

Remembering the innumerable innocent lives lost to war...

March, 2022



Don Bosco School

A weathered, grey stone gravestone with a semi-circular top, set against a black background. The stone is covered in small yellow flowers and has two larger white flowers with yellow centers placed on its surface. The text 'Spring Offensive' is written in a white, serif font across the middle of the stone.

Spring
Offensive

Design by Nikhil Sultania – XI B



Spring Offensive



War - An Exercise in Futility

– Aneek Chatterjee – XI – C

*Oh war, I despise
'Cause it means destruction of innocent lives
War means tears to thousands of mothers' eyes
When their sons go off to fight and lose their lives
"War" - Norman Whitfield and Edwin Starr*

The year was 1970. The Vietnam War raged on and threatened to rip apart the United States of America. Opinions were divided but the facts spoke true: the conveyor belt of soldiers being sent to far-away Vietnam returned red with their blood and heavy with their corpses. Norman Whitfield and Edwin Starr captured the futility of war perfectly with the runaway hit "War", with its emphatic chorus of *"What is it good for? Absolutely nothing!"* and channelled the fury of the civilians perfectly.

Wars are waged by soldiers and suffered by civilians, both innocents, bound in unknowing slavery to the politicians. Armchair generals have come and gone to be outshone by elected officials and Heads of State whose *Machtpolitik* has made pawns and puppets of their own citizens – the same people they vowed to protect. Such has always been the case throughout history and it dates back to the Medieval Era. The custom stems from the ancient times of the conquests of the Indian subcontinent, the Middle-East, Constantinople, Scandinavia, the New World, and the Anglo-Saxon Wars. In the Modern Era, the same was seen during the horrors of the World Wars; in the Post-Modern Era -- the wars in Vietnam, Iraq, Afghanistan, Myanmar, Crimea -- and most recently, Ukraine.

*With fire and sword, the country round
Was wasted far and wide,*





Spring Offensive



*And many a childing mother then,
And new-born baby died;*

*They say it was a shocking sight
After the field was won;
For many thousand bodies here
Lay rotting in the sun;*

"After Blenheim" - Robert Southey

The futility of war has been long established; the greatest artists of generations come and gone, put ink to paper, mind to matter and soul to voice, to lay bare the true horrors of war, a band-aid of ignorance and disbelief ripped off. Robert Southey's *"After Blenheim"*, Bob Dylan's *"John Brown"* and Wilfred Owen's *"Dulce et Decorum Est"* are all hauntingly beautiful poems, and all share certain themes in common: the futility of war, the horrors that occur unbeknownst to the ignorant civilian public and the nature of war as a zero-sum-game. In *"The Boy in Striped Pyjamas"* by John Boyne, set in Nazi Germany, the Jews are simply referred to as *"The Other(s)"*, much to the confusion of the protagonist, a ten-year-old child whose inherent humanity prevails against societal reconditioning and propaganda to enable him to form a close bond with a Jew child, the titular "Boy in Striped Pyjamas".

Is God willing to prevent evil, but not able? Then he is not omnipotent.

Is he able, but not willing? Then he is malevolent.

Is he both able and willing? Then whence cometh evil?

Is he neither able nor willing? Then why call him God?

"The Trilemma of Evil" - Epicurus

The morality of war has always been a highly divisive issue, but interestingly not too often spotlighted. Surely a war then is the definition of immorality, amorality, unfeelingness, ignorance, small-mindedness, and yes, evil. If a Head of State deems another Head of State to have committed some political misdeed or, more often, if the latter has declined to display subservience to the former, a war is declared. Is this a conflict between the citizens of both countries? No! But it affects them more than anyone else. Governments are happy to spend lavish sums of money, *taxpayer's money*, on the development, production or purchase of cutting-edge weapons and military technology, but, in spite of all their false promises during





Spring Offensive



elections, are far less willing to reallocate that capital and put it to better use. Better infrastructure, easier access to clean drinking water, better sanitation and lesser unemployment are all far more desirable to the public than a war that will inevitably lead to loss of life and livelihood. To wage a war and fund it can bankrupt a country, and lead to economic catastrophe.

Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, was responsible for the invasion of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, and Ukraine in 2022. On the latter occasion, he told the Russian people his goal was to "demilitarise and de-Nazify Ukraine", to protect people subjected to what he called eight years of bullying and genocide by Ukraine's government. This was not even a war or an invasion, he claimed, merely the fiction of a "special military operation" that Russian state-controlled media are required to adopt. The claim of Nazis and genocide in Ukraine was also a fiction. And there was no swift victory. A stubborn Ukrainian resistance in Kyiv has prolonged the war; for each further day that it continues, each further day that Volodymyr Zelensky, the Ukrainian President, and the Ukrainian armed forces continue to resist, the cost of the war borne by Russia rises and Putin leads his homeland closer to financial crisis. Springtime normally signals a positive transformation – the ice thaws, the sun rises and the world is remade anew. Instead, in this 22nd year of the newest millennium, blood flows and buildings collapse, guns are fired and bullets spill blood and split bone. In underground bombshelters, doctors are forced to choose between saving pregnant mothers and new-born infants, human rights are crushed underneath the boots of the soldiers; dignity and normalcy are become myths, buried and forgotten under the scores of corpses. This springtime offensive by Putin, one which has shattered the illusion of progress and prosperity that has taken decades to establish in Europe, brings to mind a quote from the famous poem of the same title-

*The few who rushed in the body to enter hell,
And there out-fiending all its fiends and flames
With superhuman inhumanities,
Long-famous glories, immemorial shames;*

"Spring Offensive" - Wilfred Owen

Politicians thus manipulate and lie to the masses, the false consumerist propaganda of the government sow seeds of misinformation amongst the masses - lies about the "enemy", seeking to dehumanise and vilify them. Worse still is the feeling of disillusionment and distrust that courses through the pawns involved - bitter is the taste of betrayal, a poison in the wine.





Spring Offensive



Mankind's appetite for conflict and bloodshed is unparalleled amongst other species on the Earth, their inherent tendency is to settle any dispute or dilemma with a show of violence rather than empathy. Perhaps it was always destined to be such – the psychological conditioning amongst all humans as a result of peephole education is to think of our society as different countries and states and cultures and not as a single race or a brotherhood of mankind. No wonder then that soldiers are often disillusioned and, sadly, often suffer from post-traumatic-stress-disorder (PTSD) upon completion of service. The American war in Afghanistan has been a continuing theme of 21st century - it finally came to its long-overdue end when American troops controversially withdrew in entirety. Joseph Biden, President of the United States of America, was brutally factual in his reasoning for the same, and completely truthful...

What I've seen over the years as senator, vice president, and president traveling these countries... A lot of our veterans and their families have gone through hell — deployment after deployment, months and years away from their families; missed birthdays, anniversaries; empty chairs at holidays; financial struggles; divorces; loss of limbs; traumatic brain injury; posttraumatic stress. We see it in the struggles many have when they come home. We see it in the strain on their families and caregivers. We see it in the strain of their families when they're not there. We see it in the grief borne by their survivors. The cost of war they will carry with them their whole lives. Most tragically, we see it in the shocking and stunning statistic that should give pause to anyone who thinks war can ever be low-grade, low-risk, or low-cost: 18 veterans, on average, who die by suicide every single day right here in America. After 20 years of war in Afghanistan... after more than \$2 trillion spent in Afghanistan, at a cost of over \$300 million a day for 20 years... and most of all, after 800,000 Americans serving in Afghanistan, 20,744 American servicemen and women injured, and the loss of 2,461 American personnel, I refuse to open another decade of warfare in Afghanistan... I refuse to send another generation of America's sons and daughters to fight a war that should have ended long ago.

"The End of the War in Afghanistan" - US President Joseph Biden





Spring Offensive



-Debasmit Das-8C-





Spring Offensive



Hero or Villain

– Kushankur Bhowmick – XII – B

“Sic ego nec sine te nec tecum vivere possum.”

(So I can't live either without you or with you.)

–Martial, Epigrams XII, 46

So did the valiant son take leave of his mother's pained bosom? So did the lover bid adieu to his weeping mistress?

The mutual agony and grief their hearts chose to suppress.

He was ready to fight, to conquer, even to take a bullet in the head

For the end of war has been seen only by the dead.

His enemy was just like him - son of an eagerly waiting mother, Partner of a young mistress!

By killing them, whether he was a hero or a villain, he found hard to confess. Yet he left his home, filled with an enigmatic doubt

To fight another war, both within and without.

Only the victors will draft the pages of history,

Whether he will be saluted or hanged - remains a mystery.





