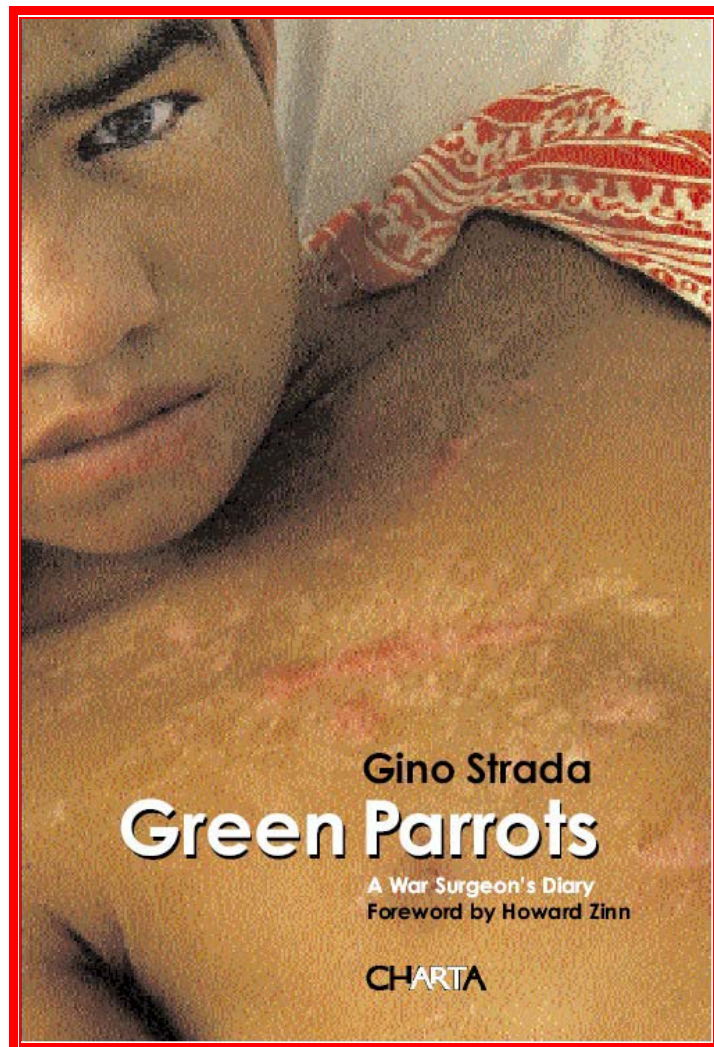




## **GREEN PARROTS**

**A War Surgeon's Diary**

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**War cannot be humanized.  
It can only be abolished**  
*Albert Einstein, 1932*

## About the book

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"Green parrots" are small winged cylinders about four inches long that flutter over lands devastated by war. The product of sick minds with no conscience, these devices are in fact antipersonnel mines that have been designed to look like toys in order to rob children of their future.

This book introduces us to the endless destruction that the "green parrots" have spread throughout the world, and in doing so raises an urgent question: Is it legitimate to accept war as an inevitable prospect for current and future generations?

Six years ago, you could find the volume *Pappagalli Verdi* in Italian bookshops. A book-diary by Gino Strada, who talks about his experience as a war surgeon during the most dramatic situations in the world.

After 35 editions in Italian with more than 400,000 copies sold and after its publication in French, German, Japanese and Korean, now *Pappagalli Verdi* has also been translated into English and will be distributed worldwide thanks to Charta, the publishing house that has decided to explore a new field in order to give Emergency and Gino Strada's testimony the chance to be known by an even more numerous audience.

Moreover, thanks to D.A.P., *Green Parrots* will be distributed throughout the United States from next spring on.

*Green Parrots*, unlike its first edition, includes a preface by Howard Zinn, one of the most important American historians, plus new texts by Gino Strada and, as an appendix, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

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**Gino Strada**  
**GREEN PARROTS, A**  
**WAR SURGEON'S DIARY**  
**Edizioni Charta**  
**[www.chartaartbooks.it](http://www.chartaartbooks.it)**  
**Distributed in USA by D.A.P.**



**CHARTA**

## **From the postface**

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"In 1932, Albert Einstein said "War cannot be humanized. It can only be abolished".

Is it possible to imagine a world without wars? Many people answer this question with a simple "there have always been wars". Yet this is not a true answer but a general ascertainment. I think today it is not only possible but also extremely necessary to plan a world without wars if we wish to avoid self-destruction. We must immediately understand which are the essential conditions to establish not only a policy of peace but also peace as the policy. For many, many years, we have been witnessing the consequences of human relationships based on abuse and exploitation, and on the use of force and violence. Taking into account the results, the tremendous amount of dead people, hunger, illness and poverty that humanity has already suffered, and considering the deep pain which we have caused ourselves, so weird, or utopic, we must look for a different way." [...]

