Narrative + Journalism = Narrative Journalism

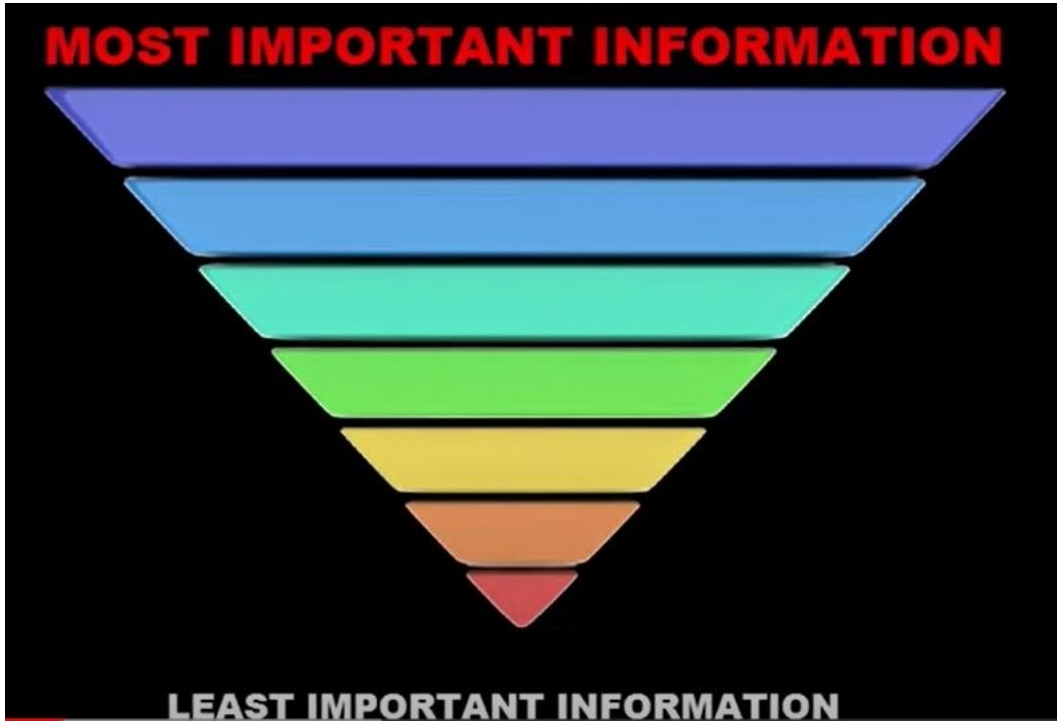
Journalism: Is what we practice everyday right?

Merriam-Webster:
Journalism:
1. A. The collection and editing of news for presentation through the media.
2 A. Writing designed for publication in a newspaper or magazine.
B. Writing characterized by a direct presentation of facts or description of events without an attempt at interpretation.

THE NEWS GATHERING MINING ANALOGY

We journalists:
--FIND this metal underground;
--MINE it -- get it to the surface
--REFINE it; process it.
--CRAFT it into jewelry that meets our standards of quality and integrity.

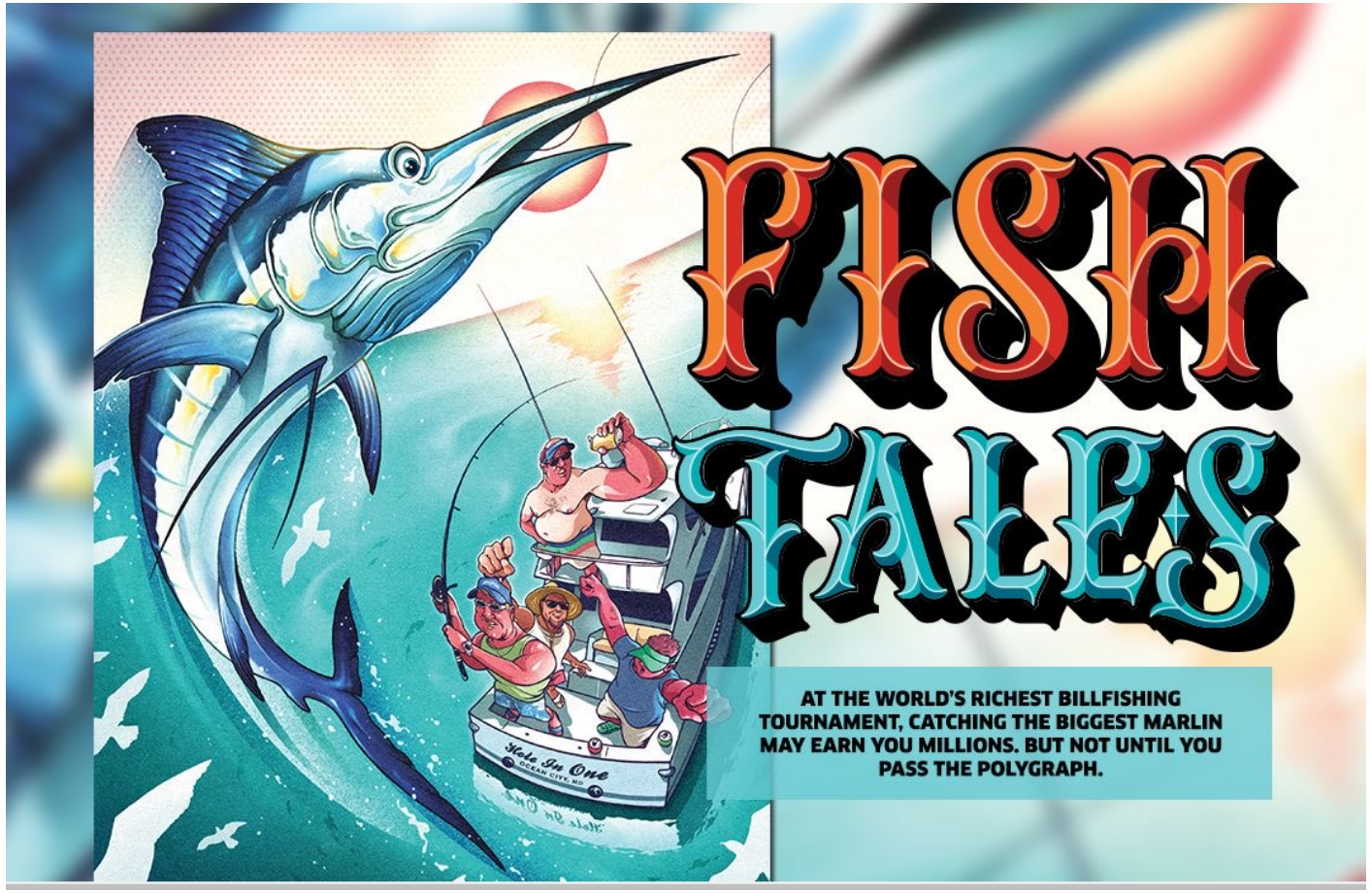
The Inverted Pyramid We Love and Adore



HEADS UP!!!



Narrative: A story with a beginning, middle, end. Organization is chronological.

