encrypted tactical communications, but they always talked to the Engels control tower unciphered. So if someone was listening on the VHF software radio—and once the app launched, there was no shortage of volunteers to listen all day and night—they could hear the Tu-95 bombers asking for takeoff clearance by the dozen. That meant it was a big raid. The app gave them a big red button to push—literally, a big red button, animated and everything. When they pushed it—“The bombers are taking off, missiles will hit in four hours!”—three million text messages got sent, and people in Kyiv, real people, real families, real children, knew to go down into the bunkers and metro stations. They were, literally, saving people’s lives.

Stacey wasn’t part of that, but she knew the people who had worked on it. She was proud to know them. But her role remained harder to define. Mapping, mostly. Occasionally feeding information to the reporters who lurked in the Project. Charting the front lines, geolocating units, tracking freight trains as they moved across Russia, laden with materiel. What, precisely, was her function?

It was the suitcase that did it—that crystallized, for her, the stakes. It was the photo by Lynsey Addario that made the papers, bloody kids on the sidewalk, the mother on the ground, soldiers tending the wounded father, Hero of the Soviet Union statue in the background. One of the kids still had the handle of his suitcase in his hand. Pink plastic roller case, like he were rushing to make his connection. Stacey stared at it, at home, at work, uncaring whether Barbara caught her. The suitcase and the bodies. Dutch