Spring Offensive



-Priyam Rudra-8D-





Spring Offensive



Spring Offensive

– AYANANGSHU GHOSH – VI – D

‘Spring’ season gets its name from the verb ‘spring’. It is a nod to the flowers and plants springing up, springing open and bursting into blossoms. Therefore, spring is the season of joy, prosperity, happiness and life. But is it always true?

There are evidences in the past that spring was not always happy, it was ‘offensive’.

21st March, 1918, First World War ...

In the Kaiser’s Battle or ‘*Kaiserchlacht*’ in 1918, the consecutive attacks of the Germans on the Western Front against the British and French (also known as the ‘*allies*’) were collectively called the ‘Spring Offensives of 1918’. It was from 21st March, 1918 to 18th July, 1918. It was Germany’s last attempt to defeat the British and French armies on the Western Front and thereby, win victory before the U.S. army could ship soldiers across the Atlantic and deploy its resources. The Germans’ advantage was that they could make gains along sections of the Western Front. The Germans launched four offensives- **Michael (main attack), Georgette, Gneisenau and Blücher-Yorck** to outflank the allies which held front from the Somme River to the English Channel. The Germans destroyed ‘*the allies*’ leading to the offensives.

The British and French army were at ease near the front while some soldiers were defending the front. The main army were sleeping carelessly. All of a sudden, the defenders were blown out and Germans thrust forward. The main army got up and started defending bravely. ‘*The sky was blank*’- which was a metaphor for the soldiers’ fate. Some of the soldiers even fell off the cliff while some of them were injured with bullets. Some of the soldiers fought bravely and defended, but they had to retreat. Some of them reached the ‘peaceful air’ of their own country. The *allies* suffered casualties in return and found little hard to defend.





Spring Offensive



Wars are fought by the heads of the countries for various reasons but the consequences of the horror of war and death are faced by the common people, their families, the soldiers which make them suffer as if their lives have no value. Considerable loss and setbacks are inflicted upon the country too.

So much so, that in the famous poem ‘**Spring Offensive**’ by Wilfred Owen, the poet depicts the miseries of war.

*“But many there stood still
To face the stark, blank sky beyond the ridge,
Knowing their feet had come to the end of the world.”*

It is an anti-war poem, which portrays how a group of soldiers embraced the cold breast of death, having no way out. ‘Spring Offensive’ by Wilfred Owen presents a group of soldiers alertly waiting near a ridge. Some of them were so exhausted that they couldn’t even stand on their feet. The season was Spring and in contrast the soldiers’ fear about their approaching death anytime.

*“Hour after hour they ponder the warm field—
And the far valley behind, where the buttercups
Had blessed with gold their slow boots coming up,”*

The fields blooming with buttercups were destroyed by the strong boots of the soldiers. The valley behind the soldiers and the flowers around them, remind them of the beauty of life and the futility of war.

*“So, soon they topped the hill, and raced together
Over an open stretch of herb and heather
Exposed. And instantly the whole sky burned
With fury against them; and soft sudden cups
Opened in thousands for their blood;”*

When the battle started, the soldiers raced to kill the enemy and this led to bloodshed.

In the end, most of the soldiers were killed by bullets or they fell off the cliff while some of





Spring Offensive



them managed to fight back and defeated their opponents, came back glorious to the “peaceful air” of their country.

24th February, 2022...

History repeats itself. During the spring of 2022, time was not happy for some people in some part of the world. War and conflict again broke out. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict again broke out after 2014. Whatever be the reasons, the common people had to suffer. The country had to face the consequences. Teachers, residents, officers had to be evacuated out of Ukrainian cities like Kyiv, Mariupol etc. Two weeks of conflict and war had to be faced by the Ukrainians. People grabbed blankets, sleeping bags, toys and colouring books to distract their children and hurried into underground shelters and bunkers. Life changed suddenly for all. When they emerged, many found their homes gone, damaged beyond repair or hidden behind curtains of flame and smoke. Aviation, artillery, rocket launchers, Grads, and such others have been used to harm the innocent people. People were fleeing at the rate of 2000 to 3000 a day. The war-conflict, bombarded with gunshots and devastation changed this season of bloom into a valley of death instead of a flower-filled, colourful, joyous and prosperous ‘spring’...

Let us solemnly pledge the future springs are not as offensive.

