

REALNEWS

Reflections at Day's End

No. 7 July/August 2009



**White Phosphorus over Gaza
January 2009**

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No. 8 March/April 2009

On the Folly of Transience

Every artist, musician and scientist worth their salt knows that the only way to make anything of worth truly their own is through repetition. Archers, footballers, sabreurs and chess players also know this to be axiomatic. Meditators, dancers, surgeons and healers all understand that without constant repetition, one's level of focus, attention and skill inevitably drop away.

Yet the present time conspires to have us believe that transience is the new value by which we are to live. This is reflected in the acceptance of inevitable obsolescence in virtually all the fruits of technology, in the seamless daily media reports of crisis after crisis with little or no reflection, reconsideration or remembrance of the waves of influence that both create and reverberate from such crises, and in the obsession with speed and curtness of delivery that characterises our newly developed forms of electronic communication.

Mobile phone texting is creating new lexigraphies and grammars, while email has reduced textual communication to verbal transactions phrased in minimalist vocabularies. We have become travellers on an ocean of information that endlessly streams and occasionally storms through our lives. And if we are to accept conventional wisdom, it is all relevant. For today, at least. Tomorrow will bring its own new waves of relevance, and today's relevancies will be forgotten.

One of the consequences of this popular enshrinement of transience is a deepening loss of connectedness with our own

origins and even with the definitive experiences of our age. Some teachers still take it upon themselves to transmit a remembrance of the profound calamity that befell Europe during the Second World War in the hope that their students will come to realise the undermining and overturning of all values that occurred under Hitler's Third Reich. Yet for so many young people, Vietnam, Cambodia, Timor and Lebanon are simply names of distant places. Something happened in Gaza earlier this year, but that was way back then, and besides, we all now need to protect ourselves from Swine Flu.

Without consciously developing a sense of continuity and memory, we too easily fall into a soporific drifting through time. We shrug our shoulders at the hopelessness of it all, disconnect ourselves from the lived realities that assail others and are benumbed to the images of pain and calamity that daily irrupt into the popular media.

We have lost our discernment, our capacity to know the difference between wisdom and folly, fairness and cruelty. We have lost our sense of outrage, our capacity to react to the abuse of vulnerable minorities by the powerful and the mighty. And we are in danger of losing our compassion, our capacity to feel the suffering of others.

It takes a strong act of will to remain abreast of the times, to maintain an inner brief to serve as active witness to the progressive and destructive forces that drive the experience of individuals, communities and populations during this time when we are all adrift. "To what end?" some may ask. That question cannot be answered without considering the further question of what we take to be truly important in human life.

If transience - the negation of duration and consequence - is the defining character of the times, then it follows that nothing really matters, apart perhaps, from those conditions and events that affect us

personally. There is no sustaining story. We might as well just enjoy the ride.

If on the other hand, human existence is more than an ephemeron, more than the day-span between our first and last breath, more than the vapid efflorescence of a lifetime before the closure of eternal night, then we had better consider more carefully the purposes and intentions that we serve within the broader vistas of time.

The post-modernist relativisation of everything under the sun, with its curt dismissal of noble narratives and great stories as wishful projections of a railing but futile impotence, leaves us with nothing but our own desires and their satisfaction as the source of all meaning in human life and experience.

We need to look deeper, to examine and retrieve the understandings of the strong and questing minds that have preceded us whose traces have thankfully been carried into present time. We need to refamiliarise ourselves with the canonical texts and teachings that have provided nourishment and direction through the centuries of hardship and struggle endured by all peoples through all recoverable time. We need to reclaim the sources of wisdom that provide the moral directives that enable us to live together with some measure of peace, fellowship and mindful co-presence.

Such values will not and cannot emerge from the ten-second grab, from “official reports”, or from “embedded journalists” who serve the purposes of their political masters. Without active searching, one cannot uncover those sources committed to presenting historically informed, morally responsible and philosophically considered representations of the events and influences that determine the conditions of life and death for so many.

Without a grounding in such moral values as truthfulness, fairness, justice and service, all things become permissible. And that is precisely where we find ourselves in the present time.

