

EXCLUSIVE

From **Lord Ashcroft** IN KYIV

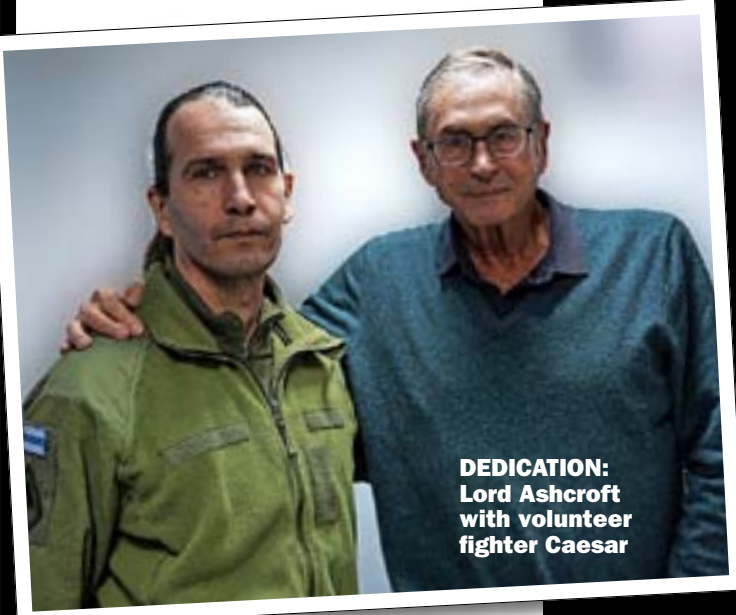
TALK OF A possible ceasefire does not concern the unconventional soldier who goes by the military callsign of “Caesar”. Even if Ukraine does eventually agree to a long-term peace deal, he will always be at war with Russia – the country of his birth – while Vladimir Putin remains in power. His hatred of the Russian president and the brutal regime he represents is palpable – Caesar can barely even bring himself to say the dictator’s name.

It was for this reason that, more than three years ago, he risked his life to flee Russia in order to fight for Ukraine. “I do not feel guilty for leaving my home-

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I’M FIGHTING AGAINST MY COUNTRY... PUTIN IS LEADING RUSSIA INTO THE ABYSS

In his latest dramatic dispatch from the war-torn nation, Lord Ashcroft meets a personal trainer who fled Russia to join Ukraine’s International Legion and hears why Codename Caesar is only too happy to have taken up arms in the struggle



DEDICATION: Lord Ashcroft with volunteer fighter Caesar

land. Instead, I feel proud that I am carrying out my Christian and military duty. I will follow my path to the end – I am prepared to die to defend Ukraine and for the cause of a free Russia,” he told me.

Caesar’s life could hardly have changed more over the past three years.

On the morning of February 24, 2022, the day Russia invaded Ukraine, he was living and working in St Petersburg. A married man with four children, he worked as a fitness trainer in a gym in the city.

“I got up at 5am. Before going to work, I saw on the news that the rockets were flying towards Kyiv so I made an immediate decision to go and defend Ukraine,” he recalled.

“In 2014 [when Russia illegally annexed Crimea and other parts of eastern Ukraine], I had some friends who went to fight for Ukraine against Russia. I wanted to go and join them but they talked me out of it.

“This time I did not discuss what I would do with anyone else. When I came home that night my whole family was distraught about the attack by Russia. They were upset and crying because they thought Ukraine would fall and cease to exist.

“I told them I was going to go and fight for Ukraine. They all supported me in my decision and do to this day.”

Caesar made contact with the International Legionnaires of Ukraine, which had been formed prior to the all-out attack to “defend the freedom of Ukraine, Europe and the whole world”, in the hope he could escape his homeland. He also contacted foreign embassies for help.

Caesar, now 51, his long dark hair tied in a ponytail, told me: “I was motivated by the fact that I am a Christian – a member of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. I have a clear view of the world, what is right and what’s wrong, and I knew I wanted to join the defence forces of Ukraine.

“Putin is leading Russia into the abyss. For 25 years he has led his people down the road of poverty, obsolescence, destruction.”

He explained that, prior to February 2022, he had secretly been a member of two militia groups in Russia, both of which

were described as “terrorist” organisations by the Russian authorities.

