Daniel Alexander

REF 2020

Portfolio

When War Is Over

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300 Word Statement

When War Is Over is a practice based research project that investigates the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's ongoing commemoration of the 1.7 million Commonwealth War dead from WWI and WWII.

This research by D. Alexander builds on the findings of the research project Designing the Commonwealth War Graves by D. Alexander and A. Haslam, which was submitted to the REF 2014.

When War is Over, was rigorous in its extensive archival research, creation of several new bodies of photographic work and the design of a book and exhibition.

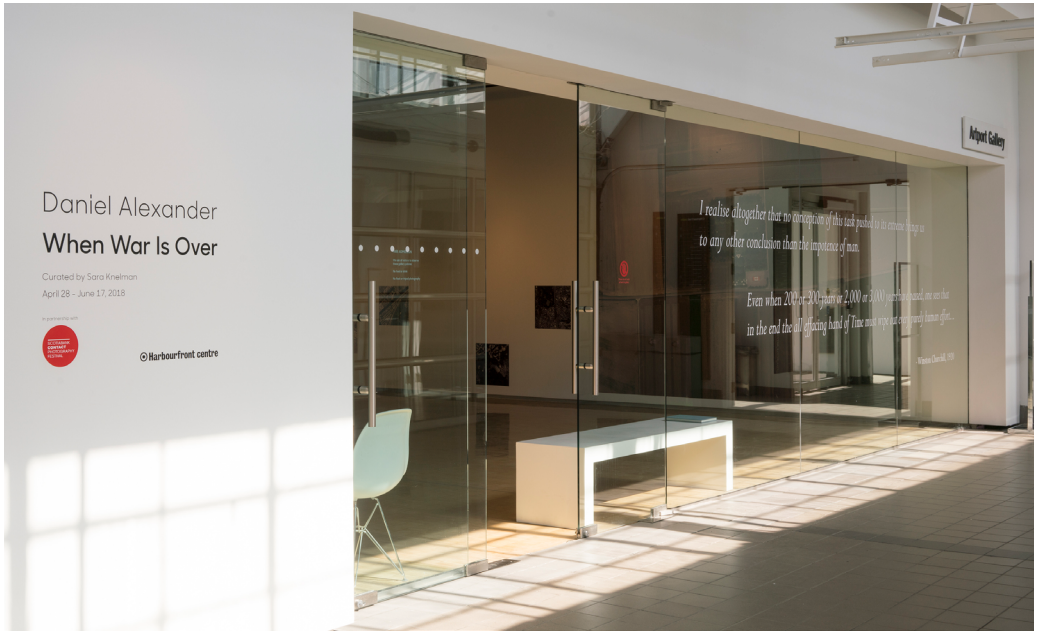
The research developed an original visual methodology for the presentation and contextualisation of archival material, new photographic work and aerial satellite images, to investigate historical and contemporary notions of permanence, process and scale, in commemorative practices.

Familiar motifs of poppy fields and sunsets over cemeteries, commonly found in books, postcards and tourist merchandise are avoided, and a rigorous, less sentimental methodology was developed to convey the scale of commemoration, make reference to the use of aerial surveillance and bombing during the wars, and present a critical perspective on the tensions involved in commemorating the individual through the uniform treatment of the many.

A key visual method used is the zoom: in both book and exhibition the viewer is moved between the micro and the macro, at one moment reading a single epitaph on a headstone, and the next hovering above a cemetery containing thousands of headstones, or moving from an individual casualty's personal documents, to the ledgers containing 1.7 million names of the dead.

Published as a book in 2016 and exhibited at Contact Photography Festival in 2018, the work is significant in its use of contemporary photographic and design practices to offer a critical perspective on this ongoing commemoration, during the 100 year anniversary of the first world war.

The Outputs - Please review this portfolio in combination with the physical copy of the book



When War Is Over
First Published in the United Kingdom in 2016
Dewi Lewis Publishing
8 Btoomfield Road, Heaton Moor
Stockport SK4 4ND, England

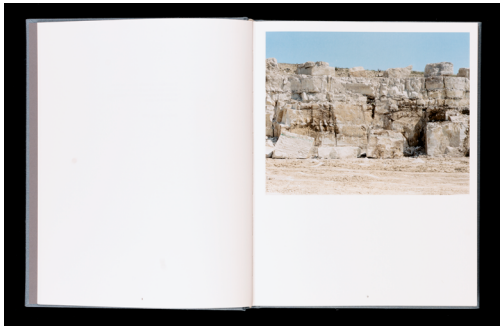
ISBN: 978-1-907893-83-4

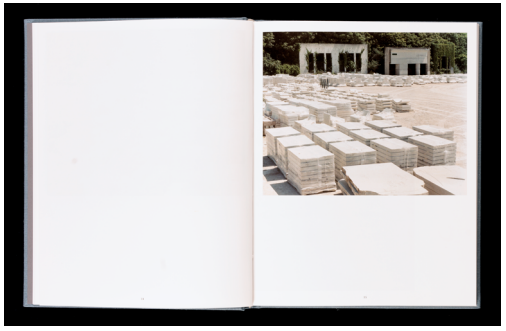
Design: Daniel Alexander
Research: Daniel Alexander and Andrew Haslam
Print: EBS Verona

When War Is Over
Primary Exhibition
Scotiabank Contact Photography Festival 2018
Artport Gallery
Harbourfront Centre
Toronto
Canada

Curated by Sara Knelman
Photographs and Texts: Daniel Alexander
Exhibition Design: Daniel Alexander

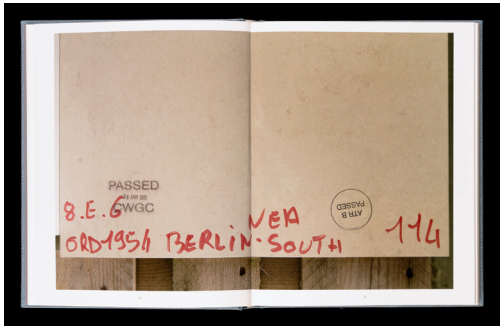
The ongoing maintance of the Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries and Memorials





A key outcome of the research was the idea of the Commonwealth War Graves cemeteries as 'living memorials' with their own lifespan. Images I had photographed during the previous phase of this research were paired with new images of the re-engraving of worn headstones, and the destruction of the old headstones. The essay I wrote for the book argues that the stones have their own life cycle, many years longer than the individuals they commemorate. This is contrary to our understanding of memorials as permenant objects.

The ongoing maintance of the Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries and Memorials



The Construction of the Fromelles, Pheasant Wood, Military Cemetery 2009

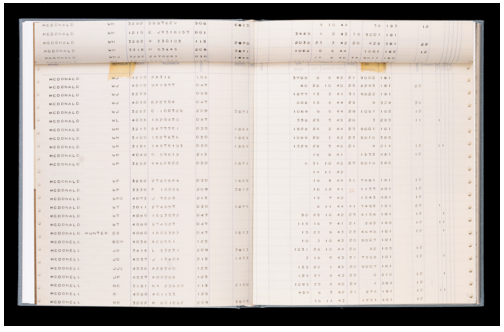
Here work created during the previous research project Designing The Commonwealth War Graves, is integrated into the book and exhibition.