Wars can be waged with brutal disproportionality and in total disregard of all existing laws that would safeguard non-combatants. Environments and ecosystems can be trashed and travestied without thought of longer-term consequences. Financial markets can be criminally manipulated so as to surfeit even further the obscenely wealthy and impoverish and immiserate the meek and the vulnerable. And public thought can be corralled and trivialised by a power-hungry and money-hungry mass media.

We need to refamiliarise ourselves with the enduring sources of discernment and morality in this time when everything has become permissible. We need to develop a will to understand more deeply the meaning of the present time.

LETTER FROM ALEXANDRA

An Entirely Different Sky

Listen to the unstruck sounds, and what sifts through that music. (Jalaludin Rumi)

Sometimes the road opens out in unexpected wonder out in places open enough for the clouds to outrun the horizon. Sometimes you cannot notice anything other than the clouds themselves, all airbrushed and bound for the sun. Sometimes on any journey there can be that upward moment when the road somehow winds or bends smack into fields of air, that still, stopping moment when the earth and sky share the same lightness. It is out in such unsuspected places that you start to see that there is nothing else between you and infinity than light and space.

Maybe it is that those far distant champion clouds are trying to teach us to listen. Maybe they are constantly reminding us of something, abandoned always to the wind, owing nothing to themselves. Tantalizing in their freshness, their disdain for boundaries can wound you to the core with longing. Just one look at heaven's reflection can be enough to spend the rest of your life walking for just another glimpse. Just that one road stop can make you spend the rest of your life living prostrate before an ever-widening sky. Walking and waiting, you go as quiet as a mountain, learning to smell the rain like a tree, sensing those first laden clouds hours before they shyly step past the horizon. Waiting and listening under any sky, there is always that spacious invitation to attention.

Keep stumbling along any road and you will still have the sky with you. Even in the crush of prison they can't keep out the rumour of its freedom. Keep walking and you will see ten thousand times ten thousand faces unveiled in the wind. Keep looking and you will fall in love every time. Keep your hands outstretched and you will see the Word of God written in the clouds. Keep on looking up again after every fall of land and load and you will always see another possibility. Despite all that rises and falls, despite all the swings of fortune, the sky is constant, seamless in its dance, big enough for every kind of season.

Stay on the path and there will be times when all that's with you is a star struck immensity of colour, the vault of sky holding nothing clearer than silence. Look again and all the winds are in your face and heaven nothing more than a gnarled and deepening vault of grey. Yet even in the winter dark, the night is still pitted with light and the sky still open for the sun's return.

Perhaps what makes a pilgrimage is a readiness for space, with all our walking merely a reminder of how big the truth really is. Sometimes all we can do is to walk and walk past the noise-soaked air we live in, past the whiteout of communication, out into the open skies of silence. Keep walking and we may find that big country of the sky, that Holy Land of Freedom that balances and borders all our sorrows.

Keep on looking and you will see the drifting clouds, calling out not just to listen, but to listen up.

ALEXANDRA CORRESPONDENT

THE DISMEMBERING OF GAZA **Part I**



Two lone voices braved the media to offer a differing view to that offered by Government spokespersons in Australia during the recent Israeli assault on Gaza. The first was that of Bob Brown. He urged Julia Gillard to speak out against the "violent and disproportionate action by Israeli leaders." More pointed were the comments of Julia Irwin, Federal MP for the NSW seat of Fowler. In her article entitled *Getting Away with Murder* published in the Sydney Morning Herald on January 11th 2009, she used metaphor to draw our attention to the obscenity of the massacre that was occurring before our eyes:

It all reminds me of an old story from the days of the Roman Empire. The emperor

Nero was upset that his prized lions were being distressed by Christians, who ran away from them in the Colosseum. Nero ordered that at the next circus, a Christian was to be buried up to his neck in the sand to make things easier for the lions. When the lions entered the ring, the biggest and the meanest saw the hapless condemned, swaggered over and stood astride the Christian's head, roaring for approval from the crowd. At that moment, the Christian craned his neck and bit off the lion's testicles. The crowd was shocked. "Fight fair! Fight fair!" they yelled.

The recent attack on Gaza has been met by a curious indifference by most so-called leaders of Western nations. As acting Prime Minister of Australia at the time, the ill-informed Julia Gillard refused to criticise, let alone condemn the actions of Israel in early January. Speaking on behalf of the Australian people, she said: "Australia recognises the right of Israel to defend itself." That comment was made on the third of January 2009, by which time it was widely known that 430 Gazans were dead and 2,300 had been wounded in 750 individual strikes carried out by air and by sea over the previous five days.

