



Mapping the Impact of the Great War

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2012-08-16 07:35:11

[This post can be used in conjunction with the resources outlined in [Commonwealth Cemeteries of World War I](#).]



The Great War as it was known, the First World War or WWI

as it is referred to today, was a world conflict. At the risk of stating the obvious it involved more people, more countries, and cost more money than any previous war in history. It also left more dead.

It is estimated, no one really knows for sure, that more than 9 million servicemen and women were killed during the war. For Britain and her Empire, what we would today refer to as the Commonwealth, that figure is roughly 1.1 million dead.

Their graves and memorials will be found all over the world ' lovingly cared for by the [Commonwealth War Graves Commission](#) ' a duty of care that translates into maintaining war graves at a staggering 23,000 locations in 153 countries. In a very real sense those graves, cemeteries and memorials may be the only physical reminder left of that conflict and, more importantly, the human cost of the war.

But visualising that sacrifice and that commemorative commitment is not as easy as just rattling off a list of statistics. AND it is vital that we are able to visualise it, because in doing so, we can start to examine questions about the war and engage a new generation in the sacrifices made and the on-going importance of remembrance of the fallen.

Statistics don't, by any stretch of the imagination, convey the impact on individuals and their communities when loved ones have been killed. However they are a starting point to demonstrate the enormity of the cost for some people. Presenting statistics graphically can help to illustrate the facts clearly and that's where our friends at the University of Oxford's World War Centenary project came in.

They took some of the thousands of GPS coordinates we've been gathering over the past few years and have turned them into the [visual representation](#) of loss you can see here today.

Imagine the impact of spinning the earth and seeing the sheer number of cemeteries there are in the UK with a war grave. Why are they here? Imagine being able to look up on your mobile device the cemeteries near you that contain a war casualty

It even made an old CWGC stager like myself gasp!

Now imagine using that as a local teaching resource, or as a means to track the line of the western front or the global nature of the conflict through the graves, cemeteries and memorials that we maintain?

Ask yourself the question 'why are there 9 war graves in a tiny cemetery at Trekkopje in northern Namibia? What happened there?' Immediately you start to see the value of being able to visualize the war in this way.

My hope is this is exactly what students and academics and 'ordinary' members of the public will do. Who knows? You may even decide to visit. We would love it if you did.

In the 1930's the Commission's founder, Fabian Ware, used the technology available to him to help the British public visualize the impact and human cost of the war 'and therefore the task of commemoration his organization faced. In an Armistice day address on the BBC he said? *If the dead of the Great war "could march side by side, four abreast, in continuous procession down Whitehall, it would take them four days and nights to get past the saluting base" of the Cenotaph.*

We took that statement and tried to give it a visual reference. So imagine that the column would stretch from London to Edinburgh in the UK. In Canada it would extend from Calgary to Regina; in South Africa from Bloemfontein to Pretoria; in India from Mumbai to Hyderabad; in Pakistan from Karachi to Multan; in Australia from Sydney to Melbourne and in New Zealand it would cover the full length of North Island. It's a powerful image but dare I suggest not as powerful or as useful as the tool we have here today.

I'm sure Fabian he would approve.

Go to the post [Commonwealth cemeteries of World War I \(http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/space-into-place/commonwealth-cemeteries-of-world-war-one/\)](http://ww1centenary.oucs.ox.ac.uk/space-into-place/commonwealth-cemeteries-of-world-war-one/) to see the different maps and tools you can use to visualise the impact of the Great War.

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