



## LEST WE FORGET

"THE EXPERIENCE WAS very moving and I slowly began to comprehend the tremendous losses sustained by so many," photographer Jean Crankshaw says of her visit to the battlefields in Europe where many died in the First and Second World Wars.

Born in Portsmouth, UK at the end of the Second World War, Crankshaw's life was defined in many ways by war. "My mother's father served in the British army and died from wounds on the Somme, August 1918, four days before my mother's fourth birthday," she says. "My grandmother, like so many, was left with small children to cope as best she could on a widow's pension.

While I had been told all this as a child, I did not understand the significance until much later," Crankshaw reflects. She immigrated to Canada in 1966, and it wasn't until a colleague suggested that a book be created about Canadians in the First World War, that Crankshaw considered revisiting the battlefields that had deeply affected her family.

In 2005 Crankshaw and her colleague Susan Evans, whose grandfather also died in 1918 in action on the Somme, made a reconnaissance journey to Europe. "On that trip we both visited our grandfather's graves," she says.

"I had expected to be emotionally overwhelmed on my first visit and I was," she recalls. "I walked in my grandfather's footsteps in the field where he was billeted prior to his death."

Crankshaw channeled all her emotion into shooting, and photographed everything she saw and experienced. A collection of her images are on display at the J.W. Bush gallery in an exhibition entitled *Over There: In the footsteps of Canadians who served in the Great War*.

"The work includes images of memorials and cemeteries, aerial shots showing the battle scars which are still visible on the landscape," the artist describes. As a whole the images string together like a storyboard of reflective thoughts. There are images from Europe and Canada included in the exhibition.

Even though her roots are British, having lived in Canada now for 40 years she feels Canadian. Her British grandfather serves as her emotional entry into this project, but she keeps the focus on the Canadian component of the First World War.

The images are shot documentary style, placing the focus on the contextual reference to war and the people affected by it. "A patch of blue" shows a beautiful view from the trenches with a tree reflected

in a ground puddle. The peace that penetrates this scene toys with our psyche as we imagine the original use of the trench. "My work demonstrates the immense contrasts between the peace and tranquility which one feels visiting those areas today and the glimpse of what life must have been like in the trenches and on the battlefield," the artist says.

"The Brooding Soldier" (above) encapsulates the show with its quiet power. An unidentified soldier, with his head lowered in homage rests as the memorial statue at Vancouver Corner. This image records the essence of Crankshaw's artistic eye. Each of her photographs hones in on the gentleness that is hoped for by all who experience war. She is able to find sensitivity within the horror, and reveal a subtle softness. "I believe that as a passionate artist and a woman I bring a unique perspective to this subject," Crankshaw explains.

There are only a handful of Canadian First World War veterans left. July 1 marked the 90th anniversary of the battle of the Somme. To bring the memory to the present day, Crankshaw includes images from Remembrance Day in Hamilton. "I have juxtaposed images of the battlefields with images taken at the 2005 Remembrance Day parade in Hamilton," she explains. "These latter images can be interpreted as depicting young Canadians who appear ready to obey the call."

"I have created a visual memorial to the people who fought and a link for those who remain, that they may take this journey with me," says Crankshaw. "Lest we forget, it is important to remember, for without our past we become nothing."

V

[LAURA HOLLICK]

#### OVER THERE: IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF CANADIANS WHO SERVED IN THE GREAT WAR

Jean Crankshaw J.W. BUSH GALLERY 459 Main St W 905.719.6992 Continues to August 25, 2006.

By VIEW, July 13 - 19, 2006