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The first days of the full-scale war: Kherson region, Nova Kakhovka



Nova Kakhovka. February 28, 2022. <https://dunrada.com.ua/do-dnia-narodjennia-novoi-kahovki-kahovskie-novosti-za-segodnia/> (Revised: 10.07.2024)

On February 28, 1952, the construction site of the Kakhovka hydroelectric power plant was classified as a city and named Nova Kakhovka. Nova Kakhovka is a city in the south of Ukraine, the administrative center of the Novokakhovka urban community of the Kakhovka district of the Kherson region. Nova Kakhovka is an important port city on the east bank of the Dnieper River, where it meets the downstream end of the Kakhovka Reservoir.

Since February 24, 2022, the city has been under temporary occupation by Russian troops.

Allow me to start my story on February 23, 2022, the last day before the start of the full-scale invasion of Russian occupiers. That day began with breakfast, exercise, and meeting with friends. However, there was a certain fear and a sense of impending disaster. My home city Nova Kakhovka, where I was then, was located 70 kilometers away from the occupied Crimea, which could not but cause concern.

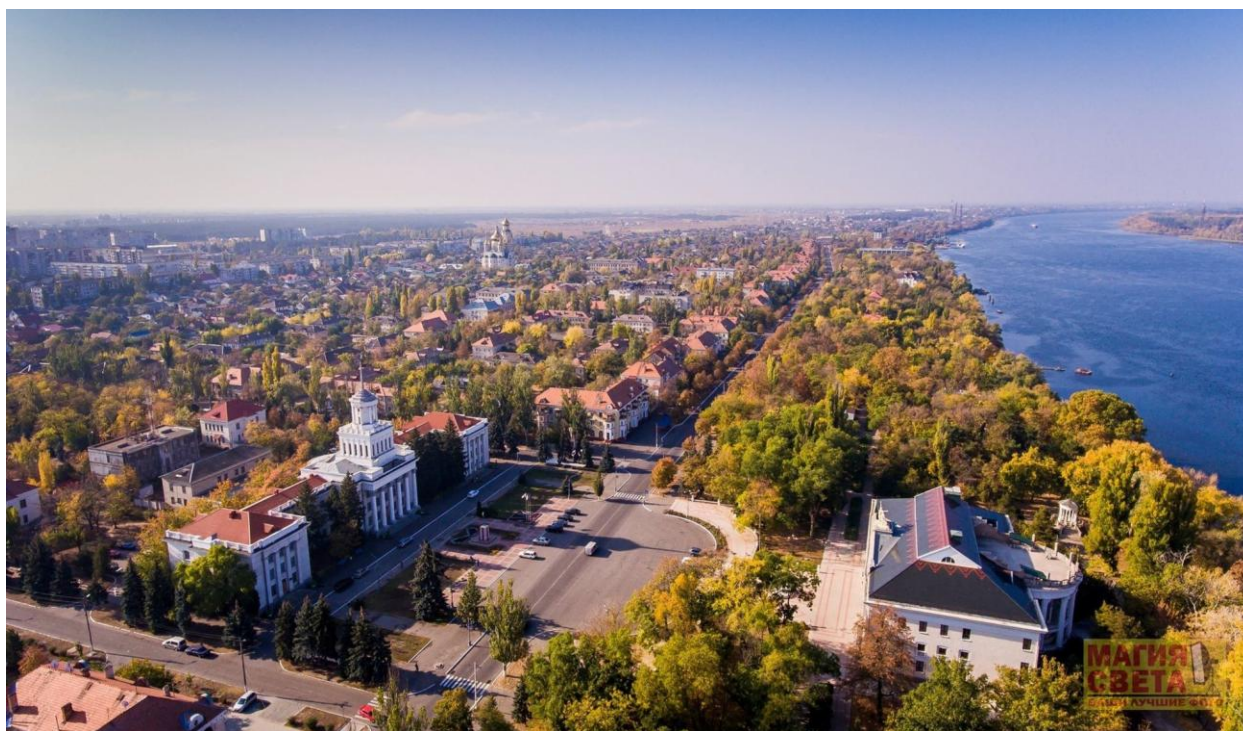
<https://ysgsij.kubg.edu.ua/>

Грінченко – Сетон міжнародний журнал молодих науковців, 2024, випуск 5
Young Scholars Grinchenko – Seton International Journal, 2024, issue 5



Nova Kakhovka. June, 2020.

https://www.tripadvisor.fr/LocationPhotoDirectLink-g4452620-i460963807-Nova_Kakhovka_Kherson_Oblast.html
(Revised: 10.07.2024)



Nova Kakhovka. 2020. <https://discover.ua/en/destinations/kherson-region-region/nova-kahovka> (Revised: 10.07.2024)

In the evening, my parents and I watched TV, but I found it difficult to listen to the news about the possible full-scale invasion, so I went to bed. My peace did not last long. A loud noise woke me up at 5 a.m. It was February 24, 2022. I did not doubt that the large-scale invasion of Russian invaders had begun.

