



©Dallas Sells liberty? 5-1/2"x7" pinhole plate photograph, 2003

Our 20th year!

PINHOLE JOURNAL

Contemporary Images 13 Vol.20 #3



©Jane Alden Stevens Municipal War Memorial, Ypres, Belgium from *Tears of Stone*, 2-1/8"x 4-5/8" negative, pinhole photograph, 2001

Call for Pinhole Photography Entries

De Santos Gallery and L2 Gallery, Houston, Texas

De Santos Gallery and L2 Gallery are presenting a juried pinhole photography show for April, 2005. This show will highlight the diversity of pinhole photography throughout the world. The exhibit will offer many opportunities for pinhole photographers to display their work through a month long show to be hosted by De Santos Gallery.

•The show is open to any photographic artists, both national and international, working with pinhole and zone plate imagery. The show will contain 20 artists exhibiting 1 to 5 images selected by the jurors. The jurors of this show will be Luis A. De Santos, Gemma T. de Santos and Alan Schwab. The overall theme of the show will be open to all and any categories of pinhole photography, including zone plate imagery.

•**All entries must be postmarked and submitted by December 31, 2004.** Artists are requested to submit 35mm slides or images on CD for consideration. **NO PRINTS WILL BE ACCEPTED AT THIS TIME.**

•All entries must be clearly labeled with name, size and title of the work. There will be a limit of 25 slides per artist. Please include a self-addressed stamped envelope for return of slides or CD.

•All works accepted must be for sale and the gallery takes 50% commission. Shipping on accepted art work will be paid by the artist both ways.

•Works that are accepted must be matted/mounted professionally and not exceed a finished size of 22"x28". The details for presentation will be sent upon acceptance. De Santos Gallery encourages that artist adopt a standard mount/mat size such as 11x14, 14x18, or 16x20. All photographs should be mounted on white or natural board.

For additional information please contact:

Luis A. de Santos
De Santos Gallery
713.520.1200

Please send all submissions to:
Pinhole Submission/ De Santos Gallery
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Tears of Stone: World War I Remembered

Jane Alden Stevens

Introduction

While on a trip to France, I found myself one day standing in a small town square. My eye wandered to an obelisk in the center of the square. On it were written the years 1914–18, and under each year were listed the names of villagers who had fallen.

As I further studied this monument, I saw that many names were listed under 1914, even more for 1915 and '16, but far fewer for 1917, and hardly any for 1918. "Why the falloff in numbers?" I asked myself. And then it struck me. There were no more men or boys that this village could send to war. They had already gone.

The casualty figures from the First World War are appalling. Of the men mobilized by the three major Western Front powers, 76.3% of the French troops were either killed, injured, taken prisoner, or suffered the unknown fate of the missing. Germany lost 64.9% of its armed forces, and the British Empire 35.8%. In total, French casualties, including the dead, wounded, and missing, numbered more than 6,000,000 (17% of its total male population), Germany more than 7,000,000 (15.4%), and the British Empire just over 3,000,000 (12.5%). It is no wonder that the term "Lost Generation" was often used to refer to these soldiers. Whether the men were lost physically or psychologically, huge numbers of civilians were directly affected by their fate. The result was a world that was forever changed.

The unprecedented number of wartime casualties introduced the concept that when a country loses a huge portion of its population in war, it has a need to publicly acknowledge, honor, and defend the sacrifice. As a result, thousands of national, local, and private memorials were built in Western Front countries. These places were, and continue to be, sites of remembrance, along with the hundreds of military cemeteries that were built along the front itself. The vast majority of these are kept in immaculate condition. The military cemeteries all have books in which visitors can write down their observations about the experience of being there and their thoughts about the war.

After deciding to undertake this project, I initially focused on man-made sites such as monuments, cemeteries, and statuary, which are the most outwardly visible manifestations of grief and memorialization of the war. I also photographed mementos left behind by pilgrims to these places.

As the project progressed, however, I became increasingly aware of the role that the landscape itself plays as a repository of memory. Nothing is more telling than the continued existence of a "red zone" in France, vast tracts of land where entry is forbidden because of the sheer number of unexploded shells still lodged in the ground. It was not unusual to find bits of shrapnel beside artifacts such as horseshoes in farmers' fields; and seeing shells lying by the side of the road waiting for pickup by the French Demining Agency was a daily occurrence in certain regions.

In France and Belgium a number of shell-pocked landscapes remain as they were when the war ended. Some have become open-air memorial parks, while others are being used for everyday purposes, such as grazing horses. Many shell craters have been converted into farm ponds where geese and ducks now swim. A sense of lingering evil and desolation infuses the air of some of these places, as if the ground itself cannot shake off the burden of the lives lost upon it. The land on which the First World War was fought retains the memory of it still, and will for generations to come.

