

Alexey Markov: anti-fascist commander, communist hero

written by Greg Butterfield
October 29, 2020



Commander Alexey Markov Photo: Ghost Battalion

On Oct. 24, Alexey Markov, commander of the anti-fascist Ghost Battalion in the Lugansk People's Republic, died in a car accident. His spouse Marina Markov was

also killed.

Alexey Markov, a communist from Russia, came to the Donbass region (formerly the eastern part of Ukraine) to fight fascism and protect the people after Ukraine's government started a bloody war at the behest of Washington and NATO in 2014.

First, Markov gathered humanitarian aid and brought it to Donbass. Then, together with his comrade Pyotr Biryukov, he organized the Volunteer Communist Detachment, made up of internationalist fighters from former Soviet republics and eventually all over the world, and returned to join the battle as part of the anti-fascist Ghost Brigade led by Alexey Mozgovoy.

Markov and Biryukov quickly proved their mettle, becoming Mozgovoy's trusted deputies. The communist fighters played a crucial part in the battle to liberate the town of Debaltseve and push back the Ukrainian invaders in early 2015, perhaps the single most important battle in the war.

After Mozgovoy's tragic assassination in May 2015, Markov took on more leadership responsibilities in the Ghosts. Eventually, when the brigade was reorganized as a 14th Territorial Defense Battalion of the Lugansk People's Militia, he became its commander.

The warm, modest Markov was a beloved and inspiring figure to solidarity activists across the globe, and to the communities he defended and served. His fellow soldiers had given him the military call-sign "Dobry" — "Kind," in Russian — and those of us who had the chance to know him agreed it was well deserved.

Markov was not a military man. Born in Omsk, Siberia, he trained as a nuclear physicist and mathematician at the University of Novosibirsk. Later, he was an IT worker in Moscow. But after the May 2, 2014, massacre of anti-fascist activists in Odessa, and the Ukrainian bombing and air raids against civilian targets in Donetsk

and Lugansk, he said that he had to join the fight against resurgent fascism on the territory of his true homeland, the Soviet Union.

“The death of ‘Kind’ is a great loss for the entire communist movement,” wrote Alexey Albu, a survivor of the Odessa massacre and coordinator of the banned Ukrainian group Borotba. “He was an example for many communists. He was the defender of the disadvantaged people of Donbass, thrown under the roller of the Ukrainian-American military machine. He was a real anti-fascist, fighting with arms against the brown plague.”



Alexey Markov (right) tours the front with international activists in 2016. SLL photo: Greg Butterfield

I corresponded with Markov and interviewed him several times during these years. I

considered him a friend as well as a comrade in the struggle.

In 2016, when I attended an anti-fascist conference in Lugansk, Markov invited me and several other international activists to visit the Ghosts defending the front line against the Ukrainian Army and fascist militias near the town of Kirovsk. We were able to meet with the internationalist soldiers living in dugouts and digging trenches at the edge of the narrow “no man’s land” that separated free Donbass from the area under Ukrainian occupation.

A look through a gun scope was all that was needed to see the enemy forces across the valley — flying the flag of the neo-Nazi Right Sector.

Today, the Ghost Battalion continues to defend this area. Despite an international peace agreement, Ukrainian forces regularly test the republic’s defenses by attempting to seize additional territory. Shellings and shootings by the Ukrainian side are frequent, targeting not only the defenders but the civilian population as well. Many Ghosts have died.

Despite working day and night to coordinate the defense of the area and frequently travelling to meetings of militia commanders, Markov prioritized political education for the Ghost fighters and support for the civilian population, hard hit by the effects of six years of war and blockade.

Markov was an important force for left unity for the former Soviet republics and beyond. The Volunteer Communist Detachment and the Ghosts united communists, socialists and anti-fascists of many organizations, backgrounds and languages into a cohesive fighting force. His dedication to building solidarity around concrete goals and rejecting sectarianism was unmatched.

