

COMMENTARY

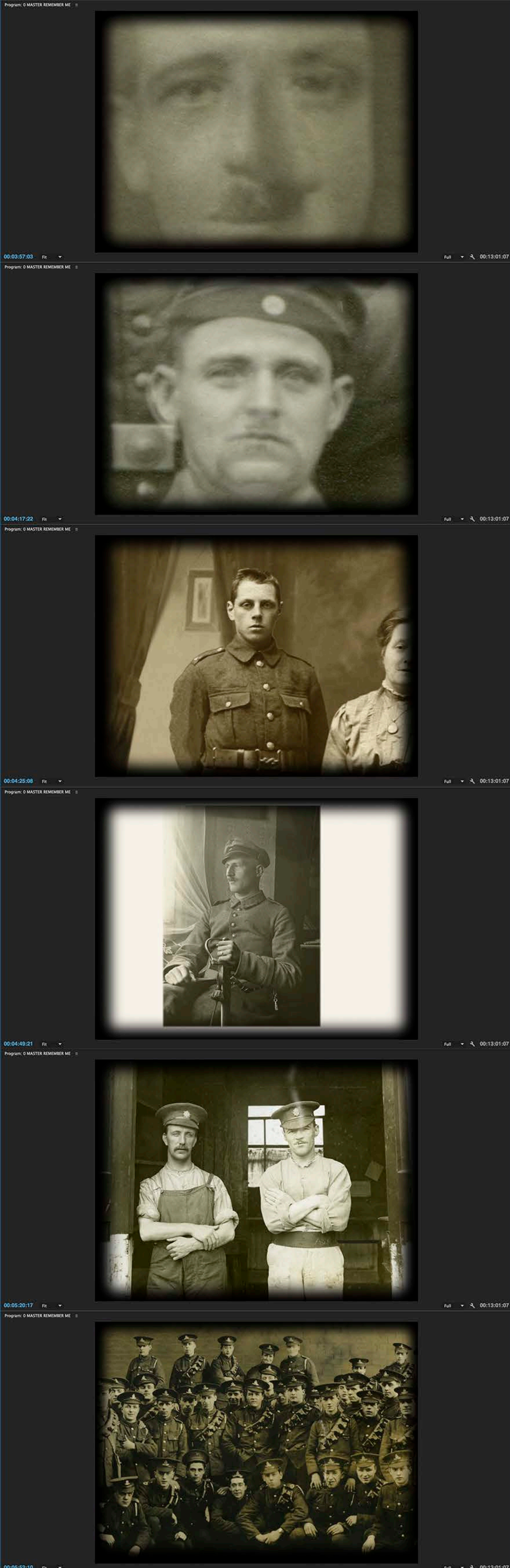
The countdown was introduced to facilitate the accurate start of the second film: the operator has to cue the first film, then at countdown 0, cue the second film. There is no visual 0 so that it is the rhythm rather than a visual that cues the action (it always takes a fraction of a second longer to respond visually than it does to press ‘Go’ to a counted rhythm...). If I were using a system like QLab, a professional theatre cueing system, then the different cue times could be automated, but I’m trying to avoid the installation having to run through a MacBook.

The epigrams frame the visual experience to come, by offering ideas about what will be seen. The Ann Thomas quotation foregrounds photography. My statement offers a provenance for these particular photographs. The Roland Barthes quotation introduces the idea of the ‘return of the dead’.

I used the desolate landscape shot in the title sequence because I didn’t want to introduce the figures as yet: I wanted the close ups of eyes to be the first figures seen so that they were people before they were identifiable as nationalities.

The white paper, the image emerging out of it, is a representation of the chemical process of the image emerging as it is developed, from a latent image (ie existing as a potential after exposure to the lit subject) to an actual image appearing via immersion and chemical reaction in the appropriate chemical bath .

Eyes. I spent a lot of time working on the images at this level of zoom, and so wanted to bring this aspect of the work to the final result. It was also interesting how the images lost their meaning and new meanings emerged. The eyes seemed to look at me in a way that was unsettling. It was an intimate experience. I became extremely familiar with these faces. And yet I did not know their names.



