

## Some Remembrance Day origins

Once again we approach that time when we assemble at Cenotaphs to celebrate Remembrance Day.

I researched Remembrance Day for a different angle for this column, finding some interesting background to the day.

In a press package from Veterans Affairs Canada, I pored over facts and figures, which I found very enlightening.

Originally called Armistice Day, it was held November 11, 1919, to commemorate the signing of the Armistice, a year before, Nov. 11, 1918, marking the end of the First World War.

The Armistice was signed at 11 a.m., that day, hence "the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month." The tradition survives, as we hold a minute's silence at 11 a.m.

From 1923 to 1931, Armistice Day was held on the Monday of the week in which Nov. 11 fell, but in 1931, MP Allan Neil introduced a bill to hold it on a fixed day—Nov. 11 was chosen.

In addition, the bill changed the name from Armistice to Remembrance Day, with the first actual 'Remembrance Day' celebrated in 1931.

When I was younger, Remembrance Day was a school holiday, as everyone assembled at Cenotaphs to remember. It was the late 50s and early 60s, and memories of lost brothers, husbands and sons were still vivid in the minds of those left behind—it had been a scant 10 to 15 years since the Second World War, and much less for those who fought in Korea.

I wondered how many died.

From 1914 to 1918, when Canada's population was only a few million, 620,000 men and women served in the First World War. Of those, 66,000, more than 10 per cent died in the muddy trenches.

In September 1939, the Canadian Armed Forces had 58,000 men and women volunteering for action in the Second World War, and Canadian soldiers formed the main assault

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Ted Brown

force at Dieppe— 900 were killed and 2,000 were taken prisoner.

Canada's troops were in full force on D-Day, with 14,000 soldiers facing the machine guns at Normandy. By the end of the war in 1945, more than a million Canadian soldiers had taken part, with 45,000 of them dying in the process. In the Korean conflict, 26,000 saw action, with 1,500 of them killed.

The most recognized symbol is the poppy. First noticed during the Napoleonic Wars, poppies bloomed over the graves of soldiers.

And 100 years later, they flourished in Flanders Fields, and were immortalized by Guelph soldier and poet John McCrae, with his 1915 poem, "In Flanders Fields."

In 1920, Mme. E. Guérin of France discovered Moira Michael wearing a poppy (inspired by McCrae's poem) during a visit to the U.S. Guérin resolved to use it as a fund-raiser for First World War veterans and orphans in Europe.

It was adopted by the British Legion and Canada's Great War Veterans Association (now the Royal Canadian Legion) in 1921, making it the universal symbol it is today.

Researching facts is interesting, but knowing the background is only part of it. Making an effort to attend services is equally important.

Because, by doing so, we show respect for all our veterans—both living and dead.

And most of all, remember why we're there.



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