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The Appropriation of Military War Dead for Political Purposes

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Using mainly the example of the Great War (1914-19) this paper will address the issues of how the burial and memorialisation of the dead is or is not controlled, how this reflects national and establishment position and control, and how the dead are appropriated by these groups for the purpose of perpetuating or justifying conflict. This process will be examined as a continuum, starting during the conflict, but continuing as a factor right through to the present day. Examples will include the post war treatment of African dead in Africa; and the re-appropriation of the British Imperial Army dead from present day Britain, India and Pakistan, after the 2003 invasion of Iraq. The paper will then touch on the appropriation of the dead from more recent and current conflict, and the response from affected descendant individuals or groups to this appropriation. Finally the example of the Western Front will be used to show how in Europe, despite this appropriation, the continuing recovery, by archaeologists, of war dead from the comparatively recent conflict of the Great War, can become a focus for tolerance and cooperation rather than intolerance and conflict.