



Russian invasion of Ukraine: War is Hell

Description

Russian tactics in Ukraine hearken back to the Hundred Years' War

By Irwin Rapoport

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I have read many books concerning military tactics employed by the English and French during the [Hundred Years' War](#) and they could be very brutal. Many people, especially those in France, were killed and being injured was a death sentence in a time without antibiotics and modern surgical techniques.

One of the tactics, more often used by the English, was the [chevauchée](#), a raid in force to pillage the countryside, create terror, weaken enemy morale, and cause death and destruction. Such raids were not a pretty sight, but for many English commanders and foot soldiers, it was a way to secure great wealth via looting and kidnapping notables for ransoms.



Lancaster's chevauchée of 1346, Battle of Crécy –
Image: [Jean Froissart](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

From the description in the Wikipedia page:

A **chevauchée** (French pronunciation: [??vo?e], “promenade” or “horse charge”, depending on context) was a raiding method of medieval warfare for weakening the enemy, primarily by burning and pillaging enemy territory in order to reduce the productivity of a region, as opposed to siege warfare or wars of conquest. The use of the chevauchée declined at the end of the 14th century as the focus of warfare turned to sieges. It is conceptually similar to the **scorched earth strategies used in modern warfare**.

The chevauchée could be used as a way of forcing an enemy to fight, or as a means of discrediting the enemy's government and detaching his subjects from their loyalty. This usually caused a massive flight of refugees to fortified towns and castles, which would be untouched by the chevauchée.

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I bring this up due to the many media reports of **Russian Federation forces** causing great havoc and destruction in the areas they continue to occupy and have occupied. As Ukrainian forces retake lands captured by the Russians, we are seeing horrific television reports of liberated cities and towns strewn with dead bodies, wrecked and flattened buildings and homes, looted stores and residences, and terrible overall destruction, whether the structures be ordinary homes, stores, churches, schools, etc. or historic buildings cherished by the local community and recognized internationally as critical examples of historical architectural deemed worthy of preservation.

We don't have any photographs from Medieval chevauchées, but we do have some from [Sherman's March](#) which devastated the **Confederacy** in 1864. This was a modern-day chevauchée that accomplished its desired effects.

States the Wikipedia page:

*Sherman's March to the Sea (also known as the Savannah campaign or simply Sherman's March) was a military campaign of the American Civil War conducted through Georgia from November 15 until December 21, 1864, by **William Tecumseh Sherman**, major general of the Union Army. The campaign began with Sherman's troops leaving the captured city of **Atlanta** on November 15 and ended with the capture of the port of **Savannah** on December 21. His forces followed a “scorched earth” policy,*

destroying military targets as well as industry, infrastructure, and civilian property, disrupting the Confederacy's economy and transportation networks. The operation broke the back of the Confederacy and helped lead to its eventual surrender. Sherman's decision to operate deep within enemy territory and without supply lines is considered to be one of the major campaigns of the war and is taught by some historians as an early example of modern warfare or total war.

General Sherman's armies left a wake of destruction that still angers many in the American South. It was a brutal method of warfare but President Abraham Lincoln was keen to end the war as soon as possible and silence the stiff resistance Union forces were encountering outside of Richmond, Virginia, the capital of the Confederate States of America. **General Robert E. Lee's** Army of Northern Virginia was putting up a stout and determined resistance which in places had both opposing armies engaging in trench warfare.



Sherman's March to the Sea – Image: Public Domain, restoration by Adam Cuerdan

It was General Sherman who is credited with saying "[War is Hell.](#)" The following quote originates from his address to the graduating class of the Michigan Military Academy on June 19, 1879 from accounts by Dr. Charles O. Brown in the *Battle Creek Enquirer and News* of November 18, 1933:

"I've been where you are now and I know just how you feel. It's entirely natural that there should beat in the breast of every one of you a hope and desire that someday you can use the skill you have acquired here. Suppress it! You don't know the horrible aspects of war. I've been through two wars and I know. I've seen cities and homes in ashes. I've seen thousands of men lying on the ground, their dead faces looking up at the skies. I tell you, war is Hell!"

* * * * *

In fact, either in 1912 or 1913, a high ranking retired German general, while delivering a speech in a major

German city, called on the hawks in the **German Imperial Army** to brush up on their history of the **American Civil War** and realize that an invasion of France and Russia via the **Schlieffen Plan** would be no walkover and that any war would likely be a long one.

It's a great pity that this general's advice was not heeded. Like the American Civil War, you had the phenomenon of millions of young men in Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, France, Germany, Austria-Hungary, and Russia enlisting so that they would not miss out on the experience, the "fun", with many expecting that the war would be over by Christmas.