We were all witness to a stonehearted disregard of the humanity of those living in one of the most densely populated regions on the planet by one of the most powerful military forces on the earth. How is it that such a thing can occur? How can politicians so casually intone, "Israel has a right to defend itself"? Defend itself from what? From the miserable and impotent Qassam rockets that vent the rage of an immiserated group of Palestinian men, many of whose families have lost sons, daughters, freedoms and lands since the military occupation of Gaza by Israel that began in 1967? From the petulant stones hurled by boys and young men at the supremely armoured Merkeva tanks that have blown apart their communities and knocked down their family homes?

There is much that underlies the present grief that sears the minds of invulnerable Palestinians, much that has been ignored, suppressed and dismissed by those who would tell us the story of the day. The massacre at Gaza could not have happened without an acquiescence to and acceptance of a view that dismisses the essential humanity and worth of the Palestinian people. How is it that so many in the West have come to perceive the Palestinians as a hostile race, a violent people, an unruly group with whom any reasoned and reasonable dialogue is impossible?

The late Edward Said spent most of his adult life in an impassioned quest to awaken our collective understanding to precisely what has happened to the people of Palestine since their traditional lands were handed over to the newly created state of Israel in 1948 even as the embers of the Second World War had yet to cool. In a lecture delivered at the University of California at Berkeley eight months before he died in 2003, Said reflected on the perverse fate of Gazans at that time:

The thirty-five year old military occupation, now the longest and most brutally sustained in modern history has taken a terrific toll in the human condition of the Palestinians at every level. In fact, short of genocide itself, I cannot think of a single one of the human rights of the people that has not been violated. With a kind of refined viciousness designed to dehumanise and break their spirit and humiliate them to a degree that is, even to someone who has been carefully but helplessly aware of what has been taking place, simply stupefying.

What has made it worse is how much of this has been wilfully shielded from witnessing eyes by propaganda about fighting for survival and against terrorism, claims that in any other instance, would defy the credulity of the most gullible intelligence.

Things have changed little. The past six years have seen a deepening rather than an easing of the plight of the people of Gaza.

Edward Said was no armchair academic. He was a driving force in the creation of the Palestinian National Initiative, a democratic movement committed to providing Palestinians with an alternative identity to that offered by the corrupt Yassar Arafat and his Fatah inner circle. Among Said's collaborators in that project was the medical practitioner, Mustafa Barghouthi.

In a recent article written in the despair of a ruined Gaza and published in *The Nation* (2/2/2009), Barghouthi offers a weepingly beautiful portrait of the Palestinian people and a clear restatement of both their identity and the character of their struggle. He reflects: "The main reason so much effort is put into distorting the character of Palestinians is that if the world were to really know what is going on here, the collective emotion would shift from apathy toward our struggle to one of anger at our oppressor."

One cannot understand the grievousness of what has occurred in Gaza without understanding the depth of dispossession and the degree of oppression to which Palestinians have been subjected since the United Nations partitioned the British-ruled Palestine Mandate on the 29th November 1947. According to UN General Assembly Resolution 181, Israel was to be apportioned 55% of the mandated territory while the Palestinians were to be apportioned 45%. That never eventuated. Even before the Israeli land acquisitions of the Six Day War in 1967, the new state of Israel had sequestered 78% of Palestinian lands.

Between 1947 and 1951, more than 400 Palestinian villages were totally destroyed. As Jewish immigrants poured in from all over the world, nearly a million Palestinians were made homeless. Attacks by the Jewish army, the Haganah, and the ruthless Irgun, a militia group headed by Menachem Begin caused a massive

exodus of Palestinians from their traditional lands. Reprisals occurred, the slaughters continued, waves of Palestinian refugees fled into neighbouring countries, and the Israelis took more lands. The slaughter of 120 Palestinians at Deir Yassin on April 9th 1948 and of 200 Palestinians at Tantura on May 15th 1948 were the earliest in a series of blood-baths that extended from the *Naqba*, the Great Catastrophe, to the Sabra and Shatila massacres in Lebanon in 1982, the *al Aqsa* mosque massacre in 1990, the bloodbath at Jenin Refugee Camp in 2002, and this most recent devastation of Gaza.