Once he was arrested and interrogated by the FSB, the Russian security service, but was eventually released.

“From my childhood, I have studied warfare. It is in my blood,” he said.

After security checks by the Ukrainian authorities, Caesar knew he would be welcome if he could reach the country.

Eventually, he escaped Russia through Hungary in June 2022 and soon afterwards went to Ukraine.

“I had no connection to Ukraine but I was determined to fight on the side of the good against Putin’s criminals. As a Christian, I understand duty and honour,” he said.

Dressed in combat fatigues, Caesar said Ukrainians accepted his reason for fighting and were never suspicious of his motives when he joined a unit from the Freedom of

Russia Legion, a paramilitary group of Russian citizens opposed to Putin’s regime.

“My unit is much loved in Ukraine,” said Caesar, who now holds the position of deputy commander and acts as a spokesman for his men.

‘I kill the bad guys to protect Ukraine’

Caesar, who served in a mortar unit on the frontline, declined to estimate how many Russians he had killed in battle.

However, he said it was not difficult for him, even as a Christian, killing these men.

“Do you feel sorry when you kill a cockroach? Those who came here with arms in their hands are killing women, children

and the elderly. They are criminals, they are bastards,” he said matter-of-factly.

“I have to kill the bad guys to protect civilians in Ukraine. I’m not a sadist. I don’t enjoy killing people, but that is part of my service, my duty. In battle, they want to kill us and we want to kill them. So that’s fair.

“My most memorable fights were around Bakhmut where I fought for a month and a half but my unit fought for much longer.

“During this time we destroyed about 500 soldiers from the Wagner Group [private army fighting for Russia] – there were some 300 dead and 200 wounded,” said Caesar, who has also been on operations behind enemy lines on Russian soil.

Caesar and his fellow Legion fighters also work with contacts inside Russia aimed at sabotaging Putin’s operations.

For example, in April 2024 they worked with a Russian sailor, callsign “Goga”, to

sabotage a Russian warship. Not only did Goga successfully set fire to the missile ship Serpukhov causing extensive damage, but the Legion enabled him to escape afterwards and defect to Ukraine.

CAESAR said he has nearly died in battle many times, but he believes that his strong Christian faith has kept him alive. “There have been so many incidents where I have nearly been killed but I always emerged without a scratch. I believe God is protecting me so I can carry out my important work,” he said.

Caesar knows he is a prime target for assassination attempts by Russia, quite apart from the possibility that he could be killed on the frontline. “As members of the

Legion, we know we are being hunted by Russians and so we are very serious about our personal security,” he said.

Caesar is now willing to be interviewed and photographed because, with the help of contacts inside and outside Russia, he has smuggled his wife and four children out of his homeland to join him in Ukraine.

However, he does not want to take up Ukrainian citizenship, which he has been offered and which would make his life easier, because he says it is his duty as a Russian to continue the fight against Putin’s evil and corrupt regime.

“As a citizen of Russia, I am partly responsible for what my country is doing. “All citizens, excluding children, the elderly and the disabled, must bear some responsibility for Russia’s actions,” he said.

Caesar, who has been decorated for his bravery, urged the West – which has become

weary of the long and expensive war with Russia – to continue supporting Ukraine. “I cannot emphasise how important this is. I would like to thank the people of Great Britain for their support of Ukraine, for understanding the importance of freedom.

‘Europe has a new Hitler...it’s Putin’

“Britain and other countries stood against Hitler. Now Europe has a new Hitler in the form of Putin.”

