
Letters To The Editor



Poppies and Memorial Day

By Gordon Graham, 824 Sq.

Poppies and Memorial Day, in recent years, have become synonymous. What may not be known is that it was not always that way.

Memorial Day originated during the Civil War when southern women chose May 30 to decorate soldier's graves. This tradition took hold in the northern states and has been carried on through the years and eventually became a national holiday. Today, on this sacred day, we honor those men from all wars who have made the ultimate sacrifice for their country.

Poppy Day, although celebrated at the same time as Memorial Day, did not have its origin until 1922, when the Veterans of Foreign Wars conducted the first poppy sale nationwide. After that, other groups working for and with war veterans joined the campaign. The proceeds from the first efforts to sell poppies were used for the benefit of children in France and Belgium who were victims of the First World War.

Why were poppies chosen for the symbol of this program? They were chosen because the fields of France and Belgium were strewn with poppies prior to the tremendous land battles that took place there. These beautiful and fragile creations of God appeared to be completely destroyed in the process, but after the carnage, they reappeared the next spring in all their beauty. This rebirth seemed to be the perfect symbol for the rebuilding of lives after the war and who can argue the point.

Adding to the impetus was the fact that a Canadian soldier penned, what became the well-known poem "In Flanders Field", which reads, in part -

*In Flanders Field the poppies blow,
between the crosses, row on row.
That mark our place; and in the sky
the larks, still bravely singing, fly.*

Today, the poppy remains the symbol of hope with veterans everywhere in this country. However, the proceeds from the sale of poppies today are used strictly for the benefit of our disabled and needy veterans. There are absolutely no administrative costs assessed and 100% of the monies collected go for disabled veterans assistance.

Soon, the men in our local VFW post and comrades across

the country will take to the streets and malls, wearing their caps and carrying a handful of poppies and a canister. These men are the lucky ones and they know it - they survived their war, be it WWII, Korea, Viet Nam or Desert Storm and have not forgotten their less fortunate comrades, who sit in VA hospitals around the country.

So, when you see one of us approach you in your car at a nearby intersection, won't you please stop, crank your window down and buy a poppy. The man in the cap will thank you profusely and you will feel better for doing so. And don't worry about waiting in traffic for that brief moment it takes to buy your poppy, our comrades sitting in the hospital face much longer waits, if you know what I mean.

Dear Bud:

Very seldom can one look back at a war and experience a "good feeling". I am very fortunate in having two such experiences and also of knowing of the kindness of my parents.

The 824th had an Italian tailor who set up shop in our area. Shortly after he arrived, the only needle he had for an antique Singer sewing machine broke. This was a disaster since no replacement needles were available in war-torn Italy. Realizing the importance of that little needle, I wrote to my parents for help. I sent along the broken needle and all of the model numbers, etc., from the old machine. My parents then started a search which involved trying to find people who may have an old machine with an extra needle, plus, they shopped every store in St. Paul and Minneapolis, Minnesota. About a month later, I received a package containing every type of sewing machine needle they could find. The tailor was, indeed, overjoyed since the needles that wouldn't fit his machine, he was able to sell and thus supplement his income.

The second incident involving my parents in far-off Minnesota, again challenged their generosity and goodness. The Italian boy who served my needs for laundry, water jugs, etc., was wearing a pair of shoes tied on with rope, or anything else he could find to keep them in place. Once again, I became involved. The first step was to make an outline of his feet (on a sheet of paper I could mail). Next, an appeal to my parents with the outline for their help. Once again they came through. My mother took her shoe ration card and the paper with the foot outlined, and went shopping. In turn, she found a pair of Army-type high shoes and sent them on their way.

As I gave the shoes to my young Italian friend, I explained about my parents' involvement and told him he should wear these shoes to protect his feet. The following day he showed up wearing the shoes. However, the day following, he was back to the old tie-on shoes. Of course, I questioned him as to why he wasn't wearing his new shoes. His family, he said, took the shoes away from him and sold them for food. Of course, I never told this to my parents since they would be devastated to know their efforts were wasted. Yet, I knew of the poverty of the people and realized that to them food for the family was more important than their son's comfort. I also learned a lesson. From then on in, I doubled my payment for laundry and service.

Jim Carney, 824 Sq.