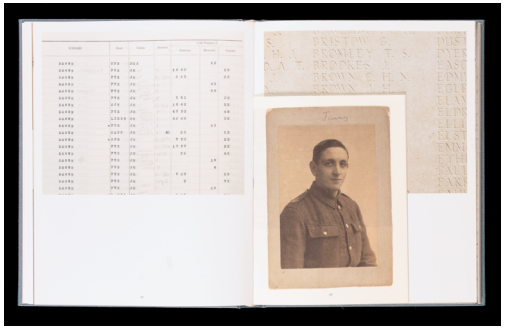
Ledgers listing the names of the 1.7 million WWI and WWII Commonwealth War Dead

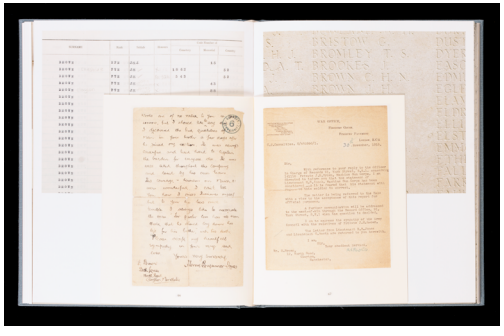
'Imagine them moving in one long continuous column, four abreast; as the head of that column reaches the Cenotaph the last four men would be at Durham. In Canada that column would stretch across the land from Quebec to Ottowa; in Australia from Melbourne to Canberra; in South Africa from Bloemfontein to Pretoria; in New Zealand from Christchurch to Wellington; in Newfoundland from coast to coast of the Island, and in India from Lahore to Delhi. It would take these million men eighty-four hours, or three and a half days, to march past the Cenotaph in London.'

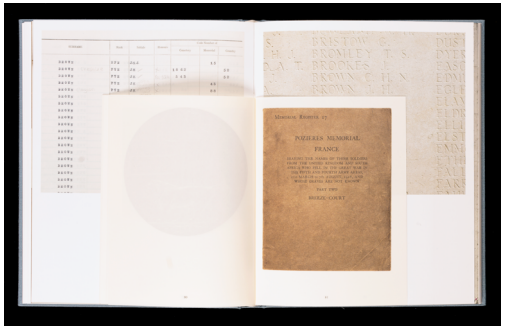
Armistice Day Broadcast, quoted by Fabian Ware, 1937

J H Brown archive documents

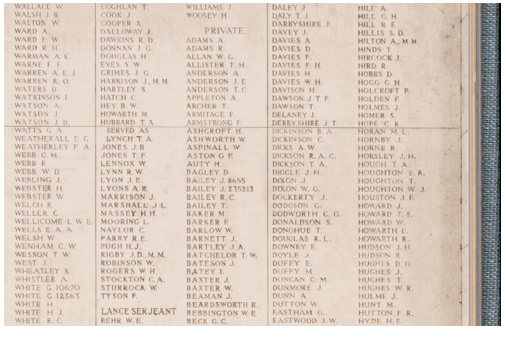






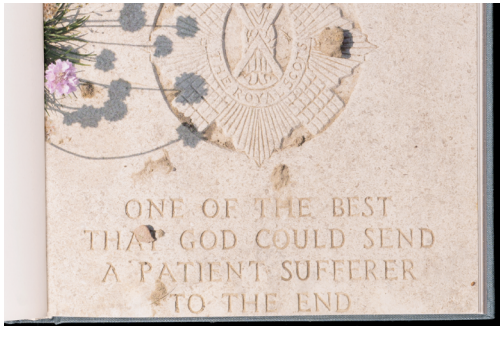


Memorials



Memorials had been photographed using large format cameras with the intention of creating images where the names on the memorials could be read in reproduction. In the book we zoom out from a close up of a memorial panel, to a whole wall of the Menin Gate memorial - in the exhibition this wall is reproduced at the height of the gallery with every name readable.

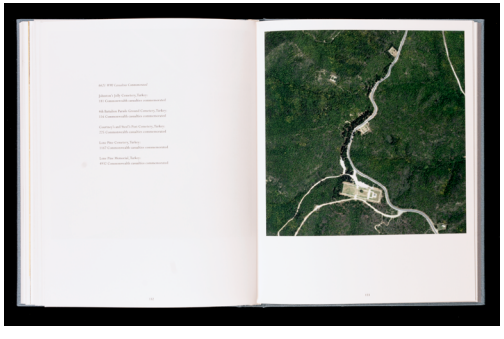
Epitaphs



The epitaphs are presented in the book as full bleed pages. This focuses the viewer on the text written on the headstone, and the headstone badge. Connections here are made between the rephotographed archive documents of the badge drawings and typographic design work, connecting the design process with the final outcomes.

In the exhibition the epitaphs were presented on a low plinth, in this way referencing the original arrangement in the cemetery where they were photographed, and emphasising their use as grave markers. The vertical nature of the photographs makes these close up aerial images, and in both book and exhibition they are presented alongside the aerial images of the cemeteries, providing one of the most direct uses of the 'zoom' to move a viewed from the individual to the mass.

Aerial satellite images of Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries around the world.



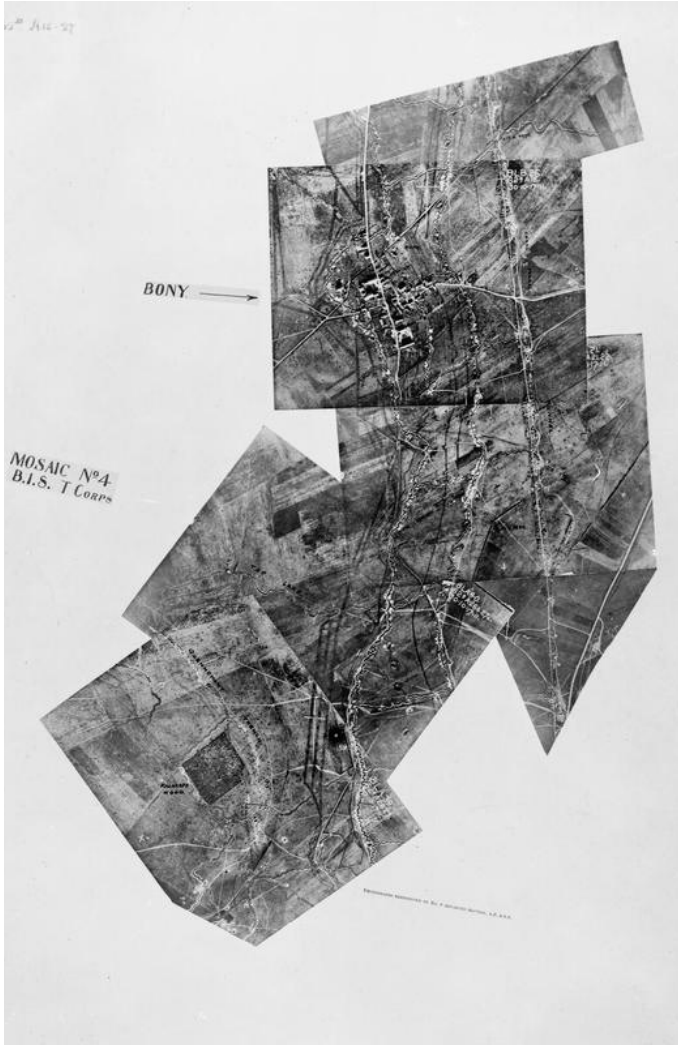
The cemeteries are pictured using Satellite imagery that I sourced from Google earth, then stitched together to create high resolution large format photographic images. This visual methodology was developed and chosen as it presents the cemeteries in a diagrammatic way, in which their scale and the mark they leave on the land is the focus, rather than the more familiar and sentimental views from within the cemeteries. The headstones are viewed as single white markings, so each picture depicts all of the burials in that cemetery. The aerial view also recalls the use of aerial surveillance and bombing in both WWI and WWII, so the means of representation is directly linked to the manner in which the war was fought. These images present the macro view of the scale of death and the commemoration. Positioned alongside this series are the epitaphs which show the micro view of individual loss.

