



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington, D.C. 20420

The Flower of Remembrance



In Flanders Fields

By John McCrae

*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.*

This was the poem written by World War I Colonel John McCrae, a surgeon with Canada's First Brigade Artillery. It expressed McCrae's grief over the "row on row" of graves of soldiers who had died on Flanders' battlefields, located in a region of western Belgium and northern France. The poem presented a striking image of the bright red flowers blooming among the rows of white crosses and became a rallying cry to all who fought in the First World War. The first printed version of it reportedly was in December 1915, in the British magazine *Punch*.

McCrae's poem had a huge impact on two women, Anna E. Guerin of France and Georgia native Moina Michael. Both worked hard to initiate the sale of artificial poppies to help orphans and others left destitute by the war. By the time Guerin established the first sale in the U.S., in 1920 with the help of The American Legion, the poppy was well known in the allied countries — America, Britain, France, Canada, Australia and New Zealand — as the "Flower of Remembrance." Proceeds from that first sale went to the American and French Children's League.

Guerin had difficulty with the distribution of the poppies in early 1922 and sought out Michael for help. Michael had started a smaller-scaled Poppy Day during a YMCA

conference she was attending in New York and wanted to use the poppies as a symbol of remembrance of the war. Guerin, called the "Poppy Lady of France" in her homeland, and Michael, later dubbed "The Poppy Princess" by the Georgia legislature, went to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) for help. Following its first nationwide distribution of poppies, the VFW adopted the poppy as its official memorial flower in 1922.

However, a shortage of poppies from French manufacturers led to the idea of using unemployed and disabled veterans to produce the artificial flowers. In 1924, a poppy factory was built in Pittsburgh, Pa., providing a reliable source of poppies and a practical means of assistance to veterans. Today, veterans at VA medical facilities and veterans homes help assemble the poppies, which are distributed by veterans service organizations throughout the country.

Donations received in return for these artificial poppies have helped countless veterans and their widows, widowers and orphans over the years. The poppy itself continues to serve as a perpetual tribute to those who have given their lives for the nation's freedom.