

Picture: DAVID PARRY/ROSS PARRY



Saved by the crier alarm...

By David Stewart

A TOWN crier evacuated a burning supermarket by ringing his bell and bellowing, "Oh Yay, Oh yay, fire, fire."

Russell Booth, 50, was dressed in full regalia for a Morris dance festival when he spotted flames at a busy Co-op store in Mirfield, West Yorks.

Managing director Russell, pictured, said: "I went round the staff area ringing my bell and shouting and then telling over 50 shoppers to get out."

"I suppose people initially saw me in the regalia and questioned it as a joke. But this wasn't just a small fire, this was a major incident with flames licking up to the roof."

Rutherglen Reformer

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21

CHILDREN

Panel plea for more volunteers

David Stewart

New members of the children's panel are needed in Rutherglen and surrounding areas, with a national campaign highlighting shortages of panel staff in South Lanarkshire.

The panel is vital in helping abused, neglected, and troubled children, who attend panel hearings in an attempt to rectify often significant family and criminal problems.

The appeal highlights a specific shortage of male volunteers, calling for eligible and interested

Vital role in helping the young

men to apply as soon as possible in an effort to provide a diverse panel service.

Rutherglen resident Susan Martin, who worked for the children's panel, lent her voice to the campaign for more volunteers, who she said are indispensable to her role.

She said: "Volunteers do not have to be middle class or even highly educated, as the perception sometimes is."

"They need to be sympathetic to the circumstances of the child and the family behind that child

and to make a common sense decision on what is the best way of supporting them."

"Volunteers who sit on the children's panel will receive training to carry out their work and will have the satisfaction of being able to make a difference in the lives of local children."

The call for more volunteers comes following reorganisation of the Children's Panel system. Scotland now has a national panel with a volunteer base numbering around 2500 - yet this simply is not enough to satisfy demand.

There has been no suggestion from the children's panel that the call for more volunteers is linked to any rise in the number of cases presented.

Moir Gray, children's panel area convener in South Lanarkshire, said: "The work of the children's panel is vital in providing support to vulnerable children and young people across South Lanarkshire."

"Whilst it can be a challenging role, it is undoubtedly a worthwhile one and I would encourage anyone in Rutherglen



Opportunity Susan Martin worked with the children's panel

interested to think about becoming a panel member and apply.

"We are going to be hosting an information evening at the council building in Hamilton on Friday, September 20, at 7pm for anyone who would like to find out more."

To find out more about becoming a panel member, visit

www.childrenspanelscotland.org, call 0844 848 3407, or text CHILD to 61611. The deadline for applications is Friday, September 27.

Applicants need to be 18 or over and no qualifications are needed as full training is given to help prepare panel members for the challenges and difficult decisions they will face.

BANKING

Bank to the future

David Stewart

A familiar name returned to banking in Rutherglen and Cambuslang this week.

For on Monday, the famous TSB signs returned to the branches on Rutherglen Main Street and Greenlees Road.

The South Lanarkshire area has eight branches, and this week officials from the banking and political fields were on hand to mark the occasion.

Rutherglen MSP James Kelly was on hand to cut the ribbon for the Royal Burgh branch.

The TSB has hailed this move as a "return to local banking," promising a banking model aimed at promoting economic growth in South Lanarkshire.

Following the opening of the Rutherglen branch, manager Paul Devine, who also oversees services at the Cambuslang branch, was delighted.

He said: "It's great to have TSB back on the high street after 18 years.

"With the return of TSB to Rutherglen Main Street and Greenlees Road in Cambuslang, my team and I are excited about bringing back local banking to the people and businesses in our community."

Mr Kelly commented: "I was delighted to join Paul Devine



Cut above the rest James Kelly MSP is helped by Oscar Parker (3), whose mum Liza is a customer, to officially return the TSB to Rutherglen

and the team at the Rutherglen TSB to help with the relaunch.

"I enjoyed the opportunity to chat with Anne Paterson who has worked at the local branch for 27 years, which is quite a remarkable achievement. The entire team at the Rutherglen branch do a great job and I wish them every

success for the future."