For the exhibition in Toronto a new set of aerial satellite images were created based on research to identify cemeteries around the world where Canadian soldiers were buried. These images were presented on the wall in a scattered formation based on their global geographic position. This was an extension to the aerial work in the book and focused on a different strand of research that had investigated the displacement of bodies in the world wars, through the enforced non-repatriation policy of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.

Archival research to inform visual methodology for representing the cemeteries.

Research at the Imperial War Museum focused on the development of aerial photography and bombing during the two world wars, and research in the Commonwealth War Graves archive uncovered images of cemeteries that had been photographed from the air.

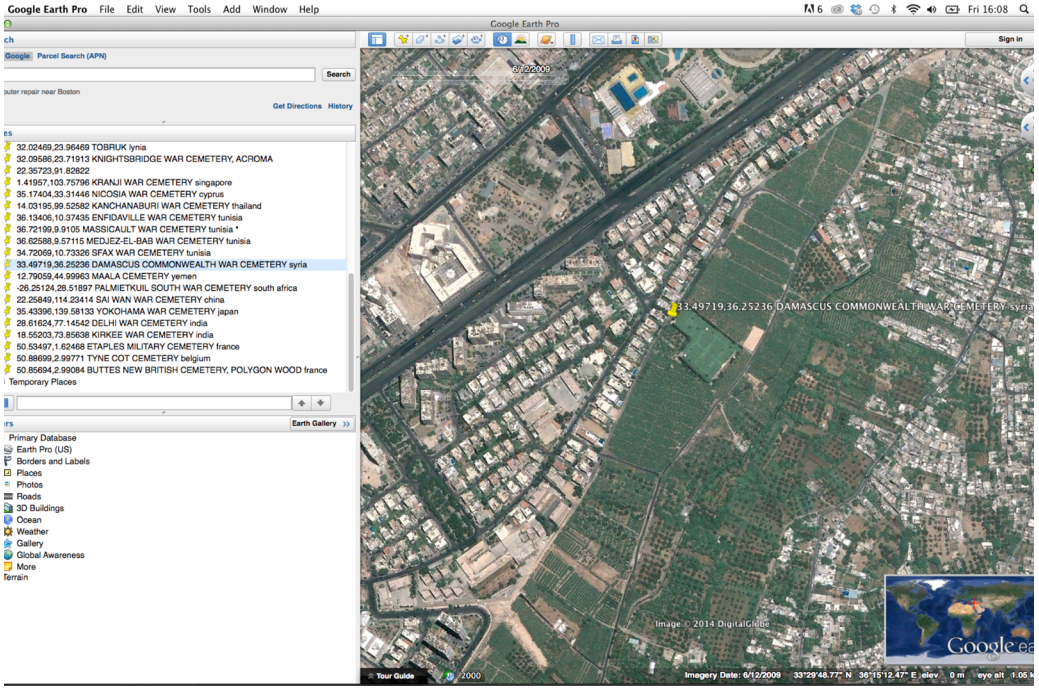
Archival research to inform visual methodology for representing the cemeteries.

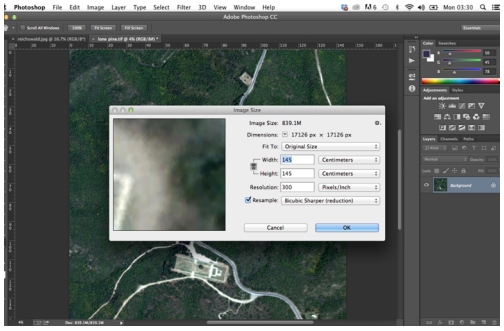


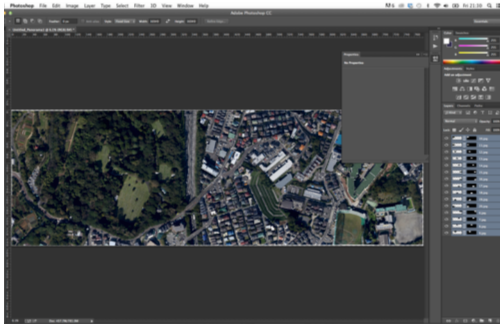
LEFT: archive image of aerial reconnaissance imagery, where multiple images taken from plane flyovers were stitched together to create an overview of a larger area of land.

ABOVE and RIGHT: In the CWGC archive I found these aerial images of Tyne Cot cemetery, taken from the air by cartographic services. My early experimentation with a method for representing the cemeteries from the air involved rephotographing and stitching together these cartographic photographs, to draw a direct connection to the aerial reconnaissance imagery developed in WWI and WWII. I was also interested in the more diagrammatic nature of the image, and the way it showed both the scale of the cemetery in relation to the landscape, and the number of headstone visible. There were not enough of these images in the archive to enable me to represent a wide range of cemeteries so I started experimenting with satellite imagery instead.

Memorials







I researched CWGC cemeteries internationally, searching for locations that would best demonstrate the global spread of the conflicts and of these memorial sites.

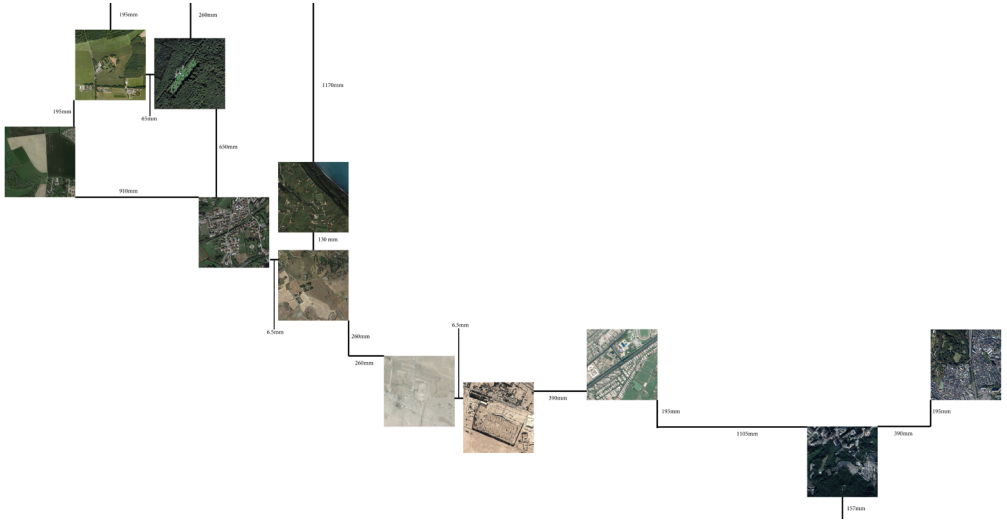
Once identified I exported detailed close-ups of the cemeteries and surrounding landscape, from a constant height. These details were then stitched together to create large scale images of 13 cemeteries (for the book) and an additional 8 (for the exhibition). Each cemetery was titled with the location and total number of casualties commemorated.

Aerial satellite images of Commonwealth War Grave Cemeteries around the world.