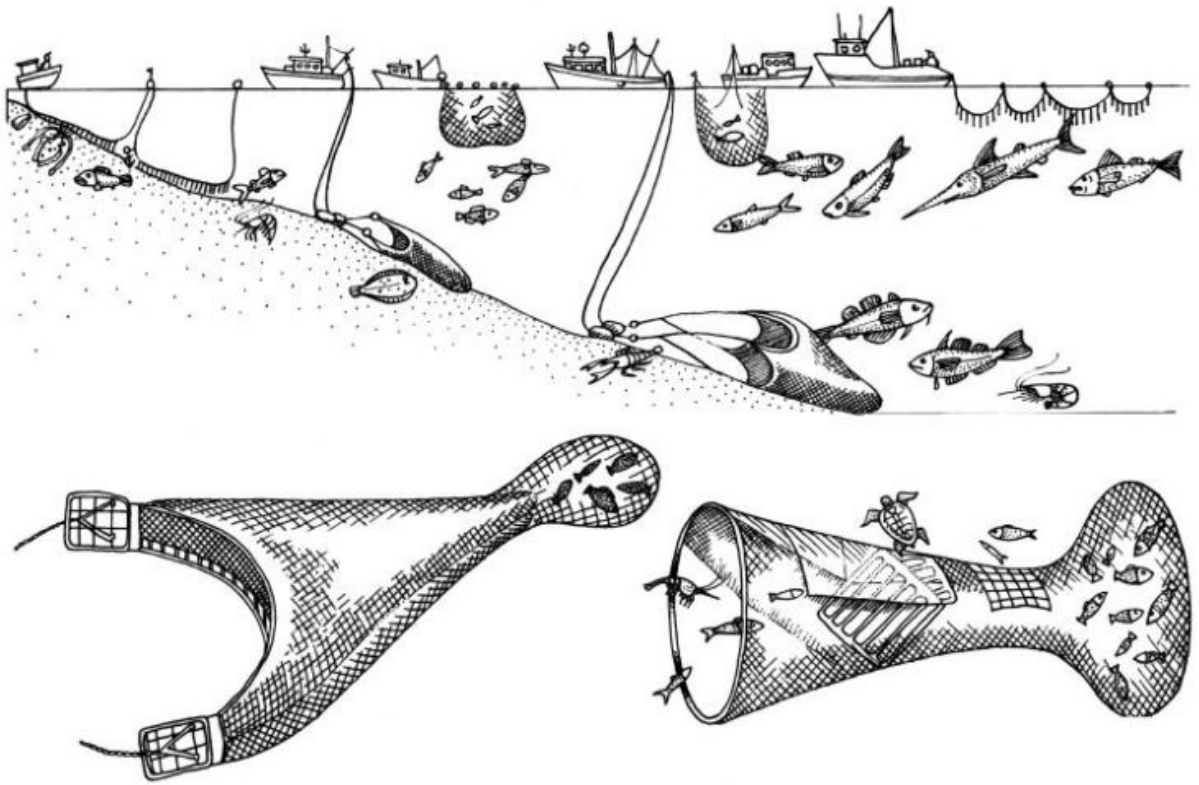

FISH
TALES
AT THE WORLD'S RICHEST BILLFISHING TOURNAMENT, CATCHING THE BIGGEST MARLIN MAY EARN YOU MILLIONS. BUT NOT UNTIL YOU PASS THE POLYGRAPH.

fish if it had grown that big," Frost says. "And it did everything it could to get away."

A successful Annapolis-based tax attorney who grew up fishing the Gunpowder River in Baltimore County, Frost is a serious outdoorsman. He lives at the mouth of the Chesapeake Bay on Kent Island and has fished the Pacific off Costa Rica and Panama. He estimates it took him 20-25 minutes to reel in the prize-winning catch, which he caught in the final afternoon hours before the official end of the five-day tournament. "It jumped [out of the water] several times. I saw right away it was a white marlin," Frost says. "I knew I had to keep the line as tight as I could. Otherwise it would shake its head until the lure came loose. I just had tunnel vision. Nothing else in the world existed for those 20-25 minutes except me and that fish."

Winning the "Super Bowl of Sport Fishing," as the White Marlin Open is sometimes called, in such dramatic fashion was a thrill beyond Frost's wildest dreams. Getting strapped to a polygraph machine the next morning inside a claustrophobic hotel room on Coastal Highway, not so much. "It was an interrogation," says the 33-year-old Frost, adding he won't be competing in the tournament again this month—or, most likely, ever. "They were very aggressive."

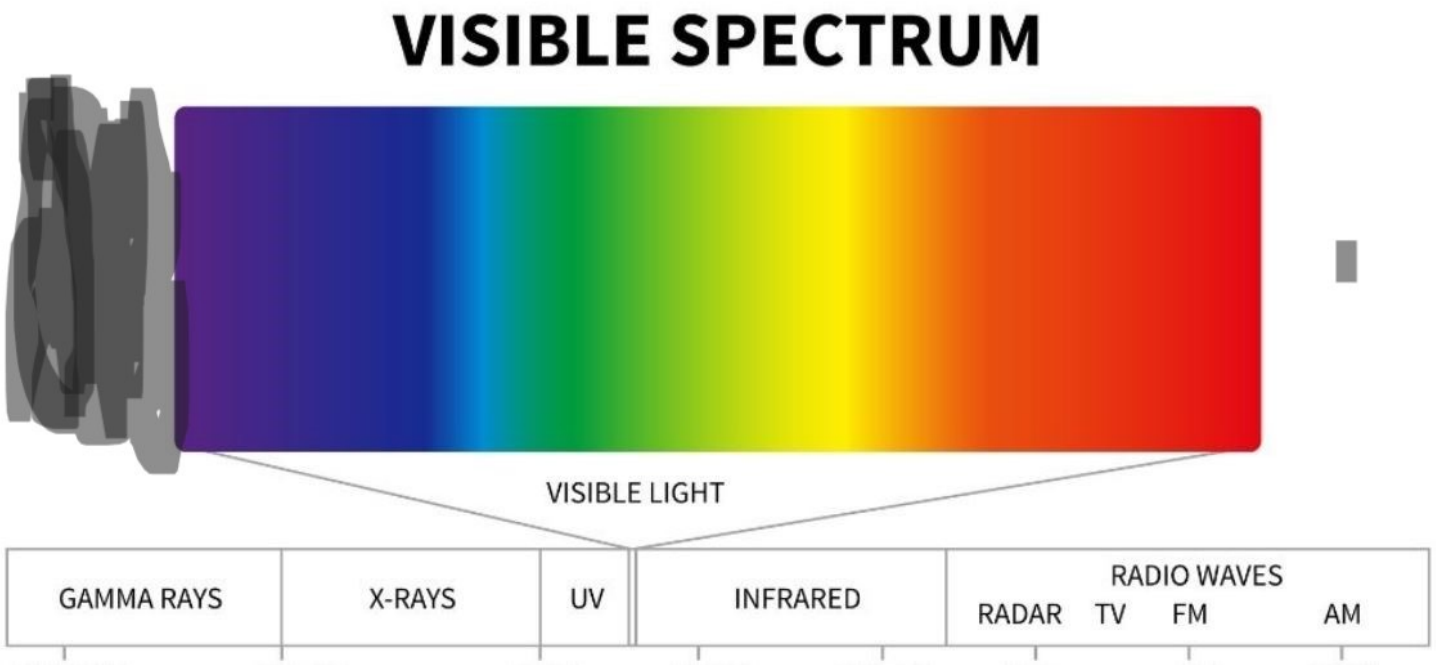
We Are Anglers!!