Paul Pester, TSB's chief executive, added that the bank, in its new guise: "bucks the trend in banking ... we look forward to bringing local banking back to South Lanarkshire and serving local communities in the area.

"And let's not forget where we

have come from.

"The TSB movement was originally created over 200 years ago when the Reverend Henry Duncan established the first Savings Bank in Ruthwell, Scotland. Its sole purpose then was to serve the local people in the community."

Fitness class based on TV dance show

David Stewart

A new fitness class based on the hit TV show Strictly Come Dancing will hit Cambuslang this month.

For Strictly will shimmy from our screens to the Valda Hunter Dance School.

Created by the stars of the hit TV show, and taking the nation by storm at community venues, Fitsteps is a fitness regime with a twist. Not to be out-done on the dance floor, teenagers and adults in South Lanarkshire are being welcomed by experienced teacher Tracey McCue to tap into their own fitness potential.

Burnside lass Tracey is no stranger to professional dancing, her dance school in Cambuslang is now teaching the pupils of its first inductees. Opening her first dance school at just 18, Tracey has had a glittering career, including a Royal Variety Performance and teaching advanced routines at the Dance School of Scotland.

Fitsteps is now a serious challenger to Zumba on the dance floor. Having had a family, Tracey sees the potential in dance to improve fitness, particularly now that many routines are famous thanks to the success of Strictly.

Tracey explained that dance has always been in her blood: "Growing up I always wanted to dance as a professional in theatre and television. I trained at the Royal Academy Ballet and the British Association Teachers of Dancing to a high standard.

"I went on to work on stage including a Royal Variety performance, pantomimes, and in theatres across Scotland. I have never had a job not dance related!"

Having met Strictly star Ian Waite during her own training sessions, Tracey is enthusiastic that Fitsteps is the perfect combination of fun and fitness.

"If you love to dance this is for you," says Tracey, "Fitsteps takes the best of ballroom and Latin and mixes it with the latest proven ways to get fit fast! It's sure to be the most fun and exciting fitness experience you've ever had!"

The fitness approach is delivered through dance, with emphasis is on helping people structure their dance towards fitness to achieve measurable results!

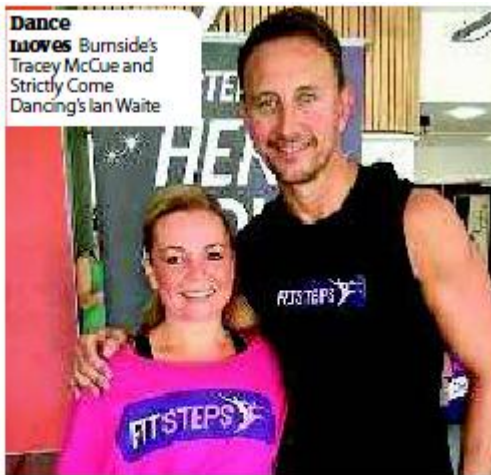
Having been on the UK Instructors' course, Tracey is keen to bring Fitsteps to Cambuslang: "Ian Waite was our trainer that day. He did a master class on how to teach Fitsteps.

"Ian Waite is an inspiration to all learning the course, and I hope I can deliver this to my classes in Cambuslang! After a warm up dances we will be doing the five, Cha Cha Cha, Quickstep, and Waltz. Once we know the dances, we can build up pace, adding more arms, direction and travel. There will be an easier option with less impact intensity and low arms."

Tracey will hold a free taster evening on Wednesday, September 25, from 7.15-8.00pm at Cambuslang Institute's large hall, with registration at 7pm.

Visit www.valdahunterschoolofdance.com for details.

Dance moves Burnside's Tracey McCue and Strictly Come Dancing's Ian Waite



Rutherglen Reformer

11.09.2013 85

All ready to go

Bully Wee aim to use international break to galvanise themselves

David Stewart

Clyde manager Jim Duffy remains confident that the team can excel this season despite a mixed start.

With two wins and two losses in the league so far, and with several key players injured, Duffy has been forced to bring in younger players in an effort to stabilise the team.

Jim said: "It's too early to

consider our losses so far as relevant to our future this year," he said.

The side have been hit by long-term injuries to key players, with forwards Kevin Watt and Stef McCluskey both ruled out of action for the immediate future.

