

We Shall **NOT** Target

# Being in Flanders Fields

By Mark Stevens

Photos by Sharon Matthews-Stevens



It's Wednesday morning, as peaceful as the day is long.

The growl of a tractor plowing nearby fields lays down a bass accompaniment to the 'mooing' of a pair of Jersey cows who stroll over to greet us, to the winds whispering in the trees rising up from the bank of the adjacent canal, to the chorus of bird calls.

**The larks, still bravely singing, fly**

Not far from this spot in the Flanders countryside, sometime during the night of May 3, 1915, Canadian soldier Alexis Helmer was blown to pieces.

**We are the dead.**

The morning sun gilds those trees overlooking the canal, it shimmers on the water's wind-riffled surface. Just beyond the tiny meadow where the cows graze, a gentle grass-covered hill is surmounted by an obelisk-shaped monument that frowns down upon a

cemetery populated by more than a thousand graves.

**Row on row**

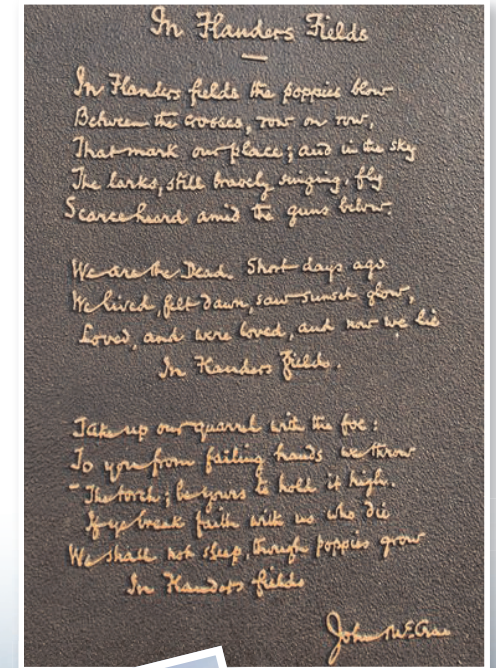
No one knows the exact location of Helmer's grave. But one thing is certain. He was remembered.

Here, at Essex Farm, was born the poem, "In Flanders Fields".

When you enter from the road, the cemetery – identified by a tall white cross imprinted with a bronze sword – is on the right. Make a left after roughly 50 metres and you will encounter concrete bunkers covered with earth, gouged from the bank of the canal. The concrete you see today came later. On May 3, 1915 the makeshift "hospital" was mere earth and sandbags.

Here a Canadian surgeon named John McCrae performed first aid, applied dressings, decided that there was no hope for some coming into his care.

On the morning after Helmer died, McCrae took pen to paper on this very spot, exhausted after nearly two weeks of constant German shelling, shattered by the death of his friend.




**Michael Chong**  
Member of Parliament  
Wellington - Halton Hills

[michael.chong@parl.gc.ca](mailto:michael.chong@parl.gc.ca)  
866 - 878 - 5556

This November 11th take time to remember the sacrifice of those who died in defence of Canada.

