



TELEVISION

Stacey Dooley: Ready for War? review — Ukraine’s teachers and florists turned soldiers

NEW

Also reviewed: Wales’ Home of the Year

[Carol Midgley](#) Wednesday April 12 2023, 10.00pm, The Times

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Stacey Dooley: Ready for War?

BBC3

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Wales’ Home of the Year

BBC2

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I dreaded getting to the end of **Stacey Dooley: Ready for War?**, in which young men from Ukraine were taught how to fight on the front line in an intensive five-week training camp in Britain. They were welders, jewellers, teachers, florists with no army experience. Given that it was filmed several months ago, there was a real chance that the epilogue would tell us that by now some of them had been killed.



Stacey Dooley with Ukrainian recruits Mykola and Artem
BLANCA MUNOZ/BBC

Mercifully it didn't. Pasha, a lovely gentle man who found he had an aptitude as a leader, had told Dooley he thought his chances of surviving "are not so big, in truth". But the final update told us he was still on the front line with his friend Ivanka, a combat medic.

Others including Artem, Mykola and Serhii had also survived, but the interpreter Aliia who helps them through their training, part of Britain's contribution to the war effort, said she had stopped asking about the new recruits once they went to war after some who she had become close to were killed. "I wouldn't be able to work," she said.

She broke down in tears when translating for Artem, a jeweller and father of a six-year-old son, who said the first question they had been asked at the recruitment office was: "Are you ready to die?" As one they had chorused: "Yes!" What outstanding people Ukrainians are. What *quality* people.

Dooley, heavily pregnant, furrowed her brow and looked close to tears as Artem congratulated her and said: "I am ready to give my life so my child can grow up in a free country." You can see why Putin was wrong-footed by the sheer courage and resilience of these people.

The course seemed pretty hardcore in the depths of winter, though to Ukrainians that might have felt balmy. Dooley watched the various modules: landmine training, the survival camp in which they slept in rain-filled foxholes, "learning to be lethal".

It must be surreal to go from being a gardener to a trained killer almost overnight. Serhii said it would be difficult to take someone's life. "I'm an ordinary man, I have no right to do such a thing," he said. "But all of us have children, parents, sisters. We're ready."

Pasha had asked Dooley to record a message to his parents thanking them for raising him, just in case. It was lovely and moving and I hope they never hear it.

If you needed something escapist after that then **Wales' Home of the Year** offered 30 minutes of property porn. It was essentially the weatherman Owain Wyn Evans, the interior designer Mandy Watkins and the architectural designer Glen Thomas tromping around three gorgeous houses and saying, "It needs more cushions" and, "I love a dark wall".

They had to choose between a grade II listed manor house near Mold, a Victorian terrace with an unusual interior in Buckley and a gothic revival cottage outside Wrexham for which went through to the grand final.

I thought the gothic revival would clinch it, but Owain and Glen were clearly not put off by all the inspirational quotations on the walls of the Victorian terrace as they both gave it ten out of ten, making it the winner and proving, at least in this particular contest, that size really doesn't matter.

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