The former Chelsea coach says that although Clyde played well when they lost 1-0 against Elgin in their last game, what matters is most putting the ball in the net.

And he hopes that

despite McCluskey and Watt's injuries, the side can get back to winning ways: "We were unlucky, despite some promising football, our performance despite key injuries was above par and we're looking forward to the next game."

Clyde next play high-flying East Stirlingshire this Saturday, and Jim hopes his side will use their home advantage at Broadwood Stadium.

The visitors this weekend will provide something of a challenge, as they have

proven to be a surprise package so far, leading the league rather than propping it up as they traditionally do.

Jim added: "The key to dealing with injuries is flexibility.

"These injuries provide younger players with the opportunity to play first-team football.

"Fringe players are being given a fair chance.

"We have youth and experienced combined and that will do us well in forthcoming games."



Revitalised Having had a break last weekend due to the international fixtures last weekend, Jim Duffy's men are raring to go against East Stirlingshire this Saturday

Furniture project offers real support

David Stewart

A project to help those in need is providing second-hand furniture to those moving into new flats from homeless and hostel living circumstances.

Castlemilk Community Church is delivering free furniture across Glasgow to anyone referred by a local agency or church.

The project uplifts donated furniture weekly and can also help with house clearances where a family member has gone into a nursing home or passed away.

Eileen Baxendale, who is overseeing the project, said: "The furniture project has been running for about a year now and it's going from strength-to-strength. We have about a dozen volunteers who help out, we rely on donations of furniture from members of the public and are always grateful for this help."

Eileen and her husband, the resident Pastor Keith, intend the furniture outreach programme to continue as long as there is supply and need for items.

"We are keen to help," continued Eileen, "and individuals are referred by a church or relevant organisation, which does include those dealing with asylum seekers."

"Only through some official capacity can we properly access the extent to



Assistance The Castlemilk Community Church furniture project is helping people throughout the area

which people are in need and respond appropriately."

The project is providing much needed relief to those throughout Glasgow who are moving into unfurnished accommodation across the city.

The church welcomes both donations of furniture, which can be uplifted for free, and encourages more volunteers to come forward.

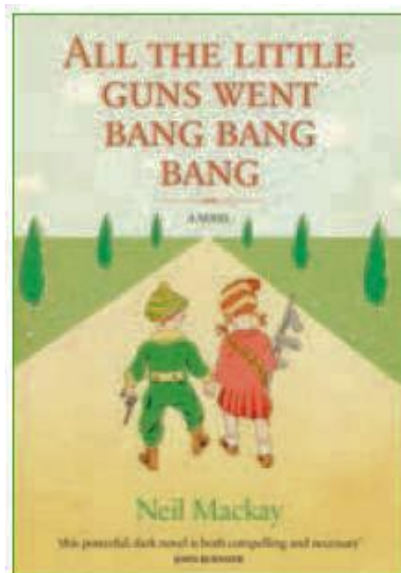
More information can be obtained by telephone at 0141 630 1938.

Keith added: "Our multi-ethnicity here at Castlemilk Community Church means

it's easy for everyone to relax and fit in. We have a warm and welcoming atmosphere which allows people to build friendships whilst exploring the Christian faith."

"This is a place where no matter what your background or age you will feel valued and included. Gone are the pews and hymn books, in there place you will find a contemporary cafe culture, with lively worship. Come and visit and enjoy a tea or coffee with us."

Services take place at 11am every Sunday, at the church at 150 Arden Craig Road, Castlemilk.



**ALL THE LITTLE GUNS WENT
BANG BANG BANG**
By Neil Mackay
Freight Books
£8.99

■ DAVID STEWART

NEIL Mackay's debut novel is the tale of two young friends' shocking descent into violence in the war-torn North of Ireland.

The novel's outward presentation, its light-hearted title and jovial cover art, isn't as misleading as it is intentional misdirection. Mackay has taken the traditional children's story and turned it on its head.

May-Belle and Pearse are two children who have in common a violent and morally bankrupt upbringing. Together they form an unwavering alliance in a destitute estate in Antrim.

Poverty at the time was rife—an often overlooked aspect of 'The Troubles' that

Mackay cleverly exposes in often sickening but accurate distinction.

