

THE 'SIEV X'

AUSTRALIAN BABY BOOMERS' WOUNDED KNEE



Picture: safecom.org.au

Dispatches from Gerald Taylor

Why is it that the SIEV 'X' incident, like an oyster kept a day too long, repeats, clawing and burning up my oesophagus, causing me to vomit like a dog, in public like this? Why is it that sometimes, if I listen closely on a still dark night, I hear the faint cries of children drowning from a long way off and a long time ago; terror fuelled spirits of the night? Could it be because the SIEV 'X' is unfinished business?

For me this is certainly the case, and I want to tell you why.

Up until the SIEV 'X' we had all witnessed, via the box, many horrors, many human wrought nightmares: Rwanda, Sierra Leone, El Salvador and Timor. But the seeds of all these horrors were planted before us baby boomers came to power.

Take Timor for instance; when Gough Whitlam sold East Timor down the river in exchange for his thirty barrels of oil buried, pirate like, beneath the East Timor Sea (which incidentally led to the murder of half a million Timorese by Australian trained troops), us baby boomers were still a voting minority. We can't be blamed for any of that. Back then there were still more of the old guard in power and the old guard had already

sold their souls to pay for expensive cold wars and costly invasions of Vietnam and Korea. Karmically speaking the old guard had nothing left to trade. But we, the baby boomers, did.

Among the ferry disasters and children overboard distractions it's easy to miss the significance of the SIEV 'X' incident, lose it in the white noise of political lies. After all it did happen a long way off and a long time ago, in the dead of stormy night. But it's this sporadic nausea, that and the distant cries of drowning children that insists on the matter being aired.

Back then, just before the sinking, three distinct groups had interests in that particular bit of seascape. The Australian government, led of course by honest John Howard saw it as the frontline in the repulsion of refugees. The Indonesian Government saw the whole disputed nautical area as a great bargaining chip in the poker game of real politic. And third, the refugees from Iran, Iraq but mostly Afghanistan, who had run as far as they could without crossing water and were propelled by fear and desperation, joined the other players on the Timor sea. This odd cast of characters turned out to be a most unholy trinity. And yes, I am talking religion and superstition. I'm talking

about the biggest spell of them all: I'm talking human sacrifice.

Ask the Toltecs or the Aztecs. Ask Caesar or Hitler or Stalin. No, damn it! You can't, those fuckers are dead. Then go ask honest John, he'll tell you. The spell of human sacrifice is the most potent spell of them all. It always works. And it worked just fine with the SIEV 'X'.



The Siev X memorial on Christmas Island. Another is planned for Canberra.

Picture: ruralaustraliansforrefugees.org

Of the four hundred crammed aboard the SIEV 'X' only fifty survived and of those fifty most won't speak of what happened. You need to remember these people are refugees and refugees know only too well that telling tales is a dangerous game.

There are some eye witness reports however of the over crowded vessel being crammed fuller by Indonesian police and special forces while the women clutching children struggled

to disembark. And there are unofficial tales of bilge pumps being trashed by Indo Special Forces before the old tub disembarked. Who knows what happened for sure? But what we do know is that an Australian frigate shadowed the SIEV 'X' as it slunk along the territorial line into Australian waters, holding the sacrifice in place, the victim's throat waiting for the knife. The frigate shadowed her until just before the storm.

Everyone knew the storm was coming. Even Australia's media warned of the rising seas and the unnamed old tub wallowing in the darkness just beyond Australian waters. When night fell and the big grey frigate disappeared below the horizon, the SIEV 'X' captain took his chance and made a dash into the storm, headed for the Australian coast.

Why did the frigate choose that moment to abandon



drowning or sinking illegal fishing boats or some such, so to hare off into the night halfway through an operation would appear an act of negligence, dereliction of duty even.

The second reason is a little more personal. A couple of years ago I had the opportunity to speak of the disaster with one of the survivors and its what he told me that made up my mind. He said that after the SIEV 'X' had foundered and the refugees had been in the heaving water for several hours, a strange thing happened. He said the big grey frigate that had shadowed them for several days returned. The ship slowly sailed amongst the survivors and almost stopped, then she picked up speed and sailed away.

The first help the survivors

received was by Indonesian fishermen next morning, and by then the blood sacrifice had already been made.

And it worked, of course it worked. Word reached the dispossessed from the Middle East that approaching Australia by sea would lead to drowning, and the steady stream of refugee boats dried up. Howard looked like a man of steel, a decisive leader, especially after the refugees proved themselves sub human by throwing their babies overboard, and honest John consequently won another lying election.

And the cost for all this geopolitical success? Well, not that much really, just three hundred and fifty innocent lives lost at sea. Just that and the loss of our national soul, our very own Wounded Knee.

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