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.

Lt.-Col. John McCrae
(1872 – 1918)

REMEMBERANCE DAY

by **LTC (GBR A) Simon THOMSETT**

Henry Gunther was an American soldier killed during the Great War in France, only one of millions of casualties that occurred between 1914 and 1918. Four years of war which cost the lives of countless milllions of people and caused untold human suffering. There is nothing extraordinary about Gunther or his death, he is sadly just another one of the faceless millions who paid the ultimate price, nothing extraordinary accept for the time and date of his death: 1059hrs, 11th November 1918. Gunther is commonly regarded as the last soldier to die during the First World War, little is known about him, but his lasting legacy will be the infamy of being the last to die of so many. His death in some strange way is almost more tragic given its proximity to what we now know as Rememberance Day, the Eleventh Hour of the Eleventh Day of the Eleventh month.

Remembrance Day – also known as Poppy Day, Armistice Day or Veterans Day – is a day to commemorate the sacrifices of members of the armed forces and of civilians in times of war, specifically since the First World War. It is observed on 11 November to recall the end of World War I on that date in 1918 with the German signing of the Armistice. The day was dedicated by King George V, on 7 November 1919, in respect of members of the armed forces who were killed during war. It now serves as a tribute and memorial to all who have died in war, past and present and is observed across the world.

In Great Britain, although two minutes of silence are observed on 11 November itself, the main ceremony is on the second Sunday of November, Remembrance Sunday. Ceremonies are held at local war memorials across the country,

the commonwealth and the world. Typically, poppy wreaths are laid by representatives of the Crown, the armed forces, and politicians, as well as members of the Public. The start and end of the silence is often marked by the firing of a cannon. On the stroke of 1100hrs (when the armistice came into force) a two minutes silence is held where people stop to reflect and to remember the sacrifices that have been made during time of war. The First Two Minute Silence in London (11th November 1919) was reported in the Manchester Guardian on 12th November 1919:

The first stroke of eleven produced a magical effect. The tram cars glided into stillness, motors ceased to cough and fume, and stopped dead, and the mighty-limbed dray horses hunched back upon their loads and stopped also, seeming to do it of their own volition. Someone took off his hat, and with a nervous hesitancy the rest of the men bowed their heads also. Here and there an old soldier could be detected slipping unconsciously into the posture of 'attention'. An elderly woman, not far away, wiped her eyes, and the man beside her looked white and stern. Everyone stood very still... The hush deepened. It had spread over the whole city and become so pronounced as to impress one with a sense of audibility. It was a silence which was almost pain ... And the spirit of memory brooded over it all.

The main national commemoration is held at Whitehall, in Central London, for dignitaries, the public, and ceremonial detachments from the armed forces and civilian uniformed services such as the Merchant Navy. Members of the British Royal Family walk through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office towards the Cenotaph, assembling to the right of the monument to wait for Big Ben to strike 11:00 am, and for the King's Troop, Royal Horse Artillery at Horse Guards Parade, to fire the cannon marking the commencement of the two minutes of silence. Following this, "Last Post" is sounded by the buglers of the Royal Marines. "The Rouse" is then sounded by the trumpeters of the Royal Air Force, after which wreaths are laid by the Queen and senior members of the Royal Family and then, attendees including Politicians, Commonwealth High Commissioners to London, on behalf of their respective nations, the Foreign Secretary, on behalf of the British Dependencies; the First Sea Lord; the Chief of the General Staff and the Chief of the Air Staff.

After the service, veterans from World War II, the Falklands, Kosovo, Bosnia, Northern Ireland, other past conflicts, and the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq take part in a march past Her Majesty the Queen at the Cenotaph. This year marked the first year since the firt Rememberance Day that there were no World War 1 veterans present, the last having died in August.

The poppy's significance to Remembrance Day is a result of Canadian military physician John McCrae's poem *In Flanders Fields*. The poppy emblem was chosen because of the poppies that bloomed across some of the worst battlefields of Flanders in World War I, their red colour an appropriate symbol for the bloodshed of trench warfare. Poppies are worn in the weeks proceeding Remenberance Sunday in order to serve as a reminder of those who have given their lives in time of war.

Today, across the world, wherever the British Armed Forces are serving, the Two minutes silence will be observed and soldiers, sailors and airman will remember those that have gone before.

They shall grow not old, as we that are left grow old.
Age shall not weary them, nor the years condemn.
At the going down of the sun and in the morning
We will remember them". ■