2,048 Commemorated

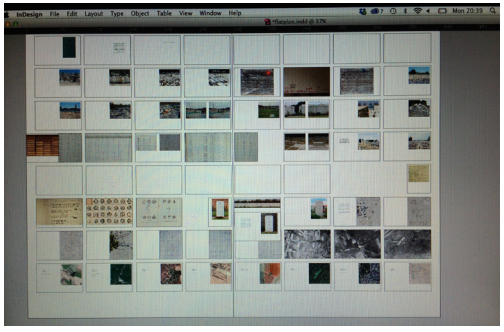
Beny-sur-Mer Canadian War Cemetery, France:
2,025 WWII Canadian casualties identified from a total of
2,048 Commonwealth casualties commemorated

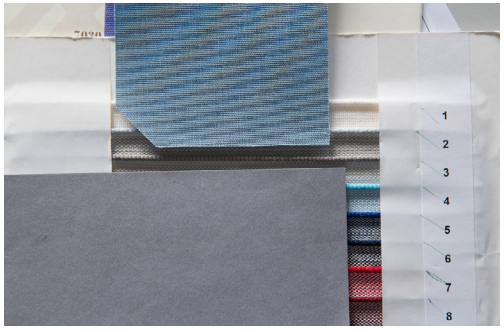
Arranging aerial images of the cemeteries in geographic relation.

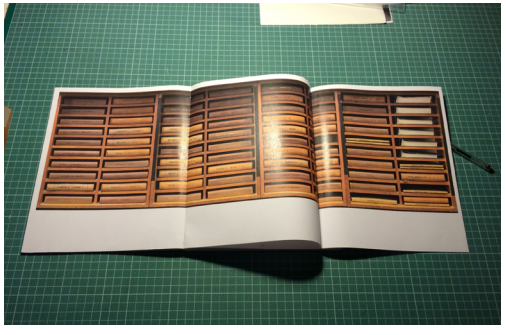


These headstones are in Wimereux Cemetery in Northern France. Unusually for a CWGC cemetery they are set flat in the ground. This arrangement made it possible to photograph them from above as another aerial view, and to frame them so they filled a book page, drawing attention to the typographic details.

Book design and production process







The book was published by Dewi Lewis publishing, and I did all aspects of the design, starting with two artist books which I designed printed and bound. This enabled me to work out some of the key conceptual devices used in the books, such as the gatefolds to emphasise the scale of the ledgers listing the names of the dead (seen above). The final published book was then printed in an edition of 600 on a commercial press in Italy.

Exhibition design process, from pre-visualisation to install

The exhibition design was then an opportunity to translate the research from book form into a larger scale physical encounter for the audience. This was programmed as a primary exhibition in the Contact Photography Festival in Toronto. I made a couple of visits to Toronto to meet with the curator and view the space, and then the exhibition design was carried out remotely, working in collaboration with the curator. Prior to the installation of the exhibition I had created an accurate sketch up model of the whole show, which was then used for the production of the work and the install.

Exhibition catalogue

CONTACT
2018

Image opposite:
Awol Erizku, *Prelude to Serendipity* (detail), 2015. © Awol Erizku.
See page 156

Covers:
Charlie Engman, *Mom Holding Peaches*, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.
Felicity Hammond, *Simulated Ruins* (detail), 2018. Courtesy of the artist.
Richard Mosse, *Idomeni Camp, Greece* (detail), 2016. © Richard Mosse. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.
Shelley Niro, *Standing on Guard for Thee*, 1991. Courtesy of the artist.
See pages 38, 32, 50 & 44

Daniel Alexander
When War Is Over

There is a word to describe the scale of monuments. As an adjective, "monumental" may refer not only to the great solidity of objects of commemoration, but also, more generally, to the enormity of a given task, to a colossal error in judgment, or to a transcendent experience. All four of these definitions—memorial, Herculean, catastrophic, awe-inspiring—may aptly describe the efforts and choices of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC). Established in the wake of the atrocities of World War I, the CWGC was set up to determine how to memorialize the unprecedented number of military dead from Commonwealth countries. The outbreak of World War II, just as the construction of World War I cemeteries had ceased, extended the operation, it was ultimately completed in 1960. Today, the names of the 1.7 million Commonwealth dead from two world wars, including more than a 100,000 Canadians, are etched in stone across some 25,000 cemeteries, 21,000 other burial grounds, and 200 memorials to the missing in 153 countries throughout the world.

When War Is Over, British artist Daniel Alexander's long-term and probing examination of this monument of monuments, explores the aesthetic, political, and moral choices that shaped the memorial's design, and the complexity of its symbolism as a marker—not just of the many lives lost, but of and for its historical moment. To do this, Alexander and researcher Andrew Haslam mined the organization's archives and travelled to many of the sites it oversees in Europe, examining various aspects of its physical imprint in the world. Alexander's resulting photographs take a range of stylistic approaches and distances: appropriated satellite views of the cemeteries; documentary photographs of the industrial processes of their construction; closely cropped images of individual gravestones and epitaphs; and photographic copies of letters and other documents that tell the story of one man's death in action. As we move from a distant overview to the most intimate encounter, how does our changing perspective reorient our understanding of, or alter our feelings for, this act of commemoration? What gets lost and what is gained, as we get closer or further away? What is the correct distance—physical, temporal, emotional—for making sense of war?

This text is excerpted from an essay originally published in Prefix Photo *37 and is reprinted with the kind permission of Prefix Institute of Contemporary Art, Toronto.*

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Tue – Sun 12 – 6pm
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Organized with Harbourfront Centre

Curated by Sara Knelman

Event see page 19

Daniel Alexander, *Headstone re-engraving: Ovillers Military Cemetery, France*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist.


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The Aerial View
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Center for Land Use
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THE SCALE OF MONUMENTS
DANIEL ALEXANDER'S
WHEN WAR IS OVER
by Sara Krolman

Previous spread
Daniel Alexander
"Portland stone, drilled to be split and cut for headstones, Portland, England" from *When War Is Over* 2009
COURTESY DANIEL ALEXANDER

There is a discrete word to describe the scale of monuments. As an adjective, "monumental" may refer not only to the great solidity of objects of commemoration, but also, more generally, to the enormity of a given task, to a colossal error in judgment or to a transcendent experience. All four of these definitions—memorial, Herculean, catastrophic, awe-inspiring—may aptly describe the efforts and choices of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC).

ESTABLISHED IN THE WAKE of the atrocities of World War I, the CWGC was set up to determine how to memorialize the unprecedented number of military dead from Commonwealth countries.[1] The outbreak of World War II, just as the construction of World War I cemeteries had ceased, extended the operation, ultimately completed in 1960. Today, the names of the 1.7 million Commonwealth dead from two world wars, including more than a hundred thousand Canadians, are etched in stone or otherwise commemorated across some twenty-five hundred war cemeteries, twenty-one thousand other burial grounds and two hundred memorials to the missing in 153 countries throughout the world.

Founded by Major General Fabian Ware and established by royal decree in 1917, the commission gathered the great and the good as special advisors. A team of prominent architects took on the challenge of the overall design plan; Rudyard Kipling was appointed literary advisor; and, perhaps most significantly, the director of the British Museum, Frederic Kenyon, was named artistic advisor and assigned the task of reviewing the proposed architectural plans and offering his recommendations. Kenyon's controversial report to the commission highlighted an overall approach founded on what he termed "equality of treatment," and recommended that "what was done for one should be done for all, and that all, whatever their military rank or position in civil life, should have equal treatment in their graves."[2] Congruity and uniformity, Kenyon believed, must come at the cost of individuality, or "the whole sense of comradeship and common service would be lost."[3] This plan also ensured that no bodies would be repatriated; instead, each of the fallen would be laid to rest as near to the place they died as possible.[4] Though controversial from the outset, Kenyon's advice was largely heeded.