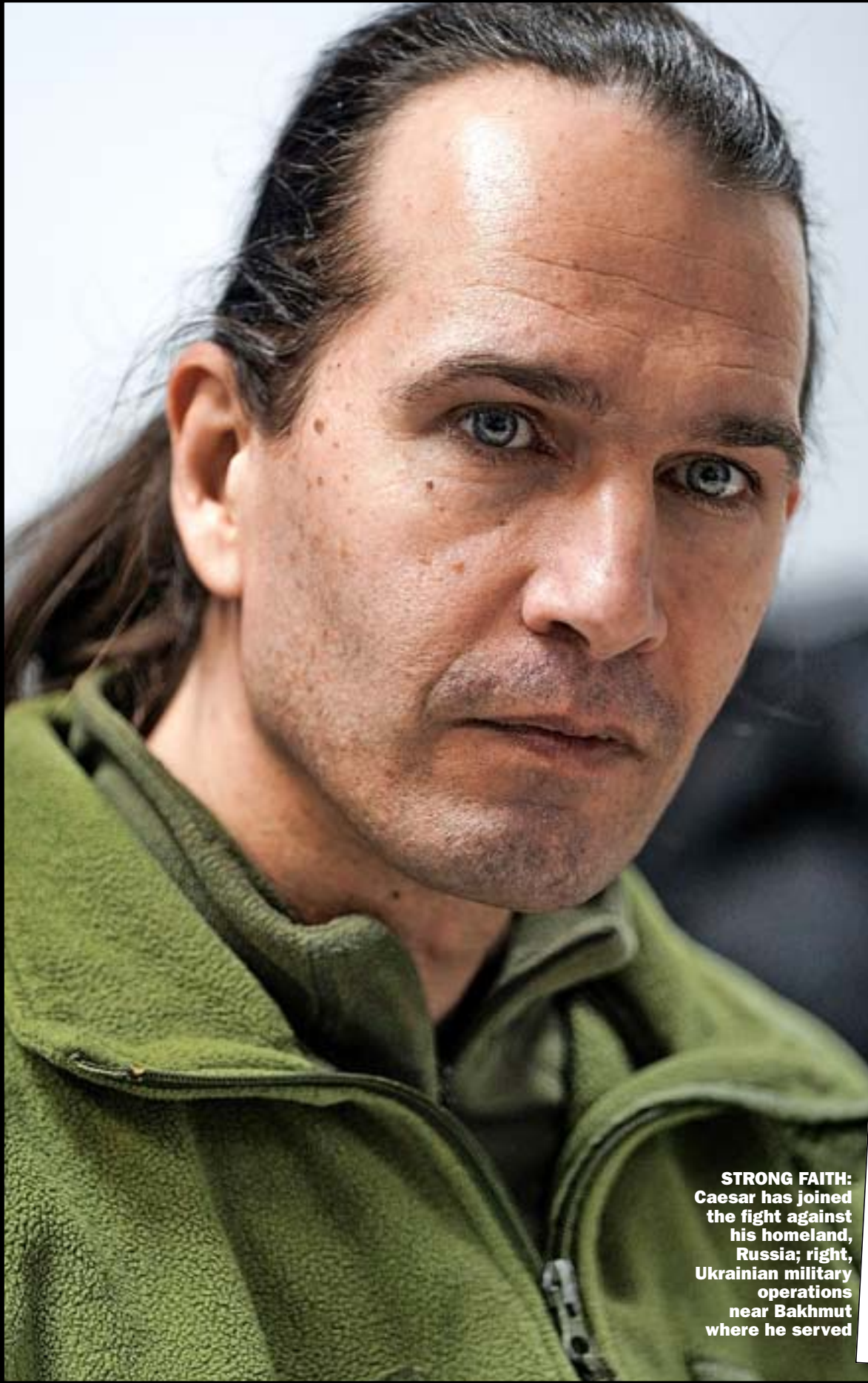
Speaking in a mixture of broken English and through an interpreter in fluent Russian, Caesar is pensive when he discusses his future. “There will never be a just peace with Putin,” he adds grimly. “My moral

obligation is to carry on the fight against Putin’s Russia so it is never capable of aggression of this kind again.

“It is my duty to make people in Russia free, and then to make them more prosperous, wiser and kinder. Even if there is a peace deal tomorrow, I will continue my work. Ukraine can only really have a victory when there is regime change in Russia.

“After the war, if I am still alive, I hope to be a political leader. I will try to educate the people of Russia. I hope to be able to help in planning a coup d’etat against Putin and to reform Russia for the better. Only then will I be at the end of my journey.”

● Lord Ashcroft KCMG PC is an international businessman, philanthropist, author and pollster. For more information on his work, visit lordashcroft.com Follow him on X/Facebook @LordAshcroft



STRONG FAITH: Caesar has joined the fight against his homeland, Russia; right, Ukrainian military operations near Bakhmut where he served

