

WORD'S WORTH

With Eric Balkind



I remember, I remember

No matter how predictable, no matter that I have watched or participated for more than 50 years, I am always moved by a Remembrance Day ceremony. I watch those old warriors standing stiffly at attention and I wonder what they must be feeling deep inside. Grief for their lost comrades? Anger at the stupidity of war? Pride that they stood up to be counted? At the end, when the Last Post sounds, sadness wells up inside, I almost choke and — there are always tears. In that moment, my own childhood memories flood in and I am, in my own way, standing right up there with them.

I remember particularly two of my uncles; they were brothers who sailed during the Second World War in Britain's merchant fleet. They were stokers — an unknown breed in today's world of diesel engines. But in the 1940s they had the dirtiest, most dangerous job on board ship — shovelling coal incessantly for four hours at a time in the bowels of those decrepit merchantmen which maintained Great Britain's lifelines. And if the torpedoes struck, the men on shift were the first to know — in the brief seconds of life which usually remained.

Somehow, both men survived the Atlantic convoys and even the infamous Murmansk run, and I know that they had tales to tell; but to the end of their days I never heard either one mention those dark times. Their generation believed in and lived by the famous British "stiff upper-lip." It was many, many years later when I learned that the pittance of a wage earned by these brave men during wartime service was cut off by the ship-owners the moment their vessels were sunk. The total injustice of it all struck like a thunderbolt and, truth to tell, I am angry even now as I recount the fact.

And on this Remembrance Day in 1992, I wonder if you know that there is a sad tale to tell of the official treatment accorded the members of our own Canadian Merchant Marines. In June of this year, the Canadian Parliament finally passed a bill which gives veterans' benefits to some 3,200 of the approximately 5,000 living survivors of Canada's wartime merchant fleet. After 47 years, they finally have access to military hospitals, home-based medical support and increased pension benefits.

But these improvements apply only to men who served on the high seas; not included are those who served on the 17 ships sunk, by German U-boats, in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Somehow, by a remarkable trick of mental sleight-of-hand, government has become convinced that being sunk in territorial waters doesn't count.

Today is Remembrance Day 1992, and Canada's merchant marine vets are expecting, for the first time, to be acknowledged and to participate in services at the war memorial in Ottawa. They are also hoping that there will be, in the Peace Tower, a book of remembrance dedicated to their own, long-lost comrades. Such recognition, denied by a succession of uncaring, ungrateful federal governments, is long overdue. We can give credit to the current feds for taking action at long last but, you know, even they can't get it right. Makes you wonder where their heads and their hearts are really at.

Wit & Wisdom

Words are easy and war is hell but words are among the few tools we have with which to describe that hell, the better to understand it and hopefully, some fine day to eradicate it.

"What distinguishes war is not that man is slain, but that he is slain, spoiled, crushed by the cruelty, the injustice, the treachery, the murderous hand of man."

— William E. Channing

"War, he sung, is toil and trouble;
Honour but an empty bubble."