The more direct antecedents of *Operation Cast Lead* lie in the Palestinian elections of January 2006. These elections were largely driven by the Bush Administration in co-operation with the newly elected Mahmoud Abbas, who took over the presidency of the Palestinian National Authority after the death of the decrepit and opportunistic Yassar Arafat, founder of Fatah. Investigative journalist Chris Hedges comments on life in Gaza at that time: "Gaza, ruled by warring factions, warlords, clans, kidnapping rings and criminal gangs, had descended into chaos under Mahmoud Abbas' corrupt Fatah-led government". (*TruthDig.com*, 26/1/09)

Things did not go according to plan in those elections. On January 26th 2006, Hamas won 56% of the seats in the Palestinian Legislative Council.

The US and Israel took immediate steps to "correct" the situation. Together with the European Union, Russia and the United Nations, the US demanded that the new Hamas government agree to accept the terms of all previous agreements made with Arafat's Palestinian Authority and to formally recognise Israel's right to exist. Hamas refused. The spigot was immediately turned off. All aid was immediately terminated. The newly elected government no longer had the means of funding its \$2 billion annual budget. With over half of the

Palestinian population living on under \$2 a day at the time, any thought of generating needed funds through tax revenues was sheer fantasy.

Israel lost no time. It immediately tightened its border crossings and blocked all movement of Palestinians into or out of the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. The Israeli Defence Force (IDF) summarily rounded up and “arrested” over 60 Hamas officials including new ministers and Legislative Council members. The Israeli government was not at all pleased with the outcome of the elections.

The Bush Administration began to bristle when it learned that Mahmoud Abbas was talking with Hamas about the possibility of forming a unity government and immediately sent Condoleeza Rice to Ramallah to sort things out. In early October 2006, she instructed Abbas to do whatever was necessary to dissolve the Hamas-led government as soon as possible and to prepare the ground for a new election.

Several weeks passed and nothing had happened. Mahmoud Abbas was delivered a thinly disguised ultimatum by the US State Department. It read, “We need to understand your plans regarding a new [Palestinian Authority] government . . . You told Secretary Rice you would be prepared to move ahead within two to four weeks of your meeting. We believe that the time has come for you to move forward quickly and decisively.” (David Rose, *Vanity Fair*, April 2008)

Tensions between Hamas and Fatah turned deadly as Hamas came to learn of the collaborations between Fatah and Washington. Fighting broke out on multiple fronts. By December 2006, dozens were being killed each month. Meanwhile, Condoleeza Rice had arranged a series of meetings and discussions with the leaders of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia

and the United Arab Emirates. David Rose reports: “She asked them to bolster Fatah by providing military training and by pledging funds to buy its forces lethal weapons. The money was to be paid directly into accounts controlled by President Abbas.”

Before the year’s end, four trucks loaded with 2,000 Egyptian-made automatic rifles, 20,000 ammunition clips and two million bullets were quietly ushered from Egypt into Gaza through an Israeli-controlled crossing. Their deadly cargo was delivered to Fatah officials. The United Arab Emirates handed over cash payments of between 20 and 30 million dollars to Fatah at much the same time.

The new hardware was put to good use within weeks. By early February, Fatah forces stormed the Islamic University of Gaza, which was seen as a Hamas stronghold, and torched several buildings. Hamas responded by attacking Fatah controlled police stations.

With Gaza was on the edge of a full-blown civil war, King Hussein of Saudi Arabia quickly convened a meeting. Abbas and his US-appointed national security advisor, the shadowy Muhammad Dahlan, met with a group of Hamas Leaders in Mecca. As a result of the meeting, Fatah members were offered several key posts in the Legislative Council, and a national unity government was formed. The Saudis agreed to pick up the tab for the Palestinian Authority’s bills, which had not been paid for over 12 months. The celebrations that followed were, however, to be short-lived.

Incensed at this development, the US drew up a plan to provide Mahmoud Abbas and his Fatah forces with \$1.27 billion dollars in military training, hardware and salaries over the following five years in exchange for an assurance that Abbas would “collapse the government” in accordance with the wishes of the US and Israel. Details of this plan were unexpectedly leaked to a Jordanian

newspaper on April 30, 2007. Within days, Hamas had come to realise that a US-backed Fatah coup was in the making.

