Comments

Voices from Ukraine

Introduction by Jonathan Jackson and Lily Hamourtziadou

Abstract

In this period of global insecurity, sharing human experiences acts as a tool to preserve history, educate future generations, foster empathy, prevent revisionism, and honor those who have been affected by conflict. By sharing personal stories, individuals provide first-hand accounts of events, capturing the human perspective and emotions associated with war. This helps to preserve a comprehensive understanding of historical events. Hearing about the experiences of those who have lived through war can be a powerful educational tool. It allows people, especially the younger generations, to learn about the realities of armed conflict and the impact on individuals and societies.. The voices from Ukraine in this article communicate the suffering, but also the hope of those caught up in the horrors, the losses and the fog of war.

Keywords: war, civilians, memories, suffering, loss, Ukraine

War involves immense suffering, loss, and hardship. Sharing war experiences fosters empathy and understanding among people who may not have directly experienced such conditions. It helps build a sense of connection and solidarity, promoting a shared understanding of the human cost of conflict.

History can be subject to interpretation and revision. Personal accounts serve as a counterbalance to official narratives or attempts to rewrite history. They provide alternative perspectives and ensure that the true impact of war is not distorted or forgotten. For those who have lived through war, sharing their experiences can be a therapeutic process. It allows individuals to process their trauma, share their burdens, and find support from others who may have had similar experiences. This can contribute to personal healing and resilience.

There are already more than half a million casualties, Ukrainian and Russian, including almost 200,000 dead, the vast majority combatants. In the war's first year and a half, Ukraine's military casualties had already surpassed the number of American soldiers who

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died during the nearly two decades of the war in Vietnam. There are even claims that casualties are comparable to those of the First World War. Body counts are often seen as a proxy for how a war is going. But these figures don't always give an accurate indication of the real situation on the battlefield – materially or morally. In war, the concern is the amount of force necessary to achieve military objectives versus ethical considerations, especially when civilians-as-combatants become legitimate targets.

More than 10,500 civilian deaths have been recorded by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights since the invasion of Ukraine. 587 of them were children.

We hope that the sharing of Ukraine war experiences allows us to honor and remember those who have died. It helps preserve the memory of the individuals and communities affected by war, ensuring that their stories are not forgotten over time.

Hello from Daria …

I was born in the village of Penkivka, Zhmerynka district, Vinnytsia region. I live with my mom and my younger brother Matvii. I like to play volleyball and draw. Before entering university, I used to play sports and go for walks with my friends, as well as traveling.

Everything stopped one day, on 24 February, when the full-scale invasion began. My father, with whom we did not live, went to war and is missing in action in the village of Pisky, Donetsk region.

When I entered the university and took a young fighter course, my stepfather died two weeks later. On the last week before the end of the young fighter course, I went home, and the next day my younger brother started school. The young fighter course was hard for me, and with the loss of my family member, it became a thousand times harder.

Now my new reality is waking up to the sound of sirens.

War is evil, with a lot of deaths and innocent bloodshed, tears, and fear. The war can end faster with the help of other countries. Meanwhile, children, animals, our soldiers, and volunteers are dying.

Hello from Maksym …

In this essay, I want to talk about my experience and feelings about the war in Ukraine from 24 February till now.

Russia's full-scale invasion of our territory took place on 24 February at 3:40 am and found almost everyone at home in bed. The first emotion I felt was fear and not knowing what to do next. But after gathering myself, I planned action and followed it. First, I wanted to send my mom and grandparents out of the country, but they were categorically against it, so we all stayed at home. In the morning, I immediately went to the store because there was no food at all, and it was unknown how it would end at that time. After we had done everything, we had planned, there was only one thing we could do – wait.

When the news reported that our military was giving the enemy a serious rebuff, our thoughts and plans changed again. So, I wanted to help them at least somehow, and it so happened that wherever I was, I was involved, from volunteering to territorial defense.

Over time, emotionally and psychologically, I got used to the war, so neither the alarm nor the missiles surprised me too much and did not cause fear, as they did for most of the population. And getting used to the war is the biggest problem of the population, because in the beginning the support from the population was much greater than now, and this is a serious problem, and it is unlikely to be fixed.

The war is evil for me, but now it no longer evokes the emotions it did at the beginning. You can get used to war, but it is impossible to get used to the deaths of people who give their lives at the front: for us, our country and freedom.

That's how, in my opinion, the views on the war have changed from the beginning of the full-scale invasion to now.

Hello from Mykyta …

I am 20 years old. I was born and lived before and during the war in Zaporizhzhia. I have secondary and pre-university education. I graduated from Aviation College, with a specialist "In Computer Engineering". I have a hobby of playing computer games. At the time of the full-scale invasion, I was just 18 years old.

