

The Poppy blooms for the casualties of all wars, its petals of paper are 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.

From the battlefields of World War I, weary soldiers brought home the memory of a barren landscape that was transformed by wild poppies; red as the blood that had soaked the soil. By the 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.

In 1915, Colonel John McCrae wrote the poem in Flanders's Field –

In Flanders Fields the Poppies blow
Between the crosses, row and 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's Field.

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's field

The poppy, as a Memorial flower to the war dead, can be traced to a single individual, Miss Moina Michael. She was so moved by Colonel McCrae's poem 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's fields

On impulse, she brought a bouquet of poppies, all that Wanamaker's Department Store had and she handed them out to businessmen at the 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's Fields. Later, she would spearhead a campaign that would result in the adoption of the poppy as the national symbol of sacrifice.

In June 1919, the 32nd Division of the Army came home to Milwaukee, Wisconsin. They had a refreshment booth decorated with poppies. Their booth was stripped twice of its poppies and in their place were donations on the counter from patriotic Americans. These donations were collected and used for the benefits of disabled veterans.

A volunteer, Miss Mary Haney took the idea to the Legion Post in Milwaukee in 1920. They distributed a large number of poppies and received money for them- also using this money for disabled veterans.

The American Legion was the first national organization to adopt the poppy as its memorial flower as of September 1920 at their National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio. The American Legion Auxiliary followed suit in October 1921 in Kansas City, Missouri.

In 1922 the first American made poppies were assembled in the hospitals in Minnesota. In 1924, the American Legion Auxiliary was given the responsibility of the Poppy program. They pledged 100% of the profits from the poppy distributions to the welfare relief for servicemen and women and their families; thus fulfilling the true meaning of the poppy, an emblem of faith; faith which is being kept with all who died through service to the living.

What does the Poppy represent?

The red petals on the poppy stand for the vast outpouring of blood.

The yellow and black center stands for the mud and desolation of all battlefields.

The green of the stem is symbolic of the forests, meadows and fields where generations of Americans have perished to make this land free.

The stem represents the courage and determination of our fallen warriors.

All poppies are made by hospitalized veterans. The material to make them is supplied by the American Legion Auxiliary. These hospitalized veterans receive pay for the poppies they assemble. This is not only a source of income but also a form of therapy for them. Some of the veterans make the poppies by using their mouths and feet because they have no hands or fingers. Whatever The American Legion Auxiliary receives in donations over the cost (15 ¢ per poppy), is TOTALLY and ONLY used for veterans and their families. Wear a poppy with pride, because this little red flower is the flower with a heart; it says "I remember!"