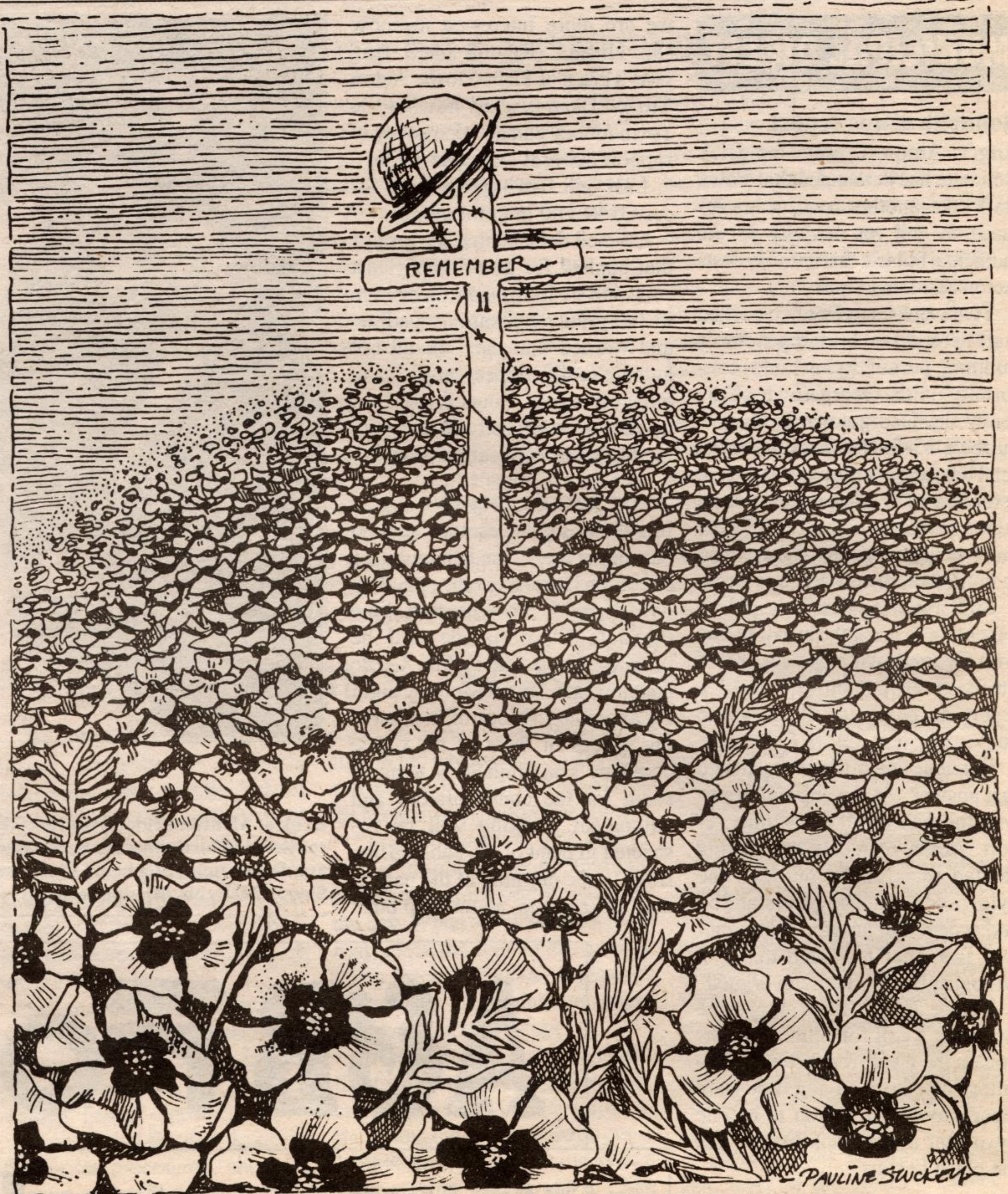
— Dryden

There is no such thing as an inevitable war. If war comes it will be from failure of human wisdom."

— Bonar Law

"When after many battles past,
Both tir'd with blows, make peace at last,
What is it, after all, the people get?
Why! Taxes, widows, wooden legs, and debt."

— Francis Moore



LETTERS

Agri-food adventure

During the week of Sept. 13 to 17, I had a chance to go to Ridgetown and learn about Ontario's agricultural industry. It wasn't just another week of school however.

On the first night we played games and had a family barbecue. By the end of Sunday night all the students from various schools felt like old friends.

Monday was a very busy and full day. We started our day off with a tour of the Ridgetown College of Agricultural Technology. After lunch we observed a tomato harvest. It takes 10 people to work the harvester, which does an acre per hour.

The next stop was Hank Vanderpol's mushroom farm. This was the worst-smelling place I have been too. Here I saw different stages in manure decomposition and mushroom growth.

At one place we saw prairie bison, a Russian boar, elk, mules deer, Llamas and many different birds. We all tasted buffalo meat and were amazed that buffalo could be cooked so many different ways. After saying thank you and having a ride on a camel, we went back to the college and watched milking.

Monday evening we visited a Rotary meeting and listened to Wendy Rose from C.P.I. of Canada. She spoke of how beneficial the pesticides were that the government offered to farmers. Tuesday we went to Omstead Foods in Wheatley. This is where all the different kinds of vegetables are

processed for most food stores in Canada. The factory was very large and noisy. Some of us had the chance to go into the freezer where the vegetables are kept until they are ready to be shipped. It was like a winter wonderland, with ice dangling off the ceiling.

From there we went to the Heinz Company where we had lunch and a tour of the company. I learned there that Heinz makes 197 different products besides tomato juice. Inside, the plant is very high-tech and no photos were allowed. Later on I discovered that Campbell's Soup Company processes tomatoes very differently than Heinz.

A tour of the Fisheries' Research Station taught us how different bacteria affect the fish industry. That night we participated in a Farm Olympics contest. The event I like most was having two 2-by-4s attached to our feet and having to walk around four bales of hay. It took a lot of coordination and team effort.

I would like to say thank you to Acton's Rotary Club and especially Mr. Fread for giving me this opportunity to experience part of Ontario's agricultural heritage.

Kim McIsaac, Acton

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