

## The IGS Global Scholar's Prize

# THE WAR IN UKRAINE

Recently I went to England for my grandfather's funeral. My grandfather was born on the day Hitler invaded Poland and lived to see the start of the next European land war, but sadly not the end. Today, Ukraine and Russia are currently engaged in the first major European land war since WWII, which has broken out 83 years later in its neighbouring country, Ukraine. Reflecting on how my grandfather's life has begun and ended in major European wars, has caused me to consider how much warfare has changed over these years, and what hasn't.

If you had asked someone a year ago if they thought that traditional warfare utilising masses of tanks and artillery was going to reoccur in Europe, most would have said no, yet here we are in 2022 with Russia and Ukraine engaged in a bloody conflict. While technology has obviously undergone significant transformations since the 1940s, some of the most powerful moments over the past seven months have been defined by more enduring values. I will address the most powerful moments of human will and fortitude I have observed and how they tell a larger story about the complexities of the Ukraine war.

- Throughout the year Ukraine has displayed many moments of bravery through the acts of individuals and groups.
- The Ukrainian forces have shown how strong people can become and what people can achieve when motivated by a common cause.
- Russian forces have shown that without real leadership and reasons to fight, resources and power lack significance in the grand scheme of war.
- Volodymyr Zelenskyy has shown what leadership in the face of extreme adversity looks like in the modern age.
- President Zelenskyy exemplifies qualities of a leader in his actions throughout the war, for example, when given the option to flee his country for his own safety, Zelenskyy responded "I don't need a ride, I need ammo", and then filmed himself on the street outside the Presidential Office saying, "I am here. We are not putting down arms. We will be defending our country, because our weapon is truth, and our truth is that this is our land, our country, our children, and we will defend all of this".
- At the moment Zelenskyy filmed this clip it seemed very likely that Kyiv would be surrounded and that he would be killed, but he was smiling and did not seem scared. Even though he is a professional comedian and actor President Zelenskyy has shown himself, through his actions, to be capable of more than just memorable quotes - and his decision to remain in the capital is very different to the decision seven months earlier by the president of another country, Afghanistan, to flee his capital to avoid capture and death.

While these quotes exemplify his bravery and commitment to his country, he has shown himself to be capable of more than just memorable quotes. Zelenskyy has maintained a consistent moral tone throughout the war, a quality not found in the opposing country's leader Putin. This has led to a country of individuals that are willing to sacrifice themselves for one another. An example of this would be the Ukrainian forces' refusal to surrender their position on Zmiinyi Island. On 25 February 2022, Russian forces requested the surrender of 13 Ukrainian soldiers and the occupation of Zymiyni Island, a small island in the Black Sea. Upon request, Ukrainian forces told the Russian forces to "Go to hell". Ukrainian forces were clearly outgunned and outmanned, yet still they resisted.

This comes as no surprise as Ukraine's public has shown their collective strength and ability to work together to maintain their freedom even before the war started. Russia has been trying to quietly invade Ukraine for many years before their invasion but the people of Ukraine have resisted with an extraordinary level of effort. One of the most impactful and shocking documentaries I have ever watched was "Winter on Fire" (2015). It detailed how the people of Ukraine's attempts to gain the support of the European Union with a student protest against a pro-Russia trade agreement turned into a long and drawn out series of violent attacks by armed pro-Russian secret police against unarmed protestors. Still, against extreme odds, the people of Ukraine continued to fight for their self determination and freedom, overthrowing the corrupt president of the country at the time.

Russia has proved over and over again that they lack the foundations of what a real fighting force looks like, from mistreating their own soldiers to committing atrocities. This is because the Russian leader, unlike Zelenskyy, doesn't care about his people or what happens to them. This is because Putin draws his power from the mineral wealth of his country to maintain his grip on Russia and exert influence far beyond his borders. Instead, Zelenskyy relies on "people power" leading the country on behalf of the people who elected him. Putin's strategy of restricting the flows of energy and food around the world, the prices of which have soared because of his actions, affects us all. But beyond prices, this is about the value of people and their right to self determination rather than the value of resources and land. People matter, and as young people, the consequences of this war matter most to us. Ukraine's fight is our fight.

*Slava Ukraini.*

Ruari Foster



**"For the first time since being at school, I was faced with a topic I felt strongly enough about to write an essay outside of a school assignment for. Writing this essay made me look inwards and question why I believe Ukraine has the moral high ground in this war and what a leader looks like in the face of adversity. Ukraine is fighting a war for their freedom, a freedom we often take for granted, and a freedom that we haven't had to defend in a long time, so that we are in danger of forgetting how lucky we are."**

Ruari Foster, Year 11 2022