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Retiring to a War Zone

Some people buy RVs.

I bought a one-way ticket to Ukraine.

(Though I'd happily drive an RV here. Or any kind of vehicle, for that matter).

It's not for the faint of heart—but it does have its own perverse logic.

From the very beginning of the full-scale invasion, I knew my 20 years in disaster response and recovery could best serve the people of Ukraine. Nearly four years later, my life is fully invested here—volunteering, assisting, researching, developing, training—wherever the greatest needs intersect with my KSAs (Knowledge, Skills, Abilities).

As the first winter approached, one need rose above all others: heat—especially in remote, underserved communities.

The task was formidable. The solution, even more so.

And strangely... I could find no one else working on this particular approach.

Three years later, with help from a Canadian NGO, we built and installed the first system at their workshop in Kharkiv. Getting the system finally built was an uphill battle. Spreading the word—and scaling it—turns out to be yet another.

Speed is everything. Yet I can't even begin to build and distribute these superior systems until I find a team and facilities for training and constructing.

Then winter and war hit me personally when I returned to Bucha, including a long illness. Cut off from the world, armed with a laptop (plus better power and connectivity than nearby Kyiv), I reluctantly traded my boots in the field for a keyboard and laptop. (What I wouldn't give for a communications volunteer!)

So, this video shows my little pride and joy: the first known state-of-the-art rocket heater system in Ukraine. May there be many more soon, in all the many variations possible.

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To draw in readers, upcoming posts will present a Ukraine you have not seen before: a resident, retired American emergency manager's perspective on response and recovery while living alongside Ukrainians in the midst of ongoing destruction.

This is the impossible reality of wartime Ukraine.

It is taking a heavy toll on everyone, including me.

I also want to draw on your experience and collective wisdom for best practices moving forward.

More than anything, I hope to encourage some of you to bring your skills to this part of the world, skills desperately needed for a fresh perspective on this incredibly massive devastation. Help explore the best approaches to recovery as we all look forward to a future of peace with shared common values.

I'll still be here to greet you, God willing. There'll probably be a free welcome dinner in it for you as well!

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