**(Gino Strada)**

## **From the foreword**

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Here in the United States, the newspapers and television stations have been filled, ever since the awful events of September 11, 2001, with news and discussion of the "war on terrorism". First it was the military operation in Afghanistan, which was advertised as a hunt for Al Qaeda and Osama Bin Laden. Then it was the invasion of Iraq, called a campaign of "shock and awe" and given the name "Operation Enduring Freedom", as if you can "shock and awe" a country into freedom.

This country has thus initiated two wars in the Middle East, and generated a huge amount of discussion. But in all of that analysis and commentary, there has been a glaring, indeed unpardonable omission: a close examination of the human consequences of those actions.

While the bombardment of Afghanistan was going on, the New York Times every day carried pictures and short biographical profiles of the men and women - almost three thousand of them - who died in the September 11 attacks. In this way, there was a recognition that there were human beings behind the statistic. But there was no comparable recognition of the human beings in Afghanistan who died under the American bombardment, or who were wounded, mutilated in the attack by the most powerful military machine on earth against a small country already devastated by a ten-year war. [...]

**(Howard Zinn)**

## Chapter 1

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April 4. Here above Choman there is a cemetery, pointed stones planted in a field where poppies and tulips are allowed to grow, in a style even more sober than that of the Bostonians.

Even the cemetery is mined. Many told us that mining water springs and cemeteries has been common practice in these areas. These are places, you can easily guess, that people have to go to frequently. One each day when alive, the other everyday after death, and someone will eventually come to pay a visit.

In the cemetery, technicians have been at work defusing mines for a long time, but it is a painstaking job. For the people in the village, land mines and the many unexploded ordinance are a source of death, but with tragic irony, a source of subsistence as well. The Valmara 69, for instance, contains a light aluminum cylinder, which on the market can be valued at up to one dollar. So they team up in groups of four to defuse one mine, there, just above the cemetery. A brisk movement and *baang!* First aid is quick, the de-mining team is a few hundred yards away. They rush to the hospital, only 4 km away.

Jalal, thirteen years old, is dead on arrival. Asad and Mohammed, forty-two and thirty-six, undergo emergency surgery, the first on the chest, the second one on the bowel punctured in ten places by the Valmara fragments. Omar, sixteen, has his leg amputated, perhaps it was him who detonated the mine. He dies while he is waiting his turn to enter the surgical room. The seriously injured victims will make it, without complications. Bottom line: two dead for one dollar. Fifty cents for a human life, an unacceptable price, at least for those who persist in believing that life is invaluable.

April 5. Haider arrives at the Hospital. He comes from a mountain village in the Sidikhan valley, a three-hour drive from Choman. There is a small dispensary up there that we visited some weeks ago, a few nurses but no doctors. Haider, 14 years old, comes from there. We recognize the elastic bandages and the i.v. lines we took to Sidikhan. The right leg is wrapped to below the knee.

He was herding a flock of goats up on the mountain slopes. He saw the mine at the last moment, one second before stepping on it. We operate immediately, but for that leg there is nothing left to do.

The day after surgery we show him the mine "catalogue" that we have put together, like criminal identification photos in a police station. He recognizes a VS-50, one of the many small mines manufactured in Italy. "But I did not see that black plug in the middle," he says. It is the rubber plate, which detonates the mine when stepped on. He has been lucky. Probably that mine was upside down, so a good deal of the explosion was unleashed towards the ground, and the boy has "only" lost a foot.

April 12. Haider is doing rehabilitation therapy. We have assured him that in the future we will do our best to find him a prosthesis, so that he will be able to walk again. He will go back to his mountains to herd his goats. He has no other choice. Should this happen again let us hope he will step on the mine with his artificial limb.

April 14. 5:45 a.m. Dearest ones, I promised you a few lines of salute and greetings for the initiative undertaken today in Milan, to tell you one more time how important is the battle you are waging to put an end to the hideous slaughter caused by antipersonnel mines, and to alleviate the suffering of so many unfortunate ones. Now it has become difficult for me to do it, after what has happened here in the last hours.

At 5 p.m. on April 13 in the village of Mortka, near Darbandikhan, four children, three brothers and one of their cousins, were playing, less than one hundred yards from their home. Farhad Hamid, 5 years old. Bahjat Majed, 12 years old. Nashat Majed, 8. Rifat Majed, 6. They were chasing each other when one stumbled on an Italian mine, a Valmara 69. The mother of the three brothers, who was at home at the time of the explosion, lent them first aid. Mortka is an isolated little village and there is no means of transportation immediately available. The children arrive at the EMERGENCY hospital ten minutes before midnight.