The full spectrum of story-telling narratives in our environment

GAMMA SCIENTIFIC

Products Applications Support Ab



A HYBRID NARRATIVE-STORYTELLING STRUCTURE:

1. ACTION
2. REACTION
3. SIGNIFICANCE
4. CHRONOLOGY

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

The New York Times

Late Edition
New York: Today, sunny, a few afternoon clouds. High 77. Tonight, slightly more humid. Low 68. Tomorrow, sun then clouds. High 81. Yesterday, high 81, low 63. Weather map, Page C18.

VOL. CL . . . No. 51,874 | NEW YORK, WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2001 | 75 CENTS

U.S. ATTACKED

HIJACKED JETS DESTROY TWIN TOWERS AND HIT PENTAGON IN DAY OF TERROR

A CREEPING HORROR

Buildings Burn and Fall as Onlookers Search for Elusive Safety

By N. R. KLEINFIELD

It kept getting worse.

The horror arrived in episodic bursts of chilling disbelief, signified first by trembling floors, sharp explosions, cracked windows. There was the second unfathomable realization of a gaping, flaming hole in first one of the tall towers, and then the same thing all over again in its twin. There was the merciless sight of bodies helplessly tumbling out, some of them in flames.

Finally, the mighty towers themselves were reduced to nothing. Dense plumes of smoke raced through the downtown avenues, coursing between the buildings, shaped like tornadoes on their sides.

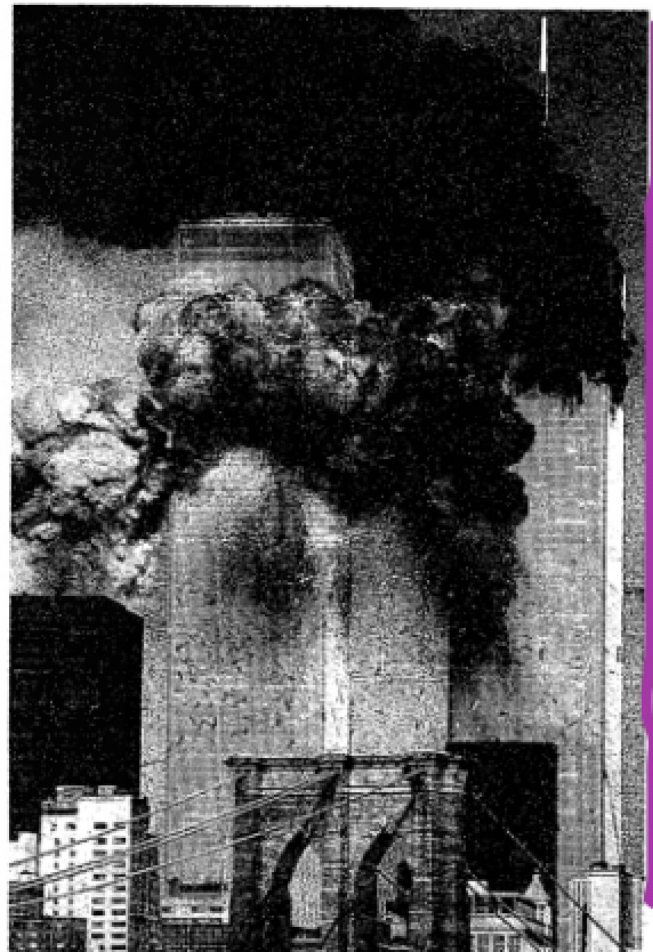
Every sound was cause for alarm. A plane appeared overhead. Was another one coming? No, it was a fighter jet. But was it friend or enemy? People scrambled for their lives, but they didn't know where to go. Should they go north, south, east, west? Stay outside, go indoors? People hid beneath cars and each other. Some contemplated jumping into the river.

For those reeling at the ground epicenter of the collapsing World Trade Center towers, the most horrid thought of all finally dawned on them: nowhere was safe.

For several panic-stricken hours yesterday morning, people in Lower Manhattan witnessed the inexpressible, the incomprehensible, the unthinkable. "I don't know what the gates of hell look like, but it's got to be like this," said John Maloney, a security director for an Internet firm in the trade center. "I'm a combat veteran, Vietnam, and I never saw anything like this."

The first warnings were small ones. Blocks away, Jim Farmer, a film composer, was having breakfast at a small restaurant on West Broadway. He heard the sound of a jet. An odd sound — too loud, it seemed, to be

Continued on Page A7



President Vows to Exact Punishment for 'Evil'

By SERGE SCHMEMANN

Hijackers rammed jetliners into each of New York's World Trade Center towers yesterday, toppling both in a hellish storm of ash, glass, smoke and leaping victims, while a third jetliner crashed into the Pentagon in Virginia. There was no official count, but President Bush said thousands had perished, and in the immediate aftermath the calamity was already being ranked the worst and most audacious terror attack in American history.

The attacks seemed carefully coordinated. The hijacked planes were all en route to California, and therefore gorged with fuel, and their departures were spaced within an hour and 40 minutes. The first, American Airlines Flight 11, a Boeing 767 out of Boston for Los Angeles, crashed into the nrth tower at 8:48 a.m. Eighteen minutes later, United Airlines Flight 175, nio headed from Boston to Lo Angeles, plowed into the suth tower.



Kelly Candaker for The New York Times

SECOND PLANE United Airlines Flight 175 nearing the trade center's south tower.

Then an American Airlines Boeing 757, Flight 77, let Washington's Dulles International Airport bound fr Los Angeles, but instead hi the western part of the Pntagon, the military hadquarters where 24,000 pople work, at 9:40 a.m. Fially, United Airlines Fight 93, a Boeing 757 flying from Newark to San Francisco, crashed near Pittsburgh, raising the possibility that its hijackers had failed in whatever their mission was.

There were indications that the hijackers on at least two of the planes were armed with knives. Attorney General John Ashcroft told reporters in the evening that the passports on Flight 11 were armed tht way. And Barbara Olson, a television commentator who was traveling on American Flight 77, managed to reach her husband, Solicitor General Theodore Olson, by cell phone and to tell him that the hijackers were armed with knives and a box cutter.

In all, 266 people perished in the four planes and several score more were known dead elsewhere. Numerous firefighters, police officers and other rescue workers who responded to the initial disaster inLower Manhattan were killed or injured when the buildings collapsed. Hundreds were treated for cuts, broken bones, burns and smoke inhalation.

But the real carnage was concealed for now by the twisted, smoking, ash-choked carcasses of the twin towers, in which thousands ofpeople used to work on a weekday. The collapse of the towers caused nother World Trade Center building to fall 10 hours later, and several

Continued on Page A14

U.S. ATTACKED; President Vows to Exact Punishment for 'Evil'

By Serge Schemann
Sept. 12, 2001

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But the real carnage was concealed for now by the twisted, smoking, ash-choked carcasses of the twin towers, in which thousands of people used to work on a weekday. The collapse of the towers caused another World Trade Center building to fall 10 hours later, and several other buildings in the area were damaged or aflame.

