

In Flanders Fields the Poppies Blow . . .

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On the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, the guns fell silent. World War I had ended. The poppy is the enduring symbol of remembrance of that war.



Photo by Wazimo U in *New International Magazine*, 28 July 2014 under creative common license.

Poppies were a common sight, especially on the Western Front. The poppy's origin as a symbol of remembrance lies in the landscapes where the battles were fought. On the war-torn battlefields of Europe, the common field poppy was one of the first plants to reappear after the fighting ceased. Its seeds, scattered in the wind, sat dormant in the ground, often for many years, germinating only when the ground was disturbed, as it was by the very brutal fighting of WW I.

John McCrae (1872-1918), a British surgeon, wrote this poem on May 3, 1915, after presiding over the funeral of friend and fellow soldier Lieutenant Alexis Helmer.




As part of the world-wide remembrance of the 100th anniversary of World War I, many countries issued stamps incorporating the poppy in the design.

Great Britain has featured the image on stamps of its Lest We Forget series, in addition to many of its World War I Centenary issues. The Lest We Forget series started in 2006 with the Battle of the Somme issue.

Poppies were shown blooming from the stems of barbed wire.



"In Flanders Fields"
by Col. 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.

In 2007, the stamp silhouetted forms of soldiers emerging from the center of the poppy.

In 2008, the face of one of the millions of soldiers who died in the war can be seen in the petals.

The association of the poppy with World War I was largely due to the efforts of two women.

Shortly after the war ended, Madame Anna Guerin (1878-196) began promoting an Inter-Allied Poppy Day in France. Her idea was for all World War I Allied countries to adopt the poppy as an emblem of remembrance for those who died during the war, and to sell artificial poppies made by French widows and orphans to raise funds for surviving veterans. In the three years following the war, she promoted her idea in Great Britain, the United States, and Canada.



Madame E. Guerin, from a 1919 publication



In the United States, poppies are not worn on November 11, Veterans Day, as this day has traditionally been a time to honor all living veterans. However, the poppy is worn on Memorial Day.

Issued in 2021, this stamp features a photograph of the poppy that Canadians wear over their hearts each Remembrance Day.

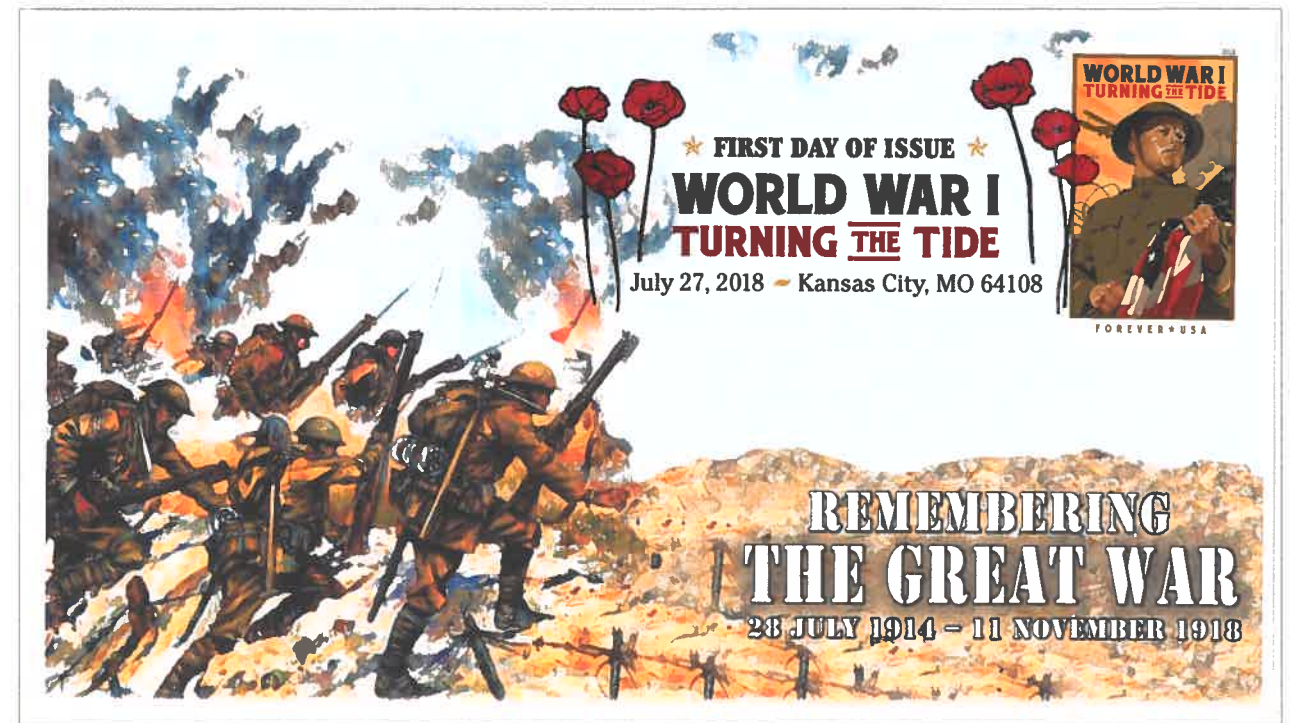


In 2018, the United States issued a single stamp in token acknowledgement of the nation's part in World War I. The official FDC digital color postmark featured poppies.

The idea spread rapidly through the Commonwealth of Nations. In 1921, the Royal Canadian Legion adopted the poppy as the symbol for its 1st National Poppy Campaign, an annual campaign which continues to this day. \$20 million are raised annually through the Poppy Fund.

In the same year, nine million poppies were distributed by the British Royal Legion. Today, 45 million are sold annually in Great Britain for Remembrance Sunday to honor and support veterans. Guerin was christened "The Poppy Lady of France."

Meanwhile, in the United States, Moira Belle Michael (1869-1944) inspired by John McCrae's poem, "In Flanders Fields . . .," was simultaneously promoting the same idea of selling silk poppies as a means of raising funds to support war veterans. In 1921, the poppy was adopted by the American Legion Auxiliary as the symbol for World War I and Michael was nicknamed "The Poppy Lady." In 1948, the United States issued a stamp in her honor.



The poppy will forever be associated with remembrance and the unity of what loss means.