Two weeks later, in mid May, five hundred Fatah National Security recruits crossed the Egyptian border in new outfits carrying new weaponry and driving new armoured vehicles. An observer commented: "They had new rifles with telescopic sights, and they were wearing black flack-jackets. They were quite a contrast to the usual scruffy lot." Hamas fighters tried to intercept these new recruits as they crossed into Gaza but were pushed back by the superior hardware and the tight discipline of the new Fatah recruits. By the end of May, Hamas and the newly armed Fatah security forces were at each other's throats.

The camel's back was completely broken on June 7th when the Israeli newspaper *Haaretz* revealed that an even larger shipment of Egyptian arms was waiting to be shipped to Fatah forces. David Rose reports: "Abbas and Dayton [the US security co-ordinator for the Palestinians] had asked Israel to authorise the biggest Egyptian arms shipment yet - to include dozens of armoured cars, hundreds of armour-piercing rockets, thousands of hand grenades, and millions of rounds of ammunition." (*Vanity Fair*, April 2008)

With over 250 Hamas members already dead over the previous six months, Hamas decided to put an end to it there and then.

It was all over within a few days. The Fatah security forces were routed and ruthlessly cut down by Hamas fighters. Mahmoud Abbas dissolved the barely-formed Palestinian Authority-Hamas unity government a week later. Hamas claimed full control of Gaza on June 15th. Those within Fatah who managed to survive the deadly battle of Gaza limped back to Abbas' new stronghold, the Israeli-occupied territory of the West Bank. The

blood spilt and damage done during that sad episode was but a minor prelude to what was about to be unleashed upon Gaza by the IDF eighteen months later in *Operation Cast Lead*.



The blockade of Gaza then became absolute. Israeli forces closed all portals of entry and Egypt followed suit at its northern border with Gaza. The movement of people and of goods into and out of Gaza was frozen. Overnight, Gaza had become even further Ghettoised.

Hamas resumed its rocket attacks on Israel. The first Qassam rockets used by Hamas had been launched in October 2001. They created the desired terror among Israelis, but were essentially useless as weaponry. According to Chris Hedges, the first Israeli death due to rocket fire from Gaza occurred in June 2004. (*TruthDig.com* 26/1/09)



Within six months of the closure of Gaza's borders by Israel, 90% of the functioning factories and workshops had shut down. There were simply no materials available to work with any more. The income of 70% of

the population of the Gaza Strip had dropped to below \$2 a day.

By June 2008, the situation of ordinary Gazans had become intolerable. The yearlong Israeli blockade had cut off supplies of all the vital materials whereby civil society could be sustained. In desperation, Hamas sought ways of breaking the Israeli stranglehold of its borders. Through talks mediated by the Egyptian government, an agreement was reached whereby Hamas offered to end the firing of rockets into Israel in exchange for an easing of the blockade at the borders. A cease-fire was agreed upon on July 19th 2008. All Hamas rocket fire ceased immediately. But in the words of Chris Hedges, "Israel never upheld its end of the agreement. It increased the severity of the siege."

In May 2007, nearly 11,000 trucks carrying goods crossed the Israeli controlled border-posts into Gaza each month. These provided essential materials – food, medicines, building materials, industrial supplies, educational items, clothing and technology – to serve the needs of Gaza's one and a half million inhabitants. By October 2008, the number had dropped to under 3,000 trucks. During the entire month of November 2008, the month before *Operation Cast Lead* was launched, only 579 trucks were allowed to cross the border.

Israeli planners had learned well from the strategic course charted by George Bush Senior, Bill Clinton and George Bush Junior in Iraq. Weaken the enemy to the point of complete impotence through blockades and sanctions, and when they have become totally defenceless, unleash all hell with the deadliest military hardware this planet has ever seen. By the end of January 2009, the results in Gaza mirrored those in Iraq. Broken buildings, broken bodies and untold numbers of grieving mothers, fathers and children.

