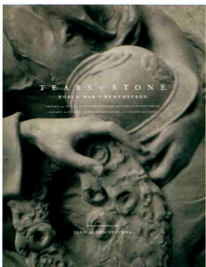


Review by Charles Mann,  
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**Tears of Stone: World War I Remembered.** By Jane Alden Stevens (Cincinnati: Jane Alden Stevens, 2004), \$35.00 sb.

A resonant collection of black and white images of Europe's World War I cemeteries, Jane Alden Stevens's photographs strike a deep note of empathy for their subject, and all the more so because their true objective is to reach beyond the literal. To my mind, these photographs aren't mere documentation, but an attempt to visually enter the emotional realm of memory and sensation. What I find most intriguing is how much imagination Stevens's images evoke in me: the rattle and smell of men in sand-bagged trenches, the yellow-white blister of artillery bursts, maggots, lice, wet wool leggings, lung-wrenching clouds of mustard gas, flares and barbed wire, dismembering explosions, the fleeting disbelief of the

wounded.... Arguably, World War I was the worst self-inflicted injury 20th century man has perpetrated on himself. The human cost is obvious. So obvious, in fact, that I have to wonder at our senseless ability to repeat ourselves.

I've always been annoyed at how easily one generation treats the history of the generation before, but annoyance bubbles to a close cousin of anger when anything as awful as the carnage of World War I is forgotten and deemed emotionally unimportant in the world's collective memory. Three million British were either killed, maimed, or went missing. Six million Frenchmen, and over seven million Germans suffered the same fate. The U.S. Army and Marines, latecomers, suffered less, but in proportion to their number. How can such a catastrophic event become just a flickering, brown on brown abstraction glimpsed as an old newsreel on the History Channel (most likely an episode on the development of military firepower or the inefficiency of early tanks)? What happens when most of the world can no longer feel the depth of horror that was the First World War? The important word, of course, being *feel*. In truth, very little happens. Initially, enough people with direct knowledge and experience of an event, or a series of events, will keep felt remembrance alive, but time has a way of blunting and truncating that memory. What at first flash is visceral becomes abstract and remote with time, thereby proving the old adage: The only way to have an experience is to experience it.

I've heard it said that if all of those killed at Verdun (the site of several terrific battles) were to stand up there wouldn't be room for them. Hyperbole, most likely, but closer to the truth than not. What I do take as truth is that each photographed stone — singular, or one in a sea of many — represents a once living, thinking, desire-filled human being. Jane Alden Stevens knows a spiritual secret and wants to share it: cemeteries are where the dead, as silent as they are, can still be heard.

C.M.