



**Mustard Gas** by Nairobi Thompson was given at the Blue Plaque Commemoration at Alfriston Cemetery in Seaford, East Sussex, on 10 November 2014. The remembrance was for the 23 soldiers of the British West Indies Regiment who are buried there.

After the shells exploded  
Each man gave thanks to God  
Or lucky stars  
For surviving  
But within one day maybe two  
Sulphur mustard  
Brimstone diffused in gas form  
Hell in yellow shade  
Blistered skin  
And blinded eyes  
After burning red  
  
Bronchial tubes stripped of mucous  
membrane  
Left the valiant asphyxiated  
Gasping for breath  
And as death took deeper hold  
Some recalled honeysuckle heavy with  
bell apples  
Gardenia scent hanging in heated  
summer haze  
Those breaths taken for granted  
After running barefoot through Trelawny  
fields  
Hunting for hog berries  
And river rafting in Matha Brae River  
And childhood laughter as chests heaved  
With carefree liberties  
Dying daily over four maybe five weeks  
Cramping pain in the gut  
As innards drowned in fluid

Indignity squatted over latrines and holes  
in the ground  
Watching life ebb  
Vomiting dreams  
Until limbs failed  
Bleaching powder and petroleum jelly  
To cover the Job sores  
No dogs to lick those wounds  
Eyes flushed with saline only saw  
Death more certain  
  
Menthol soaked gauze over metal  
breathing masks  
Offered brief respite  
While infection marched unimpeded  
Through unmanned bronchial trenches  
  
Strapped to beds in the infirmary  
Kept in quarantine  
Cut off from comrades  
Separated from mission  
Stripped of position  
Overrun by malevolent spirits conjured  
in laboratories  
  
Then throats closed  
Leaving open vacant eyes  
Souls having returned home  
To run and play again  
Catching lizards as they swayed  
On the end of long grass stalks  
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