

Among the moments of clarity the Trump Administration has unconsciously gifted to me is this: in the face of real adversity, people reveal themselves to be either doers or ditherers, those who roll up their sleeves or roll over and go back to sleep. As the President and his posse of primitives busy themselves with dismantling the American experiment, many in my circle — smart, worldly, well-educated people — seem prone to wringing their hands, pronouncing the end of civilization, and making fatuous pledges to move to Canada. As Yeats reported more than a century ago: “The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity.”

Perhaps it’s because the stakes are starker, but most Ukrainians I know have an extremely low tolerance for passivity, and even less for whiners. After years of Russian aggression, they’ve learned the lesson that action is the best antidote to despair. And among my network of volunteer friends one who best personifies this is my friend Andrei. Built like a wrestler and a bouncer (he was both), Andrei runs a



small computer business and a car repair shop, and since the start of the full-scale invasion in 2022 has devoted half of his income and most of his passion to providing support to Ukraine's frontline defenders. He'll fix up an old car, fill it with gear, and drive for twelve hours to deliver it to a remote military post, fueled principally by black coffee, cigarettes and hotdogs. Traveling with him is crash course in the bloody history of the region, ribald Ukrainian humor, and gas station cuisine.

For three years, his one-man operation provided tens of thousands of dollars of vital assistance to frontline units. Then, last month, the military recruiters came calling. Now many folks in his position would view this as a supreme injustice. A man who's risked in life scores of times to aid his country's soldiers is being told to put on a uniform and provide an arguably less useful service to his country. But Andrei didn't piss and moan. He took it with characteristic stoicism and showed up for basic training, ready to be a soldier the same way he's been a volunteer — with good humor and total commitment. As he recently wrote on Facebook: ask yourself the question: "Can you influence it?" If not, there is no point in being nervous. If so, then go ahead and change the situation for the best...the main thing is not to lose faith and have a cool head.

So now, this tubby man in his mid-thirties with a pregnant partner back home, is carrying an AK-47, hoping this may be the final year of the war, but fully prepared for it not to be. Whenever I worry that Ukraine might be defeated, I think of Andrei and realize that simply isn't going to happen.

