

American Legion
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In Flanders Fields

By Doctor John McRae 1872-1918

In Flanders 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 the 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.

One of the most asked questions is: why poppies? The answer is simple: poppies only flower in rooted up soil. Their seeds can lie on the ground for years and years, and only when someone roots up the ground, they will sprout. There was enough rooted up soil on the battlefield of the Western Front; in fact, the whole front consisted of churned up soil. So, in May 1915, when McCrae wrote his poem, around him poppies blossomed like no one had ever seen before.

Poppies are the perfect symbol for Remembrance Day, which as always November 11. From time immemorial they have been regarded traditionally as flowers of slumber and forgetfulness, but now they have become a national emblem of Remembrance.

Many thousands of years ago the ancient Greeks forged a legend regarding poppies and sleep. In this legend they likened the heads of dying warriors to the drooping poppies of the field. They even made crowns of poppies to be placed on the heads of those who had died - a symbol of perfect sleep.

However, it was the publication of these three simple verses which have been called "the greatest poem of Britain occasioned by the First World War" which firmly established the poppy as the international flower of respect and pride to be worn each year on Armistice Day.

The poem was called "In Flanders Fields" and was written by a doctor who was also a soldier and poet. He witnessed much of the trench warfare of the time and wrote his immortal poem on a page torn from a dispatch book which lay near him.

Dr. John McCrae was born of Scottish parents who emigrated to Canada His medical career was interrupted when he enlisted as a doctor with the Canadian troops so that by September 1914, he had been posted to France to care for wounded soldiers.

After writing his poem, he sent his verses to "Punch" magazine where they appeared on December 8th 1915. However, the poem was not to remain unknown for long as it was recognized it was born in the heat of the battle and that it had an enduring quality.

Dr. John McCrae was not to see the end of the War. He was wounded in May 1918 becoming a patient in his own hospital near the French coast where, suffering from pneumonia, he died three days later.