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News

## 'The reality is, this is their new home': Ukrainian Independence Day far from happy for refugees



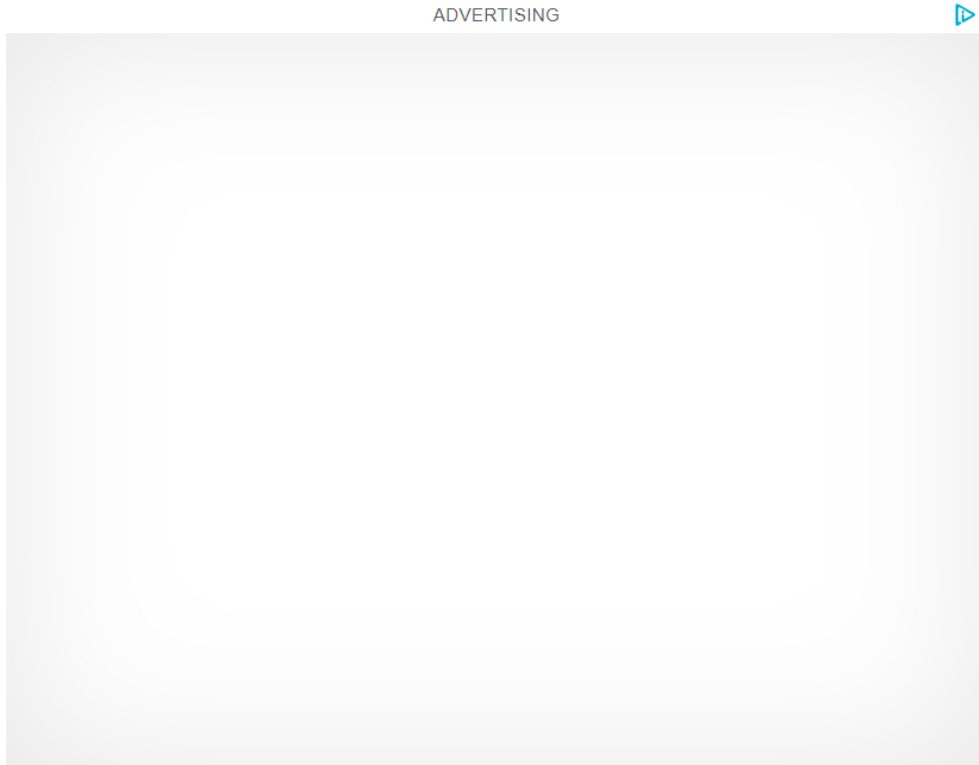
Honour guard soldiers prepare to raise the Ukrainian national flag during State Flag Day celebrations in Kyiv, Ukraine, on Tuesday. *Ukrainian Presidential Press Office via AP*

By Dan Franch

Posted August 24, 2022 5:00 am

Wednesday is Ukraine's Independence Day in commemoration of the country's Declaration of Independence in 1991. As with most former Soviet countries, it's Ukraine's second independence, the first coming in 1918.

That said, it's tough to wish the Ukrainians I know a "Happy Independence Day."



From the start of May to the end of July, I was a volunteer teacher helping adult Ukrainian refugees learn English here in Tallinn, Estonia. Prior to that, I had met only a handful of Ukrainians, and none of them were refugees. Now I know several — and their stories.

They came in March, soon after the war started with Russia. All came with their children. Some live on a designated ship. Some live in hotels. Others live with local families. And some have found apartments where they can live on their own.





The women left because of their children, wanting “a normal life and school and activities,” as one of my students said. One student described her decision to leave when she and her son were awakened by “loud balls of fire dropping from the sky.”

Able men stayed behind to fight. One woman’s husband, who was a manager at an international metal company, was recruited by the Ukrainian army to be an officer — despite no military training — and lead soldiers while building shooting blinds and trenches on the front line in Kharkiv on the Russian border. They jump into those trenches when the rockets start falling, which is four or five times per day.

According to him, hospitals are full and the wounded lie in corridors. Two of his platoon members ran over a mine and lost their limbs.

Others stay behind because they’re too old or strongly committed to holding the country together. “There’s plenty of glass work,” one student said her husband had lightheartedly reported from home.

**MAD MUSCLES**

**MILITARY DIET CHALLENGE**

**Train Like a Soldier**

Humor is a lifeline. My students came to class every day with positivity and energetic enthusiasm despite their situation.

Some hoped the war would end by August and they could return to Ukraine.

Now they think otherwise. They've enrolled their children in local schools. They've started learning Estonian. And I've been helping them with their CVs (resumes), LinkedIn profiles and additional English lessons. Sometimes it's nothing more than lending an ear and a sympathetic smile.

The reality is, this is their new home. The sooner they accept that the sooner they can move forward.

They can always go back. But for now, better to settle in and maximize possibilities.



