

Clarkson Journeys to Ukraine

BY SCOTT CLARKSON, CENTRAL DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA

[Scott Clarkson has been a documentary photographer for decades, having worked in Vietnam, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria, Jordan, Kashmir, Israel, and the Palestinian Territories during various times of crises. Other personal highlights have included being invited as the official photographer to the Richard M. Nixon Library to document the visit and book readings of Senator George McGovern and novelist Gore Vidal, several podium accesses to national and state Presidential Nomination conventions, and other various newsworthy events. For those more interested, see <http://scottclarksonphotography.com>. In June and July of this year, his photography took him to the Russian war in Kyiv and Lviv, Ukraine, and surrounding areas. What follows are some of his journal entries, photo links, and photographs from this trip. Ukraine photos appear on Scott's Imgur account under the *nom de plume* RoyGbvphotos and can be found here: <https://imgur.com/a/tfmTgNZ> and <https://imgur.com/a/fhShKDB>. (Anyone who can identify what ROYGBIV is gets extra credit.) — Ed.]

I learned about the two-wall rule from a nine-year-old boy in Kyiv on July 2 while sitting in a hallway at 2 a.m. “The rule of two walls is something you need to learn — try and have two walls that protect you from the outside. One wall tries and stops the missile, the other protects you from shell-splinters (shrapnel). It is more or less safe during the bombing here in the halls.”

Everyone has a smartphone app (shown below) to alert you to air raids. You receive the warning and can check your phone for the location of the attacks.



Witnessing people directly under siege is very odd. The air raid sirens are a reminder that everyone can be harmed by the random missiles being launched by Russians or the Belarus crowd. No one is making light of the situation.



Air raid siren on top of a building in Kyiv.

The curfews run from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m., and both Lviv

and Kyiv are shut down during that time. At night the cities are dark, the streets are empty. I arrived in Lviv on a train from Przemyśl, Poland, at 3 a.m. Walking out of the train station, where people were sleeping on the floor of the main terminal (see photo below), I enticed a cab



driver to drive me to the hotel, breaking the curfew. The hotel, indeed the entire center city, was dark, inside and out — empty and blacked out. There were no



lights on in the hotel reception area except a few bathroom “nightlights” plugged into wall sockets. I had to use my cell phone light to sign the register. Going up to the room, the halls were dark. I learned to avoid — and appreciate — the curfew times.

Various non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the amazing World Central Kitchen (<https://wck.org>) and the British-based International Rescue Committee (<https://www.rescue.org>) are located at train stations, bus stations, and town centers throughout eastern Poland and Ukraine, providing food, personal counselling, immigration services, transportation services, and other necessary services. Translation services by volunteers are everywhere, assisting those traveling out of harm's way.



During the day, some businesses, museums, and other venues are open to some extent, and some restaurants too — but not many people are sitting outside at tables, and they shut down before curfew. Religious facilities are open. We are reminded not to

take facial photos of soldiers or NGO volunteers, and certainly not government or military facilities. Theaters and other entertainment venues are closed.

Armed Ukrainian soldiers, ages 18 to 60, are present everywhere. Anyone who has visited Israel or the Palestinian Territories in the past 40 years



knows of this visual experience. Some are standing guard, but most are moving as a group. There is something unusual, perhaps unsettling, at seeing 18-year-old uniformed teenagers, both women and men, with AK-74s (or AKMs, also known as AK-47s) slung over their shoulders, with additional sidearms (typically Glock 17s).

At the Kyiv train station (where you witness and photograph the world passing by), I watched the people in the crowded station move aside to let about 300 fully packed and armed soldiers walk into the station to a platform and board a train headed east to the fighting. Every soldier carried their weapons, backpacks, and bedding foam, all very modern. Their uniforms and equipment were not rag-tag; these men and women have been in training and well-supplied. Civilians stood by very quietly and watched. I thought that it was very possible that they saw their former students, grown children, husbands or wives, barbers, local shopkeepers, lawyers, dentists, or doctors in the group.

Ukrainian men, aged 18 to 60, cannot leave the country without permission. There is no conscription, but the government does not want a brain or work force drain. Women and children are constantly either leaving or returning. The assistance funds (food, housing, transportation) are dwindling, and people are trying to return to work. With the current Russian threat mostly out east, and not in Kyiv or Lviv, many people are trying to regain some normalcy. Some are returning to travel further eastward attempting to evacuate family members out of fighting areas. There are families who simply do not want to leave their homes in the east.

Ukraine strictly enforces its rule that military

aged men cannot leave the country without permission. Coming out of the country, I watched a young Ukrainian man, about age 20, questioned by soldiers checking papers on the train and then summarily thrown off at the next stop before we arrived to the Polish border. They didn't arrest him; they just put him off the train. As we pulled out of the last Ukrainian station before Poland, I watched him stand on the platform, then turn and walk into town.

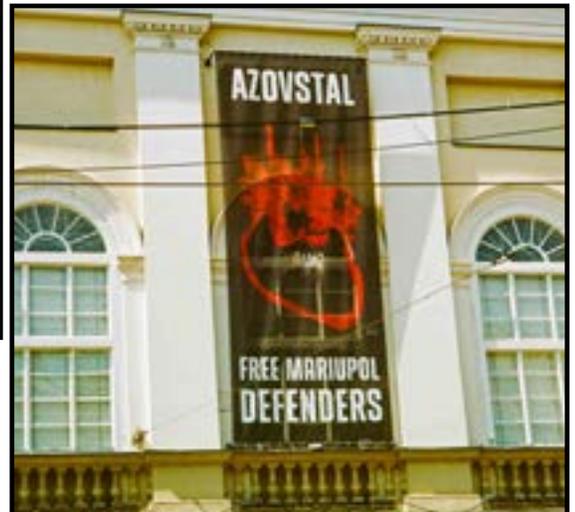
I watched a soldier, in his forties, guarding the station in Kyiv. He could have been a teacher 200 days ago, for as much as I know. People kept coming up to him bumming cigarettes, and he kept giving them out. I was next to a store, so I went in to buy him a pack to share with others. (The concern with the health-related issues of smoking has been put onto the back burner in Ukraine. When you are only getting three to five hours of sleep because of air raid sirens each night, people do not seem too concerned right now with first- or second-hand smoke or nicotine.) We began talking. He had been east in the Donbas region and was back in Kyiv for two weeks, expecting to return shortly. I asked him about the civilians with very limited training that were joining the army. He told me, they all think it's about guns and shooting like it was a paintball game. "It's not. It's the shrapnel from artillery, missiles, bombs and drones that explode that are maiming and killing soldiers." "There is rarely a 'gun fight' with Russians," he said. "It's all high tech, which people don't really understand until they see it for themselves."



These are Russian tanks and trucks destroyed by the Ukrainians. Above is the cab of a mobile radar system. At left is the "popped" turret of a tank.



The photo at left shows a plea for help in Kyiv, as hundreds of sandbags protect an historical statue in Mykhailivska Square. The picture below shows the sandbagging of a church's 200-year-old doors.



This banner in Lviv honors the courage of the steelworkers at the Azovstal steel plant in Mariupol who held out for over a month against the Russian onslaught before being captured and sent to Russian prison camps.



"Here you are safe." This banner at the train station in Przemyśl (Poland) reassures Ukrainian refugees coming in on the nightly train.



From three to 10 lost teddy bears are found at the Przemyśl (Poland) station on the Ukrainian border each night after the train from Ukraine arrives. Volunteers pick the bears up after the Ukrainian families leave the station and re-distribute them.

