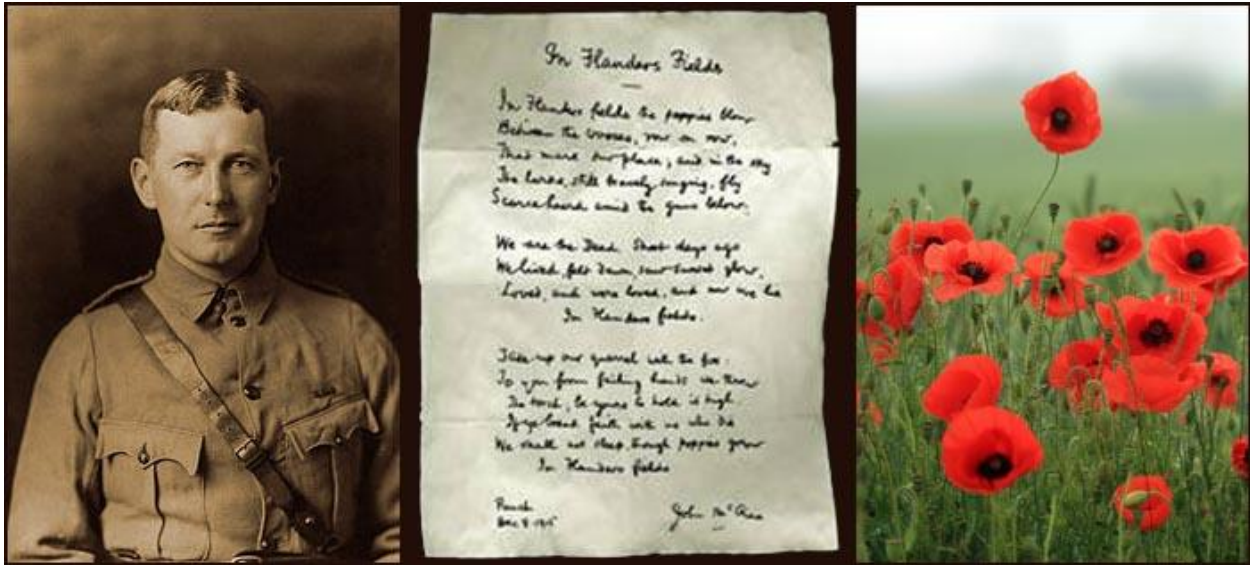


The Fields of Ypres

Dawn Donovan



Along the fields in Ypres, graves were dug to house the fallen men who would never again ache for their brides' embraces or return to school after the war was over. They were lying in a foreign land, while poppies grew above them; a symbol of a sweeter part of life amidst the horror of rat-infested trenches and rotting feet. The men knew they would probably never leave those trenches of their own accord. The one hope they had was to be picked up and buried, and therefore avoid the trenches, even without any care as to who they were or what they had done for their country.

In and around the area of Ypres, from 1914 to 1917, over 100,000 men would perish. Ypres fell victim to some of the first trenches, weapons of mass destruction, shellshock, and chemical warfare.

Seeing the men gasp for air as they lay dying from chlorine gas left men like Patrick McCoy, a Scottish officer, reflecting, "Death [has] brought its blessed relief." Escaping to the trenches, presumably to avoid the chlorine gas above, only hastened one's death, as the gas gravitated toward the ground. The survivors of the trenches would be engaged, upon escape, in a show of artillery fighting that would be dubbed "The Northern Lights." In the sickening onslaught of death, eerie lights culminated from the bombardment of mortars, bolt action rifles, machine guns, artillery, and canons.

Some were left with a new symptom of modern warfare, called shellshock, most commonly known today as "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder." Involuntarily, men who normally bore the brunt of life courageously were found in the corners of their homes, eyes wide, reliving the nightmare of the trenches. These men found little relief from

sympathetic onlookers. Good men, yearning to be rid of the hellish trenches, only found themselves, after returning home, unable to leave the images and experiences behind. It had all crept into a place deep within their being they could never escape. Hell in the trenches would follow them as long as time was their companion. There was no escape, no relief.

The only thing we can do now is remember. We must remember, for if we do not we leave all these men behind in open trenches. It isn't just that they deserve to be remembered for their sacrifice, but because we have a responsibility to not repeat the atrocities these men died to end. If war is a natural state of the world, more so than peace, then shouldn't we embrace the past for it is: lessons to be learned?

How many of us are aware that chlorine gas was used in World War I or that the poppies we see on Memorial Day are a reminder of a *In Flanders Fields*, a poem by a Canadian doctor named John McCrae? From May 25-27, 2018, for the first time, America embedded the National Mall in Washington D.C. with poppies, in honor of the 645,000 American soldiers who died while serving in the military during World War I and the wars since. From May 24-26 the 81/2 ft by 133 ft. long wall will once again display the poppies with a special commemoration of the 75th anniversary of D-Day.



John McCrae wrote *In Flanders Fields* on May 3, 1915, sitting in the back of an ambulance near the battlefield in Ypres. During the second battle of Ypres he lost a friend and witnessed the German chlorine gas massacre. McCrae would dub this second battle at Ypres "17 Days of Hades," which began on April 22, 1915.

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.