For Nashat and Rifat there is nothing to do, they are already dead on arrival. Bahjat has multiple wounds to the chest and limbs, but there is no immediate danger. Farhad is in shock. We rush him to the surgical room. The metallic fragments of the Valmara have perforated the windpipe, a lung, the stomach and the bowel. We end the operation at 3 a.m., his condition critical. Farhad never woke up. He died one hour ago at 4:45 a.m.

That's all, tiredness and anger prevent me from finding words other than "Enough, enough, enough!" A hug to all.

Daily stories of life and death. I would have liked to keep this strange journal. But I could not go on, because writing becomes sterile, because each story is similar to the previous one, because it is easy to understand what we will have to write about tomorrow, because paragraphs become notes, codes, technical jargon.

In the end I made a log, date, name, age, sex, type of wounds, and I faxed it to Milan.

I came to know that this list has become a postcard: nothing like "Greetings from Kurdistan," but only a heartfelt prayer so that in the future, albeit still far away, there will be no more need to write postcards like this.

I came to know that a multitude of people has sent that postcard to the President of the Italian Republic to ask for a ban on the Italian production of antipersonnel mines.

## About the Author

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Gino Strada, aged 56, is married and has a daughter. He graduated in Milan and specialized in surgery. During the 80s he was mainly involved with surgery for heart and heart-lung transplants, spending long periods in the United States, at Stanford and Pittsburgh Universities, and working at Harefield Hospital (UK) and Groote Schuur Hospital in Capetown, South Africa.

In 1988 he decided to apply his surgical experience to helping and treating war victims. From 1989 to 1994 he worked with the Geneva-based International Red Cross in war zones: 1989 Quetta, Pakistan; 1990 Dese, Ethiopia and Khao-IDang, Thailand; 1991 Kabul, Afghanistan and Ayacucho, Peru; 1992 Kabul, Afghanistan; 1993 Balbala, Djibouti and Berbera, Somalia; 1994 Bosnia.

The experience accumulated from years of war surgery convinced Gino Strada of the need for a small, agile, highly specialized organization capable of intervening on behalf of civilian war victims and not hampered by the bureaucratic sluggishness of large organizations.

With very scanty resources, Gino Strada and a group of friends and colleagues founded Emergency in 1994.

In January 1999 Feltrinelli published the book *Pappagalli verdi, cronache di un chirurgo di guerra*, in which Gino Strada recounted his experiences. In August 1999 the book was awarded the International Viareggio Versilia Prize.

Over 410,000 copies of this book have been sold in 35 editions up to July 2004, and it has also been published in German, French, Japanese and Korean.

In September 2002 Feltrinelli published *Buskashi, viaggio dentro la guerra*, in which Gino Strada recounted the experience of war as seen by the only western witnesses of the capture of Kabul. Over 280,000 copies of this book have been sold in 11 editions up to July 2004, and it has also been published in German.

In US. Dr. Gino Strada's activity have been featured in:

- SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN: The horror of Land Mines, May 1996 Issue
- TIME MAGAZINE: within the Article on INNOVATORS-New Philanthropy- published in the Nov. 5, 2001 issue.
- SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN: Extreme Medicine in the January 2002 Issue
- INTERNATIONAL HERALD TRIBUNE: Caring for victims , war zone by war zone by Elisabetta Povoledo, August 13, 2004
- NBC NIGHTLY NEWS WPXI TV: Dec.2, 2001
- JUNG in the LAND of the MUJAHEDDIN: a film shown at the Lincoln Center in New York, Jan. 26 2002 as part of the Human Rights Watch Film Review Festival
- PBS-POINT OF VIEW: AFGHANISTAN Year 1380, also known as "Afghanistan Collateral Damages?"

## About Emergency

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Emergency was created in Italy in 1994 with the aim of providing medical and surgical assistance to war victims—particularly to victims of anti-personnel mines—by setting up and managing hospitals in the hardest hit areas.

Emergency now exists in Iraq, Afghanistan, Cambodia, Sierra Leone, Angola and Sudan, with surgical and rehabilitation centers, hospitals and health centers.

Emergency has also worked in Rwanda, Eritrea, Algeria, Palestine and Nicaragua.

In a ten-year period, over a million people have been treated and assisted by Emergency.

In parallel with its medical aid activities for war victims, Emergency promotes initiatives and campaigns for solidarity, consciousness-raising and communication of a culture of peace.

For years Emergency has been committed to persuading Italy to abandon the use of anti-personnel mines. On October 22, 1997, the Italian government approved a law which bans manufacture or sale of these devices.

But the 110 million mines still in place in 67 countries will continue to wound and mutilate and kill.

Emergency will receive the author's rights for this book.



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