



**In Flanders Fields: US Casualties of War Puts Iraq in Perspective; The Decline of American Thought; 2d Battle of Ypres: John McCrae's "In Flanders Fields"**

## *In Flanders Fields*

Memorial Day 2004

Since hostilities began in Operation Iraqi Freedom, United States military personnel have suffered 806 deaths. An additional 110 deaths have occurred among the ranks of other coalition forces. American troops wounded in action now total 4,524. These numbers are updated regularly on the following Web link:

<http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/forces/casualties/>

On this link are shown the photographs of most of these war dead. Each has given his or her life in an effort to conquer the perpetrators of the most recent threat to the safety and security of this client nation.

The engagement in Iraq has lasted just over 14 months. The sacrifice of 806 lives in this effort cannot be minimized. However, today I'd like to draw a contrast between the 5,330 dead and wounded so far in Iraq with those of previous wars in our nation's history:



## United States Casualties of War \*

WAR	WOUNDED	DEATHS
<b>War for Independence:</b>	<b>6,188</b>	<b>4,435</b>
<b>War of 1812</b>	<b>4,505</b>	<b>2,260</b>
<b>Mexican War</b>	<b>4,152</b>	<b>13,283</b>
<b>War Between the States: Union Confederate</b>	<b>281,881 -----</b>	<b>364,512 133,821</b>
<b>Spanish-American War</b>	<b>1,662</b>	<b>2,446</b>
<b>World War I</b>	<b>204,002</b>	<b>116,708</b>
<b>World War II</b>	<b>671,846</b>	<b>407,316</b>
<b>Korean War</b>	<b>103,284</b>	<b>36,516</b>
<b>Vietnam War</b>	<b>153,363</b>	<b>58,205</b>
<b>Persian Gulf War</b>	<b>467</b>	<b>382</b>
<b>War on Terror: Iraq</b>	<b>4,524</b>	<b>806</b>

\* "US Casualties of War." In *Encyclopaedia Britannica Almanac: 2003*. (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2003), 808-809. Except: "War on Terror," from <http://www.cnn.com/SPECIALS/2003/iraq/forces/casualties/> as of 28 May 2004.

The greatest loses of life were clearly those suffered in the War Between the States (498,333); World War II (407,316), and World War I (116,708), while the least loss of lives are those who have fallen in the Middle East (1,188).

No one likes war except those of a depraved mind. However, it is the last option to which kings resort. And the honorable application of warfare to resolve disagreements between nations is an imperative if a free nation is to remain so. However, September 11, 2001, gave our country and its leaders a moment of objectivity during which we could focus on the reality of a deadly enemy different from any previously engaged. On that date we were the victims of a coup de main culminating a consistent series of minor actions that had occurred over a quarter century. And this occasion was markedly different from the others. The insanity of Islamic fanaticism assaulted our homeland at its economic and political centers leaving behind thousands dead and a population mentally staggered by al Qaeda's \al keye' eh-duh\ brazen audacity and arrogant chutzpah.



The aftermath has seen the United States engage terrorist operatives in Afghanistan and Iraq. The campaign has been as successful as any objective observer could hope. War is hell. And on this occasion we have thrown down the gauntlet to an enemy that does not fight by the Marquess of Queensberry Rules. They wear no uniforms, they do not march in ranks, nor do they even muster on a battlefield. Instead they blend into the population they seek to assault. They either conscript women and children or use them as shields. They fight from religious sites but become enraged if our troops return fire. They fight in the shadows, in broad daylight, or in the blackness of night. They recognize no rules of engagement but plead the Geneva Convention's protocols when to their advantage. They are driven by a religion that is the most evil conceived out of the mind of Lucifer. From it they justify the murder of innocents and the maiming of civilians. Of all the categories of warfare conceived in the minds of men none has been as unorthodox and sinister as this.

Yet in the face of such circumstances we find our nation torn asunder. The efforts of the Bush Administration to effectively prosecute this war have been perceived as problematic. The reason for this has been a failure of the population to accept the reality that we are actually at war. Arrogant, self-possessed, and self-absorbed, the majority of American has been led astray by the propaganda of the master conspirator, Lucifer, the ruler of this world.

Due to the advance of Frankfurt philosophy over the past forty years our nation's ability to think clearly has been prevented by a constant inculcation of humanist viewpoint and progressive ideology. These beautiful lies have been force-fed to two generations of students so that today establishment viewpoint is considered to be the railings of "right-wing radicals" and "fundamentalist Christians."