"I have a sense it's a horrendous number of lives lost," said Mayor Rudolph W. Giuliani. "Right now we have to focus on saving as many lives as possible."

The mayor warned that "the numbers are going to be very, very high."

He added that the medical examiner's office will be ready "to deal with thousands and thousands of bodies if they have to."

For hours after the attacks, rescuers were stymied by other buildings that threatened to topple. But by 11 p.m., rescuers had been able to begin serious efforts to locate and remove survivors. Mr. Giuliani said two Port Authority police officers had been pulled from the ruins, and he said hope existed that more people could be saved.

STRUCTURE:

*ACTION=GREEN

*REACTION=LIGHT BLUE

*SIGNIFICANCE=YELLOW

*CHRONOLOGY=RED

Earlier, police officer volunteers using dogs had found four bodies in the smoldering, stories-high pile of rubble where the towers had once stood and had taken them to a makeshift morgue in the lobby of an office building at Vesey and West Streets.

Within an hour of the attacks, the United States was on a war footing. The military was put on the highest state of alert, National Guard units were called out in Washington and New York and two aircraft carriers were dispatched to New York harbor. President Bush remained aloft in Air Force One, following a secretive route and making only brief stopovers at Air Force bases in Louisiana and Nebraska before finally setting down in Washington at 7 p.m. His wife and daughters were evacuated to a secure, unidentified location.

The White House, the Pentagon and the Capitol were evacuated, except for the Situation Room in the White House where Vice President Cheney remained in charge, giving the eerie impression of a national capital virtually stripped of its key institutions.

Nobody immediately claimed responsibility for the attacks. But the scale and sophistication of the operation, the extraordinary planning required for concerted hijackings by terrorists who had to be familiar with modern jetliners, and the history of major attacks on American targets in recent years led many officials and experts to point to Osama bin Laden, the Islamic militant believed to operate out of Afghanistan. Afghanistan's hard-line Taliban rulers rejected such suggestions, but officials took that as a defensive measure.

STRUCTURE

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Senator Orrin Hatch, Republican of Utah, told reporters that the United States had some evidence that people associated with Mr. bin Laden had sent out messages "actually saying over the airwaves, private airwaves at that, that they had hit two targets."

In the evening, explosions were reported in Kabul, the Afghan capital. But officials at the Pentagon denied that the United States had attacked that city.

President Bush, facing his first major crisis in office, vowed that the United States would hunt down and punish those responsible for the "evil, despicable acts of terror" which, he said, took thousands of American lives. He said the United States would make no distinction between those who carried out the hijackings and those who harbored and supported them

"These acts of mass murder were intended to frighten our nation into chaos and retreat, but they have failed," a somber president told the nation in an address from the Oval Office shortly after 8:30 p.m.

"The search is under way for those who are behind these evil acts," Mr. Bush said. "We will make no distinction between the terrorists who committed these acts and those who harbor them."

The repercussions of the attack swiftly spread across the nation. Air traffic across the United States was halted at least until today and international flights were diverted to Canada. Borders with Canada and Mexico were closed. Most federal buildings across the country were shut down. Major skyscrapers and a variety of other sites, ranging from Disney theme parks to the Golden Gate Bridge and United Nations headquarters in New York, were evacuated.

But it was in New York that the calamity achieved levels of horror and destruction known only in war.

The largest city in the United States, the financial capital of the world, was virtually closed down. Transportation into Manhattan was halted, as was much of public transport within the city. Parts of Lower Manhattan were left without power, compelling Mayor Giuliani to order Battery Park City to be evacuated. Major stock exchanges closed. Primary elections for mayor and other city offices were cancelled. Thousands of workers, released from their offices in Lower Manhattan but with no way to get home except by foot, set off in vast streams, down the avenues and across the bridges under a beautiful, clear sky, accompanied by the unceasing serenade of sirens.

While doctors and nurses at hospitals across the city tended to hundreds of damaged people, a disquieting sense grew throughout the day at other triage centers and emergency rooms that there would, actually, be less work: the morgues were going to be busiest.

A sense of shock, grief and solidarity spread rapidly through the city. There was the expectation that friends and relatives would be revealed among the victims. Schools prepared to let students stay overnight if they could not get home, or if it emerged that there was no one to go home to.

There was also the fear that it was not over: stores reported a run on basic goods. And there was the urge to help. Thousands of New Yorkers lined up outside hospitals to donate blood.

STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE:

*ACTION=GREEN

*REACTION=LIGHT BLUE

*SIGNIFICANCE=YELLOW

*CHRONOLOGY=RED

As in great crises past, people exchanged stories of where they were when they heard the news.

"There is a controlled professionalism, but also a sense of shock," said Mark G. Ackerman, an official at the St. Vincent Medical Center. "Obviously New York and all of us have experienced a trauma that is unparalleled."

"I invite New Yorkers to join in prayer," said Cardinal Edward M. Egan as he emerged from the emergency room of St. Vincent's in blue hospital garb. "This is a tragedy that this great city can handle. I am amazed at the goodness of our police and our firefighters and our hospital people."

All communications creaked under the load of the sudden emergency. Mobile phones became all but useless, intercity lines were clogged and major Internet servers reported overloads.

The area around the World Trade Center resembled a desert after a terrible sandstorm. Parts of buildings, crushed vehicles and the shoes, purses, umbrellas and baby carriages of those who fled lay covered with thick, gray ash, through which weeping people wandered in search of safety, each with a story of pure horror.

Imez Graham, 40, and Dee Howard, 37, both of whom worked on the 61st floor of the north tower, were walking up Chambers Street, covered in soot to their gracefully woven dreadlocks caked in soot, barefoot. They had spent an hour walking down the stairs after the first explosion. They were taken to an ambulance, when the building collapsed. They jumped out and began to walk home. "They need me; I've got to get home," Ms. Howard said. Where was that? "As far away from here as possible."

In Chinatown, a woman offered them a pair of dainty Chinese sandals. Nearby, construction workers offered to hose the soot off passing people.

The twin pillars of the World Trade Center were among the best known landmarks in New York, 110-floor unadorned blocks that dominated any approach to Manhattan. It is probable that renown, and the thousands of people who normally work there each weekday, **that led Islamic militants to target the towers for**

STRUCTURE

STRUCTURE:

*ACTION=GREEN

*REACTION=LIGHT BLUE

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destruction already in 1993, then by parking vans loaded with explosives in the basement.

There is no way to know how many **people were at work shortly before 9 a.m.** when the first jetliners sliced into the north tower, also known as 1 World Trade Center. CNN and other television networks were quick to focus their cameras on the disaster, enabling untold numbers of viewers to witness the second jetliner as it banked into the south tower 18 minutes later, blowing a cloud of flame and debris out the other side.

Even more viewers were tuned in **by 9:50 a.m.** when the south tower suddenly vanished in swirling billows of ash, collapsing in on itself. Then at **10:29 a.m.** the north tower followed. A choking grey cloud billowed out, blocking out the bright sunshine and chasing thousands of panicked workers through the canyons of Lower Manhattan. Plumes continued to rise high over the city late into the night.