I left my room. My parents were already up. The explosions continued and the apartment was brightly lit. We went out to the balcony. There a terrible panorama opened before us – a military unit, located about a kilometer from our house, was under enemy fire. Shell explosions lit up the sky, and a fierce fire engulfed the entire perimeter of the military base.

We stood on the balcony for a long time, unable to take our eyes off this horrifying picture of war. I called my family and friends and asked if they saw the same thing. It was like a nightmare, and I did not want to believe that the war had come.

We needed to collect the necessary things and documents, but I did not have a clear plan of where to go or what to do. At 7 a.m., we decided to go to my mother's work – to school, where her colleagues were supposed to gather. "Perhaps together we can find a way out of this situation and make a plan for our next steps", I thought.

As we left the house on our way to school, my attention was focused on other walkers we met along the way. Some were carrying suitcases; others were simply hurrying to work. However, they all had one thing in common – eyes filled with fear. When we reached our destination, teachers who were already there met us. Several people were helping move documents and equipment into storage, and we joined them. While we were doing this, we discussed possible courses of action, but no one knew exactly where to go.

It was 10 a.m. suddenly, in the distance; we heard the heavy sounds of rocket launchers. It was clear that the enemy was already very close. We immediately went to the basement, where people from nearby buildings were gradually gathered.

It was 11:00 a.m. I followed the news on a local Telegram channel and saw a terrible picture – the occupiers' flag had already been raised at the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Station. This picture broke my heart. From friends who were nearby, I saw videos from online cameras, where a stream of military equipment had already crossed the borders of our city and was heading towards Kherson.

Looking into the eyes of my comrades, I understood that each of us was on the verge of despair and fear, but together we could do more than we could alone. Therefore, we collected water and supplies, and organized assistance for the people caught in the middle of the conflict. Our school has become a refuge for many. This was our first step in a full-scale war – supporting each other in difficult times.

Therefore, we spent the first five days of the full-scale war, supporting each other. We tried to distract ourselves from the ominous reality, by talking, playing cards, and watching movies. My friend Misha was with his cat. The purring of this little furry creature was a real comfort to everyone. Food was prepared for the children in the school canteen, and we decided to bake pies for those who were in the shelter at the school.

In those days, there were battles for the crossing to the Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Station. The explosions rang out, it was scary, but every day they became less frequent – the Russian invaders were steadily advancing.

On the fifth day, the explosions had died down, and we decided that there was no point in staying at the school, so we went to our private house in the city, thinking it would be safer there than in the apartment.

After moving, we tried to live at least a normal life, doing housework and visiting friends. In the evenings, the whole family watched movies. In addition, I tried to study and find a job, although it was difficult, especially when all forms of communication began to be completely blocked. It was scary to be without the Internet, because you had no information from reliable sources, only russian radio and TV channels.

The people of our Nova Kakhovka city were very pro-Ukrainian in their thinking and mentality. There were several large rallies at the beginning of the occupation; almost the entire town came out with flags and slogans such as “Nova Kakhovka is Ukraine”. The behavior of residents unpleasantly impressed the russian military. They dispersed the first such rally with smoke grenades, several people were injured.

After that, the security and filtering measures of the city were strengthened. The occupiers were looking for volunteers, activists, officials, and teachers. Cases of abduction of residents by the occupiers and their removal to unspecified places have become more frequent, and many of them have not returned.

A shortage of goods quickly began, and within a month of the war, there was almost nothing left on the store shelves. There were also problems with money due to the inability to use debit cards, and it was difficult to find where to get paper currency.

Every day the city I love with all my heart turned into a deserted wasteland. Many people began to leave due to the moral pressure from the russians and fear for their lives and the lives of their loved ones. My family was also looking for ways to leave our hometown. However, it was difficult for me to make that decision, because my father firmly stated that he would stay in Nova Kakhovka.

Due to the unbearable pain in our hearts, my mother and I finally decided to leave. We chose the route through Kherson – Beryslav – Davidiv Brid – Bashtanka – Mykolaiv – Odesa. Our departure was delayed several times due to various factors, including shelling and military checkpoints.

Nevertheless, on May 3, 2022, my family and I were at the bus station, waiting for the bus from Nova Kakhovka to Kherson. At that moment, I wanted to wait for this bus all my life, because I understood that I did not know how long I would be separated from my father and my beloved city.