The cross fades were built in as a sort of morph between faces. I don't have the software or the RAM to make actual morphs, but the translucency was appealing and I like the blurring that the crossfade achieved, which prefigured the ending, where all the faces are overlaid in an homage to Galton's Composites. The crossfades move between British and German soldiers, but at this level of zoom we cannot tell who is who until uniforms become visible. The camera is static, but then begins a slow pull out which facilitates the reveal of nationality via making uniforms visible.

Parallax Effect: the motion is slow motion, but the swinging chain is in real time. While I was making this section, I tried both time frames, but I preferred the real time chain swing because it gave the frame a dream-like quality of something not quite being as it should for the slowness of the figure's movement. I was seeking this disconcerting quality to invoke in the viewer a sense of the uncanny.

The panning and zooming of the camera is necessary to make the parallax effect visible, but it also became part of the visual grammar of the piece: the roving camera is unsettled, always moving. Sometimes called the Ken Burns effect, it is also part of the visual grammar of viewing still images in film medium. When puppeting the figures, I wanted to try to instil a sense of them looking at us while we are looking at them. In Tagliafierro's film *Beauty*, we are onlookers: the figures are carrying on with what they are doing regardless of our gaze. Here, there is eye contact and the figures are responding to being looked at. The men are already posing for a camera; now they are posing for us perhaps in the moments before the shutter was pressed. I also wanted the effect not of real, full on movement, but of the movement of people who are posing, trying to stay still, to have a photograph taken. And too much movement can take the soft and delicate into the world of comedy...



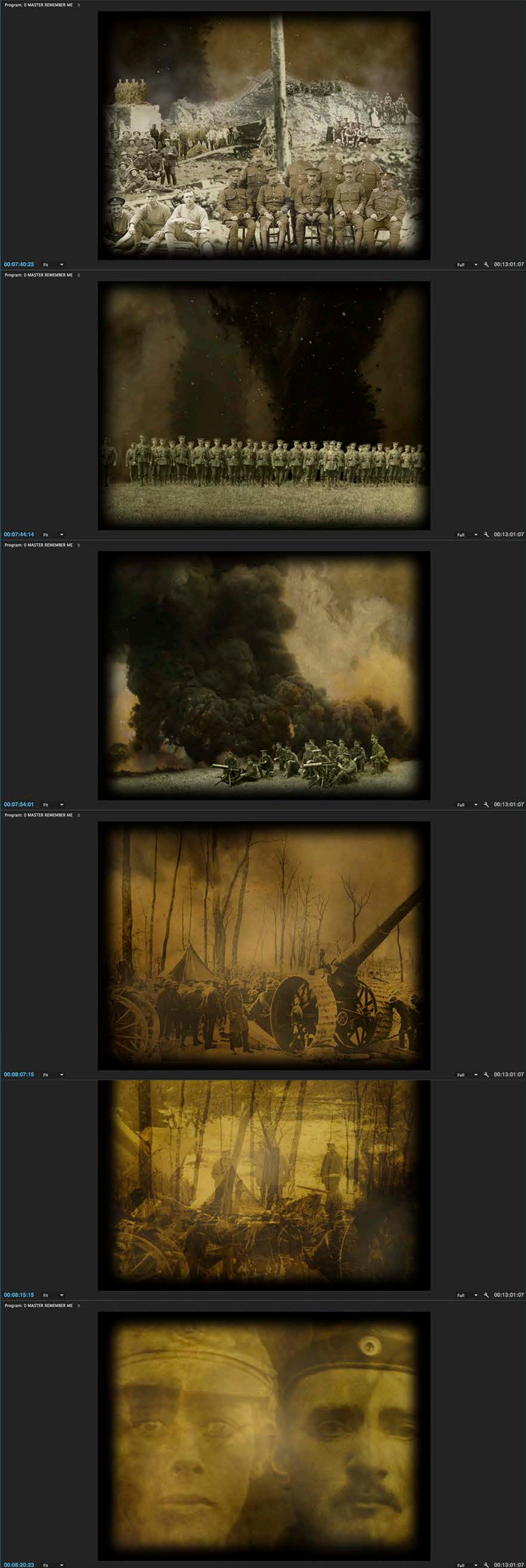
The postcard scenes emerged after I accidentally made the first composite by selecting the wrong layer and I liked the effect. Many of the German photographs I've acquired have been used as postcards and sent to people, and they give their names and details of the regiments and addresses of where they are stationed. However, I will need a German handwriting expert to decipher them, so this is something for the future of this project.