The four-month cease-fire was broken on November 4th 2008. Richard Falk, professor emeritus of international law at Princeton University and UN Special Rapporteur on Palestinian human rights since 2008 comments: "A temporary ceasefire between Israel and Hamas that had been in effect since 19 July 2008 had succeeded in reducing cross-border violence virtually to zero; Hamas consistently offered to extend the ceasefire, even to a longer period of ten years. The breakdown of the ceasefire . . . came about mainly as a result of an Israeli air attack on 4 November that killed six Hamas fighters in Gaza." (*Le Monde Diplomatique*, 12/3/2009)

The Israeli game plan had been set long before the cease-fire agreement. Israeli military planners bided their time until the opportune moment. That moment happened to coincide precisely with the day of the US elections, November 4 2008. Israeli planners knew well that their attack would not appear on the front page of any newspaper outside of the Arab world.

The next day, November 5th, the siege of Gaza became absolute. Israel completely closed down the borders. Predictably, the useless mortars and puny Qassam rockets were once again launched across the border from Gaza into Israel. This was precisely what the Israeli military had counted on.

The rest moved like clockwork. F-16 fighter jets and Apache helicopters were loaded with precision missiles and messy bombs; Israeli navy attack ships lined up off the Gaza coast-line; and earth-shaking battalions of Merkeva tanks were set rolling together with their well-armed ground troops as the slaughter was about to begin.

In the next edition of REALNEWS, we will look closely at how *Operation Cast Lead* was conducted, will consider deeply the consequences of this horrendous event in the life of the Palestinian people, and will reflect upon the way that long-established norms in the

conduct of warfare can be so casually dismissed and disregarded by militarily powerful nations.

Notes

1. Mustafa Barghouthi offers a clear view of Palestinian steadfastness in the face of a relentless violence. See

<http://www.thenation.com/doc/20090223/bargouthi>

2. The speech "Palestine: a Challenge to Humanity" delivered by Barghouthi at Berkeley in 2004 graphically describes life in Gaza and the West Bank under the policies of Ariel Sharon. Barghouthi speaks both as statesmen and as medical practitioner who has seen too many mothers, fathers and children torn apart by fierce weaponry. See

<http://www.radio4all.net/index.php/program/8916>

3. David Rose's brilliant account of the shadowy activities of the Bush Administration in undermining the legitimacy of the January 2006 elections that gave Hamas a majority of seats in the Palestinian parliament is a great read. See <http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2008/04/gaza200804>

4. Edward Said was among the clearest of voices alerting us all to the plight of the Palestinians. His passionate advocacy for the Palestinian cause and his luminous intelligence are fully evident in a lecture presented at the University of California at Berkeley in February 2003 on the eve of the US invasion of Iraq. This was the last major speech that Edward Said gave before his death. It can be heard on:

<http://www.radio4all.net/index.php/program/6472>

POEM FROM MITCHAM

Desert Rain

Parting of the heavens
Each a perfect tear
Shed for the love of red earth
Parched dust quenched
A taste of oceans that fled long ago.

MITCHAM CORRESPONDENT

LETTER FROM GEMBROOK

Anzac Day

After yesterday's slow gentle rain, 7ml, the first in four weeks, it was especially pleasant setting out on my walk up the spur this morning. The ground was wet and the air cleaned of dust and the smoke from DSE burns that's been hanging in the air these past weeks.

I had my transistor radio in my carry bag, tuned, unusually, to the ABC 774, and Macca's *Australia all Over*. Being the last Sunday before Anzac Day, the show had an Anzac Day focus. As I went up Quinn Rd. a brass band played a slowish version of *Waltzing Matilda* interspersed with the trumpet tune of the "The Last Post." Enjoying this inspiring musical nuance, I was distracted by an empty drink can on the road. It was a 'Woodstock' bourbon and coke can. I crushed it with my heel and put it in a plastic bag in my carry bag.

"Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda, you'll come a waltzing Matilda with me."

The music finished and I walked on, half listening to Macca's prattle, the show's jingles, the voice grabs. But my mind was now on Anzac Day. In the clarity of the sharp morning air, feeling fit and fresh, it dawned on me that I have a problem with Anzac Day. It's difficult, if not impossible, for me to join the feeling of celebration that now comes with it. Or to accept, as Macca

said, that it has become our 'National Day.'

