

Glimpses of Brillion

By Frenchy Corbeille

Memorial Day Edition - 2011

So much to say, so little space. I shall endeavor to use the space well.

Most of us who have half a century behind us remember that Memorial Day was originally known as Decoration Day. We also remember that it was observed every year on 30 May. It is difficult to state with certainty when, where and how it all got started, but there are some indisputable facts. While the civil war still raged, organized groups of southern ladies decorated the graves of their fallen spouses and sons. The practice either spread to or was duplicated in the north. After the war's end, General John A. Logan, commander of the Grand Army of The Republic, on 5 May 1868, issued a general order declaring that 30 May 1868 would be observed as Decoration Day. Flowers were placed on the graves of Union and Confederate soldiers at Arlington National Cemetery. Five years later, New York became the first state to recognize 30 May as a holiday and by 1890 all of the northern states had followed suit. The formerly Confederate states had their own days for honoring the war dead and did not adopt 30 May until after World War I, when the dead of all wars were to be honored on this day.

It remained 30 May until Congress passed the National Holidays Act in 1971, making Memorial Day observance the last Monday of May, in order to insure a three day holiday weekend. In my not very humble opinion, that was a huge congressional blunder. Memorial Day was not intended to be a holiday, but rather a day of remembrance, when we honor our fallen heroes and do homage to their accomplishments. What Congress accomplished was to make it a kick-off for summer fun, when white shoes and gloves come back in vogue, and men wear Panamas instead of Stetson beavers. I am blessed to reside in a community whose motto is "Small City- Big Heart". We have a parade on Memorial Day, to honor our war dead. Gravesites are marked by the Stars and Stripes and no guards are posted to insure the flags are not stolen. None are necessary. I only recently learned that our nation's capitol, Washington, D.C. went 60 years without having a Memorial Day parade. In 2004 they staged one. I'll bet you are proud to live in Brillion!

We are all familiar with "Buddy Poppy" and look forward to donating to the VFW cause for the privilege of wearing one. The poppies are made by disabled veterans and proceeds from the sales are used to help those same folks and their dependents. Why red poppies? Read the following poems.

In Flanders Fields

John McCrae, 1915.

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.

We cherish too, the Poppy red
That grows on fields where valor led,
It seems to signal to the skies
That blood of heroes never dies.
Moina Michael

Moina Michael not only authored the second 4-liner, she did it in 1915, the same year John McCrae wrote "In Flanders Fields". Then she went two steps further--first she wore a red poppy to honor the fallen on Memorial Day, then she sold some to her friends and co-workers so they too could wear them. A French lady, Madame Guerin, was visiting the U.S. and learned of this new custom. She carried the idea back to France where she went a step further and made artificial red poppies to be sold and worn on Memorial Day. The funds raised were used to benefit orphans and widows of the war dead. A couple years later, in 1922, she approached the VFW with her idea and from there the rest is history. When you come out a store and find a man selling red poppies, buy one, and wear it proudly. You have just helped him and a host of other unfortunate souls who have sacrificed much of their lives and some of their limbs that the rest of us may live in peace.

A final word - To help re-educate and remind Americans of the true meaning of Memorial Day, the "[National Moment of Remembrance](#)" resolution was passed in Dec 2000 which asks that at 3 PM local time, for all Americans "To voluntarily and informally observe in their own way a moment of remembrance and respect, pausing from whatever they are doing for a brief silence and reflection. We can do that.

Let's Roll!

FREEDOM IS NOT FREE
Frenchy sends with Warm Regards