"The screaming was just horrendous," recalled Carol Webster, an official of the Nyack College Alliance Seminary who had just emerged from the PATH trains when the carnage began. "Every time there would be another explosion, people would start screaming and thronging again."

The scenes of horror were indelible; people who left from the broken towers, people who fought for pay phones, people white with soot and red with blood. "We saw people jumping from the tower as the fire was going on," said Steve Baker, 27. "The sky went black, all this stuff came onto us, we ran."

The timing was murderous for the armada of rescue vehicles that gathered after the planes crashed, and were caught under the collapsing buildings. Many rescue workers were reported killed or injured, and the anticipation that Building 7 would soon follow led to a suspension of operatios. The firefighters union said that at least 200 of its members had died.

Mayor Giuliani, along with the police and fire commissioners and the director of emergency management, was forced to abandon a temporary command center at 75 Barclay Street, a block from the World Trade Center, and the mayor emerged with his gray suit covered with ash.

In the evening, officials reported that buildings 5 and 7 of the World Trade Center had also collapsed, and buildings all around the complex had their windows blown out. The Rector Street subway station collapsed, and the walkway at West Street was gone.

World leaders hastened to condemn the attacks, including Palestinian leader Yasir Arafat and Libya's Muammar el-Qaddafi.

European leaders **began quiet discussions last night** about how they might assist the United States in striking back, and Russia's president, Vladimir Putin, joined in expressing support for a retaliatory strike.

But in the West Bank city of Nablus, rejoicing Palestinians, who have been locked in a bitter struggle with Israel for almost a year, went into the streets to chant, "God is great!" and to distribute candies to celebrate the attacks.

Many governments took their own precautions against attack. Israel evacuated many of its embassies abroad, and non-essential staffers at NATO headquarters in Brussels were ordered home.

In Afghanistan, the ruling Taliban argued that Mr. bin Laden could not have been responsible for the attacks. "What happened in the United States was not a job of ordinary people," an official, Abdul Hai Mutmaen, told Reuters. "It could have been the work of governments. Osama bin Laden cannot do this work."

Apart from the major question of who was responsible, a host of other **questions were certain to be at the forefront in coming days and weeks**. One was the timing -- why Sept. 11?

The date seemed to have no obvious meaning. One of the men convicted in the bombing of the United States Embassy in Nairobi in 1998, in which 213 were killed, was originally scheduled for sentencing on Sept. 12. But the sentencing of the man, Mohamed Rasheed Daoud al-'Owhali, had been put off to mid-October.

It was possible that Mr. Al-'Owhali and the others convicted with him were close witnesses to the bombings, since terror suspects typically await sentencing at the Metropolitan Correctional Center in Lower Manhattan. Officials have not confirmed that the convicted Nairobi bombers are there.

Many questions would also be raised about how hijackers managed to seize four jets with all the modern safeguards in place. Initial information was sketchy, although a passenger on the United Airlines jetliner that crashed in Pennsylvania managed to make a cellular phone call from the toilet. "We are being hijacked, we are being hijacked," the man shouted at 9:58 a.m. As he was speaking, the plane crashed about eight miles east of Jennerstown, killing all 45 aboard.

For all the questions, what was clear was that the **World Trade Center would take** its place among the great calamities of American history, a day of infamy like Pearl Harbor, Oklahoma City, Lockerbie.

The very absence of the towers **would become** a symbol after their domination of the New York skyline for 25 years. Though initial reviews were mixed when the towers were dedicated in 1976, they came into their own as landmarks with passing years. King Kong climbed one tower in a remake of the movie classic.

In April, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, which ran the World Trade Center through its first 30 years, leased the complex for $3.2 billion to a group led by Larry A. Silverstein, a developer, and Westfield America Inc.

In recent years, the complex has filled up with tenants and revenues have increased. In addition to the towers -- designed by the architect Minoru Yamasaki, each 1,350 feet tall -- the complex included four other buildings, two of which were also gone, for a total of 12 million square feet of rentable office space.

Providence Sunday Journal
NEW ENGLAND NEWSPAPER OF THE YEAR
SUNDAY, MARCH 27, 2022 | PROVIDENCEJOURNAL.COM
PART OF THE USA TODAY NETWORK



A FIGHT FOR REDEMPTION

RI veteran in legal trouble at home finds new purpose in defense of Ukraine

TOP: Alex Tobiassen, wanted by Rhode Island authorities on a warrant since 2017, has been living and fighting in Ukraine, first against Russian-backed separatists and more recently against Russian invaders. In this picture, he says, he was serving in March 2021 in the Mariupol sector with the Ukrainian marines.
PROVIDED BY ALEX TOBIASSEN

Mark Reynolds Providence Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

Less than 72 hours into Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine, fighters in the coastal city of Odesa scrambled to counter a feared amphibious landing. ● Alex Tobiassen, a 27-year-old former Rhode Islander, scrambled with them. ● Bristling with AK-74 assault rifles, grenades and a rocket launcher, his rented Toyota Camry was bound for a popular beachside park along the Black Sea. ● An armed companion with a British accent piped up in the back seat: ● "We just had news that they might be coming to Odesa," he said. "Alex, do you have anything to say?" ● "Ah yeah," Tobiassen said calmly. "We're ready to defend this city to the last breath."

How did an American who has Rhode Island's 401 area code tattooed on his torso, who also has a 10-year-old son living in that same calling area, end up fighting in Ukraine on the third day of the Russian invasion?

The streamlined answer is that Tobiassen has been on an overseas odyssey for about five years now, and this is just the latest chapter.

An Afghanistan war veteran, he's a recovering drug abuser who says he flew to Iraq to fight ISIS but balked on that, then made his way to Ukraine in 2017. There he fought Russian-backed separatists in the Donbas region as a foreign legionnaire, and later became a card-carrying member of Ukraine's armed forces.

His account touches on Rhode Island's opioid epidemic and places him in various war-zone settings in sucked separatists in the Donbas region during a tectonic shift in world history.

See VETERAN, Page 20A



SOURCE maps4news.com/RHERE; USA TODAY



Mark Patinkin
Columnist
The Providence Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

High court nominee's Providence milestone

If, as expected, Ketanji Brown Jackson makes it onto the Supreme Court, a single moment in Providence in the spring of 1996 will have proven pivotal in the path that led her there.

Jackson was in her final year at Harvard Law School, now having a job interview with federal Judge Bruce Selya at the U.S. District Court, overlooking downtown's Kennedy Plaza.

Selya, known for his even-handedness and compelling writing style, is just the fifth Rhode Islander to sit on the First Circuit Court of Appeals, which oversees most of New England and Puerto Rico.

