

Lt. Col. John McCrae was a Canadian medical officer serving on the battlefield in the province of Flanders in Belgium during WWI. On May 2, 1915, his very close friend, Alexis Helmer, was killed by a German canon shell. That evening, in the absence of a chaplain, Col. McCrae presided over the burial of his friend and recited from memory a few passages from the Church of England's "Order of the Burial of the Dead."

The next day, Sergeant-Major Cyril Allinson was going about his duties delivering the mail. He saw Col. McCrae sitting on the back of an ambulance parked near the field hospital just a few hundred yards north of the town of Ypres (e-press) Belgium. McCrae was composing his now famous *In Flanders Fields* poem. Allinson silently watched the colonel and later recalled that, "His face was very tired but calm as he wrote. He looked around from time to time, his eyes straying to Helmer's grave."

Within minutes, Col. McCrae had completed the poem and when he was done, without a word, McCrae took his mail from Allinson and handed him the poem. Allinson was deeply moved by what he read: "The poem was an beautiful description of the scene in front of us both. He used the word "blow" in the poem because the red poppies growing in the fields were actually being blown that morning by a gentle east wind. It never occurred to me at that time that (his poem would become legendary)." But why wouldn't it? You see, Col. McCrae captures in a few short, emotional verses, the loss we feel for those heroic men who fought and died for their country, and the need for all of us to always, always, remember their great sacrifice.

Here is his poem, composed at the battlefield...

**In Flanders fields the poppies blow
between the crosses, row on 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, and felt the dawn,
and saw (the) sunset's glow.
We loved and were loved:
And now we lie
In Flanders fields!**

**So take up our quarrel with the foe.
To you, from failing hands, we throw the torch:
Be it yours to hold it high.
(But) If (you) break faith with us who die,
We shall not sleep... though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.**