Growing up amidst domestic violence and prostitution, our two protagonists find hope in each other's fantasies, often depending on each other to justify their own existence.

In a sense this is a love story showing just how far misery will chase company.

Through his two young protagonists, Mackay explores the argument of nature versus nurture. That children are a product of their environment is undoubtedly Neil Mackay's assertion and he pushes it with dark, compelling prose.

An attempted murder early on in the story slightly distorts proper escalation of suspense but it is testament to Mackay's skill that the reader simply must find out what happens next.

The crimes committed by the children strongly resemble the cases of Venables and Thompson, Mary Bell, and the Moors Murders.

Neil Mackay is an award-winning crime reporter and has long been interested in solving the mystery of why children kill. Having reported on the murder of James Bulger, one can't think of an author better placed in taking this subject into fiction.

As much as it accurately manifests the political climate of the time, 'The Troubles' form a backdrop to a more satisfying investigation into the origins of crime and why, specifically children, kill.

This is refreshingly not a political novel about sectarianism. Young Pearse does, however, somehow manage to give a high-brow speech on the political relevance of the Ulster flag. I didn't hear his similarly uneducated mother and father tell him that amongst beatings.

This is probably the most violent book I have ever read, and no mistake. No jolly romp here. Wings are pulled off insects, cars explode slicing people in half, and some poor lad gets brutally murdered with a Halford's tool-kit.

Mackay is ostensibly trying to show how absence of parental responsibility can lead to children having no moral code. Yes, both

May-Belle and Pearse grow up in horrific households, but attempts to use this to explain child killers ignores entirely the role of personal responsibility.

If this all sounds rather heavy for you, you'll find the text surprisingly readable. Mackay takes the innocence and humour of youth and tests these traits in anarchic circumstances, making for a very unique novel.

Hilarious 'nursery rhymes' and humorous mishaps punctuate the story and provide much-needed light relief. But these are short-lived and our two children are soon back on a mission to destroy any thing or person before them.

Readers who aren't interested in 'Molly Malone' style Irish tales might skip pages concerned with the children's ancestry which appear to be of little relevance to the story.

Don't look for redemption at the end, and one can say this without ruining the plot. In somewhat *Wuthering Heights* style, almost every character is corrupt and beyond help. Yet arguably this is a book that had to be written.

It was about time someone wrote about child killers in this manner and it goes down as a pioneering mix of accessible fiction and social commentary.

It's not a perfect debut but it is a strong indication that in this author we have an unprecedented voice that can take on controversial issues and produce tales that both shock and interest readers.

The literary-fiction community welcomes Neil Mackay to its ranks and says 'more please!'

All The Little Guns Went Bang, Bang, Bang is a bizarrely titled but positively unique novel. This story vividly evokes both the beauty of friendship and the depravities of moral decline.

■ David Stewart has written for national and local newspapers and has undertaken staff-desk positions.

Real Lives: Jim's always out to lend helping hand

David Stewart, EDINBURGH EVENING NEWS, 9 December 2013

Jim Sanderson has won the volunteer of the year award at an event hosted by Voluntary Sector Gateway, West Lothian.

Born in 1960 in Armadale, a village with a strong community spirit, Mr Sanderson attended Armadale Academy and enjoyed taking part in sports, particularly football and golf.

After leaving school in 1976, he helped out at Armadale Thistle FC, beginning as a ballboy but going on to fill a wide range of roles. He also worked at the local golf club, maintaining the greens and helping wherever he could. Work was seasonal, offering little stability, but he always landed roles in the community to see him through the year.

He went on to volunteer at the local children's club, becoming a valued member of staff and helping young people build their confidence and creativity.

Laura Stephen, development worker at Armadale Youth Space, praised Mr Sanderson's work and enthusiasm. She said: "Everyone that came to the children's club had great respect for Jim and valued his input and opinion very much. At one point the group was temporarily moved into portable cabins but he helped see that events continued to run smoothly. He is very committed indeed."

Altogether, Mr Sanderson has contributed more than 30 years of voluntary work in West Lothian.