See PATINKIN, Page 22A

A VALIANT EFFORT



A season for the ages for Providence coach Ed Cooley and the Friars.
SPORTS, 1B

SUNDAY+

You've asked for more and we're delivering more in the expanded Sunday Providence Journal print edition. Here's what you'll find today:

+Amy's Rhode: A visit to Knight Memorial Library in Providence, a neighborhood gem that needs the public to lend some support. **11A**

+ Time Lapse: Police dogs through the years, helping officers protect and serve. **18A**

+ Behind the Scenes: A road trip through our fascination with license plates. **19A**

+ At the Schools: Losing on the big stage doesn't ruin a special season. **3B**

+ Walking RI: A three-day trek on the Trestle Trail in Coventry. **8B**



SUBSCRIBER-EXCLUSIVE **Women in History** SPECIAL SECTION INSIDE

USA TODAY

Guidelines in spotlight: Justices decide when to step aside from cases. **6A**

Eliminating 'hurdles' to voting
"Let RI Vote" legislation would make pandemic changes permanent. **10A**

Weather
High 50° | Low 25°
P.M. shower. Forecast, **16B**

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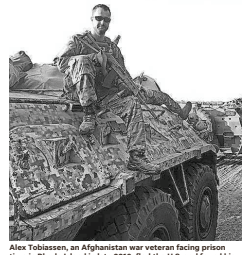

Alex Tobiassen, an Afghanistan war veteran facing prison time in Rhode Island in late 2016, fled the U.S. and found his way to Ukraine, where he fought in the Donbas region. One of his tours was with the Ukrainian marines.
PHOTOS PROVIDED BY ALEX TOBIASSEN

Alex and Iryna Tobiassen are shown with their 4-year-old daughter in Bucharest, Romania. Tobiassen shuttled his family to the Moldovan border on the first day of the Russian invasion and then returned to fight. He joined them in Romania on March 4.

Veteran

Continued from Page 1A

During multiple video teleconferences with The Providence Journal this month, Tobiassen supported key parts of his story with video, online links, photos and documents.

And, unprompted, expressing regret and shame with a tear in the corner of his eye, he acknowledged that he's wanted by Rhode Island authorities for an armed robbery. He says an opioid addiction led him to steal $30 from a convenience store cashier at knifepoint in 2015.

To believe Tobiassen is to wonder if a search for redemption might explain, at least in small part, his quest for combat in overseas war zones over the last five years.

"Absolutely," he says.

The digital snippets and videos help explain how a former student at the Community College of Rhode Island became swept up in historic events. They illustrate the path to war chosen by a fugitive and a father of two children: a boy who was living in the Newport area on the first day of Putin's "special military operation" and a 4-year-old girl who took cover that day in a bathtub in Odesa.

The video imagery from Tobiassen's experience on Feb. 26, which starts out in his rented car, is a good place to get his story rolling: It shows him doing what he says he was called to do.

The Russians are coming

The M-14 is a main road that meanders through parts of southern Ukraine, much as Route 1 traverses Southern New England.

On Feb. 26, that road brought Tobiassen through central Odesa to the far edge of a recreational haven that Ukrainians refer to as a "hydropark."

At one time, the park had been named after a Russian gangster who rose to command the Red Army and sit on a lofty committee in the Soviet government. After the Cold War, it was renamed.

On the five-lane stretch of M-14 that borders the large public space, a Ukrainian police cruiser was parked diagonally in a blocking position.

Police officers and other Ukrainian fighters held defensive positions around it, training their assault rifles toward the woody parkland bounded by beach and sea to the south. They also squinted up the road to the east.

Briefly, the sound of gunfire cracked across the seaside district.

Tobiassen and his companions, including a sniper, set out along the road, bearing in the general direction of the noise. Tobiassen told them to move in a triangular "wedge" formation. They arrived at another intersection where Tobiassen said something about a sniper.

Nearby, they found elevated positions on a slope. It had sightlines on the road itself and on a point of exit from the shoreline park.

The previous night, about 25 miles to the east, Ukrainian forces had stopped an attempted coastal landing, killing at least 20 Russian troops, according to reports posted online by Ukrainian sources.

Even further to the east, beyond the Crimean Peninsula, one of two Russian amphibious task forces in the Black Sea had landed troops, according to an online report from USNI News, a product of the U.S. Naval Institute.

A potential large-scale landing in Odesa by the other amphibious task force had become a concern, according to the same report.

Tobiassen says he saw two "BTRs," a type of armored personnel carrier, arrive at the park-side scene carrying Ukrainian troops.

Those mechanized forces destroyed a single-landing vessel that had tried to deliver saboteurs to the beach, he says.

The gunfire heard earlier had come from Ukrainians firing on the same vessel, he says.

While his video clips document the sound of gunfire, they do not show any action on the beach. The Journal could not independently verify the destruction of a landing craft.

An analysis of scenes in the video as well as satellite maps and street views confirm Tobiassen's presence at the location.

After what seemed like two hours to Tobiassen, he learned that he and his team could stand down and regroup.

They were celebrating with other fighters indoors when a "huge explosion" shook Odesa, he says.

Feeling vulnerable, they all raced for the door. Tobiassen collided with another fighter trying to rush out; he hit the pavement so hard, he thought he had broken his knee and his elbow.

The loud noise was not from a bomb.

It was from a Russian plane crashing to the ground after it was torn apart by a Ukrainian surface-to-air missile, Tobiassen says.

Amid all the action of the day, a question nagged him: Did he want to risk the chance of being captured by Putin's forces?

'All he ever talked about was fighting for what was right'

Tobiassen was only in second grade when his mother, Catherine Gurspan, found out what he wanted to do with his life.

He came home from school on Sept. 11, 2001, and told her he wanted to grow up to fight the people who had bombed our country, she says.

"All he ever talked about was fighting for what was right," Gurspan says.

The boy also shared his plan with his grandfather, Dan Gurspan, who had fought in the U.S. Army Air Force during World War II as a gunner and radio operator until his capture. Gurspan had bailed out of a B-17 bomber, the "Leap Year Lady," after enemy fighters set it on fire and it split apart over Germany in 1944.

Gurspan's admiring grandson obtained a general equivalency degree as a 17-year-old.

By the end of 2018, he had passed basic training and airborne school, according to a record that Tobiassen identifies as his DD214, a standard military document that verifies a soldier's service.

Tobiassen became a member of the Rhode Island Army National Guard and was assigned to a Rhode Island-based company of the 143rd Infantry Regiment's 1st Battalion, he says.

He was deployed to Afghanistan on a six-month tour in 2012, where his unit provided security for civil affairs personnel as they met with tribal elders and carried out other missions, including bridge-building projects, he says.

His combat tour, which is documented on the DD214, ended sooner than he wanted. He hadn't once fired his gun at any enemy targets, he says, although he had come under fire.

Tobiassen came home from Afghanistan with medals for his service. He was also the father of a growing baby boy. (Gurspan says she later took custody of his son.)

Tobiassen's mother says he was deeply anguished by the death of a soldier in his unit who had been fatally injured — run over — when he climbed out of an armored vehicle to help an Afghan child. Tobiassen was a turret gunner in the same vehicle, says Gurspan.

In 2014, she says, Tobiassen was at Fort Belvoir in Virginia, where the Army helps some soldiers, including wounded men and women, transition to civilian life.

As Tobiassen tells it, one day he was back in Newport on leave when he met a woman. She was with him as he planned his return to Virginia and withdrew $1,000 in cash from an ATM across from the Newport Police Station, he says.

He accuses the woman of luring him to a home in Newport's Festival Field apartment complex and conspiring with two other men to rob him of his cash. During the robbery attempt, he says, he was shot in his upper leg.

"I never thought anybody would ... shoot me in Newport," he says.

What followed was six months of physical therapy and relearning how to walk, he says.

