

**THE MASTERS ADDRESS**  
from the  
**ANZAC COMMEMORATION SERVICE**  
**This was part of the Installation Meeting of**  
**The United Lodge of Otago. No. 448.**

As it is the tradition at the completion of our Installation, the Lodge conducts a brief ANZAC Service to remember those 'that shall never grow old' and for the Master to spend a few moments to reflect on their sacrifice for us.

Having completed some twenty years service in the RNZAF from the 1970's to the 1990's, I was spared the need to serve my country in hostilities overseas. But I did have the opportunity in the mid 1980's to serve my country in a peaceful role in Singapore for two and half years. During this time I attended ANZAC Day Services at Kranji War cemetery which is located on the northern side of the island. To attend a cemetery that is maintained by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission is something to behold. Not far from the cemetery there are a number of housing estates and busy motorways but one would never know it. Such is the peacefulness of the surroundings. To walk amongst perfectly straight rows of headstones in such spotless surroundings is a very eerie feeling when one stops and considers the conditions these young men fought and lost their lives in. as soon as you walk from the car park into the cemetery you become aware of how special this place is. What a waste it appears as you walk down row upon row of headstones and note that many of the fallen were only in their early twenties.

The service is held at a large memorial within the cemetery and at the end of the service it is customary to place a poppy at the foot of the memorial and in doing so it makes one stop and reflect for a few moments as to how and why such a token of remembrance came to be.

The Red or Flanders Poppy has been linked with battlefield deaths since the Great War of 1914 – 1918. this plant was one of the first plants to grow and bloom in the rooted up soil of Flanders battlefields, the connection being made most famous by Lt Col John McCrae in his poem;

“IN FLANDERS FIELDS”

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.

In 1918 an American teacher Miss Moina Bell Michael, inspired by McCrae's poem, first created the Flanders Fields Red Poppy as a symbol of Remembrance. As a result of Miss Michael's tireless campaigning, her complete dedication to the cause and the inspiration her idea gave to others, the delicate flower of the red field poppy has become an internationally recognised symbol of Remembrance and welfare

for war veterans.

**The story of the making of the poem;**

Although he had been a doctor for years and had served in the South African War, McCrae found it impossible to get used to the suffering, the screams, and the blood in his dressing station. As a surgeon attached to the 1st Field Artillery Brigade, McCrae has spent seventeen days treating injured men – Canadians, British, Indians, French and Germans – in the Ypres salient.

It had been an ordeal that he had hardly thought possible. McCrae later wrote of it, “I wish I could embody on paper some of the varied sensations of that seventeen days. Seventeen days of Hades! At the end of the first day if anyone had told us we had to spend seventeen days here, we would have folded our hands and said it could not have been done”.

One death particularly affected McCrae, a young friend and former student. A shell burst on 2 May 1915 killed Alexis Helmer of Ottawa. Lt Helmer was buried later that day in the little cemetery outside McCrae’s dressing station, and McCrae had performed the funeral ceremony in absence of the chaplain. The next day, sitting on the back of an ambulance parked near the dressing station beside the canal de l’Yser just a few hundred yards north of Ypres, McCrae vented his anguish by composing a poem. McCrae was no stranger to writing, having several medical texts besides dabbling in poetry.

In the nearby cemetery McCrae could see the wild poppies that sprang up in the ditches in that part of Europe, and he spent 20 minutes of precious rest time scribbling fifteen lines of verse in a notebook.. A young soldier watched him write it, . Cyril Allinson, a 22 year old sergeant Major, delivering mail that day when spotted McCrae. When McCrae finished 5 minutes later, he took his mail from Allinson and, without saying a word, handed his pad to the young NCO. Allinson was moved by what he read. It was very nearly not published. Dissatisfied with it, McCrae tossed the poem away, but a fellow officer retrieved it and sent it to newspapers in England.

McCrae’s in “Flanders Fields” remains to this day one of the most memorable war poems ever written. It is a lasting legacy to the terrible battle in the Ypres salient in the spring of 1915.

Finally Brethren, as we approach our National Day of Remembrance, it is time to reflect on those thousands of young New Zealanders, many of whom were Freemasons, that in many campaigns over the years, have given their lives on far off shores for the good of mankind. To the young Airforce men that on ANZAC Day last year were so tragically killed in a helicopter accident while flying down the Kapiti coast to partake in a fly past during Wellington’s Remembrance Service.

Rest assured Brethren “We will remember them”.

Delivered by Wor, Bro. Barry K Cloake, PGS, newly Installed Master, of The United Lodge of Otago, 448, at the Installation Meeting, on 19 April 2011