

“In Flanders fields the poppies blow, between the crosses, row on row.” The first line of this now famous poem written by Canadian soldier John McCrae, brings to mind a solemn and peaceful vision of an area that was previously a scene of great devastation. Replacing the death and destruction that took place in Flanders Fields, memorial crosses were erected for over 12,000 soldiers, nearly 370 of them being Americans. The poppies grew from the earth that was disturbed by continuous bombardment and by soldiers’ feet constantly running through, bringing the seeds to the top, which were then fertilized by bone and bloodshed. This hallowed ground is just one example of the willingness of our military to go where they have to go, and do what they have to do to protect our rights and freedoms. Through their selfless sacrifice, we are able to live our lives as we like. The immense gratitude, respect, and admiration that we have for them should be evident everyday.

The poppy is a symbol of the sacrifices that our veterans have made for our freedom. Seeing the bright red flower is an immediate reminder to veterans that their service matters and is not forgotten. Veterans Day is our best attempt at showing them that. In the eleventh hour, on the eleventh day of the eleventh month, of 1918, an armistice was officially signed, effectively ending World War I. On November eleventh, 1919, President Woodrow Wilson first referred to this day as Armistice Day. The day was observed with public gatherings, parades and a short pause of activities at eleven o’clock. In the years to follow our country was involved in World War II and the Korean war. In 1954, President Dwight D. Eisenhower declared November eleventh to be Veteran’s Day in the United States, in order to honor all those that have served. On this day, we get the opportunity to show veterans and their families that their sacrifice has not gone unnoticed. The years, months and hours spent away from home serving and protecting not only those they love, but complete strangers, is truly remarkable. Their willingness to give their

lives for our country is a debt that we can never hope to repay. The way we choose to honor them should measure up to that. How can we possibly show them what it has meant to us? It must go beyond celebrating them one day a year. It is our responsibility to make sure that veterans and their families are taken care of physically, mentally, and financially throughout their entire lives. We must do better. We must do more. We can start by keeping the focus on veterans' causes. Raising money and donating to organizations that support veterans like the Wounded Warrior Project, Veterans' Assistance Commission, and Disabled American Veterans will assure that veterans have somewhere to turn to get the help that they need. It is important that veterans know that they are supported and appreciated. Continuing to celebrate Veterans Day helps to keep the focus on the much needed supports and services that these heroes have earned and deserve.

Much like the poppies of Flanders Fields, our armed forces have seen and withstood the worst. However, they always continue to return with strength and dignity year after year, standing proudly among us. To all veterans who are with us today and to those who are no longer, the debt that we owe you can and will never be repaid. Just know that you are admired, you are appreciated, you are, and will continue to be our strength and our pride.