The ordeal, he says, spiraled him into drug abuse — fentanyl and opiates such as OxyContin.

Court records show that Newport Police charged Tobiassen with felony assault in August 2015, and in December of that year, Middletown police charged him with first-degree armed robbery.

He was accused of brandishing a knife in the Cumberland Farms on Aquidneck Avenue in Middletown, assaulting a customer and robbing the clerk of $30. He wanted the money for drugs, he says.

"It's one of the biggest regrets of my life," he says, adding that his only solace is that no one was hurt.

He was held for months at the Adult Correctional Institutions. He pleaded guilty in August 2016 to both of the 2015 crimes and was released on a promise to appear at a sentencing hearing, according to court records.

Tobiassen says that other men at a halfway house he stayed at abused drugs. He was certain that either probation or prison would eventually lead him to a fatal overdose.

He says he figured he faced a suspended prison term with 10 years of probation, or as many as 10 years in prison. He didn't stick around to find out.

Instead, he says, he flew out of Logan Airport in late 2016 on a jetliner that shuttled him to Amman, Jordan, where he caught another flight to northern Iraq. There he waited to fight for the YPG, he says.

YPG stands for the People's Protection Units. The mostly Kurdish militia, which was accepting foreigners, was at war with the Islamic State.

Tobiassen says he wanted to battle the monsters who were beheading people and raping little girls and women of Yazidi ethnicity.

However, he says, he learned about some difficulties with the YPG's operations on the Syria-Iraq border. The organization, he says, kept him waiting in a safe house for weeks. He opted out and flew to Istanbul, Turkey.

After three days there, he says, he traveled to Ukraine, drawn in part by the prospect of seeing an area of Europe where he hadn't traveled.

Continued on next page



Tobiassen, formerly of Newport, took this picture of a disabled tank on Feb. 25. He says he came under fire in the same field, a short distance from the Dnieper River near Kherson, as he tried to assist Ukrainian forces.

Continued from previous page

In Kyiv, he met his future wife, Iryna, a refugee from Donetsk in the Donbas region. There, Ukrainians were at war with other Ukrainians, separatists, who had Russian backing. Soon she was pregnant. They married on a trip to Georgia, also a former part of the Soviet Union.

By November 2017, Tobiassen was a member of the Georgian National Legion, fighting in trenches in Donbas.

Veterans of Georgia's multiple wars with Russia had established the legion to help Ukraine after Russia invaded Crimea in 2014, according to published reports. Later, the legion was among several paramilitary organizations integrated into Ukraine's armed forces, according to the Military Times.

During Tobiassen's first month, one legionnaire in his group was shot and killed and two others were wounded, he says. Another two were hit by artillery fire. New fighters arrived, and he realized he was the only one in the original group still fighting, he says.

One day, a correspondent from a popular Ukrainian television news program visited the legionnaires in their bunkers.

Soon, Ukrainians saw Tobiassen on television speaking in Russian.

"There is a sniper over there," he told the reporter from Television News Service, the news programming arm of Ukraine's 1+1 TV Channel.

In April 2019, Tobiassen joined the Ukrainian Marines.

His second deployment started in June 2020 and ran 13 months into the middle of 2021, he says. Around that time, he says, his battalion participated in "Operation Sea Breeze," an annual NATO military exercise with partners in the Black Sea.

By then, Tobiassen's daughter was no longer a toddler. She relished strolls along the seaside boardwalk in Odesa's Arcadia neighborhood, marveling at every dog she came across. On warm summer nights, he treated her to ice cream.

Tobiassen taught English courses. A disc jockey, he specialized in techno music.

He says he studied Russian and stayed away from drugs. Like many Ukrainians, he wondered about Vladimir Putin's next move.

A looming attack

In early 2022, Tobiassen's relationship with Iryna was fraught with arguments and headed toward estrangement, he says.

One disagreement involved the Russian troops massed along Ukraine's borders.

Tobiassen envisioned scenarios where he might want to evacuate his family to a safer country. She couldn't imagine that.

Still, the two of them made plans for war, buying lots of food and withdrawing cash from the bank.

He had secured a U.S. passport for his daughter, but there was a problem: As part of that process, he had relinquished his own passport, according to the account he later gave to The Journal.

Despite ever greater concentrations of Russian troops on the border, many Ukrainians were skeptical about the potential for a large-scale Russian invasion.

On Feb. 13, shortly before the Olympics' closing ceremony, the Associated Press reported that Russia-backed separatists in Donbas had accused Ukraine, without evidence, of shelling conflict areas and also blamed the country for an explosion involving an empty car.

The car explosion and the separatists' announcement of evacuations from their areas were in line with U.S. warnings that Russia would use so-called "false flag" attacks to justify an invasion.

Tobiassen took it as a signal. He rented a car. On the morning of Feb. 24, Iryna woke him up.

"It started," she told him.

Time to go, he said. But she insisted on staying in Ukraine.

He checked his military gear. He had body armor and some medical equipment. His gun, however, wasn't something he could take home from the base.

That day, Putin's opening salvos included a missile attack on Odesa, a city of about 1 million people.

Tobiassen was outside near the rental car when a missile cruised over his house and hit a military target less than a mile away, he said later. The blast set off all the car alarms on his street and shook out the windows in his home.

"We put our daughter in the bathtub," he says.



Alex Tobiassen, wearing the attire favored by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, talks during a recent video teleconference.
MARK REYNOLDS/THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL

Then, Iryna changed her mind.

"Let's go. I want to get out of here," Tobiassen recalls her saying.

They drove southwest to the town of Reni on Ukraine's border with Moldova. Traffic was backed up a half-mile.

They walked to the checkpoint. Tobiassen's daughter had two sets of clothes and no toys. He watched his daughter cross into Moldova with her mother at 5:21 p.m.

"I thought it could have been the final goodbye," he says.

Unarmed against invaders

That night, the first of the war, he returned to Odesa and his empty house on Pedahobichnyi Lane. Before bed, and after his sleep the next morning, he ate like he might never return.

He needed a rifle. He was in contact with peers in his Marines unit, but his commanders hadn't responded to his messages, he says. He believed the unit was to the east, on the other side of the Crimean Peninsula, in an area likely to draw Russian invaders.

On the morning of Feb. 25, he donned his fatigues and body armor and set out for a downtown military headquarters. There, he provided his credentials and asked commanders for a gun.

They had no weapons for him. At this phase of the crisis, guns were far harder to find in southern Ukraine, he says.

Off he went in his rented Toyota, headed east, unarmed.

Searching for friendly forces near Crimea

In the city of Kherson, toward the middle of Ukraine's southern coastal region, Tobiassen noticed the presence of local forces, civilians on the streets, and no fighting. He left. And he continued toward the serpentine Dnieper River, even though he was alone and had stopped seeing Ukrainian troops.

Just beyond the Dnieper lies a strategically important coastal area adjacent to the Russian-occupied peninsula of Crimea.

Outside Kherson, Tobiassen headed for that coastal area, turning off M-14 and onto another road, M-17. About three miles from the river, the divided highway bends across one last large open field. Then it passes through some residential areas and ramps onto a bridge.