When War Is Over, British artist Daniel Alexander's long-term and probing examination of this monument of monuments, explores the aesthetic, political and moral choices that shaped the memorial's design, and the complexity of its symbolism as a marker—not just of the many lives lost, but of and for its historical moment.[5] To do this, Alexander and researcher Andrew Haslam mined the organization's archives and travelled to many of the sites it oversees in Europe, examining various aspects of its physical imprint in the world. Alexander's resulting photographs take a range of stylistic approaches and distances: appropriated satellite views of the cemeteries; documentary photographs of the industrial processes of their construction; closely cropped images of individual gravestones and epitaphs; and photographic copies of letters and other documents that tell the story of one man's death in action. As we move from a distant overview to the most intimate encounter, how does our changing perspective reorient our understanding of, or alter our feelings for, this act of commemoration? What gets lost and what is gained, as we get closer or further away? What is the correct distance—physical, temporal, emotional—for making sense of war?

The gridded precision of the plan, both within each site and across them all, is perhaps most visually striking when seen from above. The "god's-eye view," after all, has the advantage of flattening perspective and making sense of patterns that recur over large swaths of land. Alexander's aerial images are not really his at all, but rather appropriated from the stores of map-data satellites, and though I begin with them here, they form the final component of his project, abruptly placing the viewer at a great remove from the subject. Though this kind of perspective would have been unfamiliar to many people at the time the

[1] In 1960, the name of the commission was changed from the Imperial War Graves Commission to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission. The end of World War I marked an important shift in the British Empire from its position of power toward its dissolution and the eventual formation of the Commonwealth in 1949. In this sense, the commission's establishment was "a response to weakness, not an expression of strength." See R.F. Holland, *Britain and the Commonwealth Alliance, 1918-39* (Cambridge: Palgrave Macmillan, 1981), 1.

[2] Frederic Kenyon, *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad Will Be Designed, Report to the Imperial War Graves Commission by Lieut.-Colonel Sir Frederic Kenyon, K.C.B., Director of the British Museum* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1918), 6.

[3] Kenyon, *War Graves*: 6.

[4] Though more than one-hundred thousand Canadian soldiers lost their lives in World War I and World War II, only those who died in Canada during training, from illness or from wounds received elsewhere are entombed in Canadian soil. The vast majority of lost Canadian soldiers remain scattered across the world in cemeteries in the UK, France, Italy and Hong Kong, among others. Donald Brittain's documentary *Fields of Sacrifice* (1964) offers a thorough if eccentric journey across world-war battlefields on which Canadians fought and many of the sites where they are buried.

[5] Daniel Alexander and Andrew Haslam, *When War Is Over* (Stockport: Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2016).

sites were erected—aerial technology was devised, in fact, for military purposes—the CWGC's project seems designed to be seen from above. From these heights, the cemeteries appear neatly stamped on the surface of the earth, remarkable for their sameness and ordered ubiquity. And only from this perspective can we move so swiftly around the world and grasp the breathtaking breadth of the endeavour, connecting the dots among sites in France, Germany, Turkey, Greece, India, South Africa, Egypt, Syria, Japan and many more not pictured.

The aerial image, it is worth noting, was long considered illegible to a layperson. It was "harmless and valueless," according to Edward Steichen, unless deciphered by experts who might disclose "the information written on the surface of the print," much like coded text.[6] Today, though, we are used to deciphering the world from this elevated angle of view. Whether playing video games, navigating Google Maps or watching the news, our eyes and brains have acclimatized to this heightened overview of the earth below. So what can we "read" in these pictures? A reassuring equivalence, to be sure; a sense of order and even peacefulness. Yet there is also a sharp dissonance: despite the comforting effect of the tidy structures, they also serve as reminders of the conflicts that have played out across many of these landscapes in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries—most recently the Arab Spring revolutions and their aftermath. Seen from such heights, the commission's aspirations of camaraderie and equality seem overlaid by the violations of power and oppression that continue to spur the waging of war.

As if in vigilant (if futile) defense against such violations, the CWGC maintains to this day the laborious upkeep of every gravestone and memorial. Conceived to appear perennially pristine, each site's constant regeneration fuels an industry and offers physical and metaphorical resistance to the death and decay the sites simultaneously hold up. In order to maintain the cemeteries, the labour of restoration and replacement must be constant: workers replace two thousand headstones each year, and re-engrave about seven per working day. On the ground, at human scale, the stones appear fresh and new. The antiseptically managed gravesites are a far cry from the overgrowth of British Victorian cemeteries, where nature and the passage of time are allowed to make themselves visible, and where the aesthetic of the era that built them prevails. Instead, the commission's perpetual restoration has the uncanny effect of evading the mark of time and collapsing the temporal distance between us, today, and a scheme that began one hundred years ago.

Alexander presents the process of fabrication, restoration and decay in a quietly beautiful sequence of images. Tracing the life cycle of gravestones, the photographs move us rhythmically from the rough mounds in the Portland quarries, through mining and cutting, to the engraving workshop, and, ultimately, to the cemetery. The final two images in the sequence are particularly telling: in one, a quadrant of a cemetery is cordoned off with red-and-white caution tape. A large, green umbrella shades a barely visible man from the intense rays of sun that flood the rows and rows of headstones around him. He is crouched, facing away from the camera; behind him, atop a headstone, sits a small cardboard box; in front of him and to his right, a coiled orange cord disappears over another headstone. His work is to re-engrave the headstones; and, when the stones can no longer be revitalized by such methods, they are reduced to rubble, as the final image shows, and replaced,

[6] Edward Steichen, as quoted in Beaumont Newhall, *Airborne Camera: The World from the Air and Outer Space* (New York: Hastings House, 1969): 54.
[7] Viscount Wolmer, House of Commons Debate, May 4, 1920. http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1920/may/04/imperial-war-graves-commission

"Headstone re-engraving, Ovillers Military Cemetery, France" (2013) from *When War Is Over* by Daniel Alexander
COURTESY DANIEL ALEXANDER

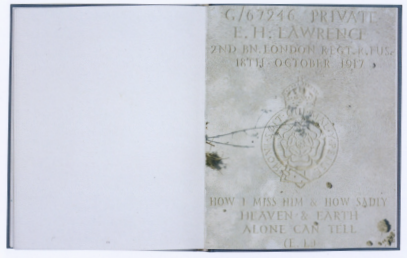
beginning the cycle once again. In the face of ongoing war and conflict, how should we feel about these gestures of care, this ongoing performance of ceremony? Are they heroic, nostalgic or futile? Hopeful, or hopeless?