He said: "I had supportive parents who instilled in me the importance of helping others. I was privileged to grow up in Armadale, a village whose people I have always found most kind. It's from those people that I learned the value of kindness."

He continues to work at a Friday evening drop-in centre aimed at arming young people with skills and self-esteem vital for entering further education and work. He has arranged numerous pool competitions and spent time encouraging youths to identify their strengths and use them wisely – as he did.

He said: "I enjoy meeting new people and helping with as many different projects as I can. The reward lies in seeing a difference in people's lives. I also enjoy chatting and meeting new friends, from young people to parents to local councillors."

Mr Sanderson is now helping the children of those he initially assisted when he started voluntary work. Their parents still remember him fondly and are keen to reminisce with him at the end of the local youth club's events. He is a trusted adviser in community centre staff training and has assisted in the development of modern counselling services.

He now works teaching young people to use computers, having been instrumental in founding the community centre's Youth Space initiative.

He said being named volunteer of the year was a surprise.

"I couldn't believe it when I won the award," he said. "I'm really thankful. I'll keep helping in the local community as long as I'm needed and able to do so."

Obituary – Andy Calder, Neuroscientist

David Stewart, EDINBURGH EVENING NEWS, 9 December 2013.

NB: This is the raw copy I obtained via my e-mail to the news-desk, it was subject to minor editing by Gareth Edwards (Newsdesk, EEN) but I cannot retrieve the print copy until I order a back issue.

Prominent Edinburgh neurologist, Andy Calder, has died aged 48. Calder was a respected authority in research into cognition and brain disease.

Born in Edinburgh in 1965, Andy Calder was the son of George and Kitty Calder, also of Edinburgh. He attended St Thomas of Aquin's High School, Tollcross, before studying psychology at St Andrew's University. There Calder was an eager athlete and an accomplished musician, playing a wide range of styles on the piano.

Calder travelled to Durham to embark on a Ph.D., where he and a fellow student formed a duet at the University Ball, their performances fondly remembered by academic contemporaries of the time.

Andy Calder was known as a man capable of serious academic work whilst maintaining a fun and light-hearted zest for life. His lighter side was no more evident than in his participation in pantomime, to which he contributed greatly, balancing the academic and the humorous.

Of note stand his visits to the Science of the Face exhibition in 1998 and the Scottish National Portrait Gallery. These were no mere pleasurable pursuits, since Calder was highly regarded in the field of facial recognition science and the study of emotions.

Research therein led him to prominence in the psychology community, seeing him bring innovative findings to this specialised field.

Andy Calder's studies concentrated on interpretation of emotion and more generally the fascinating sphere of Brain Science. He was known as an academic who was fastidious in research but equally talented in presenting his findings in an accessible manner.

Calder's pleasant nature was key in creating a favourable atmosphere in laboratories traditionally

known for serious, perhaps dry, academic work.

As his Cambridge friend and colleague at the CBSU (Cognition and Brain Science Unit), Professor Sophie Scott, remembers:

"People liked working with Andy. He was an outstanding scientist."

Andy was an expert in research on the importance of facial recognition, its connection to specific emotions, and in the interpretive perceptions of others.

His work in psychology was widely respected and meticulously undertaken, featuring painstaking research and insightful theory.

Andy was a pioneer in cognitive studies who remains cited in today and held in great esteem by the modern psychology community.

Calder's ground-breaking work in psychology recognised, it is however his humour and enthusiasm that will also stay in the minds of those who met him.

Remembered as a kind and generous man, Calder was a prime example of how the light-hearted and the serious can be combined without, as he might have termed it, a hint of cognitive dissonance.

Andy Calder died of a brain haemorrhage in October 2013. He did not marry and is instead survived by a legacy of friendship, humour, and an outstanding contribution to science.

EDINBURGH COUNCIL CHALLENGED OVER STRESSED STAFF

David Stewart, THE EDINBURGH REPORTER, 25 March 2014

A quarter of long-term staff absences at Edinburgh Council last year were caused by stress or mental health issues, new figures reveal.

The latest figures, obtained through Freedom of Information legislation, show that 707 Council workers were long-term absent last due to "stress, depression, mental health and fatigue syndromes."

