

IN FLANDERS FIELDS

John McCrae

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John McCrae was born in Ontario in 1872. He graduated from the University of Toronto with a degree in medicine, established a practice in Montreal, and lectured at McGill. McCrae went overseas after the outbreak of **World War I** in 1914 and served with the army medical corps in France. He died of **pneumonia** in January 1918. As a poet, he wrote only occasional pieces. His reputation rests solely on his single achievement, *In Flanders Fields*.



Sound file:

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The Lyrics

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.

John McCrae , physician, poet (b at Guelph, Ont 30 Nov 1872; d at Boulogne, France 28 Jan 1918). Educated at U of T, he was appointed fellow in pathology at McGill in

1900. He served in the SOUTH AFRICAN WAR as an artillery subaltern 1889-1900. The author of a number of medical texts, he also contributed poetry to various magazines. In 1914 McCrae enlisted in the CANADIAN EXPEDITIONARY FORCE as a medical officer. He died of pneumonia at the hospital of which he was in charge in 1918. "In Flanders Fields," his most enduring poem, was first published in *Punch* in 1915. A book of the same title was published posthumously in 1919. His birthplace in Guelph is now a historic site. David Evens, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, p. 1258.

World War I On 4 Aug 1914 Britain's ultimatum to Germany to withdraw from Belgium expired. The British Empire, including Canada, was at war, allied with Serbia, Russia, and France against the German Austro-Hungarian empires. Prewar Canada has a regular army of only 3000, but 60 000 militia had trained in 1913; most provinces, including Quebec, insisted on military training in their schools, and defence spending had risen sixfold since 1897.

Desmond Morton, *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, pp. 2341-2344.

Questions:

1. What is the significance of the poppy?
2. Why did Canada join the war?
3. How many Canadians died during WW1?