The Landscapes section is where I started to animate different backgrounds. into the shots. Because I didn't want the effect to wear off or become too overwhelming, I saved this effect for the battle sequences. The groups of people in the landscape is incongruous because they are posing in a battle ground. Soldiers would not have behaved like this in this landscape, thus foregrounding the disjunct between how they pose in a studio and what soldiers actually do. The relatives owning the photographs, would no doubt have found it difficult to imagine the realit of their relative's life at the Front. But they perhaps construct an image out of these poses, The rituals of posing and drilling seem vastly at odds with the reality of the trenches.

I kept in references to these being photographs, via the postcards and the visual references to the frame, to foreground the 'photograph-ness' of the shots, and to emphasise that these are stills.

Grouping figures together who were not photographed together creates a surreal effect, and I wanted to save this for the central battle scene with animated landscapes. The soldiers are vastly at odds with their surroundings, something else which adds to the dreamlike quality.

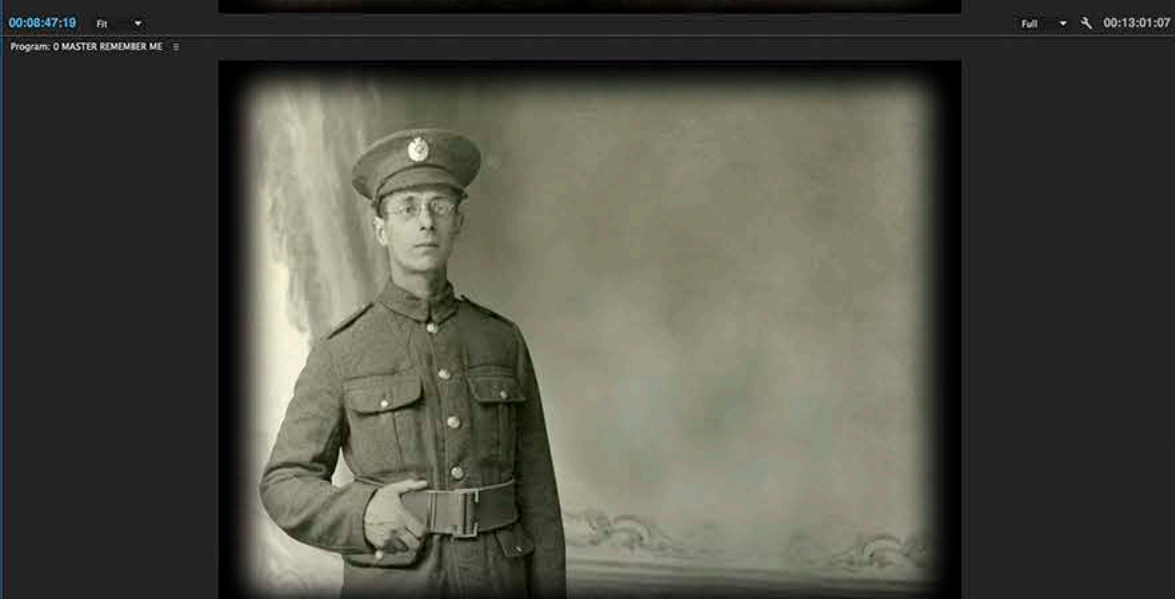
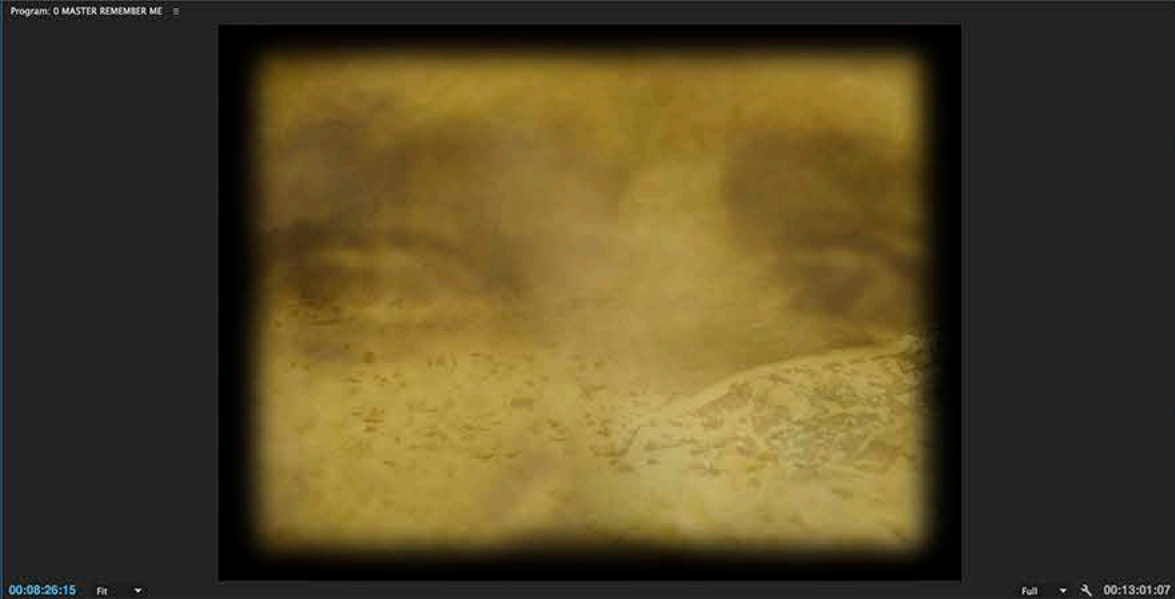


