

## **“Symbols”**

*Essay by Damien MacLennan, Branch #118 North Vancouver*

On Remembrance Day, we take a moment to remember all of the soldiers who sacrificed their lives during war to keep our country free. We are very privileged to live in a country such as Canada, and we must be thankful for the opportunity to feel safe. We should also reflect on war-torn countries and their suffering. On this day, we take a moment to reflect on the many sacrifices that were made in war. Powerful symbols can help us do this.

A striking symbol that helps us reflect on Remembrance Day is the vivid red poppy we wear on our chest with pride. The poppies symbolize the blood of fallen soldiers who had to leave their home so that their country could be free. In Flanders Fields, many tombstones stand erect across the plains of Belgium, with poppies scattered amongst them, almost as if they were resting with the soldiers. They display a brilliant red mirage of unspeakable beauty, providing almost comfort among the dead. These poppies flourished amongst the fields that were trampled upon by Canadian soldiers, whose bravery will never be forgotten. This is why the poem “In Flanders Fields” is such a powerful example of this symbolism; it is from the perspective of the dead, who are hauntingly telling their experience of war using the poppies as symbols of remembrance. Wearing a poppy is not only a symbol of remembrance, but also a sign of war.

Another important symbol of our soldiers' sacrifices is the emphatic trumpeting sound of “The Last Post,” followed by two minutes of juxtaposed silence at 11am, and the graceful laying of wreaths at memorial sites. When different families lay down wreaths, it acknowledges their ancestors who died fighting in the war for a very long time. The two minutes of silence represent us reflecting on the many privileges we have, living in a free country, not a country at war. We should all reflect on this during this moment, as two minutes is not a lot of time compared to the many years that the soldiers were fighting in the war.

Lastly, the symbol of time should be reflected upon, as we remember how long these soldiers had to fight for, and how strong they had to be to endure suffering for so long. War lasted for years; it must have been extremely difficult for these soldiers physically, mentally, and emotionally, especially when they became extremely injured and lost comrades. Time must have felt like eternity to these soldiers, so by acknowledging this time, we pay tribute to their sacrifice.

Human beings use symbols to help conceptualize difficult events and remember them better. By wearing a poppy, honouring the two minutes of silence, laying wreaths, and reflecting upon the long duration of war, we allow ourselves to remember the soldiers and their sacrifices, while also humbling ourselves to all the privileges we have in Canada, particularly that of being free. What a gift it is to remember such bravery and sacrifice.