

# Civilians continue to face horrors as Mariupol becomes Ukrainian Alamo

Evan Simko-Bednarski

Bodies littered the streets and Ukrainian troops rejected a Russian ultimatum to surrender what is left of the bombed wasteland of Mariupol on Wednesday, with the last remaining defenders of the Donbas port city taking cover at a steel plant that threatens to become a Ukrainian Alamo.

The last stand at Azovstal — a sprawling industrial complex in the city's east — could be the final act of resistance in a city that has been cut off and pummeled by airstrikes and artillery fire since the early days of the war.

"This is our last address to the world. It may be our last one ever," Major Serhiy Volyna of Ukraine's 36th Marine Brigade, known to be among the steel plant's defenders, said in a video message [posted to Facebook on Wednesday](#). "We might only have a few days, or even hours, remaining."

Volyna said he had 500 wounded troops with him in Azovstal, as well as hundreds of civilians, including women and children.

In a video from one of the bunkers, terrified young mothers can be seen cradling their babies while toddlers are bundled in heavy coats to protect them from the bitter cold, [the Times of London reported](#).

"We get a bit scared when they start shooting," said one boy, who appeared to be around 5 or 6.

A teenage girl recalled how she had survived shelling in the early days of the invasion.

In an interview with the Washington Post, Volyna clarified that his troops — an assortment of Ukrainian marines, guardsmen and far-right militia members — would not lay down their weapons so long as they continued to receive orders to fight.

He said he did not believe Russian promises of safety if they surrendered.

“No one believes the Russians,” he told the paper.

Russian-backed separatists said shortly before a 2 p.m. Wednesday deadline to surrender that only five people in the demolished city had

turned themselves over to enemy forces.

The situation for the estimated 100,000 civilians left in Mariupol remained bleak.

Photographs from the few Western journalists who've made it back into the city showed civilians using bicycles and shopping carts to transport what few belongings they've been able to save, while walking past pockmarked buildings and burned-out tanks.

Russian troops threatened to open fire on any civilians not wearing a

white armband identifying them as a noncombatant, according to Petro Andriushchenko, an adviser to Mariupol's mayor.

"The occupiers no longer 'mildly' propose that civilians wear white ribbons to mark themselves," Andriushchenko wrote on Telegram.

"They have turned to direct threats to open fire on anyone seen on the street without such ribbons."

"The Russians are gradually turning the city into a true ghetto for Ukrainians," he added.

Andriushchenko accused the Russians of violating their own proposed

cease-fire for the surrender of Ukrainian troops on Tuesday, and predicted they would do so again on Wednesday.

"Nothing new, everything according to Orwell: peace is war, freedom is slavery," he wrote.

Video taken over the weekend shows bodies covered with bloody sheets along the city streets, as civilians walked past. Other videos showed entire city blocks destroyed, with multi-story apartment buildings turned to rubble.

The city, a major port on the Sea of Azov in the eastern Donbas region, has seen some of the war's most brutal fighting and human rights abuses.

Russian airstrikes hit a hospital maternity ward early in the war. A week later, some 300 people were killed when Russian forces bombed a theater that was serving as a civilian shelter. The theater was marked with large letters spelling "children" in Russian.

In addition to near-constant bombardment, the city has been under siege for nearly two months, cut off from power, water and supplies. The city's unpowered morgues began to overflow early last month, and it started burying its dead in mass graves.

The Russian blockade has also limited access to news.

"[The people in Mariupol] don't have full information at all because they don't have internet," Roman Skyliarov, a former resident of the city, [told the BBC Wednesday](#).

Skyliarov said his former neighbors are nervous to leave the embattled port because "They think that what is happening in Mariupol [is] happening everywhere."

Mayor Vadim Boychenko tried to dispel those fears on social media.

"During these long and incredibly difficult days, you survived in inhumane conditions. You were in an information vacuum, without access to any information," he said to his citizens on Telegram. "Do not be afraid, and evacuate to Zaporozhye," he said, referring to the Ukrainian-controlled city on the Dnipro River.

"Already, 200,000 Mariupol residents were able to leave. Today these people are safe," he said. "Dear Mariupol, Ukraine is waiting for you. We

are waiting for you."

The Mariupol City Council late Wednesday posted a video showing a long line of buses, some bearing a Red Cross emblem. The buses were "ready to continue the evacuation of Mariupol," the council said.

But just over an hour later, word came that a humanitarian corridor meant for the evacuation had once again failed.

"Unfortunately, the humanitarian corridor from Mariupol did not work as planned, today," said Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereshchuk. "Due to the lack of control over their own military on the ground, the occupiers were unable to ensure a proper cease-fire."

"Tomorrow morning we will resume our efforts," she said.