Whether it is a landscape formed by the violence of man and left to remind us of the cataclysm that produced it, or a physical structure built by man to honor those lost to that violence, the human impulse to memorialize lost loved ones is profound. The photographs in this book are the result of the journey I began that day in the square and act as both a reminder of the ongoing cost of historical events and a mirror to the human heart.

Defining Experiences

When working on any creative project, an artist invariably has experiences that become defining moments. Sometimes these are a result of serendipity—simply being in the right place at the right time. Other times they are a result of having carefully observed the subject and its environment for a period of time. The following experiences are among the most significant I had while shooting *Tears of Stone*.

Nine villages in the hills above Verdun, France, suffered complete destruction during a ten-month battle in 1916. One of them, the village of Fleury-devant-Douaumont, had more than 400 inhabitants and was the last impediment blocking the German advance toward the city of Verdun. It changed hands more than 16 times over the course of a few weeks at the height of the conflict. Nothing remained.

I drove up to the site and parked the car. Set back from the road and running parallel to it was a tall barbed-wire fence bearing warning signs due to the unexploded shells still in the ground beyond it. I realized that this was part of the cordon rouge, or "red zone," the tracts of land in France that have yet to be fully demined. On the other side of the road, the terrain looked like a bizarre moonscape. There was no even ground anywhere, except for some paths that had been carved out between the hillocks. I followed one of these paths, which follow the course of the former village streets, down a hill, then turned left onto another. Three-foot-high pedestals with trilingual signs appeared, marking the locations where the baker, farmer, butcher, road repairer, and other village artisans and merchants used to live. A few piles of moss-covered brick rubble and the pedestals were the only evidence that the village had ever existed in this distorted landscape.

Although the land of the village proper was successfully demined, the chemicals from the shells had so devastated the soil that Fleury, along with eight other villages nearby, was not allowed to be rebuilt. Any crops grown there would have been unfit for human consumption. Therefore, all of these villages' former inhabitants were permanently displaced, never to return home. Seeing the water-filled shell hole into which the contaminated village spring of Fleury flows filled me with sorrow. Although the cause of the water's toxicity lies more than 85 years in the past, it is yet another reminder of the long-term impact the war had on the land, and on the people who had lived there.

Of the 3,153 men of the South African Brigade who fought in the 1916 Battle of Delville Wood in France, 75% became casualties. The forest itself was obliterated, with only a single hornbeam surviving. The woods have since been replanted, and a large memorial and museum have been built on site to honor the South African efforts in both world wars. Behind the museum and on either side of it are overgrown trenches from the battle that visitors can wander through.

To the left of the museum is the hornbeam, standing alone from the other trees that have grown up in the battlefield since the war. A nearby sign tells its story. The tree is the only place in the park where visitors leave artifacts, perhaps because it is the only living link to the men who died there. Most of the mementos are small crosses with red poppies in the center, left



©Jane Alden Stevens *Le Wettstein, French Military Cemetery, France* from *Tears of Stone*, 2-1/8" x 4-5/8" negative, pinhole photograph, 2001



©Jane Alden Stevens *Memento*, Vermandovillers German Military Cemetery, France from *Tears of Stone*, 2-1/8" x 4-5/8" negative, pinhole photograph, 2001

behind by citizens of the British Commonwealth, and with short messages scrawled on them. The crosses have been left either at the base of the tree or in the fissures of its trunk where it has healed around its wounds. The bark has been worn smooth in spots where many hands have touched it over the years. It is clear how sacred the tree is and how honored it is for its resiliency. Its continued existence serves as a connection across the years to those who died there.

On the day I visited, it was very cloudy and cold. After hours of waiting in vain for the sun to come out, I decided to go ahead and photograph the tree anyway. No sooner had I put the camera into position, then a soft shaft of late-afternoon sunlight broke through the cloud cover, suddenly illuminating both the tree and the ground around it. I caught my breath, so powerful had the tree's presence become when bathed in light. I snapped the shutter as the sun disappeared, just as swiftly as it had arrived.

It had poured all morning, but the rain had just stopped when I arrived at the Chatham Naval Memorial. The sky was still deeply overcast and threatening, and the wind was blowing fiercely.

The site of the memorial is very imposing. It sits atop a high bluff overlooking Chatham, England, with a sheer cliff in front of it, empty moors to the east and south, and a small road leading up to it on a ridge from the north. The memorial itself is graceful and beautiful, with a tall obelisk rising from its center. Below the column are bronze panels containing the names of World War I naval casualties, and it is surrounded by a circular wall carrying the names of those lost at sea during World War II.