This scene was complex to create. Despite not wanting to colour correct in order to maintain a sense of the original photographs, I did use colour correction and filters on several layers in this to bring the groups all into the same landscape. I could have gone further, but wanted to keep the slight visual disruption. Again, I felt this added to the dreamlike quality. I could have very easily made them all totally uniformly coloured via an adjustment layer at the top of the layer stack in After Effects, but when I did do this, something was lost...

The smoke plumes were made by expanding and warping the plumes taken from two images I acquired of shell explosions. over several keyframes. The drilling soldiers were colour shifted as this animation progressed from green to a darker brown to bring them more into keeping with the plume as the camera zoomed in.

I used the Film Burn transition only a few times. It's a great transition for the topic, but I was fearful of overusing it, so apart from the opening title sequence saved it for this sequence featuring British and German heavy artillery. I acquired the German gun photograph easily. Then I had to bid hard on eBay for the British gun photograph to accompany it in this film.

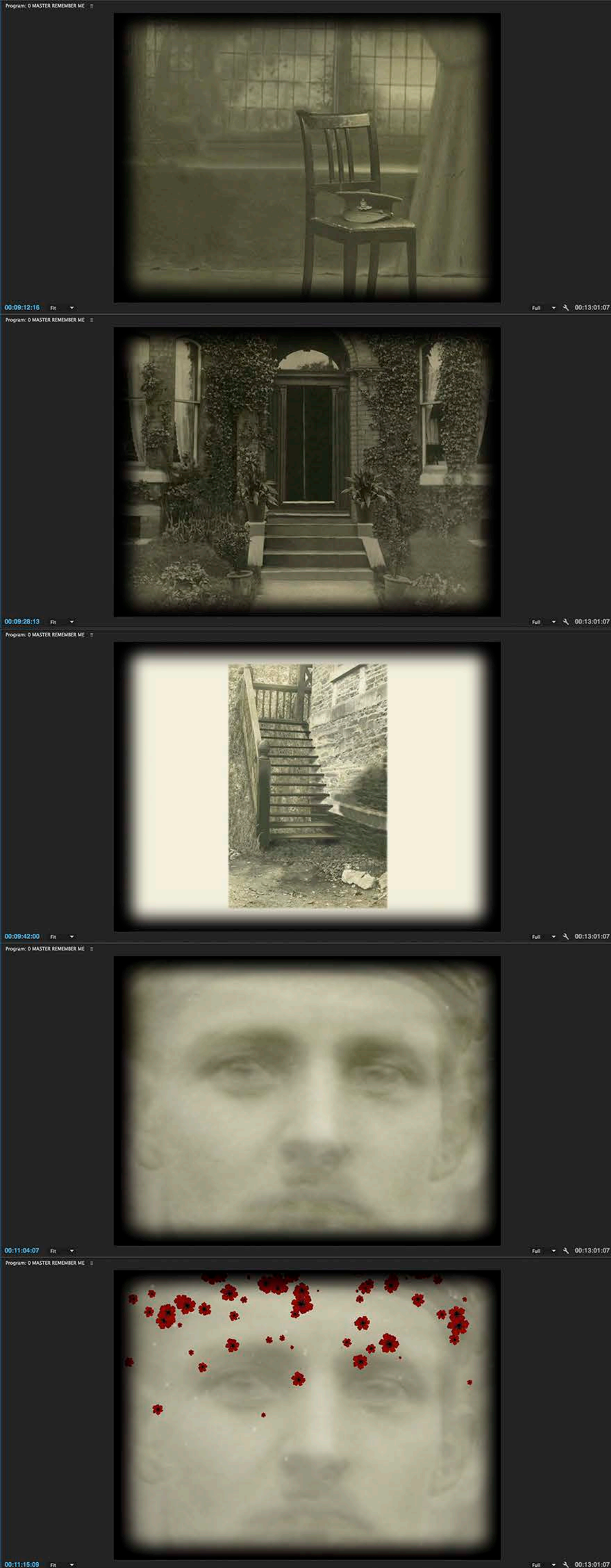
Using the two faces of obviously opposing armies was something I introduced to add the human element to the images of guns. There are people in the shots, but the close ups of faces is much more powerful.



The superimposed images in this sequence are different from the rest of the film because this is battle. Using parallax on the guns was tricky: in both shots there were many planes of dimension, meaning that though possible, the hours this would have taken for both shots, was more than I had: I bought these shots quite late into the process after looking specifically for images of artillery. So, again, something for the future. I took time to work out what I wanted to do with this section and it was the last one completed. I knew that it needed to resolve into the scene with the empty landscape and the eventual reveal of the officers. I'm pleased with the result because it lifts us out of the previous treatment of the other stills to something momentarily different, so that we can return in the narrative structure back to them.