View of London from St. Paul's cathedral after the Blitz – Image: [H.Mason](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

The Schlieffen Plan failed for numerous reasons, with some saying it could never have been successfully executed and others stressing that it failed because the Germans sent several divisions from France, thus weakening one of the wings, to East Prussia to deal with the Russian invasion that captured several towns for a few weeks. The local German commanders, without the help that was dispatched to them, cleared out the Russians and once that front was stabilized, the Germans proceeded to launch their invasion of the Russian Empire, capturing what is today modern Poland, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, and large parts of Western Russia, including Ukrainian territory. In this effort, they were aided by Austro-Hungarian forces.

Rarely do wars and battles go according to plan, and many supposed cakewalks lead to lengthy campaigns that take the lives of many and last for months or even years. During the 1950s, many military advisors told Presidents **Harry Truman** and **Dwight D. Eisenhower** that two to three American divisions would be sufficient to restore order in Vietnam, be under French control or South Vietnam after the country had been partitioned. Neither president gave the order to send in the troops.

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The Russian invasion of Ukraine has caused great suffering and death and is a needless conflict. There is no excuse for it and if Putin merely wanted to occupy the territory he desired via the two breakaway republics his government recognized, there was no need to launch an invasion of Ukraine to "save the people" from its supposed "neo-Nazi regime."



Children left homeless after London Blitz – Image: [H.Mason](#), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Some people reading this article will recall the news reports televised during the **War in Vietnam**, which were horrible enough. The Associated Press, via its excellent reporting staff stationed in Vietnam, took some very graphic and disturbing images that captured the tragedy of the conflict that engulfed Vietnam, Cambodia, and parts of Laos.

And we have some readers who personally experienced the **Second World War** either as soldiers or civilians, be it during the **blitz of London** and other cities between 1940-41 and the V-1 and V-2 attacks in 1944, in German-occupied Europe, and Germany itself. Montreal is also home to a fair number of people who experienced the Holocaust in the concentration camps or hidden with families to avoid capture by the Germans. We also have people who experienced the war in the Pacific theatre as combatants and civilians.

Suffice to say, there are Canadians who have experienced war and genocide and know just how much war is indeed hell. They shall never forget their experiences.

Striving for peace is a worthy goal and while Putin and those enabling the invasion of Ukraine must be tried as war criminals, we need to find a way to end the war. We must stop the killing and the ongoing destruction, especially as the new Russian general put in charge of the invasion forces, [Alexander Dvornikov](#), is well known for the terror tactics he employed in Syria.



Russians protesting war on Ukraine in Czech Republic – Image: [AlexVolter](#), [CC BY-SA 4.0](#), via Wikimedia Commons

We can advocate for regime change by encouraging individuals high up in the government and military and calling on ordinary Russians to rise up. We can urge the military units to stop fighting and for the police to no longer obey orders from the government to arrest people demonstrating their opposition to the war.

Ukrainians of all ages are suffering and more than 5 million have fled the country as refugees. If it is painful to watch this ongoing horror story. Just imagine what it is like to be caught in the middle of the maelstrom or be a refugee, fleeing with just a suitcase if one is lucky enough.

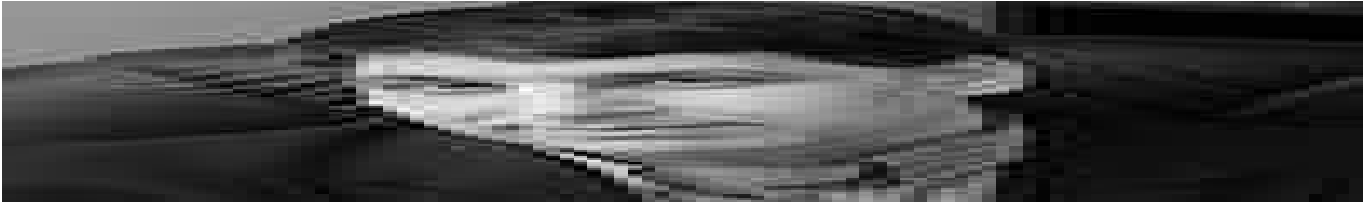
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Feature image: Destroyed school building in Kharkiv, Ukraine, 23 March 2022, by Fotorreserger via deposit photos.com

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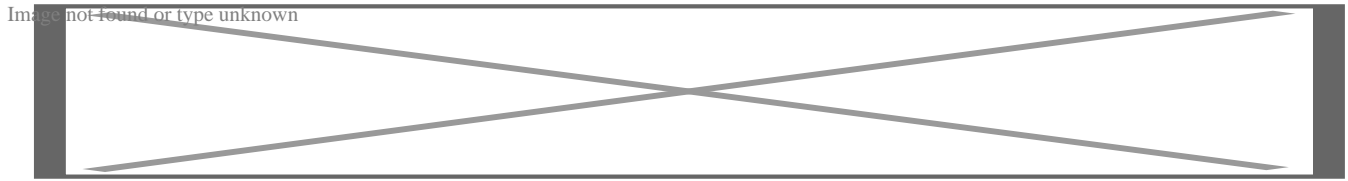
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