Back on 23 February 2022, some people knew that the war would begin because there were already columns of tanks, trucks, cars, and armored vehicles on the border of our country, despite this, many people thought that it was all a lie and everything would be fine. I spent the last day before the war for the first time in a long time with friends, having fun, recalling all sorts of interesting stories, making plans, and sharing our goals.

On 24 February at 5 am I woke up to the noise of airplanes in the sky and the words that the war had begun, but no one believed it until about 9 am I went outside. Many institutions did not work, such as banks, educational institutions, and enterprises. In stores where there were still products left were huge queues ATMs had long queues and people could only withdraw 3,000₴ per one person on this day. We all read the news and saw that the attacks began on all sides, including my city of Zaporizhzhia. On 25 February there was the news that a huge column of tanks was heading toward the city, which was already in the center of the region and had captured a lot of territories, so from that day on, many people packed their things and went to the train station. At that time, almost all the tickets were sold out, so after a while an evacuation train was launched, which accommodated a lot of people every day the columns of tanks were getting closer to my city every day we heard explosions, but everyone was at home and ready to take things and go to a safe city and this happened on 3 March, the enemy was already 35 kilometers away from me. So, my family and I decided to go to Lviv and packed our things and at 6 in the morning, we went to the train station where there were already a lot of people waiting for two hours with bags for the train. There were no tickets, everyone hoped to go on the evacuation train, which we then boarded. At that moment there were already several thousand people at the station and many of them did not get on the train, so they waited for the next day I was in a reserved carriage.

In my block of six, there were about 20 people, and it was all over the train. Everyone was changing places. Everyone was running. Everyone was nervous and did not know where to go. We were traveling for almost 24 hours. I slept very little on the third floor where the bags and suitcases were supposed to be. In Lviv, I was met by volunteers who offered me free tea food and help. We settled in an apartment thanks to a few friends. In this apartment, we spent about five days almost without going anywhere, only to the store for food. All the time we read the news and followed the situation in Zaporizhzhia, the next train stopped 35 kilometers from the city and in general the situation became calm, so we decided to return home after moving. We saw a lot of checkpoints of concrete walls up to 4 meter high, and then until the summer of 23 we were only in our city, we studied remotely, we worked every day, there were air raids, some days they reached ten alarms a day, we also often woke up from explosions and often had to hide under the table. The floor and windows were shaking due to the blast wave. Now my city is not as fun and

interesting as it used to be, but still, people from all the corners of Ukraine come there. I haven't seen my best friends for a long time because they have been abroad since the beginning of the war. Now I study in Lviv because this city is much safer and calmer.

Hello from Alina …

I'm studying at the Faculty of Preventive Activities. I take an active part in the life of the university. At my faculty, I am the head of the cultural and mass commission where I write scripts and organize various events and concerts.

War is a terrible phenomenon that causes a lot of suffering and destroys the lives of many people. In times of war the feelings I feel – sadness, fear, helplessness, and hope for the best.

First, war brings sadness. The events unfolding around them are very terrible and tragic. Murders, destruction – all this creates an atmosphere of deep doubt. Loss of life, separation from loved ones and destruction of dreams – all this breaks the heart. The feeling of fear is also an integral part of war. Danger is always at every turn and there is no place where you can feel completely safe. Fear for one's, fear of an unknown future. These are feelings that fill the soul during war. Helplessness is another feeling that arises during war. Seeing the destruction and suffering, it is hard to find a way to help or change the situation. It causes a feeling of powerlessness and a feeling that nothing can be done to stop this horror.

However, even during war, there is hope for the best. Hope for peace, for an end to suffering. For the restoration of destroyed places and the restoration of normal life. This feeling helps people endure difficult times and find ways to build the future.

Hello from Stepan …

My experience and experiences of the war since age 24 have been extremely difficult and affected my life forever as I'm from the Donetsk region.

When the war began, I felt a mixture of fear, indignation, and helplessness. Every day I had to face danger that left a deep mark in my memory. The first month of the war was particularly difficult. Constant shelling, lack of communication and electricity, and constant fear for life, both one's own and that of relatives. I and the people with whom I lived began to adapt to the "new conditions", trust our instincts and react to danger quickly and decisively.

One of the most important aspects of this period of staying at home was the support of family and friends. When it became extremely dangerous to stay at home, a decision was made to leave the region for another part of the country.

The beginning of the "refugee path" was difficult. Losing my home, my native land turned my life upside down. All that remains is faith in the best and victory. During these two years, I faced numerous challenges, the experiences of which taught me to be strong and resilient. This experience changed me as a person and made me more empathetic and grateful for every moment of life. Although the hard times may recede, the memories of them remain, reminding me of the importance of peace and mutual understanding in the world.

(As told to Jonathan Jackson and David Lewis, Director of The Ethical Alliance, in January 2024, and printed with their permission).