There is obvious symbolism in the reprise of the crowded landscape now empty of people and landscape features, and revealing ultimately only the group of offices who fade back to their field back in Blighty. Although the death rate among officers at the trenches was extremely high, since they were very often leading their men over the top of the trench parapets, those controlling operations were usually safely back behind the lines. But what is often forgotten is that the majority of those who served at the front survived, but at what mental cost?

The Fade to Plate sections emerged as I was making the plates for the parallax effect and the power of the empty rooms was something I had to use. The empty plates are reinforced with moving smoke to introduce a touch of movement and time into the scenes.



I find the emptiness quite moving. The hat on the chair is very poignant. Of course, I don't know what happened to these people, and perhaps the implication is that they did not return. I intend the effect to be about loss of names as much as loss of people. Whenever they died - a hundred years ago, or twenty - they are all now gone.

Building the Plate for the house was a long and painstaking process. This was probably the Plate that took the longest to complete. I'm particularly proud of the result!

The stairs in the German group also took time to reconstruct. It's interesting to note that photographers were using then the same tricks we use today to build interesting group compositions - get everyone onto the steps...

The faces at the end are all the faces from the opening, but this time simultaneously superimposed, as in Francis Galton's Composites. His was a project to reveal degeneracy. My purpose was to unite these men, who had their sufferings at the Front in common. The fall of poppies is because as a child I loved the fall of poppies, one for each death, during the annual Service of Remembrance at the Royal Albert Hall. The fluttering in silence was powerful and made a huge impression on me as a child... Making the effect in Trapcode Particular pushed my skills into new areas, especially when it developed a glitch, and I had to work hard not to panic and start from scratch. I've done a lot of not panicking making this...