

Leaving Vinnytsia with our thoughts still on Liza and her mother, on Day Five we pressed south towards Odessa and then onward to Mykoliav, which one soldier just back from the front lines called “The Gateway to Hell”. As we drove east we soon found out why.

This day, approaching the midway point of our Mission, also marked a major change in the nature of the landscape, from pastoral and agrarian to one that that was tellingly war-like, where signs of recent combat were all around us, some left behind only a day or two after Russian soldiers were forced to de-occupy numerous small villages that we were delivering aid to. The conditions we found there were appalling as the evidence of genocide was omnipresent. But this also served to remind us that we were right where we were needed most - for this is where the “neediest Ukrainians” were found, tattered and in deep despair after weeks of brutal occupation by Russian soldiers and after months without aid supplies.

To put it simply: we were their only hope.



Beginning just a mile or two east of Mykoliav, the entire landscape took on a more war-like look, reflecting the significant increase in combat activities along this western end of the war’s front lines. So too did our Mission Team, as we “armored-up” and were accompanied by a Ukrainian anti-tank company who joined our ranks. And the more we drove east along the front lines, we soon found out why Ukrainian soldiers refer to this as The Gateway to Hell.