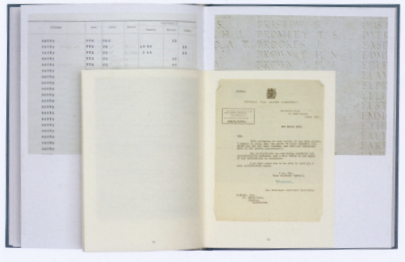
The principles of the commission's project were controversial at the time of their creation and fueled a lively debate in the House of Commons in 1920. Viscount Wolmer, a Conservative member of parliament, offered the clearest dissenting view of the design plans. Although he did not necessarily favour the repatriation of the military war dead, he advocated for the families of the fallen to have the final choice in how their loved ones would be memorialized. "It is a memorial," he opined of the proposed plans, "not to freedom, but to rigid militarism." He continued:

> Uniformity is not and never can be equality. You might as well say it was equality to order that every man should wear boots of number five size, or that everyone should live in a particular style of house. That would not be equality. There is an absolute distinction between uniformity and equality, and, indeed, an antagonism between them, which those who support the attitude of the War Graves Commission almost entirely miss.[7]

Regardless of our interpretation of the CWGC's aesthetic and moral choices as egalitarian or autocratic, they achieve, by design, a general, even clinical effect, and enforce the perpetual obliteration of the specific and the individual.

As a concession to the proposed homogeneity of each gravestone, and despite Kenyon's hesitation, his proposal allowed family members to write a personal epitaph (approved by the commission, of course), to be engraved at the





When War is Over (2016)
by Daniel Alexander. Artist's book
COURTESY DANIEL ALEXANDER

bottom of each stone.[8] This small spark of civilian input, of the personal, of *difference* is not easy to see, hidden by the uniformity of typeface and design. To draw our attention to these epitaphs, Alexander gives us a selection of close-up images of headstones, tightly cropped to include each soldier's name, rank, regimental badge, and the chosen epitaph. The shadows cast by trees and plants on some of the headstones elicit the feeling of standing above them, the hot sun behind, as you shade your eyes to read:

> HOW I MISS HIM & HOW SADLY HEAVEN & EARTH ALONE CAN TELL
>
> EVER REMEMBERED BY HIS SORROWING MOTHER, SISTER & BROTHER
>
> MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN MAKES COUNTLESS THOUSANDS MOURN

Though many of the epitaphs cleave to tradition in their choice of words, as personal messages they convey a sense of the immense weight of human loss. Is one person's deep sadness heavier than a field full of death? How does the sacrifice for country measure up to the hearts of mothers, fathers, sisters and brothers?

As viewers, these images are as close, physically, as we can get to the stones themselves. But at the heart of the published version of the project, Alexander includes, as a smaller bound booklet embedded in the larger structure, a name and a narrative, the records of one life lived and lost: James Hair Brown. "Jimmy," as is scrawled in pen on the top edge of his portrait, had dark hair, big ears, kind eyes and a gentle smile. Photographs of various documents record his birth, on February 18, 1898, and recount his death, just twenty

[8] Kenyon's report offers reluctant approval of this feature: "It is clearly undesirable to allow free scope for the effusions of the mortuary mason, the sentimental versifier, or the crank; nor can spaces be given for a lengthy epitaph. On the other hand it would give satisfaction in many individual instances to be allowed to add an appropriate text or prayer or words of dedication." Kenyon, *War Graves*: 9.

[9] Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004): 76-77.

years later. First-hand written letters, followed by typewritten, formal confirmations, relate to his family that he died on March 21, 1918, by rifle or machine-gun bullet, while tending to a wounded comrade. Finally, documents convey the balance of army funds due, and the booklet ends with an image of a memorial medal, engraved with his name. Jimmy's body was never recovered, and his name is also engraved on the Pozieres Memorial in France, along with others "whose graves are not known." How do we approach this memorial, when we are searching its endless lines for a name we recognize? What do we feel, now, when we can find a face in a sea of death, with a mother and brother, a life whose end was witnessed, an end met while trying to save another?

As we have steadily zoomed in, from an overview of thousands of graves, to an intimate glimpse of one person's experience, the character of our subject has also shifted, from the general to the specific, and from the collective to the individual. How do we prefer to remember—together or each alone? Susan Sontag has suggested that collective memory is, in fact, a misnomer: "All memory," she writes, "is individual, unreproducible—it dies with each person. What is called collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened, with the pictures that lock the story in our minds."[9] So if it is not a remembering, as such, then what is the story these memorials tell? And how do our interpretations of them change with new ways of seeing? After a hundred years, what is the legacy of this epic undertaking? As our ideas of what monuments should be—and of what historical moments mean—tilt the ordered lines, how can we revisit or reshape the relation between objects and memory? One way, of course, is to keep looking, to remain attentive in the face of the monumental, and, from our seeing, to generate counter-monuments, as Alexander's images do.

L'échelle des monuments : *When War Is Over* de Daniel Alexander

La Commonwealth War Graves Commission commémore le nombre sans précédent de militaires décédés issus des pays du Commonwealth durant les deux Guerres mondiales. Les travaux de la commission, achevés en 1960, ont résulté en la commémoration de 1,7 million de soldats tombés au combat, dont plus de 100 000 Canadiens, dans au-delà de 2 500 cimetières et 21 000 autres lieux d'enterrement, de même que de soldats portés disparus dans 153 pays à travers le monde. Dans cet essai, Sara Knelman se penche sur le nouvel examen, de longue haleine, que consacre l'artiste britannique Daniel Alexander à ce monument parmi les monuments. Intitulée *When War Is Over*, l'œuvre explore les choix esthétiques, politiques et moraux qui ont façonné la conception des engagements de la commission et la complexité du projet en tant que témoin non seulement des nombreuses vies perdues, mais aussi d'un moment historique particulier.

Histoire de Jimmy, histoires immortelles

Le Commonwealth, organisation de 53 États, essentiellement des territoires ayant appartenu à l'Empire britannique, a mis au compte des deux guerres mondiales 1,7 millions de morts. La *Commonwealth War Graves Commission*, créée en 1917, en a la charge dans le souci de maintenir une mémoire perpétuelle de ces morts. Le *Lance Corporal* James Hair Brown, *Machine Gun Corps*, matricule 14.110, est l'un d'eux, tué dans des circonstances officiellement non élucidées le 22 mars 1918 (un témoin direct note le 21 mars). Il est le personnage principal du livre *When War is Over*.

JEAN PERRET

Dans ce livre toilé de bleu gris d'une élégance toute ontemue, *Jimmy*, comme écrit à la main au-dessus de son portrait photographique en uniforme, fait l'objet d'un petit cahier de 24 pages au papier plus fin, enchâssé parmi les grandes pages de l'ouvrage. La reproduction de divers documents déroulent sa vie, de son acte de naissance, le 18 février 1898, à l'avis de décès envoyé à son frère près d'une année après sa mort. On y trouve aussi le décompte de sa dernière solde, ainsi que l'annonce de remise à sa famille des *British War & Victory Medals*. À l'entête de Buckingham Palace, le roi Georges signe une note de reconnaissance jointe à une autre médaille, frappée du nom du soldat mort au champ d'honneur.

Dans ce cahier de fac-similés décidément passionnant, deux autres documents complètent ce récit singulier, inscrivant de la sorte dans l'entier du livre la trajectoire d'une figure commune et emblématique. Ce sont deux lettres manuscrites : l'une d'un officier au père du soldat décrit les circonstances héroïques de sa mort, son trépas en une minute à peine, l'autre d'un officier prisonnier en Allemagne adressée au frère raconte son courage et son héroïsme tout comme son intégration exemplaire dans la section qu'il commandait. Ces voix d'outre-tombe donnent corps à *Jimmy*. Elles dévoilent un système de liens mis en œuvre entre le front de la guerre et les familles, entre les hommes de l'armée et les autorités de l'État.