On the way to Kherson, my mother and I saw the consequences of the war – destroyed buildings, burnt equipment, and military checkpoints. It was painful because we remembered this route as something completely different. When we got to Kherson, we stayed with friends.

The next day, at six in the morning, right after the end of the curfew, we left for Odesa. On the way out of Kherson, we met our first russian military checkpoint. In total, we passed about 40 russian checkpoints, some of which stopped us for a cursory inspection.

Around 1 p.m., we reached the first Ukrainian checkpoint. When I saw our blue and yellow flag, I could not hold back the tears, and the sense of freedom I felt at that moment was like nothing I had ever felt before.

Our Ukrainian soldiers looked much better than the russian ones. They were in modern uniforms and armed, and they seemed friendly and familiar to us. They were happy to see us, but they were also watching us carefully, and we understood the reasons for their caution.

We arrived in Odesa in the evening, and at first, my mother’s friend Tamara, whom we often visited on vacations before the war, received us. The first month was a blur. I immediately started looking for a job. I had to finish my thesis.

Although there were occasional air raids and sirens in Odesa when we arrived, the atmosphere was much calmer and freer. A large number of goods in stores during the first week seemed unusual, and seeing Ukrainian flags on the streets was heartwarming.

Within a month, I found a job in an IT company in Odesa, and my mother started working for a volunteer fund called “Nova Kakhovka – the City of a Thousand Springs”, where I helped her from time to time. In general, the fund takes care of internally displaced persons from Nova Kakhovka in Odesa and other Ukrainian cities and collects aid for Ukrainian soldiers on the front lines.

However, every day I feel uneasy because my family stays in Nova Kakhovka. Every time reading the news about the shelling of the city, it is a source of great stress. I immediately start calling everyone I know, but sometimes we do not hear from relatives for weeks due to the lack of communication. Uncertainty makes it almost impossible to find peace.

On 6 June 2023, the dam was deliberately destroyed, causing catastrophic drainage of the reservoir. At the time, the dam was under the control of the Russian military, which had seized it in the early days of the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

We received terrible news from relatives who remained in Nova Kakhovka. In the autumn, a rocket hit the house where my friend and her mother were, but they miraculously survived and are still undergoing rehabilitation. In the winter, during the provocative shelling by the Russians, a mortar shell hit the house where my brother lives. He was lucky to be in the opposite part of the house at that moment.

Although life in Odesa is relatively peaceful, the news from my occupied hometown always reminds me that the war is on. These feelings are incomparable to anything else. Therefore, I experience any blackouts or rocket attacks much easier, because I know that there are situations that are much more difficult to survive.

In the winter and spring of 2024, Odesa is constantly bombarded with rockets and Shaheds every day and night. All this is very difficult to endure.

I found people close to me in spirit. I have a job and hobbies in Odesa.

Nevertheless, a part of my heart remains in Nova Kakhovka.

The famous Ukrainian writer Oleksandr Dovzhenko beautifully described my feelings for this city in the 20th century: *“I love Nova Kakhovka. I love the Dnipro – the great river of my people, clean gentle air, clear sky, and breadth in everything. Moreover, restraint in the landscape, and majestic calm. In addition, nowhere would I want to live like here, on a wonderful shore, and I have never been filled with love for people as here. Kakhovka became the Motherland of my heart, the homeland of my dearest feelings”*.



The collapse of Ukraine's Nova Kakhovka dam. June, 6, 2023.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/06/07/world/gallery/ukraine-nova-kakhovka-dam-collapse/index.html> (Revised: 10.07.2024)



Palace of Culture in Nova Kakhovka after the explosions at Kakhovka Hydroelectric Power Plant, on June 6, 2023. TASS.

<https://www.radiosvoboda.org/a/pidryv-kakhovska-hes-evakuatsiya-zahroza-zaes/32446581.html> (Revised: 10.07.2024)



The russian army dropped an aerial bomb on the temporarily occupied Nova Kakhovka on the morning of September 15, 2023. <https://www.yahoo.com/news/military-russia-accidentally-drops-aerial-114920836.html> (Revised: 10.07.2024)



The russian army dropped an aerial bomb on the temporarily occupied Nova Kakhovka on the morning of September 15, 2023. Photo: National Resistance Center (NRC). <https://www.yahoo.com/news/explosion-temporarily-occupied-nova-kakhovka-094146438.html> (Revised: 10.07.2024)

On November 14, 2023, the Armed Forces of Ukraine liberated Nova Kakhovka in the Kherson Region. I will definitely return to my free city after our Victory because Nova Kakhovka is Ukraine.