Don't get me wrong, I have no disrespect for it, or the RSL. It's just that it fills me with mixed emotions, sadness and anger. I'm sad for those who lost their lives serving in the name of their country. Sad for the civilians, men, women and children, killed in the crossfire or obliterated by bombing. Sad for those crippled physically, and sad for the mental and emotional suffering. Sad for the inhumanity of war.

I wondered what my grandfather would think? He served in WWI, in the 57th Battalion, made up largely of men from suburban Melbourne. Australia's - and the 57th Battalion's - first major action in France was the battle at Fromelles. Grandfather, fortunately, missed the first day, when over 5,600 Australians died, and when the 60th Battalion was almost wiped out in the heaviest day of casualties in our military history. Men of the 57th Battalion spent the next four days bringing wounded men back from no-man's land between the trenches. There were some 8,000 plus Anzacs killed at Gallipoli over 8 months, 2000 in one day at Fromelles. There's a statue at the site in Flanders of a sergeant of the 57th Battalion carrying a wounded digger on his shoulders. Like Simpson and his donkeys at Gallipoli, this is the epitome of Anzac Day.

Grandfather Wilson, Poppa to us, was wounded in the face and back by shrapnel at Ypres and sent to hospital in England. But he was back with the 57th Battalion when it liberated Villers-Bretonneux on Anzac Day 1918, after it had been occupied by the Germans in a forward push. Later he was shot in the right buttock at Boulogne and again sent to hospital in England, where he remained until the war ended. He died fifty years ago so I didn't really know him, but Elvie tells me he was a self-effacing man who

didn't waste words. A non-drinker, he didn't participate in Anzac Day. He didn't like the boozing that went on afterwards, and didn't like being reminded of the war. He gave his army mates the silver service when they came to his house, and always helped returned men.

By the time I reached the top of the hill I'd picked up more empty cans, another 'Woodstock' bourbon and coke, a 'Jack Daniels' Tennessee whisky and coke, and two 'Jim Beam' and coke. Also a plastic bottle of Coca-Cola. And a glass bottle of vodka cruiser. And, no kidding, a condom, still sealed in its plastic sachet.

I can't help but feel anger on Anzac Day. Anger at the military command that sent the diggers to their deaths in the water, on the beach, and on the cliffs at Gallipoli. Anger at the politics of war, invading Turkey intending to take Constantinople to give to the Russian ally later. Anger at the stupidity of sending thousands of men out of the trenches into heavy machine gun fire and almost certain death at Fromelles. Anger at the flagwaving and the superiority it engenders. Anger at Vietnam. Anger at Iraq. Anger at Gaza. Anger at inhumanity.

Finishing my walk, I counted the crushed aluminium cans I'd collected as I put them in Jod's box in the shed. There's always more on a Sunday morning. There were six 'Woodstock' Kentucky bourbon and coke, five 'Jack Daniels' Tennessee whiskey and coke, and three 'Jim Bean' Kentucky bourbon and coke, one Bundaberg rum and coke, and one VB.

"Waltzing Matilda, waltzing Matilda, who'll come a waltzing Matilda with me?"

GEMBROOK CORRESPONDENT

REDEMPTORUM
A Song of Easter

*We did not know that your blood would shine
through thorns,
That the air would erupt in rays and points of
brilliant light,
That forms of fine flame would appear and
vanish around you.*

Son of the Sun, Son of Man.
You show your face again and again
In these days of passion compassion and
pain
These days of fire and storm and shame,
To all who would call you by your name.

In forest on sea and in desert dry
You walked and waited and then turned
around.
Those who heard your story, who saw
your glory,
Will never lose sight of your many faces,
In trance and wonder, in crystalline graces.

Perfect pearl reflects and refracts
In changing hues, in reds and blues
The places and faces now fixed in time
Within this sphere of earth sublime
The stories untold, in silver and gold,
The present and past, the first and the last.

Now the stone rolled over to close the
wound
Of an earth long seeded with grief and blood
Restored in love, renewed in light
With a thief to the left and a thief to the right
With blood run thin, with day become night.

To you who once were who are and will be
To you who were emptied of blood and of
water
Remember the land and the sky and the sea
And strengthen and comfort the sons and the
daughters
Yet to return to our great mother Earth
To restore and renew, and to bring to new
birth.