



REAL

WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY **OLEH SENTSOV**

ARTHOUSE TRAFFIC & CRY CINEMAIN COOPERATION WITH **PROPELER FILM, DOWNEY INK.**

DOCUMENTARY | UKRAINE, CROATIA | 101 MINS | UKRAINIAN



Karlovy Vary
International Film Festival
Special Screenings

INTERNATIONAL PRESS

Claudia Tomassini + Associates | Claudia Tomassini & Lorenzo Ormando

press@claudiatomassini.com

+49 173 2055794

CREDITS

Production **Arthouse Traffic and Cry Cinema**

In co-production with **Propeler Film, Downey Ink.**

Filmed by **Oleh Sentsov**

Sound postproduction **Igor Kazmirchuk**

Image postproduction **Oleksiy Moskalenko**

Producers **Denis Ivanov, Oleh Sentsov, Mike Downey, Boris T. Matic, Lana Matic**

SYNOPSIS

During the first days of the Russian full - scale invasion of Ukraine, film director Oleh Sentsov, an army reservist since returning from his incarceration in Putin's gulag, joined a unit of the Ukrainian Defence Forces. In his role as an army lieutenant, he took part in a number of intensive battles – and during one, his BMP armored vehicle was destroyed by Russian artillery. In the aftermath, he became embedded in nearby trenches and tried to organize via radio the evacuation of part of his unit. All the while his men were under consistent attack, and eventually ran out of ammunition, making their evacuation all the more urgent. This military event on the Ukrainian – Russian front line positions was given the code name Real.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

REAL cannot be called a film. And it cannot be called a documentary. It is a document of this war recorded by accident during one battle.

We don't see the battle itself here. It takes place somewhere off-screen, a little further, and we see only one trench and hear the negotiations on the radio between the participants of these hostilities during the Ukrainian counter-offensive in the summer of 2023.

This incident occurred during one of the operations when the advance infantry of our company was landed at a position codenamed "Real", after the Madrid football club, and was encircled by Russian units. I was one of the commanding officers who participated in the operation. The Bradley armored vehicle in which I was transported with the second wave of troops was hit, and we were forced to shelter in a trench further back from the Real position.

There is no action, there is no fighting, there is not even a visible battle. All this is not in the film, although periodically the trench is shelled. There is something else – the truth. There is a truth about the war that may not be very pleasant for everyone, including the participants themselves. Here, at war, not everything goes as you want, not everyone is a hero, not everyone is smart, and not everyone is organized. But everyone dies. Equally. Both smart and not smart, and brave and not brave. But this moment took place in this film and was recorded by accident.

I did not intend to shoot anything. I did not think at the time that anything interesting was happening in the frame. I was just checking my camera, accidentally pressed the button, and turned it on. That is how the hour and a half of footage was produced, as long as the battery lasted, with no editing and no beginning or end.

Most people's idea of war are based on novels, heroic and adventurous movies, and video games. But real war is about waiting. The danger is that absolutely real images become more abstract and ironically less real for viewers, as they are filtered through these media perspectives, detaching them from the true experiences and hardships faced by those on the ground. For better or worse, REAL is a slice of military life that shows this war without embellishment. It shows that even things that might not seem connected to fighting, like the decisions you make as a commander, can matter a lot – they can cost people's lives.

It is like a radio play: a lot of things happen in radio negotiations, and sometimes it's hard to follow the events, it's hard to understand them, but you can very clearly understand the atmosphere of events and realize the tragedy happened on the position Real.

The resulting film may have no meaning. Because it does look like war. War has very little meaning either. Because war is complicated, sometimes incomprehensible. Sometimes it is meaningless, and always it is tragic.

ABOUT THE FILMMAKER

Oleh Sentsov was born on July 13, 1976 in Simferopol, Crimea, Ukraine.

GAMER, his first feature, premiered at the Rotterdam IFF in 2012 and later participated in more than 30 international film festivals.

After the November 2013 breakout of the Maidan protests, Sentsov became an activist of the Auto-Maidan movement. During the first months of the Russian annexation of Crimea, Sentsov was arrested there by Russia's Secret Service FSB and charged with planning terrorist attacks. Despite a complete lack of evidence, he was unlawfully sentenced to 20 years of imprisonment, giving rise to a global campaign for his release, #SaveOlegSentsov.

Oleh was serving his term in the Labytnangi Penal Colony in the North of Russia. On May 14, 2018, he went on an open-ended hunger strike protesting the incarceration of all Ukrainian political prisoners in Russia and demanding their release. After 145 days of the hunger strike, he ended it due to health concerns and the threat of force-feeding.

In 2018, he received the European Parliament's *Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought*, before being finally released on September 7, 2019, as part of a prisoner exchange deal between Russia and Ukraine. The world premiere of Oleh's next film RHINO took place in the Orizzonti program of Venice IFF, won the Grand-Prix of Stockholm IFF, and was released in more than 20 territories.

On February 24, 2022 Oleh Sentsov joined Ukrainian Defence Forces.

FILMOGRAPHY

- 2008 A PERFECT DAY FOR BANANAFISH (short)
- 2009 THE HORN OF A BULL (short)
- 2011 GAMER (feature)
- 2020 NUMBERS (feature, co-director)
- 2021 RHINO (feature)
- 2024 REAL (documentary, director)