**Testimony 2: “There was active shelling. Then the shooting began.”**

*The nature of the injuries we see on MSF’s medical evacuation train, as well as the stories they tell our teams clearly show that civilians are not spared in the war in Ukraine. Each day, our teams on train hear harrowing stories. A 30-year-old woman we met on the train shared the story of what her family experienced\*.*

“We’re from Mariupol. We have suffered a lot in the war. When there was an explosion near our apartment block, we decided to move in with my husband’s parents. They live in a one-story house and we stayed there for some weeks.

My husband is a policeman. When rumours started about upcoming “cleansings” by paramilitary groups targeting war veterans and policemen, we decided to leave the city. It took us almost a week to get out of Mariupol. It was difficult to get out of the left bank of the city, since almost all bridges were destroyed. There was only one bridge left.

We were five people in the car – my husband, my son, my husband’s sister and her three-year old daughter and me. My sister-in-law was just visiting from Kyiv. The car was packed, with all our bags and belongings stuffed into every corner. We only had this one car, so we had to leave our parents behind. We simply didn’t have enough space.

We had signs on the car windows saying we had children on board and we had also used old clothes as a white flag. We also tied white cloths on the side mirrors, clearly marking our car as civilian.

When we reached the city centre, we heard explosions. We saw a man lying on the ground, his legs were lying separately from his upper body. He was screaming for help and trying to crawl towards our car but we couldn’t stop. We had to move onwards. There was active shelling. Then the shooting began.

At first, I thought they would target the tires of the car. I had heard reports that they would shoot at the tires to prevent people from leaving. But then I realized they were actually targeting our windows and more specifically the passenger seat. My husband screamed that we should all get down. I tried to cover my head with the bags around me and with my laptop. Everything went so fast.

The car hit something metal and it stopped. This was when the most horrible part began. I slowly turned my head towards the left, towards my husband and saw that his jeans were covered in blood. I looked up a bit more and saw that his t-shirt was also covered with blood. When I eventually had the courage to look at his head, I saw that his left side was fully covered in blood. At first, I thought he had been shot in the head and was dead. Then I realized that he was still alive but his eye had been badly damaged. One by one, the kids started crying and sobbing. My son said, “Daddy, please don’t die”.

Then suddenly the shooting completely stopped and there was only silence. I couldn’t get a picture of what was going on inside the car. I couldn’t see the kids or my husband’s sister. I couldn’t see if they were alive. It was a mess, the bags were completely destroyed, our stuff was everywhere. The front window was smashed and there was glass everywhere. I started to panic. I jumped out and started screaming, “There are kids in the car. How can you shoot at kids?!” Then I screamed for help. I said, “My husband is dying”. But no one replied. There was only silence.

I was afraid that if we didn’t move further, we’d get shot. But I also knew I had to stop the bleeding somehow. I had prepared a first aid kit, that fortunately didn’t get destroyed. It was still down by my feet - literally the only thing that was still intact in the car. I gave him a haemostatic [a bandage to stop the bleeding] and pressed a sanitary pad on his eye. Then I checked if everyone else was alive.

When we reached the hospital in the 17th district – the only functioning hospital in the whole city – they had an operating theatre but no specialized surgeons. The two doctors on duty said they were working there basically non-stop since 24th of February. They referred my husband to the ophthalmology department. They could not perform surgery due to the blackout in the city, so they just stitched the upper part of the eyelid together with the lower one. That’s all they could do for him. They allocated us two beds in the hospital. My husband vomited blood during the night. The others tried to sleep but it was a horrible night. In the morning we saw busses in front of the hospital running to Volodarske.

When we reached Volodarske, there were no doctors and no hospital, only volunteers handing out pain medication and bandages. We spent two days there in the local art school where my husband slept on wooden pallets and us sitting on stools. We learned that a local person was driving people to a larger town nearby in exchange for money. He dropped us directly at the hospital there. On the x-ray we could see that my husband’s left eye socket was full of glass splinters and that they had simply sewed them in in Mariupol. My husband’s condition deteriorated. We asked for surgery but it wasn’t possible. For five days, we stayed at in a local church, where we were provided with food. It was the first time in one and a half months that we had had hot water.

On 1 April, we travelled on. Colleagues of my husband waited for us and took him directly to the hospital in Dnipro. He had surgery and was told that he was very lucky that even though there was a week in between the injury and surgery date, the infection didn’t spread to the brain. My husband will need another surgery to reconstruct his eye bone. He will then get an eye prosthesis.

The next day, we all reunited and spent a month and a half in Dnipro. Now, we’re on our way to Lviv with this train. So many things have happened since the war broke out. All the tears have been cried and now I want to move onward.

*\*She has asked to remain anonymous for her and her family’s security.*