



# Beyond All Limits: How the Ukrainian Special Forces of the Shaman Battalion Plan the Impossible

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The front offers no discounts, but there are units born for the impossible. The **Shaman Battalion (Shamanbat)**, an elite unit of the Ukrainian military intelligence (GUR), operates in the shadows where others cannot or will not intervene. Land, air, water: for these men, there are no operational boundaries, only missions to accomplish.

In a rare and intense interview with *RBC-Ukraine*, a Shamanbat operator fighting under the code name "**Kos**" broke the silence. From the first bullet fired from a car window to the hell of mud and hallucinations on the Dnipro River, his account offers a raw and rhetoric-free glimpse into the reality of the conflict.

## The Beginning: A Gunshot on a Bridge in the Kherson Region

For Kos, the total war began at 4 a.m. on February 24, 2022, in his homeland, the Kherson region. Faced with the trails of rockets in the sky and the roar of Russian helicopters, the decision was immediate: *"Pack my things, I'm going,"* he told his wife.

Less than an hour later, together with a friend, he was in a car headed towards Kyiv. It was on a road bridge that the first dramatic contact occurred:

*"There was a Russian soldier in the middle of the road. I told my friend to lower the window and stop only if they blocked us. When the Russian turned towards us, I shot. My friend kept repeating: 'What did you do, what did you do?' But I knew we had no other choice."*

From that moment, Kos became part of the Shamanbat, a unit founded on a principle as simple as it is brutal: **if there is a mission, a way to do it is found.**

## The Defense of Kyiv and the Myth of the Russian Retreat

In the early days of the invasion, Shamanbat operators deployed to defend the capital wearing dark civilian clothes. A detail that threw Moscow's vanguards into panic.

*"We were in black jackets and pants. The Russians couldn't understand who we were and why we fought so hard," recalls Kos.*

The soldier categorically denies the Russian narrative of the "gesture of goodwill" to justify the subsequent withdrawal from Kyiv: the Russian failure was caused by catastrophic losses and a structural collapse of command. *"When their company commander was killed, they ran around like chicks without a hen. They were trained, but without guidance, it was over for them".*



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## Hallucinations and Determination: Crossing the Dnipro

Among the most complex operations faced by the unit was the creation of a bridgehead on the occupied bank of the Dnipro River, in the Kherson region, right after the Kakhovka dam disaster.

The unit had no specific training for large-scale amphibious landings. **They learned everything in a week.**

The operation turned into a test of endurance at the limits of human capabilities. The suffocating heat, continuous fighting, and toxic gases released by the mud and river sediments caused severe hallucinations among the soldiers after more than ten hours on the ground:

- An engineer from the unit stopped to report, in all seriousness, seeing *Bugs Bunny* sitting on a tree.
- Even Kos, once back in the rear, saw spectral figures moving around him.

Despite the exhausting psychological and physical pressure, the mission was a total success. The Russian prisoners captured that day were incredulous: "*They kept asking us: how did you do it? There's too much water, we controlled everything. It's impossible*".

## The Enemy's Change of Pace and the Reality of the Front Today

Kos has been fighting the Russians, on and off, since 2014. He has witnessed the radical change in enemy violence: "*In 2014-2015 they didn't treat civilians like in 2022. When I saw what they*

*did in the villages near Kyiv, I realized there would never be room for dialogue".*

Today the front is experiencing a phase of fierce attrition. Kos describes the Russian strategy as an endless sequence of **"meat assaults"**, where soldiers are sent recklessly without pause. According to prisoner testimonies, many of them choose to surrender to the Ukrainians for a specific reason: the Russian **blocking units** positioned behind them have orders to shoot anyone attempting to retreat. *"Surrendering is the only way they have to survive".*

## The Mobilization Issue: "No One Is Born Ready"

The debate on conscription in Ukraine is heated, but for those who have been in the trenches for over four years, the perspective is much more pragmatic. Kos, who can't wait to take a three-month leave to be with his family, does not accept the excuses of those avoiding recruitment by saying they are "not ready".

*"No one was ready for this war. It's not like learning English. Come. We will teach you everything. You will be at the level of the Shamanbat or the Armed Forces. You will not be thrown recklessly. If there is motivation and character, the rest is learned."*

Kos is keen to dispel the myth that enlistment equates to an immediate death sentence: *"There are guys who have gone through the whole war without a scratch, just a few bruises. Because operations are planned. Thinking of ending up directly on the front line without preparation is a couch fear".*

## What We Fight For: The Value of Normality

While Kos enjoyed a few days of leave in Kyiv, observing the open cafes and children playing in the parks, he did not feel resentment for that apparent normality distant from the front. On the contrary:

*"We do what we do precisely so that people here can go out for a coffee and walk with their children. Yesterday was gray, today is white."*

On the end of the war, Kos prefers not to make geopolitical predictions. He acknowledges Vladimir Putin's obsession with wanting to go down in history as a conqueror to justify hundreds of thousands of sacrificed lives, but he has no doubts about the final outcome: *"I don't know*

*how our victory will happen. But it will happen".*