Conservative MSP Gavin Brown urged the Council to review its procedures in aim of improving overall welfare of its staff.

Following such a review, Brown, MSP for Lothians, urges the council to take steps to combat occupational health issues: "The council should then consider carefully what action it can take to reduce stress in the workplace so that the absence rate decreases."

Edinburgh Council states there is no recorded link between absences due to stress and specific work-related issues but it is in the process of introducing a new stress management policy.

This new initiative should shortly come into effect, according to Cllr Alasdair Rankin, Finance & Resources Convener, said: "The Council is committed to promoting the health and wellbeing of its staff, and provides access to a range of support for staff both at work and to facilitate the return to work of those who are off sick.

"Our existing arrangements are being enhanced through a new stress management policy, which will be implemented in the coming months. This will adopt a pro-active approach to the management of work related stress and reflects industry best practice.

"A confidential information, advice and counselling service for staff has already been introduced. The 24 hour helpline is free to call from a landline, and is there for work-related or personal matters."

Lothians MSP Sarah Boyack, said the statistics represented a 'serious concern' for the health and well being of employees. "The extent of absence due to stress, mental health and fatigue underlines the importance of proper support services fore employees and I am writing to the Council to ask what steps they are taking to address the situation and will also raise the matter in in the Scottish Parliament."

John Stevenson of Unison, Edinburgh, blamed cuts in public services for the increase in stress-related absenteeism at Edinburgh City Council. Unison has been negotiating with the council on the new stress policy and urges the identification of stress factors before they cause ill health.

"Our members face the public daily and see first hand their frustrations about cuts to services. With the extra workloads and extra pressures, something has to give and that manifests itself in stress absences, said Stevenson.

While recent absence rates have remained relatively stable at Edinburgh City Council, last year 2850 employees were off sick for at least a fortnight, well beyond the council's stated 'trigger point' of six or more days.

Independent MSP Margo MacDonald said:-”Whether or not this figure accurately reflects the situation in the City of Edinburgh Council or indeed any other of the councils in east central Scotland I would imagine there is considerable strain on all departments. Employees across the board are being asked in some cases to fundamentally restructure their processes and organisational boundaries at the same time as absorbing the cuts coming from central government. That is a recipe to produce stress and strain in any big authority.”

DEFINING VICTORY: THE WAR ON TERROR

David Stewart.

With the end of the Cold War resulting in the United States remaining as the only viable military superpower on earth, one could perhaps say that what happened in New York on Sept. 11, 2001, was inevitable. An interventionist foreign policy had led the country to step into conflicts around the world, and however well-meaning its intentions, the country incurred the wrath of groups that saw the flexing of U.S. muscle as an attempt to impose its culture, beliefs and religion on other countries.

That power also brought with it a sense of hubris, a belief that American size and power made the country somehow invulnerable to attack. There was abundant belief that no one “in their right mind” would launch an attack that would make them the target of U.S. reprisal. The bombing of the USS Cole in Yemen was a big crack in that armour. While some arrests were made, and some very showy trials took place, the motivating parties behind the act slipped away into the shadows.

Americans like to believe that the “War on Terror” began either with the bombing of the Beirut Marine barracks, the attack on the Cole or with the WTC attack, but the fact is that terrorism is hardly a new concept. As long as there have been organized human governments, there have been those who have used violence to show their disagreement with those governments. Those people have been labeled terrorists unless they managed to overthrow the governments against which they fought, in which case they usually end up as either liberators or tyrants, depending on how things sort out.

The countries of Europe and Asia had dealt with terror threats on their own soil for years, from the Red Brigades and IRA to countless others. Their police and military were accustomed to responding to bomb threats, isolated attacks and the sort of hit-and-run warfare which guerrillas worldwide practice. The U.S., however, was a comparative babe in the woods. The Oklahoma City bombing, carried out by two disturbed men against a government building and resulting in dozens of deaths and casualties, was a home-grown affair and considered “domestic” terrorism (as if that somehow made it different or less menacing).

When the first plane hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center at just before 9 am., the first thought almost universally was that it was some horrible accident. Then the second plane hit, then the Pentagon was struck and the public learned about a fourth plane that had apparently been brought down by counterattacking passengers. Over the next day, as the towers collapsed, the body count was totaled and the culprits sought, the shock and fear turned to rage, and the U.S. military machine was fueled and given its marching orders.