The result of this national inversion of thought from traditional values over to progressive ideologies has resulted in paralyzing our ability to defend ourselves. The ideologues would rather adhere to a strict interpretation of case law regarding the Bill of Rights, a case law that has been corrupted for sixty years by activist judges. Progressives in position of power do not perceive that we as a free people are engaged in an arduous struggle for liberty whose conclusion will find the defeat terrorism or the destruction of this client nation.

The ideas that the progressives have been successful in incorporating into our nation's legal and cultural fabric encompass a triumvirate of evil: diversity, multiculturalism, and political correctness. These will prove to be the tragic flaws that bind our abilities to successfully fight the War on Terror.

These barriers have made it extremely difficult for the Bush Administration to execute a quick and efficient strategy against the Islamic enemy. Like all criminals, terrorists where possible use the law as a shield in order to carry out their nefarious plots and escape prosecution if apprehended. Thus, diversity and multiculturalism enables them to enter the country and then carry out their schemes with impunity. The enemy is among us. Al Qaeda's Fifth Column operates freely within the walls of Fortress America.

Freedom of speech allows freedom for descent. But in time of national crisis such discussion should be willingly restrained so as not to give aid and comfort to the enemy. To quote the Lord in **Mark 3:25**, "If a house is divided against itself, that house will not be able to stand." This axiom has become a self-evident truth in the United States of America. A cultural fissure has split the country virtually in half. The progressives are at war with the traditionalists. The vituperations increase daily in both guile and volume. And the resultant logghead has informed the enemy that we are ripe for attack.

The inability of grown men and women to unite for a common cause in the face of a determined and relentless adversary speaks volumes with regard to the status quo of our client nation. Political leaders in a lust for power ignore the importance of displaying a united front against the enemy. Instead they complain, find fault, and with crocodile tears bemoan the loss of some 800 U.S. troops.

Today, I like to put the War on Terror into perspective. I'd like to go back to a conflict that initially did not even involve U.S. armed forces and to a series of battles that produces the most horrendous blood-lettings in what might be called modern warfare.

Four battles near Ypres \Ń' pra\, Belgium, in World War I were a series of operations in the Flanders sector of the Western Front, important chiefly because of the proximity of Ypres to the Yser \Ń-zer\ River and to France's major ports on the Strait of Dover.



The casualties that occurred in the Ypres salient were overwhelming. Once the war was over an effort was made to recover the thousands of bodies strewn across Flanders's fields. An intensive three-year search uncovered over 200,000 men and tens of thousands more were periodically discovered across this area during the next 60 years. The modern world had never seen such carnage in warfare.

We will concentrate our comments this morning on the Second Battle of Ypres. A summary of its combatants is provided by:

***Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia, 15th ed. s.v. "Ypres, battles of":***

*The second battle (April 22-May 25, 1915). By spring 1915 the Allied forces holding the Ypres salient were distributed as follows: two French divisions on the northern flank, a Canadian division on the northeast; a British division in the apex of the salient; and two more British divisions on the southeastern flank. The Germans decided to attack this salient—both in the hope of destroying its potential threat and in order to try out their new weapon, poison gas.*

Respect and reverence must be paid by all who enjoy freedom to those who give their lives for the defense of freedom. The United States, as noted earlier, suffered the loss of almost 117-thousand of those who fell in battle during what President Woodrow Wilson called the "war to end all wars."

Yesterday, President Bush commemorated the opening of the new World War II Memorial National Park in Washington, D.C. We are approaching the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day. There are numerous topics in American military history that we could address this Memorial Day. But I have chosen the Second Battle of Ypres for a reason: This nation has lost hundreds of thousands of lives on the battlefields of this world during its two-hundred twenty-eight year history. There have always been those who abhorred the involvement of our nation in every war it has fought. But not until the Frankfurt School's progressive philosophy gained prominence in the 1960s has this nation suffered such a deafening rant of anti-war squabbling among its national leaders. Those who voted to send our men into battle now gush and spew, criticize and denounce the efforts which are being taken to eliminate what is potentially the most dangerous enemy we have ever faced.

The mission of terrorists is to foment fear within the souls of the target population so as to intimidate them into surrender or capitulation with their demands. Political leaders of both parties have disgraced the efforts of our men at arms whom they voted to place in harm's way. The only reason they are not considered traitors to this country is because half the population agrees with them and the other half would be shouted down if they raised the issue.