The advertisement features the MAD MUSCLES logo on the left. On the right, there is a grid titled "MILITARY DIET CHALLENGE" showing meal plans for 14 days. Each day includes a breakfast, lunch, and dinner menu with corresponding icons. Below the grid, the text "Train Like a Soldier" is displayed in a bold, black font. To the right of this text is a red circular button with a white right-pointing arrow.

Those I teach would go back if they didn't have children. But a war zone is no place to raise a child. Approximately 7 million people have fled Ukraine, 45,000 having arrived here.

The women I teach left their husbands, their families, their friends. All they brought is a suitcase or two — just grabbed what they could and left.

If it sounds like something from a history book, that's no surprise. These stories have been told before. However, this is happening right now. Only the characters have changed.

Ukrainians are scattered across Estonia, other parts of Europe and beyond.





Friends are dispersed. Families are split. Some families are even divided, members having moved to Russia in the past and now taking Russia's side. It's tough to be happy.

Theirs is an age-old story. The one difference — technology and social media. My students talk with family and friends each day no matter where they are.

Thus, to the Ukrainians I know and those I don't, I cannot say Happy Independence this year. Instead, I say Solemn Independence Day or Somber Independence Day or just Independence Day, a way to let them know I'm aware of the significance of this date.

May there be a Happy Independence Day next year at this time.

**MAD MUSCLES**

**MILITARY DIET CHALLENGE**

DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4	DAY 5	DAY 6	DAY 7
<b>Breakfast:</b> 1/2 cup of oatmeal, 1/2 cup of blueberries, 1/2 cup of strawberries, 1/2 cup of raspberries, 1/2 cup of blackberries, 1/2 cup of kiwi, 1/2 cup of mango, 1/2 cup of papaya, 1/2 cup of guava, 1/2 cup of passion fruit, 1/2 cup of dragon fruit, 1/2 cup of pomegranate, 1/2 cup of persimmon.	<b>Breakfast:</b> 1/2 cup of oatmeal, 1/2 cup of blueberries, 1/2 cup of strawberries, 1/2 cup of raspberries, 1/2 cup of blackberries, 1/2 cup of kiwi, 1/2 cup of mango, 1/2 cup of papaya, 1/2 cup of guava, 1/2 cup of passion fruit, 1/2 cup of dragon fruit, 1/2 cup of pomegranate, 1/2 cup of persimmon.	<b>Breakfast:</b> 1/2 cup of oatmeal, 1/2 cup of blueberries, 1/2 cup of strawberries, 1/2 cup of raspberries, 1/2 cup of blackberries, 1/2 cup of kiwi, 1/2 cup of mango, 1/2 cup of papaya, 1/2 cup of guava, 1/2 cup of passion fruit, 1/2 cup of dragon fruit, 1/2 cup of pomegranate, 1/2 cup of persimmon.	<b>Breakfast:</b> 1/2 cup of oatmeal, 1/2 cup of blueberries, 1/2 cup of strawberries, 1/2 cup of raspberries, 1/2 cup of blackberries, 1/2 cup of kiwi, 1/2 cup of mango, 1/2 cup of papaya, 1/2 cup of guava, 1/2 cup of passion fruit, 1/2 cup of dragon fruit, 1/2 cup of pomegranate, 1/2 cup of persimmon.	<b>Breakfast:</b> 1/2 cup of oatmeal, 1/2 cup of blueberries, 1/2 cup of strawberries, 1/2 cup of raspberries, 1/2 cup of blackberries, 1/2 cup of kiwi, 1/2 cup of mango, 1/2 cup of papaya, 1/2 cup of guava, 1/2 cup of passion fruit, 1/2 cup of dragon fruit, 1/2 cup of pomegranate, 1/2 cup of persimmon.	<b>Breakfast:</b> 1/2 cup of oatmeal, 1/2 cup of blueberries, 1/2 cup of strawberries, 1/2 cup of raspberries, 1/2 cup of blackberries, 1/2 cup of kiwi, 1/2 cup of mango, 1/2 cup of papaya, 1/2 cup of guava, 1/2 cup of passion fruit, 1/2 cup of dragon fruit, 1/2 cup of pomegranate, 1/2 cup of persimmon.	<b>Breakfast:</b> 1/2 cup of oatmeal, 1/2 cup of blueberries, 1/2 cup of strawberries, 1/2 cup of raspberries, 1/2 cup of blackberries, 1/2 cup of kiwi, 1/2 cup of mango, 1/2 cup of papaya, 1/2 cup of guava, 1/2 cup of passion fruit, 1/2 cup of dragon fruit, 1/2 cup of pomegranate, 1/2 cup of persimmon.
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<b>DAY 8</b>	<b>DAY 9</b>	<b>DAY 10</b>	<b>DAY 11</b>	<b>DAY 12</b>	<b>DAY 13</b>	<b>DAY 14</b>

**Train Like a Soldier**

• An Addison native, Dan Franch, franchdan@gmail.com, has lived since 2015 with his wife and youngest son in Estonia, where he teaches and owns a language and copy editing business.