Concomitant with the projection of military force was a change of heart on U.S. soil. A package of laws dubbed, in the best Orwellian fashion, The Patriot Act was rushed through both houses of the American Congress and signed into law by President George W. Bush, who had become something of a folk hero with his press conferences delivered atop piles of wreckage in New York and at the Pentagon.

Like golfers fleeing lightning on the links, American citizens fled into the first place they thought was safe, and the Patriot Act (and the powers behind it) promised to take all the steps necessary to ensure that nothing like 9/11 would ever happen again. What was left largely unsaid was that the Act contained in it provisions that allowed the government to intrude upon the lives and business of private citizens in ways that, had they been proposed in calmer, more rational times, would have been shouted down as fascist or worse.

Suddenly, the government was given the power to monitor private citizens' bank and email accounts, phone calls and personal friendships. In many cases, no warrant was needed. In others, the warrants were issued but remained sealed, giving those doing the enforcement the only access to the documents granting their powers. This is somewhat akin to allowing a bartender sole control over what constitutes a cocktail. You may order a scotch and soda and end up served a margarita and have no recourse.

Abroad, a coalition of international forces poured into Afghanistan in search of Osama bin Laden and al-Qaida, treading on soil the Soviets had learned was not easily subdued during their disastrous attempt at conquest in the 1980s. The weapons the Americans had sold to the mujahedin for use against the Soviets were suddenly turned against the NATO troops, and the mountains that had been the downfall of thousands of Red Army foot-soldiers began to claim more lives.

Bin Laden, almost captured in the caves of Tora Bora, on the Pakistan/Afghanistan border, slipped away among the friendly tribes in Pakistan, and soon President Bush declared “Mission Accomplished” in speech given on the deck of an aircraft carrier that may yet go down as the most over-reaching, poorly thought-out publicity gesture in history.

The mission, which was not actually clearly defined beyond killing bin Laden, was most certainly not “accomplished.” The U.S.-led coalition went next to Iraq, toppling Saddam Hussein in a quest to seize and destroy weapons of mass destruction that, as it turned out, had quite likely never existed in the first place. A new cadre of terrorist threats was spawned with the Iraq War, as again the West was seen as attempting to impose its will on a culture alien to it.

With shadowy funding sources and a seemingly endless supply of weapons provided by cash-strapped Russian suppliers, Chinese manufacturers operating blissfully free of world oversight and other arms makers working through third parties, al-Qaida and innumerable similar groups began pursuing their own agendas, from Somali pirates boarding cargo ships to hostage takers in Mexico and South America operating as much for profit as political motive.

Now, the War on Terror has become a catchall phrase, almost a slogan used to justify and explain any military action, covert or otherwise, against those who are seen to mean countries in the West harm. Whether it takes the form of intelligence agents infiltrating a gun club in the U.S. or French soldiers going on the offensive in Africa, the war is very much alive and kicking.

To again invoke Orwell: We have reached the state where Oceania is forever at war with Eastasia. Since terrorism has such a broad definition, it is left to those who fire the guns and drop the bombs to make the final call on what fits. As long as there are different cultures on earth, as long as there are different religious and political beliefs, there will be the friction that causes the fire that becomes defined as “terrorism” by those who lose lives.

Thus, it is a Sisyphean task. The boulder will never reach the top of the hill. The war will never be won. Every time a U.S.-controlled Predator drone launches a missile and takes out another al-Qaida bigwig, another rank and file member will step up to take his job. Now, al-Qaida has become the McDonald’s of terrorism, with “franchises” of fighters around Africa and Asia taking the name of the organization and receiving training, funding and arms from the parent organization.

In a way, it's not too different from the way of the world during the Cold War. Both the Soviets and Americans funded rebel groups in various countries, fighting each other without actually going toe-to-toe.

We have created a state of never-ending war. Unless the "one world government" that conspiracy theorists the world over fear and dread comes to pass, unless some evolution of the human psyche magically grants us the will to settle differences without the use of high explosives, it's going to be a very long night indeed.