

The Poppy and Remembrance Day

In 1915, Lt. Col. John McCrae penned a poem on the Great War:

In Flanders Fields
In Flanders Fields, the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
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.

By 1921, the poppy had become a symbol of remembrance for the war dead of the Great War. That war cost 5,509 lives each day of the war, from 1914 to 1918. Just for some comparison, the American Civil War in four years took 518 lives per day.

A French woman Moina Michael, whose image is on a 3-cent U.S. postage stamp, began making the rose-colored poppy to help widows and orphans of the war in 1921 and the British Legion. The next year, the British Legion funded a factory in England to produce the poppies with ex-servicemen. Over time, the poppy has been used by other organizations. The purple poppy was used to honor the animals lost in the war, and the white poppy symbolized peace and later represented anti-war sentiment. The red poppy is on display each November in Great Britain and the Commonwealth.

In 2014, the Tower of London placed 888,246 ceramic red poppies in the moat around the tower as the centerpiece for Remembrance Day. The number represents 6% of the adult male population. In the United States, the day has been named Veteran's Day—a day to take time and remember all those individuals that gave their last full measure for the nation.