He also prioritized internationalism. No matter how busy he was with daily life-and-death matters, Markov felt it was important to stay in touch with the international

movement. He always responded to requests for solidarity statements and interviews from foreign activists.

In an [interview with Struggle-La Lucha](#) in 2019, Markov explained: “The world is entering a phase of another economic crisis, and for big capital it is very natural to try and channel the discontent of the masses by setting some nations against others. Uninformed people will sooner see the cause of their impoverishment in ‘illegal immigrants’ or the machinations of treacherous neighbors, than realize that their poverty is a necessary condition for the further enrichment of a handful of super rich.

“This was already the case at the beginning of the 20th century, when global capital relied on the Italian and German fascists in their struggle against the world labor movement. So, the current oligarchs set Ukrainians against Russians, Europeans against Asians, and white residents of the U.S. against African Americans in order to distract them from their real enemies.”



Street art pays tribute to Markov in Italy. Photo: Banda Bassotti

Tributes to Alexey Markov



Commander Markov's funeral was held Oct. 27 in the town of

Alchevsk, the Ghosts' original headquarters. He was buried next to Ghost Brigade founder Alexey Mosgovoy. Words of tribute were offered by his comrade Pyotr Biryukov, now commander of the 4th Separate Motorized Rifle Brigade; Alexander Borodai, first prime minister of the Donetsk People's Republic; and Kirovsk Mayor Gennady Kartsev.

Vivien of No Pasaran Hamburg told SLL: "I had the luck and the honor to take part in the anti-fascist forum that was held in Alchevsk on May 7, 2015. Comrade Alexey Mosgovoy said, 'We will not bow. We will not accept the exchange of one oligarch by another.' It was made clear by both Mosgovoy and Markov that they appealed to the class to unite — including to the Ukrainian soldiers on the other side of the front — to build socialism.

"They had established or were establishing socialist elements already," she explained. "And they had an army: arms, and a group of fighters of high ethics and motivation. They had a clear vision for the future and solid knowledge of the past. This is one reason why it hurts so much to lose our dear commander: He personified the idea that socialism is possible, when we study, love, dare and fight — even nowadays, in Europe."

The [Union of Donbass Volunteers](#), an organization representing the interests of anti-fascist soldiers, remembered "our close friend and comrade, a member of the Council of Commanders of the Union. ... Condolences to the family and friends of Alexey Markov, the servicemen of his unit, the entire Lugansk People's Republic, which has lost its brave defender, one of the best."

[Yakov Osadchiy](#), spokesperson for the People's Militia of the LPR, said: "Standing up to protect the Lugansk people, [Markov] remained faithful to the common idea and his own ideals until his last breath. The importance of his services to the Republic cannot be assessed, since it is difficult to imagine a person who cares more for the people of Lugansk than Alexey."

Osadchiy stressed that “he was and remains an example of courage and heroism for his comrades.”

[A Ghost Battalion soldier](#), responding to fears that Markov’s death might mark the end of the Ghost’s internationalist, anti-fascist commitments, wrote: “The battalion commander worked at 100, 150, 200 percent. ... You can write for a very long time and a lot about what kind of person the battalion commander was, how much he did. You can write even longer and more about the fact that it is impossible to abandon our duties because of his death. But there is no time for that. The truth is, our responsibilities must be done.

“‘Kind’ will stay with us. ‘Ghost’ will remain ‘Ghost.’ So say we all.”

And not only in Donbass.

“The name of our local group of activists, No Pasarán Hamburg, derives from Markov’s call that we received on the 2018 Antifascist Caravan; to continue spreading the truth about the war against the people of Donbass,” says Vivien. “After returning to Hamburg, we founded the group in this spirit: To uphold anti-fascism everywhere, to fight for a better world. To kill fascism by ending capitalism and aiming for socialism.

“He was my commander. We will continue his fight.”

Commander Alexey Markov, ipresente!