A large number of grown men and women, who apparently fancy themselves leaders in our government, are behaving as irresponsible rabble. Their feigned concern for our troops is only a rhetorical veil which they hope conceals while it advances their hidden agenda—an insatiable desire to assuage their lust for power.

Our nation could not have pursued any of its past wars to conclusion with such despicable people in positions of authority. We are in danger of losing the War on Terror because those who have been propagandized by progressive ideology now infect the offices of government, the agencies of media, and the halls of academia. They are an amoral accumulation of rabid ideologues who suffer from pseudo-intellectual arrogance.

Today's overview of the Second Battle of Ypres is dedicated to them with the realization that if they had held their positions of power during World War I Germany might well have captured Western Europe and Great Britain.

Our first source will be from a book written by:

***Groom, Winston. "Introduction." In A Storm in Flanders: The Ypres Salient, 1914-1918: Tragedy and Triumph on the Western Front. (New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2002), v-vi; xi:***



The Ypres Salient in Belgian Flanders was the most notorious and dreaded place in all of the First World War, probably of any war in history. Typical was this British infantryman's reaction on being told that his battalion was to go there: "I mentioned Ypres and he cursed the place. Rumors of what waited ahead of us had disturbed everyone." This was said between men who had just gone through the ordeal of the Battle of the Somme, where more than 50,000 British soldiers became casualties on the first day.

From the autumn of 1914 to the autumn of 1918 Flanders was, in effect, a gigantic corpse factory. Hundreds of thousands died there for ground where gains were measured in mere yards. It was where, in 1914, the British professional army was virtually annihilated, though it had stopped the German drive to capture control of the English Channel. It was where, in 1915, the Germans first introduced the hideous novelty of poison gas. It was where the horrors of the flamethrower were unleashed. It was where, in 1917, during the most infamous battle of the war, Passchendaele (päs' en-dä' la), thousands fought and drowned in mud sometimes waist deep. And it was where, in 1918, all the ground gained over the previous bloody years was first lost in a great German assault and then, in an electrifying turnabout with the aid of newly arrived American divisions, was not only regained but precipitated the final destruction of the German war machine. (p. v)

What people most remembered about the Salient was the smell: the ever-present odor of rotting humans, horses, mules, rats, and food mixed with the stench of excrement, lingering poison gases, the repulsive aroma of quicklime used to decompose the dead, and the acrid stink of high-explosive artillery shells. It was said that you could smell the battlefield miles before you ever reached it. It was where the poppies grew in Flanders Fields while a million men lived like troglodytes in slimy underground trenches and from 1914-1918 fought and died with such consistency that even on "quiet days" casualties ran into the thousands—every day, for four long grisly years.

Almost every British army battalion at one time or another fought in Flanders. Although for purposes of continuity historians have categorized events at Ypres into three or four major battles, in fact the fighting there was continuous. In short, it was Hell on Earth. (p. vi)

Ypres was in Belgium, in a region called Flanders, named for an ancient land that ran along the North Sea from northern France into northern Belgium. (p. vii)

While Americans have largely forgotten the First World War, the British nation dwells on it—some say they are obsessed by it—since a great part of an entire generation of their menfolk lie buried beneath Belgian and French soil. (Not long into the war, an administrative decision was made to not send back the bodies of those killed, even though they were barely a stone's throw across the English Channel. The reasoning was that it was impossible to send back everyone—not only because there were so many "missing" but because it would create a huge logistical nightmare. One suspects it was also because so many funerals might have had a chilling effect on British resolve.)

The war of 1914-1918 was a different time from what we know now, with another, more horrid war past, the Cold War subsided but threats of deadly terrorism presently on people's minds. There is every probability—as most historians persuasively argue—that if the First World War had not been fought, then the Second World War would not have been either; that the rise of Hitlerism and communism would have been only a frightful dream. But the war was fought, and when it was over more than four years after it began, 9 million soldiers, sailors, and aviators were dead and countless more maimed for life, four great empires were erased from the earth, and the course of the twentieth century was changed forever. (p. xi)

<http://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/tg/detail/-/0871138425/qid=1085806892/sr=12-3/104-4520880-0576746?v=glance&s=books>



“But this war *was* fought,” writes Groom. It was inevitable. Tensions had been gradually growing among the dominant powers of the European region. Germany, Austria-Hungary, Italy, Russia, France, and Great Britain had competing interests throughout the Eastern Hemisphere so that slight changes in the balance of power were all that were needed to hurl the continent into war.