Tobiassen's search for Ukrainian forces to help in combat took him deep into the second-to-last field. A line of trees marked the far end.

As he neared that tree line, he saw two tanks in the woods and plumes of smoke.

He still saw no friendly troops to meet up with. He passed the trees on his right and rolled into the last field.

He reached for his iPhone 12. With one hand, he says, he captured video of smoke rising off the canopy and receding behind him.

He was about a half-mile across the field when he saw another tank. This one was on the opposite side of the highway, its turret pointed north.

A row of farm buildings, which are recognizable in satellite photos of the area, formed a backdrop behind the inoperative tank.

At some point, heavy gunfire forced Tobiassen into a U-turn, he says.

As best he can recall, he drove north in the southbound lanes until he found a passage across the median to the northbound lanes. He took some video that shows him driving in a northerly direction and passing by the tank on the opposite side of the highway.

He acknowledges being a little unclear on the sequencing, but he says he knows he was on the northbound side of the highway and also well north of the tank when he had to leave the car and seek cover from intense gunfire. He tumbled down a roadside embankment.

There, in silence, he encountered a Ukrainian armored personnel carrier. A hatch was ajar. Tobiassen poked his head inside. He recoiled from the sight of slain troops.

He climbed back up to the car and drove north, traveling about 600 feet before he encountered two stranded Ukrainian Army soldiers sporting airborne insignia.

A column of Russian tanks and armored fighting vehicles was bound for a city to the west, Mykolaiv, they told him. They asked for a ride to the next big city.

A little further along, he picked up a third Ukrainian soldier. He whisked him back to Kherson.

The city buzzed with Ukrainian military activity and talk of a larger Russian column well to the north, headed southwest, toward Mykolaiv.

The word on the street was that the invaders were on a course that arched through part of the world's breadbasket, traveling along local roads and also blazing across farmland.

One soldier, he says, told him the column was " huge," adding an expletive.

None of the Ukrainian fighters in Kherson had an extra gun for him, he says.

Many packed into civilian cars and sped toward Mykolaiv on the M-14.

He and his comrades joined them. They were close to their objective, parked in a gas station, when he heard the racket of helicopters to the north.

The rotor clatter intensified. Tobiassen braced himself.

At this moment, people around the world were still reacting to images of Russian gunships attacking an area near Kyiv on the first day of the war.

Tobiassen had his iPhone out in time for the choppers to skim across some treetops and into his view.

They thundered over a nearby field at low altitude.

Later, Tobiassen surmises that the copters, which were Ukrainian, had been regrouping and were about to renew their hunt for the Russian column.



Tobiassen, a recovering drug user, was facing prison time in 2016 when he fled Rhode Island, hoping first to fight ISIS. He ended up fighting separatists in Ukraine, becoming a father, and joining the battle during the first week of Russia's invasion. PROVIDED BY ALEX TOBIASSEN

Armed at last, he heads back to the fight

In Mykolaiv, in a modern scene with overtones of World War II, Ukrainian forces were preparing defenses around a key bridge that takes the M-14 across a river dividing the city.

Tobiassen delivered his passengers. He also made contact with a group of Ukrainian Marines who weren't from his battalion, he says.

But he still had no gun. He couldn't reach any of his contacts in Odesa by cellphone. He believed he could be more helpful in his home city.

There, he found local forces handing out guns. He says he and a friend, a British citizen fighting in Ukraine, each qualified for AK-74s. He also received magazines and grenades, he says. They would share a single-use rocket launcher effective against light armored vehicles.

They were ready when they were dispatched to the hydropark on Feb. 26.

On the night of Feb. 27, an air-raid siren sounded. Tobiassen saw bright tracer rounds probing the night sky and heard an explosion. He learned later that Ukrainian forces had shot down a Russian helicopter, he says.

On March 2 he visited with a foreign television crew in his house. On March 3, a Russian Defense Ministry spokesman warned that Russia would not treat westerners captured while fighting for Ukraine as prisoners of war entitled to the protections of the Geneva Convention.

That day, Tobiassen learned of Russian advances, including one that had mustered control over Kherson. He assessed the presence of Russian ships off the coast and sadly anticipated the fall of southern Ukraine to Putin's forces.

He also thought Ukrainians would try to slow the invaders by destroying bridges on the westward route to the border.

Late that day, he says, he set out for the border in a race to bypass a key bridge on highway P-70, about halfway through the 4½-hour jaunt to the border.

By the evening of March 4, Tobiassen was in Bucharest, Romania. His daughter was in his arms. His parents were in the hotel after a trek from Rhode Island. They were working on a plan to bring Iryna and his daughter to the United States.

All of this is in play when Tobiassen reaches out to The Journal.

He says he wants to tell his story to help keep Americans focused on Ukraine's struggle and on the country's need for all types of assistance.

He mentions that he's interested in bringing context to the 2016 posting, still online, that announced his indictment in Rhode Island. Those offenses do not define him, he says, emphasizing that he has responsibly scrambly overseas.

Initially, Tobiassen expresses interest in returning to the United States himself when his daughter reaches the trip. But a few days later, the plan is in flux: For one thing, Iryna's request for a travel visa has been denied, he says. Meanwhile, Ukraine's fight has been strong enough to change his calculations about continuing to fight there.

Tobiassen says he still intends to help coordinate his daughter's passage to the United States. But now he says he will take himself back to the war zone, this time to Kyiv.

Tobiassen says he sometimes hears an inner voice that seems to keep him on the lookout for situations that are likely to reveal what he's made of.

He felt he was in such a situation on Feb. 25 as he moved, unarmed, toward Russian invaders outside Kherson, he says.

The voice seems to be gaining sway again:

Yes, the fugitive says, in time he will return to Rhode Island to deal with whatever a judge might order. But not yet. He hears a "rallying call" for Ukraine, he says.

"It's their Stalingrad," Tobiassen says. "It's like our Normandy. ... All my years of military preparation and training have led up to this point."

Crucial elements of narrative:
SETTING
CHARACTERS
CONFLICT
PLOT


Little Red Riding Hood
PROBLEM
Little Red Riding Hood finally arrives. She soon notices that the wolf is pretending to be her Grandma. She screams for help.
FALLING ACTION
Just as the wolf is about to eat Little Red Rising Hood, the Woodcutter arrives and chases the wolf away. The wolf is arrested and taken to jail.
BUILD-UP
Little Red Riding Hood meets the wolf. The wolf asks Little Red Riding Hood where she is going. He then rushes to her Grandma's house. He locks Grandma in the cupboard and pretends to be her.
ENDING
Little Red Riding Hood, Grandma, and the Woodcutter live happily ever after.
BEGINNING
Little Red Riding Hood has a basket of food to give to her sick Grandma. She walks through the woods towards her Grandma's house.

A fun narrative structure to work with

FIRST A STRAIGHT-FORWARD CHRONOLOGY IN FIVE PARTS

- 1. Beginning
- 2. Build-Up
- 3. Problem
- 4. Suspense leading right up to the mountain-top
- 5. Climax/Falling/Ending

NOW, TAKE PART FOUR AND MAKE IT PART ONE

- 4. Suspense leading right up to the mountain-top
- 1. Beginning
- 2. Build-Up
- 3. Problem
- 5. Climax/Falling/Ending