

PUBLIC RELEASE: 4-MAY-2004

Lest we forget: Unforgettable images speak for those fallen

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

 PRINT  E-MAIL

The contest for the French city of Verdun in World War I devoured better than one million soldiers. Perhaps the most grisly statistic footnoting that explosive clash is the knowledge that only about 290,000 relatively whole bodies were recovered from among the casualties of this unprecedented bloodshed. The other 710,000 or so were simply removed from the battlefield in pieces and parts.

Rightly touted as the "Great War" and naively as the war to end all wars, World War I ushered in the 20th century with a thunder clap of violence and death by innovation: Something new called the howitzer lobbed shells weighing more than a ton each that tore and chewed the earth in gargantuan chunks and denuded whole forests, leaving nothing but smoldering toothpicks for tree trunks. Equally lethal fragmentation shells harvested men.

Now, the ceaseless barrage and the mauling losses of that four-year war are quietly chronicled in haunting black-and-white images by Jane Alden Stevens, professor of art at the University of Cincinnati. Stevens, who journeyed to Great Britain, Germany and France over the span of nearly two years to document the war's lasting impact, is just out with her book, "Tears of Stone: World War I Remembered." The book's images - previously exhibited in

Media Contact

Mary Reilly
mary-bridget.reilly@uc.edu
513-556-1824

[@UofCincy](#)

<http://www.uc.edu/news> 

More on this News Release

Lest we forget: Unforgettable images speak for those fallen

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI

FUNDER

The English-Speaking Union, University of Cincinnati, Ohio Arts Council

KEYWORDS

HISTORY

galleries across the country - are accompanied by brief essays and viewers' reactions in English, German and French.

Apropos to the approach of Memorial Day on May 31, Stevens explains, "One of the things I wanted to do with this project was to explore the persistence of human memory. Do we actively remember the losses of wars from well before our time?...And how does the land itself remind us of our violent past? Do we still care?"

As her experiences and photographs attest, the stark answer to these questions is a simple and straightforward, "Yes."

Remembrance is powerful in these photographs that depict immense destruction still visible in upended, pock-marked fields; shrapnel-gouged trees; abandoned towns never rebuilt; memorials and sculptures that record unhealed grief; as well as mementos left by families who still make pilgrimages to World War I cemeteries and battlefields.

In crisscrossing Europe, Stevens found that she was not only chronicling a past but, indeed, a powerful present - how people live today because of a seemingly long-ago war. Millions of acres of forest are still surrounded by barbed wire, off limits because of unexploded shells. Both pasture and forest are marked off with skull-and-crossbone signs in three languages warning people, "Do not enter. Danger of death." Farmers in northeastern France - where hundreds of thousands, if not millions, of artillery explosions once coated the countryside - still unearth unexploded shells when turning over the soil for planting. Modern casualties of these shells are still listed as World War I deaths.

"In the Somme region one day, I was walking in fields of wheat, corn and sugar beets...I came to a crossing of wagon paths...I stood there wondering which way to go. Then, I saw that to the left was a pasture...the land there was in stark contrast to the smoothly graded fields all about. It had shell holes and mutated hills. It was immediately evident what had happened in this place," Stevens says.

She photographed these landscapes of death along with cemeteries, memorials and

ORIGINAL SOURCE

<http://www.uc.edu/news/NR.asp?id=1528>
➔

Breaking News

- 🕒 Antibody-based drug helps 'bridge' leukemia patients to curative treatment
UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS M. D. ANDERSON CANCER CENTER
- 🕒 Global study shows diabetes and heart disease can be a deadly combination
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT
- 🕒 Study: OneTouch Via enabled diabetes patients to report improved insulin dose compliance
TONIC LIFE COMMUNICATIONS USA
- 🕒 Eye study underscores the long-lasting benefits of controlling diabetes
NIH/NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE

[View all breaking news >](#)

Trending Science News

- 🕒 New atlas of light pollution
GFZ GEOFORSCHUNGSZENTRUM POTSDAM,
HELMHOLTZ CENTRE

sculptures relating to the war - all of which are still visited by Europeans. Stevens recalls meeting one couple coming into a British cemetery at dawn. They'd come to visit the grave of the man's great uncle on behalf of the dead soldier's daughter. "It really gave me a newfound respect for the sacrifices war imposes on both civilians and soldiers, and the incredibly long-term effects of war," says Stevens.

Perhaps the most moving memorial, for her, was the epitaph written by one father for his son: Sadly disfigured. 'Twas for the best. - Dad

The exhibits of her work and this book have been and are a means for American audiences to remember and revisit this war and the ones that followed. Both veterans and schoolchildren visited the "Tears of Stone" exhibits and wrote reflections on what they saw, reflections that are included in the book. "It gave me the sense," according to Stevens, "that the emotions that this war generates are universal to any war...."

The emotional wallop of Stevens' work is what has most impressed Chicagoan Ed Warner, who bid on and walked away with a copy of "Tears of Stone" at the Society for Photographic Education's national conference there in March. He explained that he'd first bid on the book because of its general topic - World War I - since he'd traveled along the Western Front. Later, it was the photographs themselves that gripped him.

He said, "They convey the scars, the emotions of loss, the deep wells of memory that World War I represents still for most Europeans. School kids in France go on established field trips to Verdun like our kids go to memorials in Washington D.C. We're almost to the 100-year point of when that war began, and we tend not to think about it much here, but it's alive for the Germans, French and British. Absolutely everyone lost a grandfather or an uncle or knew someone who was maimed...If you just sink your hand into the soil around Verdun, you'll come up with a handful of steel. You don't have to go deep at all. It's literally and figuratively just below the surface."

Warner added that Stevens may be the only American who has ever so photographed and memorialized World War I. "It's been done by Europeans, but it's rarely - no never - been a photographic topic for Americans," he added.

🔍 Eye study underscores the long-lasting benefits of controlling diabetes
NIH/NATIONAL EYE INSTITUTE

🔍 Implantable device cuts obstructive sleep apnea symptoms
UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

🔍 Laser ablation becomes increasingly viable treatment for prostate cancer
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA - LOS ANGELES HEALTH SCIENCES

[View all latest news >](#)

Stevens' own experience with her epic project - which she began in 1998 - has changed her own Memorial Day and Veterans Day customs. She reports, "Regardless of what I'm doing on those days, I stop and make a point to remember. I take my kids to Spring Grove Cemetery and talk to them about why these days are important....I hope they'll learn that history isn't tidy. It's living. It resonates down to the present, to a future that we can't predict."


Stevens will be signing her book, "Tears of Stone: World War I Remembered," at the UC Bookstore from 11:30 a.m.-1 p.m. Wednesday, May 26. Visitors can also view a handful of the "Tears of Stone" images (and order the book) by clicking on "Tears of Stone" at www.janealdenstevens.com


Stevens' work has been supported by grants from UC, the Ohio Arts Council and the English-Speaking Union.

###

Disclaimer: AAAS and EurekAlert! are not responsible for the accuracy of news releases posted to EurekAlert! by contributing institutions or for the use of any information through the EurekAlert system.

 PRINT  E-MAIL

 Breaking News RSS Feed

 All EurekAlert! RSS Feeds

@EurekAlertAAAS

facebook.com/EurekAlert

Help / FAQ

Disclaimer

Privacy Policy

Terms & Conditions

Contact EurekAlert!

 **EurekAlert!** |  AAAS

Copyright © 2016 by the American Association for the
Advancement of Science (AAAS)