Behavior of journalists in crisis situations

Analysis of case studies from Ukraine:

Case VI: Viktoria Roshchina/Region Zaporizhzhya

Sources:
https://rsf.org/en/news/war-ukraine-list-journalists-who-are-victims-gets-longer-day
https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=4855373964560262&set=a.1070614946369535

Viktoria Roshchina, a Ukrainian journalist reporting for the independent TV station Hromadske, was shot at on 8 March 2022 when her car encountered a column of Russian tanks in the Zaporizhzhya region. She and her driver had to abandon the vehicle and seek refuge in nearby fields and later in a farmhouse. Soldiers broke into the car and confiscated her equipment. She was considered missing for eleven days. This case gives rise to fundamental explanations about dangers for journalists in armed conflicts (front line, weapons, checkpoints).

Dangers for journalists

Every weapon and every ammunition constitute a danger. It does not matter who operates the weapon or what the intention is. Weapons are there to kill. The weapons of an army in a war are created precisely for that purpose. In this compact analysis, the following aspects are considered:

1. course of the front line - the mobile border
2. the type of weapon (small arms, combat vehicles, artillery)
3. mission of an armed grouping
4. behaviour at the checkpoint
5. mines and unexploded ordnance

1. course of the front line - the mobile border

General: There are borders between countries. In case of tensions or conflicts, these borders are closed, later also fortified by fences and barriers and guarded by police/border guards. No one would think of crossing such a border without permission. If you absolutely have to cross to the other side, you do it at a border crossing point, preferably with a visa. And you have to abide by the rules of the receiving side.

In war: In a war of aggression there is also a border. It shifts with every combat action, sometimes in one direction, sometimes in the other. Where the border was yesterday, it is no longer there today. The border in war cannot be recognised by a fence or a border post, but by soldiers. Often, however, the border is not directly with the soldiers, but 200 - 1,000 metres in front of them. It is difficult to recognise it.

1. information about the current situation in the frontline area must already be obtained when planning movements - either through discussions on the ground or through reliable internet sources.
When you leave the positions of one side, you automatically drive towards the border. From the other side it looks like this: "There's a vehicle coming straight at us from the enemy! "
3. the front line can only be passed at the risk of life.

2. the type of weapon (small arms, combat vehicles, artillery ammunition)

Small arms are fired by individual soldiers and greatly decrease in accuracy with increasing distance. The shots come singly or as a burst of fire. There is a lot of shooting in combat and not every shot is aimed. There are also ricochets when bullets ricochet. A car offers no protection against this danger. The protective waistcoat only protects in the area of the hard plate.

1. the best protection is to put bulletproof cover between yourself and the shooter (e.g. sandbags, car tires, stone & concrete walls.... cars, for example, are not protection. As we always see in the movies in the cinema it's garbage - the bullets go through the sheet metal of the car body).
2. leave the attacker's field of vision as quickly as possible.
3. the distance to the attackers should be increased until the shooting stops.

Attacks from **combat vehicles** have a lethal effect, the ammunition is designed to destroy other combat vehicles. The effective range is between 1,000 and 2,500 metres, depending on the armament. Combat vehicles shoot with optronic sights. Visual quality is poor, especially when thermal imaging cameras, residual light amplifiers or IR optics are used.

1. hits from these guns are fatal.
Due to the wide variety of situations in such an attack, no instructions for action can be given here.

Attacks by **artillery, rockets and bombs** are mostly carried out out of sight of the target. The fire can be either directed by an observer or unguided at a coordinate. The gun can be located up to 300 km away. Artillery attacks rarely consist of only one explosion. The explosion cadence and the size of the target area vary greatly. The lethal (fragmentation) range of the explosions can be up to 1,000 metres.

1. Take cover immediately, against a wall, a car, even a kerb or a dead person.
2. Lie on your stomach, face down, hands on the back of your neck and feet together. Do not stand up until at least 5 seconds after the explosion, as splinters may still fly.
3. leave the target area as soon as possible.

3. mission of an armed grouping (background information to improve acute situation analyses).

This classification has fluid transitions and is not all-encompassing. Not every troop has the same mission:

Saboteurs/terrorists attack by surprise and disappear before being detected and engaged. Often single fire at long range or explosive attacks. Attack stops after a short time.

Reconnaissance forces are specialised forces designed to reconnoitre the enemy without being detected themselves. These forces deliberately open fire to evade detection.
Combat reconnaissance consists of a small number of combat vehicles. These are also tasked with reconnoitring the enemy, but actively engage weaker forces.
Combat units consist of battle tanks and infantry fighting vehicles. They conquer terrain and destroy opponents in direct combat.
Supply convoys are trucks accompanied by individual combat vehicles. Their intention is to reach their marching destination quickly and without casualties.

4. behaviour at the checkpoint (CP)

Soldiers at a CP are tense. Their mission is to detect the enemy and engage them in time. Bystanders are controlled and pass through the CP.

Behaviour:
1. approach the CP slowly
2. switch off the evening light on the car, switch on the interior light, hands visible.
3. pay attention to the post/soldier who communicates the further procedure (visual signal, shouting, signs).
If you want to connect with the CP, stop facing the CP and walk towards it.
5. the vehicle should be parked so that it cannot be seen by the (CP´s) enemy, i.e. do not stop on the enemy side of the CP or in the CP, but drive through, leave the CP working area and then park the vehicle out of sight of the enemy and walk to the CP. The vehicle should be parked out of sight of the enemy so that enemy forces do not see you talking to the CP. This may jeopardise the neutrality role.

5. mines and unexploded ordnance

Mines are tactically positioned booby traps for tanks or people. They can be laid openly or covertly. In this war they are used by both sides. From the RUS side they are used to protect a flank. From the UKR side, only individual mines have been deployed along the RUS supply routes so far.
1. if a mine is detected, it must always be assumed that several mines have been laid.
If possible, mark the area of the mine with something red.
3. stay in your own treading or driving lane and leave the danger area backwards to a safe surface.

Duds are unexploded ordnance (artillery shells, rocket parts, bombs). They can be damaged or undamaged. Unexploded ordnance is just as dangerous as functioning ammunition. The only thing that is damaged is the activated firing mechanism. Duds can explode at any time, even without external influences.

If possible, mark the area of the unexploded ordnance with something red.
If possible, leave the area, but in any case, keep a distance from the unexploded ordnance. Depending on the size, up to 1,000 metres.
3. if it is not possible to keep a sufficiently large distance, you should definitely put a stable building or a large earth wall between you and the danger.