This situation simmered from around 1871 up to 1914 when Francis Ferdinand, the Archduke of Austria and heir apparent to her emperor Francis Joseph I, was assassinated in Sarajevo \sar-a-yā' vō\, the capital city of Bosnia. Austria then declared war on Serbia which in turn activated various treaties throughout Europe. This and competing national interests led to the outbreak of World War I.

This year's Memorial Day is being observed in the midst of the War on Terror and finds our nation divided about its necessity to even be fought. What took place in Flanders is a stark reminder of what happens when the balance of power shifts among nations with competing national interests and especially when the wild card of Islamic jihad is thrown into the mix.

As painful as the loss of one life surely is, the present sacrifice of just over 800 servicemen and –women is not to be compared to the 9-million lost over a four-year span during the First World War. And the stakes this time could be far greater than those that precipitated that conflict.

From the midst of the quagmire that resulted, a three-stanza poem captured the imagination of Great Britain and it became one of the most famous compositions to emerge from the period. It had a motivational impact on the British who lost so many of their sons on the fields of neighboring Flanders, Belgium.

Today's tribute to our war dead and all veterans who have served our nation so honorably will salute the one who wrote this poem. First of all some circumstances in the life of Dr. John McCrae. For this we consult:

**Granfield, Linda. *In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poem by John McCrae. (Niagara Falls: Stoddart Kids, 1995), 10-13; 26-27;***

When the First World War began in 1914, no one knew that millions of young men and women would die before the conflict ended in 1918. No one knew that villages would be erased from the map, or that entire nations would be changed forever. In fact, people thought the war would be over before Christmas.

There was no single reason why the war began. Some European countries, like Germany, craved more power. Others, like France, wanted revenge for past wrongs, and Britain feared Germany's growing fleet and industrial power. People were primed for war. The murder of the heir to the Austro-Hungarian throne, in June 1914, was the spark that lit this ready tinder.

When the German army moved into neutral Belgium, Britain upheld its treaty obligations to defend the Belgians.

But the Great War was unlike any other in history. It was a new and horrible artillery battle fought from rat-infested, water-filled trenches dug deep into foreign soil. There would be little noble about it, except the dedication of millions to fight for what they believed. Into this nightmarish terrain of the Western Front stepped John McCrae. (p. 10)

McCrae's ancestors included soldiers and physicians, and he carried on the tradition. As a boy in Guelph (Guelph, Ontario), he won a gold medal for being the best drilled cadet. While in university, McCrae belonged to the Queen's Own Rifles. Medical school was followed by American and Canadian hospital work and teaching. All the while, McCrae wrote short stories and poetry in which peace after death was a repeated theme.

The battlefields of Flanders were not the first John McCrae had ever encountered. In 1900 he sailed from Halifax, Nova Scotia, to South Africa, where the Boer War was blazing. There he saw first hand the cost of battle, though he still believed that a man must fight evil wherever he encountered it. After a year in South Africa, McCrae returned to Canada, and for ten years he was a doctor and a teacher, not a soldier.



McCrae was in England on holiday when war was declared in 1914, yet he answered Canada's call for recruits. (p. 11)

McCrae's mental attitude was common among his fellow Britons which he expressed upon entering into the Canadian army, "I am going to war because I think every bachelor, especially if he has experience of war, ought to go. I am really rather afraid, but more afraid to stay at home with my conscience."

Forty-three-year-old Major John McCrae was assigned to the Ypres Salient as a brigade surgeon with the Canadian division. The circumstances he encountered there took their toll on a man noted for his uplifting personality. As a medical officer his duty was to treat the wounded which turned out to be a constant daily parade of mangled and disease-ridden bodies of his countrymen.

#### **Granfield, *In Flanders Fields*, 20-21; 26:**

Trenches were zigzagging alleys carved deep into the soil and sandbagged for support and protection. Soldiers moved through a three-line system of trenches: the outlying reserve trench; the support trench; and then the fire trench, which looked across "no-man's land," a shell-scarred area that separated the soldiers' trenches from the enemy's.

