

A Russian price on his head

A WARTIME underground leader with a Russian price on his head and the scars of Gestapo torture still on his body slipped unnoticed into Sydney yesterday.

He is Mykola Lebed, 54, a legendary hero to hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians living in exile outside Russia.

He once led the Ukrainian Insurgent Army which in turn fought the Nazi invaders and the troops of Stalin who ruthlessly suppressed the Ukraine's bid for independence.

The present Soviet political police, the KGB, said an arrest warrant for him. And Mr. Lebed carries in his wallet a Gestapo poster offering a big sum for him dead or alive.

Mr. Lebed now lives in New York still waging his war but now with propaganda, pamphlets and ideas.

He is secretary-general for foreign affairs of the Supreme Ukrainian Liberation Council (UHLV).

He is in Australia to lecture the 25,000-strong Ukrainian community here (7000 members in Sydney alone) to fan the flames of hope that the Ukraine may yet win world recognition as an independent republic and not remain a colonial province of the Russian Communist empire.

As a young freedom fighter, Mykola Lebed was a fiery idealist. Now in middle-age he confesses to being more of a realist.

He no longer believes the Ukraine will get its independence as the result of a nuclear war, or outside intervention, or even from internal revolution within Russia itself.

He pinns his hope of a separate identity for the Ukraine on evolution — a resurgence of its nationalism and culture, and its young people renouncing "Russification" and the yoke of Kremlin control.

"The best I can hope for in the rest of my own lifetime is to see the Ukraine as a separate State, perhaps still within the Communist bloc but with the independence of Tito's Yugoslavia," he says.

"Open rebellion in the Ukraine against Moscow started out in 1934. Stalin saw to that."

PENT-UP

"But Khrushchev and then Brezhnev recognised the independent nature of the 50 million people of the Ukraine. They have taken off the pressure, allowed its youth greater freedom of speech, and heavily industrialised the region."

"My own belief is that all the pent-up forces of the Ukraine will some day manifest themselves in a tremendous uprising, political, if not military, that will end in the Ukraine getting its rightful place in the sun."

This belief Mr. Lebed expresses not with the voice of a fanatic, but soberly and quietly. He is a little, bald-headed man whose right arm hangs a little awkwardly.

That right arm is covered with long, hideous scars, in New York plastic surgeons virtually had to rebuild it, twisted and deformed as it was from months of being shackled to the walls of prisons.

by WALLACE CROUCH

escape came when the Germans, having conquered Poland, were marching him and other political prisoners to a concentration camp.

"There was a riot, the guards opened up with guns, and the man intended to me was shot. I told one guard I couldn't move with a wounded man dragging me down, so he removed the shackles and as he turned his back I ran for my life."

"I got back to the Ukraine. I had no food or water for five days. But I made it by sheer will-power."

When Hitler's Panzers thundered through the Ukraine in 1941 they brought a terror worse than Stalin's secret police. The Nazis plundered its granaries, its steelworks, its coalmines and massacred its people.

HIT BACK

Mykola Lebed secretly toured the countryside organising the scattered resistance groups into the Ukrainian Insurgent Army. It hit back at the Nazis with guerrilla warfare.

The Gestapo plastered "wanted" posters of Lebed everywhere. On one occasion while sheltering in the home of a priest, two Gestapo men searched him.

The Nazis searched him. They overlooked a pistol tucked in his belt. But they did find in his pocket a forged passport identifying him as a German collaborator. They let him go.

"As the tide of war turned and the Nazis retreated, we knew it was only a matter of time before the Communists would resume their drive against us, especially that now we were well organised."

"I undertook the mission of the country to the West to plead the case for the liberation of the Ukraine should the Allies proceed with their early plans to strike at Germany through the Balkans."

"Instead, their invasions were through France and Italy. Our case was the last — and my own chance of getting back to the Ukraine impossible," he says.

While Mr. Lebed stayed in New York pleading the case for the Ukraine, its stubborn peasants continued fighting — even in the streets of Kiev, the capital — the forces of Stalin.

Eventually the revolt was crushed, and after Stalin's death succeeding Soviet rulers tried to pacify the Ukrainians with better agriculture, new industries and some freedoms. But even today, according to Mr. Lebed, unrest still simmers in the Ukraine.

And the word "Warud" still hangs over the head of Mykola Lebed.

He says, "Only recently while visiting Europe, I was contacted by a man claiming to be a Ukrainian nationalist and suggesting I get together to talk with other underground men in a house in Berlin close to the Wall."

"I made a precautionary check, then cancelled the meeting."

"The man was a Soviet secret police agent. And I've no doubts the idea was to get me alone and then the Wall into Berlin."

He married his wife, Daria, also a resistance fighter, in a Warsaw prison. Both she and her daughter, Sorlianna — now 22 and a graduate student of Columbia University — were inmates of the terrible Nazi concentration camp, Ravensbruck.

Suffering and starvation are Mykola Lebed's companions of old. Yet he keeps on fighting, plotting, planning.

He tells of how the very early Ukraine was the largest and richest of the Slav states, surviving even the Mongol and Tartar hordes before Czarist Russia swallowed it up and gave it inferior status.

A long-simmering movement for Ukrainian nationality was given impetus by World War I and for three years from 1917 the Ukrainian Republic existed freely.

But the success of the Russian Revolution spoiled the end of this freedom. The Reds seized the richest parts of the Ukraine, and Poland, Czechoslo-



MYKOLA LEBED

vakia and Rumania between them split up its western sections.

The infamous Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939 next allowed Russia to regain control of all the Ukraine, the richest and most densely populated of all the Soviet republics.

Stalin's collectivisation of agriculture in the Ukraine, Russia's greatest food bowl, resulted in a terrible famine. This, in turn, was followed by unrest, massacres and deportations.

Those who starved to death or were butchered in those bloody years were numbered in millions.

This was the terror in which young Mykola Lebed, son of a peasant farmer, grew up to become a full-time resistance fighter.

In 1935 Mr. Lebed, as a "contact man" travelled illegally to confer with underground Ukrainian leaders in Berlin. The Gestapo arrested him and extradited him to Poland.

The Poles had no love for Ukrainian nationalists.

They sentenced Lebed to death, changed the sentence to life imprisonment, and for four years Mr. Lebed was held in solitary confinement under appalling conditions.

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