I wandered around the memorial for a while, the whole time hearing snatches of music that would come and go with each gust. In walking around to the front of the obelisk, I discovered a wreath that had blown over lying at its base. I propped it back up as a gesture of respect and walked down toward the lip of the cliff to a good vantage point. When I turned around to photograph, I saw that the water that had apparently collected in the wreath from the overnight rain had begun to drain out of it and flow toward me.

It was a totally unexpected sight, almost shocking in how much the water looked like blood in all but color. The flute music

seemed louder now and more constant despite the strong wind. I stood there frozen for a moment, too many thoughts swirling around in my head to easily sort out. In the few minutes it took me to photograph the scene, the wind had dried the water. It was almost as if it had never existed, although the musical notes sporadically kept drifting in.

As I left, I immediately saw that the source of the music: a young woman (probably 17 or 18) who was slowly walking through the moors that abut the memorial. It appeared as though she was walking home from school—she wore a small backpack, and her head was slightly bent over a recorder. I recognized the song as a Celtic lament, the notes of which drifted in and out at the will of the wind. The coalescence of the wreath, the water, and the music was unforgettable, a perfect summation of sorrow, pain, and remembrance.

While in the Somme region of France, I decided one day to take a short cut via a dirt road that led up a very large hill through some farmers' fields. After reaching the top, I rechecked my



©Jane Alden Stevens Romagne-Sous-Montfaucon German Military Cemetery, France from *Tears of Stone*, 2-1/8" x 4-5/8" negative, pinhole photograph, 2001

map and discovered that two small British military cemeteries were located nearby within hiking distance of each other. On a whim, I stopped and walked to the nearest one, Redan Ridge No. 3. Other than the cemeteries and a village in the distance, nothing but fields was in view. The silence was profound.

I approached the cemetery and entered. It was quite small, with just over 50 graves. After wandering around a bit and not finding much to photograph, I left, intending to walk to the next one. But something tugged at me about this place. I felt I was leaving prematurely but couldn't explain why. I turned around and went back in, but still nothing spoke to me. Frustrated and dissatisfied, I left the cemetery once again, this time taking a slightly different path. Almost at once, my eye was caught by something on the ground. The reason I had been called there became instantly clear.

A mature fairy ring, comprised of mushrooms growing out of the low grass surrounding the cemetery, lay in front of me. It is unusual to see a fairy ring, much less one at its peak, for they appear only under certain climatic conditions. A day or two later this ring would have vanished, mushrooms being somewhat ephemeral, and I never would have known it had been there.

Ancient European folklore ascribed magical powers to these rings, and it did not seem accidental to find one in this location. It appeared to be guarding the cemetery, which is located in what used to be the German front-line trenches in this part of the Somme region. I never made it to my original destination that afternoon, preferring to spend time in a place in which the works of nature were seamlessly woven together with the works of humankind.

A high stone wall surrounds the Langemarck German Cemetery, near the Belgian city of Ypres. Entry is gained by passing through a stone blockhouse, which is extremely dim inside, even on a sunny day. Its oak-paneled walls have been carved with the names of the missing. Light streams in from the open door opposite the entryway, and the opening serves as a frame for four shadowy figures standing sentinel on the opposite side of the cemetery. (I later discovered these were statues of grieving soldiers.) After passing through the doorway, I encountered a mass grave containing the remains of 25,000 unidentified German soldiers immediately in front me. It was surrounded by bronze panels containing more names of the missing and was planted over with low shrubs. Lying at the front of the grave was a letter that had been laminated to protect it from the weather, with a single red rose fastened to

it. The letter, written in German, had 24 signatures on it and read as follows:

We, the 10th grade class from the Friesenschule in Leer, East Friesland, Germany, have come to this sad place to better understand the terrible event of the 1914-1918 war.

It is difficult for our generation to understand from books and texts the unimaginable suffering and despair of the millions of soldiers who fell in the war. Therefore... we are visiting certain important sites of the First World War, including this one.

We are visiting this site of memory in the hope that:

- mankind will never again take part in such a terrible event, which completely ignored every aspect of human dignity over the course of 4 years;

- the memory of this senseless war with its tears, desperation, and the suffering of those left behind will never be extinguished.

