

# Why the Poppy for Memorial Day?

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Observed on the last Monday in May in the United States, Memorial Day marks the unofficial start of summer. It is a day to honor and remember all those who have died while serving in the armed forces for our country. It was originally known as Decoration Day and while many cities claim to have held the first one, Grand Army of the Republic leader General John A. Logan chose May 30, 1868 as a national day to honor and remember those killed during the Civil War by laying flowers (decorating) on their graves. This was the first official Decoration Day and it was held at Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

More than forty years later, during World War I, a Lieutenant in the Canadian Army named John McCrae noticed red poppies growing across the landscape where fighting had raged during the Second Battle of Ypres. The year was 1915 and this scene inspired him to write the poem, 'In Flanders Fields.' Little did he know that the seeds of this flower can remain dormant for as long as 100 years and will only grow in soil that has been overturned and disturbed, such as when trenches are dug, bombs are exploded, or mass cemeteries are created. Thus, battlefields provide the perfect conditions for these flowers to grow and Western Europe has been the site of countless battlefields throughout history. The conditions for their growth date back for centuries, but the connection between war and their appearance only was recognized during the Napoleonic Wars of the 19th century. To Lt. McCrae, the poppy symbolized the blood shed of his fellow soldiers and his poem became a symbol of that devastating war.

Shortly before the war ended in 1918, Moina Michael, an American professor and humanitarian, read McCrae's poem in the Ladies Home Journal and found herself deeply moved. She wrote a poem in response to McCrae's titled 'We Shall Keep the Faith' and decided to make and sell silk poppies as a way to remember those who had died in the war and to help support those veterans lucky enough to make it home. The idea quickly spread to Britain, France, and other countries who fought in World War I. Today, many European countries associate the poppy with Remembrance Day, November 11th, the day World War I officially ended (known in the United States as Veterans Day). In the U.S., the red corn poppy has become synonymous with Memorial Day. Over time, the organizations of the VFW and American Legion have adopted the selling of artificial poppies, which has become symbolic of the Americans who have died serving in the armed forces during all eras since the 1920s.

## "In Flanders Fields"

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, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,  
Loved and were loved, and now we lie  
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:  
To you from failing hands we throw  
The torch; be yours to hold it high.  
If ye break faith with us who die  
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow  
In Flanders fields.

Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae  
~ May 3, 1915  
(As published in Punch Magazine, December  
8, 1915)

This activity has been prepared for you by the  
staff at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in  
Madison. Learn more at [wisvetmuseum.com](http://wisvetmuseum.com).



# Share Your Connection to a Fallen Servicemember

Open the American Battle Monuments Commissions “Search ABMC Burials and Memorials” website, [abmc.gov](http://abmc.gov)



Click on Burial Search on top of the page.



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Under the State Entered Service From box, scroll down and select 'Wisconsin'.

Under War check the box next to the conflict you would like to search, or leave all unchecked, to see all Wisconsin Veterans buried at one of American Battle Monuments Commission's cemeteries.

You can also narrow search results based on which cemetery your Wisconsin Veteran is buried in under Cemetery/Memorial, and/or under Branch of Service, which branch of the armed forces they served in. (Feel free to substitute a family member if you have one who died while serving our country.)

After you have selected your search, click the Apply button.

The screenshot shows the 'Start Your Search' form with the following fields: First Name, Last Name, Serial/Service #, Unit, State Entered Service From (highlighted in red), Cemetery/Memorial, War (with checkboxes for Korean War, Other, Vietnam War, World War I, World War II), Date of Death (Day, Month, Year), and Missing Status. The 'Apply' button is at the bottom.

This screenshot shows the same 'Start Your Search' form, but with the 'Apply' button highlighted in red. A small informational box on the right side of the form states: 'ABMC doesn't have casualty lists. ABMC doesn't have information on burials within the United States. ABMC does have burial and memorialization information on 200,000+ Americans honored at our sites. Most died in WWI or WWII.'

### Optional

Have your family create an Instagram or Facebook post (Note: Be sure to have your parents' help with this activity)

Have a picture of you and your adult planting the poppies or the poppy you created taken.

Under your picture, enter something like: This year for Memorial Day my (insert adult's name who helped you) and I (insert planted poppies or made poppies) in honor of (insert your veterans name). He/she was a (insert rank) in the (insert branch of service) during (insert war). He/she died serving his/her country and is buried at (insert cemetery name).

#WisRemembers #WisVetsMuseum #MemorialDay2021 (You could also write this out on paper to keep for yourself too.)

### Example

This year for Memorial Day my father and I planted poppies in honor of Marvin A. Abrams. He was a Technical Sergeant in the U.S. Army Air Forces during World War II. He died serving his country and is buried at Ardennes American Cemetery. #WisRemembers #WisVetsMuseum #MemorialDay2021



This activity has been prepared for you by the staff at the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison. Learn more at wisvetsmuseum.com.

