

VETERANS' WEEK

5 - 11 NOVEMBER

2006

Share the Story



Each year, Canada marks Veterans' Week from November 5 to 11. Veterans' Week is a time to honour and remember all those who served Canada in times of war, military conflict and peace.

The theme for Veterans' Week 2006 is *Share the Story*. When we *Share the Story*, we become a part of a legacy of remembrance – a chain of events that will link our past with our future, and preserve the memories of our military heroes.

Talk to one of our Branch Veterans this month! Here are five of them.



From left: **Sid Potter**, served in the Atlantic & Pacific with the British Merchant Navy from 1943-52; **Trevor Stevens**, served in the RCAF from 1941-45; **Jason Taylor**, the youngest veteran at Branch 322 enlisted in the Canadian Army in 2002 and has recently returned from seven months in Afghanistan; **Doug Haigh**, joined the Canadian Army in 1942 and was sent overseas in 1943 with the Canadian Signal Corp celebrating his 19th birthday aboard his ship; **Doug Ferguson**, the oldest surviving Veteran at Branch 322 of the Legion served in the Core of Royal Engineers in the British Army from 1936-45.

Why the Poppy?

A writer first made the connection between the poppy and battlefield deaths during the Napoleonic wars of the early 19th century, remarking that fields that were barren before battle exploded with the blood-red flowers after the fighting ended.

During the tremendous bombardments of the First World War the chalk soils became rich in lime from rubble, allowing 'popaver rhoeas' to thrive. When the war ended the lime was quickly absorbed, and the poppy began to disappear again.

After John McCrae's poem In Flanders Fields was published in 1915 the poppy became a popular symbol for soldiers who died in battle.

Three years later an American, Moina Michael, was working in a New York City YMCA canteen when she started wearing a poppy in memory of the millions who died on the battlefield.

During a 1920 visit to the United States a French woman, Madame Guerin, learned of the custom. On her return to France she decided to use handmade poppies to raise money for the destitute children in war-torn areas of the country. In November, 1921, the first poppies were distributed in Canada.

Thanks to the millions of Canadians who wear flowers each November, the little red plant has never died. And neither have Canadian's memories for 116,031 of their countrymen who died in battle.



Today, fields of brilliant poppies still grow in France

How Do We Remember?

On November 11, especially, but also throughout the year, we have the opportunity to remember the efforts of these special Canadians. In remembering, we pay homage to those who respond to their country's needs. On November 11, we pause for two minutes of silent tribute, and we attend commemorative ceremonies in memory of our war dead.

Following the First World War a French woman, Madame E. Guérin, suggested to British Field-Marshal Earl Haig that women and children in devastated areas of France could produce poppies for sale to support wounded Veterans. The first of these poppies were distributed in Canada in November of 1921, and the tradition has continued ever since, both here and in many parts of the world.

Poppies are worn as the symbol of remembrance, a reminder of the blood-red flower that still grows on the former battlefields of France and Belgium. During the terrible bloodshed of the second Battle of Ypres in the spring of 1915, Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, a doctor serving with the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps, wrote of these flowers which lived on among the graves of dead soldiers:

*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.
John McCrae*

The flowers and the larks serve as reminders of nature's ability to withstand the destructive elements of war by men, a symbol of hope in a period of human despair. In Canada, traditionally the poppies which we wear were made by disabled Veterans. They are reminders of those who died while fighting for peace: we wear them as reminders of the horrors of conflict and the preciousness of the peace they fought hard to achieve.

The two minutes of silence provide another significant way of remembering wartime while thinking of peace. Two minutes are scarcely enough time for thought and reflection. As we pause and bow our heads, we remember those brave men and women who courageously volunteered for the cause of freedom and peace.

For those who lived through these wars, remembering means thinking of comrades. It evokes memories of men and women who never returned home. Those born after the wars might picture the youthful soldiers who eagerly joined up from high schools, businesses and farms across the country, only to meet death while fighting against the enemy. They may imagine the anguish of a man leaving a new wife, a young family, an elderly mother. The important thing for all of us to remember is that they fought to preserve a way of life, Canadian values, and the freedom we enjoy today and often take for granted. Remember that the silence is to honour their sacrifice and memory.

There are memorials to commemorate the service of Canadian troops in Canada and overseas. The National War Memorial in Ottawa was originally designed to recognize those who served in the First World War. It has been rededicated to symbolize the sacrifice made by Canadians in the Second World War, in



Korea, and in subsequent peacekeeping missions. The National War Memorial symbolizes the unstinting and courageous way Canadians give their service when values they believe in are threatened. Advancing together through a large archway are figures representing the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have answered the call to serve; at the top of the arch are two figures, emblems of peace and freedom.