At the request of the author, Kiting magazine is proud to join our fellow publishers, Kite & Friends from Germany and Le Lucane from France, in the joint publishing of Wolfgang Bieck’s article honoring those who died in some of the shared history of our three countries. As a German kite flyer, Bieck is experiencing firsthand many of the pressures on European countries from current world conflicts and as he wrote when he offered us his article, “Kiting and KAPing are sometimes more than just a way to have fun.”

The Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial near Romagne-sous-Montfaucon (above), with 14,246 graves from World War I, is the largest American military cemetery in Europe. The ossuary of Douaumont (right) contains the bones of about 130,000 French and German soldiers who could not be identified.

In the winter of 1987/88, I discovered a new passion in Kite Aerial Photography (KAP) and spent most of my time assembling equipment and learning how to use it. Looking back, that moment was like throwing a stone in a pond and not knowing where the small waves would reach. Now I understand the flow of those waves and something about their effects. This is why I want to write about KAP and how it touches my heart, enriches my life and my love.

Once you discover the hobby of kite flying, kite festivals will have an almost magnetic effect, pulling you to the opportunity to display your own equipment and demonstrate how you use it. Festivals also allow you to satisfy your curiosity about innovations, developments, and flight characteristics of other kites. It is also a way to meet other kite flyers and to learn and be inspired by their experiences.

I never imagined that I would get to visit kite festivals on the Indonesian islands of Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi, and Bali, or in the city of Belgaum, India, but that became a reality and they are still an unforgettable and enriching part of my life.
On the Atlantic coastal region of Europe, I have been lucky over the years to attend kite festivals on the island of Fano, Denmark; Knokke, Belgium; Berck sur Mer and Dieppe, France. Only a person running with his eyes closed, blind to the world, could travel to these kite festivals and not witness the evidence of war. A traveler is confronted with bunkers, fortresses, cemeteries and war memorials giving witness to the history of World War II (1939-1945), World War I (1914-1918), the Franco-German War (1870-1871), or the Napoleonic Wars (1792-1815).
During the festival week of Berck sur Mer, our French friend, José Wallois, organized KAP excursions mainly heading to historical monuments such as Fort d'Ambleteuse, the fortified town of Montreuil sur Mer, the citadel of Calais, the Port de la Créche, or the British War Cemetery Terlincthun, both near Bologne sur Mer.

In recent years, I also had the opportunity to visit significant sites from World War I in France. This includes sites such as Verdun with the ossuary of Douaumont, the nearby Fort Vaux, the hill of Vanquois, the military cemetery Ramagne-sous-Montfaucon, the American Tower of Montfaucon d'Argonne, and the American war memorial Montsec.

I also visited the landing beaches in Normandy and the Canadian War Memorial in Dieppe (World War II). The liberation of Europe started with the D-Day and Operation Overlord at the landing beaches "Sword" and "Gold" (Britain), "Juno" (Canada), and "Utah" and "Omaha" (America).

As a traveler, you see numerous cemeteries of fallen soldiers. The inscriptions on the individual crosses exert a profound effect on me. I do not see a simple cross anymore, but feel that the cross is speaking to me, telling me the name of the young soldier, his nationality, and the dates of his birth and death.

The death of all these young people causes me to face my own ego and I feel that the death of all the soldiers allows me to live in freedom in the present time. Each one of these soldiers had dreams of living like I have today. Each one would perhaps have loved to start a family, and to have enjoyed his life. I am not ashamed to confess that I have cried several times facing all these crosses and it filled my heart with intense sadness.

Kite Aerial Photography is silent and therefore a suitable method to document these places while preserving the dignity of the surroundings. Verdun is now considered the world capital of peace. About five kilometers northeast is the ossuary of Douaumont which contains the bones of about 130,000 French and German
soldiers who could not be identified. To the east, there are 16,142 graves of French soldiers; they make you fall silent.

The Meuse-Argonne American Cemetery and Memorial near Romagne-sous-Montfaucon, with 14,246 graves from World War I, is the largest American military cemetery from both World Wars in Europe. The American Tower of Montfaucon d’Argonne honors the soldiers who made the breakthrough against the Germans on September 26, 1918, and was considered the biggest victory for the American forces in that era.

The American cemetery in Colleville-sur-Mer overlooks Omaha Beach and is the most famous of the war cemeteries in Normandy. There are graves for 9,387 American soldiers who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of Europe during Operation Overlord and subsequent battles.

This year, my French friends and Kite Aerial Photographers, Jean-Daniel Chautelaute and Emmanuel Colonner, accompanied me to document some of these historic places by KAP. Together we flew our kites to record the grave fields and memorials, reflecting the unimaginable suffering in Verdun and its surroundings.

Kites connect humans to the sky. In Bali, they fly kites to honor the Hindu gods: Shiva the destroyer, Brahma the creator, and Vishnu the preserver. Kitflying in Bali is not a sport but is part of their religion. Travelling to Indonesia and other countries has taught me about the similarity of people and to accept diversity. Modern genetic analysis of mitochondrial female DNA proves that all living Homo sapiens derive from a direct line of descent, so actually we are indeed all brothers and sisters.

The passion of kiteflying and KAP over a period of 29 years has enriched my life in a way I was not able to imagine before. The documentation of places of war by KAP has opened my mind about the past and has created a great respect for those people who sacrificed their lives to enable my life of freedom and security. If they could hear me, I would say, “You are not forgotten. Thank you.”