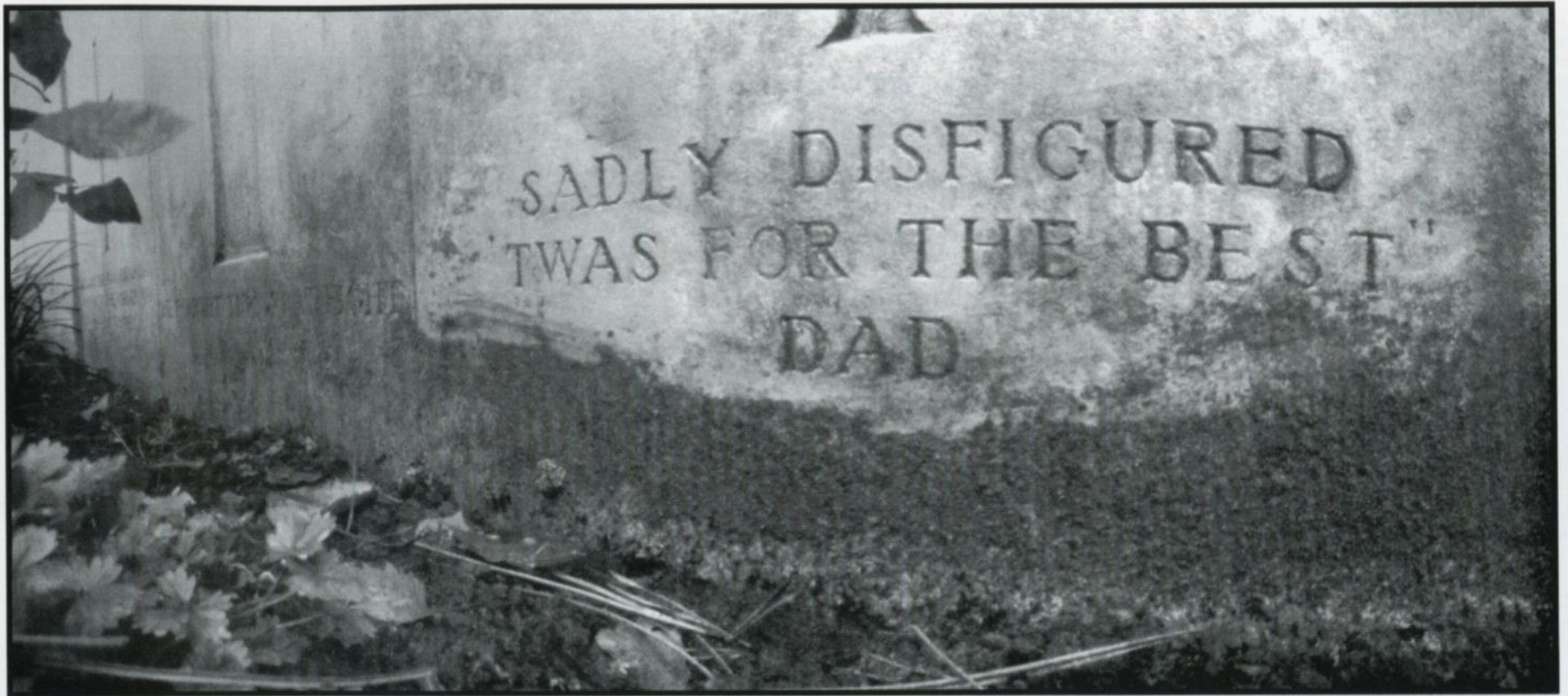


©Jane Alden Stevens Trench Hill 62, Ypres, Belgium from *Tears of Stone*, 2-1/8"x 4-5/8" negative, pinhole photograph, 2001

*With this in mind, we appeal to all people in all
countries to learn to live together in peace,
and therefore*

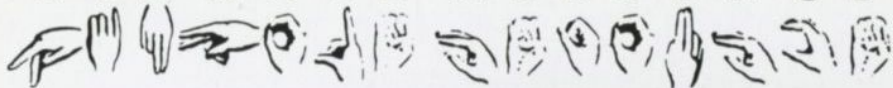
NO MORE WAR!

I was deeply impressed that a class of teenagers had traveled so far from home in order to learn more about an event that lay so far in the past. I was equally impressed with the care and passion they had obviously invested in the writing of this letter. But given the nature of human beings as has been proven over millennia, it is not likely that their wish for an end to all war will find fulfillment. I gazed down at the grave before me, feeling more powerfully than ever the importance of remembrance and being grateful that I was there that day.



©Jane Alden Stevens Epitaph, Brookwood Military Cemetery (British), England from series *Tears of Stone*, 2-1/8" x 4-5/8" negative, pinhole photograph, 2001

PINHOLE RESOURCE



©Jane Alden Stevens St.-Charles-de -Potyze French Military Cemetery, Belgium from *Tears of Stone*, 2-1/8" x 4-5/8" negative, pinhole photograph, 2003

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