Les autres documents concernent la pierre tombale. James Hair Brown n'a pas de sépulture. Un courrier du 3 mars 1920 déplore que sa tombe n'ait pas été identifiée malgré les recherches assidues, ce qui signifie que son corps n'a pas été retrouvé. Pour lui et tous les autres disparus, c'est un autre geste mémoriel que les autorités engagent, qui consiste en l'érection de monuments, de murs sur lesquels sont gravés les noms de dizaines de milliers de soldats. James Hair Brown fait partie du Memorial Register 27, à Pozières, dans la Somme, sur la partie qui énumère les centaines de noms compris entre Breeze et Court.

Le récit que développe ce livre est plus complexe et dévoile une économie, une industrie et une culture des cimetières militaires. Le photographe anglais établi à Londres Daniel Alexander et le designer Andrew Haslam, spécialiste des polices d'écriture, ont conçu ce livre en un lent mouvement panoramique (un travelling associé à un zoom arrière, dirait-on au cinéma). Au début, l'inarticulé, les énormes pierres de Portland. Ce calcaire résistant, qui vient de l'île du même nom, dans le Dorset, est très apprécié pour la construction des édifices publics en Grande-Bretagne. Il a été utilisé aussi pour la façade des Nations unies à New York et pour les centaines de milliers de tombes militaires.

Ensuite, le livre décrit la conception et les chantiers donnant naissance aux cimetières militaires, à leurs configurations géométriques, aux stèles funéraires, aux tombes consetées en des alignements d'une impeccable rectitude.

Les photographies suivent le processus de découpe des stèles aux dimensions prescrites. Ces plaques minérales sont ensuite enveloppées de plastiques transparents laissant apparaître un ensemble de références et l'indication de leur destination, le cimetière militaire d'Arras en France, par exemple.

Cette industrie est pensée, dessinée, calculée selon des normes toutes militaires. Le livre en donne des aperçus très convaincants. Les photographies invitent à des interprétations anthropologiques et archéologiques éclairantes. Nous sommes aux antipodes d'un cimetière du type Père Lachaise avec ses réseaux d'allées, ses chemins, ses coins et recoins, et ses arbres dont les racines renversent tombeaux et autres sépultures.

Les polices et les modes d'écriture font l'objet de directives très précises, comme les insignes des régiments qui doivent figurer sur les stèles. Les pages qui reproduisent ces documents montrent la parfaite maîtrise de ce système unique de référence .

Une citation de 1918 de Frederic Kenyon, directeur du British Museum, est de ce point de vue éclairante, qui souligne la réserve qu'il convient d'avoir en matière d'inscriptions sur les tombes de la part de proches, familles, amis: point d'effusion n'est admise, par contre une citation religieuse d'au maximum trois lignes peut être prise en considération, mais doit être agréée par la commission ad hoc. Cet ordre général est parachevé par la blancheur immaculée et revendiquée des pierres tombales. Aux désordres bruyeux et sanglants de la guerre répond l'ordre poli et net de la paix.

Registres énumérant les noms des morts du Commonwealth durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale ainsi que les sites mémoriaux.

Le détail et la multitude. C'est une grande réussite de ce livre que de suggérer la mesure des cataclysmes gigantesques qui ont emporté tous les *Jimmy*. Voir ces grands cahiers que sont les registres des militaires tombés, soigneusement réunis dans des casiers de bois – il faut déplier une troisième page afin de voir ce qui n'est qu'une infime partie de tout ce rangement. Sur les pages ouvertes, les colonnes déclinent les noms, les grades, le lieu d'enseveliseement, le pays... Des noms, des noms, des noms. Puis ces noms gravés sur les pierres tombales. Daniel Alexander et Andrew Haslam en donnent l'impression exacte, le montage brillant des pages. D'abord 13 noms sur l'une, puis 41 sur la suivante, l'addition est impossible, inimaginable.

Et le livre se déplie à nouveau, deux pages deviennent trois pour révéler le panorama de ce cimetière d'Étaples, dans le Pas-de-Calais, où plus de 11 500 morts sont réunis, alignés, répertoriés, stèles blanches, dominées par un autel sur lequel est placé un cercueil stylisé. Le gazon, légèrement jauni, est coupé ras.

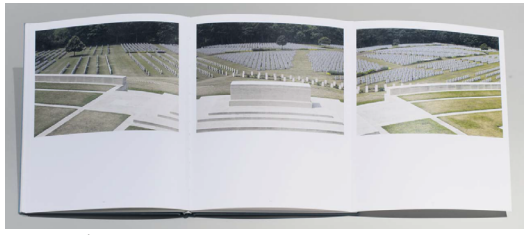
Plus loin, le livre déploie ses ailes sur quatre pages pour révéler l'alignement exemplaire, au cordeau, de quarante stèles, avec devant quelques fleurs, des plantes de petite taille, et derrière des buissons.

Avant les pages donnant légendes précises aux photographies et documents reproduits, la dernière partie met en valeur des images prises du ciel. Extraordinaire spectacle auquel la marche du livre nous a préparés et qui en même temps coupe le souffle. La beauté du monde vue de haut, telle que la chantent des photographes à la mode, ou les cicatrices dans la chair de la terre des inhumanités de l'histoire? Douloureux et émouvants que ces petits, tout petits territoires incrustés dans les paysages de villes, de faubourgs, de campagnes, de forêts, ces vues par satellite saisies en Europe, en Égypte, en Syrie, en Inde, en Afrique du Sud, au Japon, qui dessinent en rectangles appliqués la volonté de mémoire et la monstration des stigmates des souffrances vécues. Un engagement opiniâtre contre l'amnésie, un témoignage contre les béances des mémoires collectives.

La photographie du Knightsbridge War Cemetery en Libye, 3651 morts du Commonwealth et 18 d'autres nationalités (la distinction est toujours faite), est la dernière du livre. Ce lieu donne l'impression de disparaître dans l'immensité du désert. La mémoire est lentement, imperceptiblement, engloutie dans la terre.

La tâche des autorités n'en est que plus considérable, qui est d'entretenir, de restaurer les sites, de les refonder selon les traditions et injonctions publiées dès 1918. La première image du livre est celle de la couverture d'un fascicule intitulé *War Graves*, sous-titré *How the cemeteries abroad will be designed*. Aujourd'hui, il en va du maintien de 2500 cimetières, 21000 sites funéraires et 200 monuments de disparus dans 154 pays.

Au regard des violences déchaînées du présent, la mémoire des guerres achevées se prolonge en une spirale vertigineuse. Mais quelles consciences en seront les gardiennes demain ? Pour l'heure, 22 000 pierres tombales sont remplacées chaque année, 80 à 90 sont gravées par jour, et quand en 2009 une fosse commune est découverte dans le Nord de la France, qui rend à leur vie *post mortem* 250 soldats, un nouveau site est planifié, architecturé et installé. C'est ainsi le cycle d'une économie de la mémoire et de l'histoire qui se perpétue, une régénération disent les auteurs de ce livre qui en détaillent les mouvements en toute lucidité : *When War is Over* est un livre... perpétuel.



Cimetière militaire d'Étaples, France : 11 552 victimes des deux guerres mondiales, dont 10 890 victimes des nations du Commonwealth et 662 victimes d'autres nationalités.

Un film doit être ici rappelé, *Requiem* de Reni Mertens et Walter Marti (1993, 81') qui est un voyage dans des cimetières militaires en Europe. Pas une seule apparition humaine dans cette œuvre magistrale, pas un mot, sinon la présence de mille fantômes de la guerre et la musique de Léon Francioli, lancinante, entêtante, qui nous emporte en une méditation recueillie.

