

War: What is it good for?



By Nate Smelle

Whether reading a newspaper, switching on the television, or logging into our social, everywhere we look for information we are reminded that we are still at war with ourselves. For the past 20 months virtually every news report has highlighted the grotesque reality of life in Ukraine during the Russian invasion. One in their right mind might think that the bloody images of bombed out schools, hospitals, churches, and residential buildings would send a strong enough message to those paying attention around the world regarding the pointlessly cruel and wasteful nature of war. But, again humanity seems to have missed the memo. Instead of projecting a loudening clarion call for world peace, the senseless violence painting the soil red with the blood of Ukrainians and Russians seems to have gone unnoticed. On Oct. 7 Hamas launched a surprise attack on Israel, killing more than 1,300 Israelis. During the assault more than 150 others were also taken hostage. In response to this deadly incursion Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to exact vengeance, declaring, "What we will do to our enemies in the next few days will echo for generations." Well, he certainly wasn't bluffing. Since Netanyahu ordered a "complete siege" on the Gaza Strip by the Israeli military, more than 1,900 Palestinians have been killed. According to the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza, the death toll includes 583 children and 351 women. The ministry also reports that there are 7,388 people injured, including 1,901 children and 1,185 women. At the same time Netanyahu ordered the siege, he also halted all shipments of food, water, fuel and supplies intended for the 2.3 million people living in Gaza. While the heinous attack on Israel by Hamas on Oct. 7 certainly provoked the vengeance currently being unleashed by Netanyahu on the people of Palestine, the fact is that both sides in the conflict are now guilty of war crimes. Certainly there are many on both sides who deserve to and must be brought to justice for their violence; but, committing more atrocities against innocent people will only amplify the hate in the hearts of combatants, and exacerbate the situation. How does that old saying go? Something about an eye for an eye leaving the whole world blind? While discussing the political and religious complexities of war with our friend the artist Arne Roosman over the weekend, the focus of our conversation kept shifting back and forth between the conflict in Israel/Palestine and the Russian war in Ukraine. Agreeing that there sadly appears to be no end in sight with either war at the moment, we shook our heads in disgust at how yet again nations have chosen violence over peace. As we reflected on the aftermath of the two conflicts along with the long-term ecological footprint and cost to humanity they will leave behind, he told me about his experience of travelling through Germany by train with his family as they immigrated to Sweden after the Second World War. Describing the view of post-war Hamburg, Germany he had as a youth from the train, Roosman painted a vivid picture of a war-ravaged landscape, with disheveled-looking individuals desperately trying to clear the rubble and carnage from the ruined city's streets. As he shared his observations with me, I thought of how perfectly his description of the scene in Hamburg fit the images I had seen coming out of Gaza over the past week, or Ukraine in the past 600+ days. With the implications of the similarities between these three conflicts fresh in my mind, I dropped by the office to have a look through The Bancroft Times archives. Flipping through the pages of 1945, I found several photos which also fit with Roosman's description of Hamburg. The ones which really grabbed me, however, were of the aftermath of the atomic bomb dropped on the City of Nagasaki

in Japan on Aug. 9. More bloodstained ruins and rubble for permanently scarred survivors to clean up. Another 80,000 murdered. When will we learn that war, for whatever reason, is essentially a waste of our time and energy? Tragically the American writer Mark Twain was on point when he declared, "History does not repeat itself, but it often rhymes."