

SALUTING COWTOWN

FACT SHEET

History of the Poppy



In the spring of 1915, shortly after losing a friend in Ypres, a Canadian doctor, Lt. Col. John McCrae, was inspired by the sight of poppies growing in battle-scarred fields to write a now famous poem called *In Flanders Fields*.

After World War I, the poppy was adopted as a symbol of remembrance. During the war (1914–1918), much of the fighting took place in Western Europe. Previously beautiful countryside was blasted, bombed and fought over, again and again. The landscape swiftly turned to fields of mud – bleak and barren scenes where little or nothing could grow.

Bright red Flanders poppies (*Papaver Rhoeas*) however, were delicate but resilient flowers and grew in their thousands, flourishing even in the middle of chaos and destruction.

On impulse, Moina Michael bought a bouquet of poppies and handed them to businessmen meeting at the New York YMCA where she worked. She asked them to wear the poppy as a tribute to the fallen. That was November 1918. World War I had just ended, but America's sons would rest forever in Flander's fields. Later she would spearhead a campaign that would result in the adoption of the poppy as the national symbol of sacrifice.

On Sept. 27, 1920, the poppy became the official flower of The American Legion Family to memorialize the soldiers who fought and died during the war. In 1924, the distribution of poppies became a national program of the Legion. The (Royal) British Legion, formed in 1921, ordered 9 million of these poppies and sold them on November 11 that year.

In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row

That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved, and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

—Lt. Col. John McCrae

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