Daniel Alexander & Andrew Haslam
When War is Over
Dewi Lewis Publishing, 2015

www.dewilewispublishing.com
www.danielalexanderphotography.co.uk

Cimetière de guerre de Palmietkuil, Afrique du Sud : 339 victimes de la Seconde Guerre mondiale, dont 217 du Commonwealth.

Astres noirs

Peut-être est-ce ce désir de ne plus y voir clair, pour éprouver l'expérience d'une perte, quand le noir phagocyte toute luminance. Le champ noir de la représentation révèle néanmoins d'étranges configurations. Les deux photographes réunis dans ce livre, Katrin Koenning et Sarker Protick, elle Allemande établie à Melbourne et lui Bangladais établi à Dacca, sont-ils guidés par la volonté de défier le diktat des appareils digitaux qui affirment ne plus connaître de frontières infranchissables dans le champ du perceptible, sachant voir même au fond de la nuit la plus profonde, en deçà du 0,01 lux, dernier seuil de la perception humaine de la lumière ? Sans oublier le fameux *Eigengrau*, dit « gris intrinsèque », cette efflorescence qui sollicite l'œil dans la nuit noire par une espèce de mirage mystérieux.

Astres noirs est une conversation entre Katrin Koenning et Sarker Protick qui consiste en une mise en regard de leurs images prises au téléphone portable. Dialogue muet, aucun texte ni légende, un silence qui incite au recueillement et à l'élaboration d'hypothèses quant à ce qu'on voit. Dans ce livre de belle facture toute noire avec ses doubles pages de papier de bon grammage mat, imprimées de gris métallique, plusieurs photographies de l'un ou de l'autre font parfois série, jusqu'à onze vues à la suite pour Katrin Koenning. Des traces de lumière évanescente, des silhouettes, des façades de maison flanquées de grands arbres et de leurs ombres, des jaillissements d'eau, des flaques, ce visage caressé d'un halo de lumière et celui-ci absorbé par trop de clarté, des objets de tous les jours, des situations étranges comme ces baigneurs agrippés à une corde – de jeu, de survie ?

Le noir regorge d'univers et ce livre rejoue en quelque sorte la photographie, quand celle-ci donne comme pour une première fois en partage des lignes, des volumes, des silhouettes, des abstractions à force de n'être plus identifiables. Plaisir de voir émerger des surfaces provoquées par des raies de lumière, des ébauches de figurations, qui renvoient au premier temps, en 1826, alors que Nicéphore Niepce avec cette *Vue de la fenêtre*, la première photographie, fait surgir des bâtiments, un arbre et amènage en profondeur cette fascinante ouverture sur le monde...

Il convient de regarder au verso des pages, dans cette façon de cavernes que forment les feuillets non coupés en tête. Quelques images y sont déposées, comme dissimulées et en train de prendre consistance tels des fragments de peurs, d'émerveillements, de doutes et de certitudes. Des inscriptions de lumière dans un noir fait de mille couleurs.

J.P.

Katrin Koenning, Sarker Protick
Astres noirs
Chose commune, 2016

www.chosecommune.com

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When War Is Over

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When War Is Over / Daniel Alexander & Andrew Haslam
Hardback, 164 pages
ISBN 978-1-907893-83-4
Published by Dewi Lewis Publishing
30.00 retail
Reviewed by Helen Trompeteler

When War Is Over by Daniel Alexander and Andrew Haslam combines contemporary photographs and archival material to document the history and ongoing work of The Commonwealth War Graves Commission. Established in May 1917 (originally as the Imperial War Graves Commission) it is responsible for maintaining memorials for 1.7 million Commonwealth War dead at sites in 23,000 locations across 153 countries. When considering the magnitude of the First and Second World Wars, the question arises: How to possibly convey the incomprehensible scale of such loss while simultaneously presenting narratives of individual humanity?

While the distinctive uniform headstone design and typography of commonwealth graves are immediately recognisable to many, this book tells the lesser known history of the Commission's origins. Under the vision and leadership of founder Fabian Ware, a former school teacher and newspaper editor, and Frederic Kenyon, then director of the British Museum, the Commission's ideology was founded on equality. In his report 'War Graves, How the Cemeteries Abroad will be Designed" (1918), Kenyon argued: "…what was done for one should be done for all, and that all, whatever their military rank or position in civil life, should have equal treatment in their graves."

The tension between commemorating the individual through the uniform treatment of many was the subject of a heated debate in the House of Commons on 4 May 1920 when the Commission's founding principles were challenged, and it is a theme that is at the heart of Alexander and Haslam's publication. *When War Is Over* evocatively succeeds in exploring this dilemma through its exceptionally well considered pacing and layout. Contemporary landscapes of anonymous monolithic quarries are followed by simple details such as a duck egg blue umbrella sheltering a solitary gardener or stonemason at work. Elsewhere a diptych showing a small private interment ceremony is shortly followed by a double gate fold depicting 122 ledgers listing the names of war dead, reminding us of the scale of the Commission's operations.

Half way through the book, an unexpected booklet interrupts a sequence of images depicting numerous typed and engraved names. Printed on thin delicate paper, a few carefully chosen documents recount the story of a soldier, Jimmy (James Hair Brown). Beginning with his youthful studio portrait, reproduced letters soon reveal Jimmy's death on the 22nd March 1918 while attempting to rescue a wounded comrade, and the Imperial War Commission's subsequent systematic search for his grave during March 1920. The sensitive design of this booklet with its change in scale, content and paper type suggests an ephemerality which forces the viewer to slow down and engage with Jimmy's story and the Commission's work on a deeply personal level.

When War Is Over ends with a series of satellite photographs of cemeteries in countries including France, Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Syria, and Libya. Each image is accompanied by a brief caption listing the thousands commemorated at each site. Devoid of sentimentality, these images not only show the long-term impact of war on the landscape, but also uncomfortably recall aerial surveillance photographs from wars past and present. The book consequently closes with the viewer questioning ideas surrounding conflict, permanence, and memory.

Ultimately this book represents a living history: a testament not only to the war dead, but also to Ware and Kenyon's original vision, and those countless overlooked individuals who ensure these memorials survive in their continuing cycle of repair and regeneration.

– reviewed by Helen Trompeteler for Photomonitor

When War Is Over by Daniel Alexander and Andrew Haslam was published by and is available from Dewi Lewis Publishing.

When the War is Over | 1854 P

1854.photography/2016/03/when-the-war-is-over/

PHOTOBOOK — 10 MARCH 2016

When the War is Over

by STEVE O'NEIL

Reading Time: 4 minutes

Few things feel so ever-present, or familiar, as the history of the world wars; we take their presence in history as much for granted as we do the many monuments that honour their dead. They populate every town and village, but we seldom stop to think about these monuments.
Daniel Alexander and Andrew Haslam's new photobook, published by Dewi Lewis, asks us to do just that. *When the War is Over* is a study of the ongoing commemoration of the 1.7 million who died in the world wars.

It tells us the story of the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, set up following the First World War, and so invites us to revisit this hugely familiar subject matter from a different perspective.

Fredrick Kenyon, then director of the British Museum, in a report for the Commission titled 'How the Cemeteries Abroad Will be Designed', set out that "What was done for one should be done of all, and that all, whatever their military rank or position, should have equal treatment in their graves".

In doing so, *When the War is Over* takes us through the process behind the construction of war graves around

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