

The Poppy Story

From the battlefields of World War I, weary soldiers brought home the memory of a barren landscape transformed by wild poppies, red as the blood that had soaked the soil. By that miracle of nature, the spirit of their lost comrades lived on.

The poppy became a symbol of the sacrifice of lives in war and represented the hope that none had died in vain. The American Legion Auxiliary Poppy has continued to bloom for the casualties of four wars, its petals of paper bound together for veterans by veterans, reminding America each year that the men and women who have served and died for their country deserve to be remembered.

Poppy Day has become a familiar tradition in almost every American community. This distribution of the bright red memorial flower to the public is one of the oldest and most widely recognized programs of the American Legion Auxiliary.

This poppy, as a memorial flower to the war dead, can be traced to a single individual, Miss Moina Michael. She was so moved by Lt. Col. McCrae's poem, "In Flanders Fields," that she wrote a response:

*. . . the blood of heroes never dies
But lends a luster to the red
Of the flower that blooms above
the dead
In Flanders' Fields.*

On impulse, she bought a bouquet of poppies – all that New York City's Wanamaker's Department Store had – 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 was over, but America's sons would rest forever "in Flanders' Fields." Later she would spearhead a campaign that would result in the adoption of the poppy as the national symbol of sacrifice.



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