In bad weather, rain filled the trenches. Days of standing in the cold, stagnant water left men with a dangerous condition called trench foot. Rats and brutal winter weather added to the misery. (p. 20)

Snipers and heavy artillery fire, as well as poisonous gas attacks, provided the military doctors with thousands of patients. Bronchitis, pneumonia, and influenza spread quickly among soldiers in such close, unhealthy quarters. War wounds often had to be treated on the field by a soldier's comrades, rather than a doctor, so each soldier carried a bit of iodine and some bandages in his pocket. After dark, a stretcher squad of four men would lift the wounded to their shoulders and stumble across the bomb-scarred field, all the while dodging snipers' bullets and mud holes that could claim them.

At the dressing-station, doctors and nurses treated those with minor injuries and determined which of the seriously wounded soldiers would be sent to better-equipped hospitals in France, or in England for major rehabilitation. Once he was back on his feet, a soldier who had spent a few weeks in a soft hospital bed in England would find himself in the muddy trenches again, replacing yet another wounded comrade. (p. 21)

John McCrae treated injured soldiers in dressing-stations, tent hospitals, and buildings so cold there was frost on the floor. He handled the survivors of some of the war's most devastating battles: Second Ypres, the Somme, Vimy (ve' mē) Ridge, and Passchendaele (pās' en-dä' la). (p. 26)

It was during the Second Battle of Ypres where certain circumstances inspired McCrae to compose his famous poem, "In Flanders Fields."

#### **Groom, *A Storm in Flanders*, 116-18:**

Second Ypres had cost the Allies more than 70,000 casualties and the Germans about half that amount—a combined 100,000 men shot down for less than three miles of real estate. About the best thing that came out of it for the British was the value of a poem.

It was no ordinary poem. It became easily the most popular poem of the war, and after the war as well, and when it was published it swept through England and the far-off Americas like a prairie fire. It was titled, "In Flanders Fields." (p. 116)



On May 2, 1915, at the height of the Second Battle of Ypres, a friend of John McCrae's, Lieutenant Alexis Helmer, was killed. Helmer had been a popular figure in the brigade, and his death was mourned by many. The artillery shell that killed him literally blew him to bits: his remains had to be collected in sandbags and then placed in an army blanket in such a way as to resemble a human form. In the midst of booming guns, McCrae conducted the burial service himself, then went to sit on the step of a field ambulance.

Those who were present recorded that the sky was full of larks; that the poppies for which Flanders is renowned were beginning to bloom in the fields and sprout between the crosses in the growing military cemeteries. McCrae took out a pad and pencil and within twenty minutes had penned one of the immortal poems of the war.

*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. (p. 117)*

Afterward, McCrae showed the poem to several of his fellow officers and at first did nothing with it. At one point he submitted it to *The Spectator* (a London-based magazine) but they turned it down. Somebody suggested that he send it to the English magazine *Punch*, which published it on December 8, 1915, more than seven months after it was written. It became popular immediately, and its stirring challenge to "Take up our quarrel with the foe: To you from failing hands we throw the torch" became a sort of rallying cry.

When I was a boy I remember on a certain Veterans Day in my home town a number of people stood around Court Square seeking donations for red poppy lapel pins. My mother gave one of these people some money and they gave her the flower. I asked her what it was for and she told me it was to "help the veterans." I didn't know what a veteran was but she explained it was a person who fought in the war and made sure we were free. The poppy pin was a result of John McCrae's poem and initially became a means of raising money for families and veterans who were in need following the First World War.

**Granfield, *In Flanders Fields*, 30-31:**

Throughout history, the scarlet corn poppy has been a symbol of life. But after the publication of "In Flanders Fields" in 1915, it became a universal symbol of remembrance. The sturdy flower blossomed on the makeshift graves that were hastily dug during the war and, on the bombarded landscape of western Europe, seemed to thrive where nothing else could. Soldiers often picked the bright flowers and wore them on their helmets.





During the war, posters promoted wearing poppies in honour of the war dead. In 1919 a group of Americans, welcoming troops home, stripped the poppy decorations from a refreshment booth and left donations behind. Veterans' organizations soon realized that the demand for poppies could benefit disabled soldiers and families left in need by the war. The British and American Legions adopted the poppy as their memorial flower. By 1921 silk poppies made by French war widows and orphans were among the first remembrance flowers sold in North America.

Each year millions of poppies, reminders of the soldiers of the First World War and every conflict since then, are constructed of silk, plastic, paper, or felt. They are still handmade, and are sold by veterans and volunteers around the world. The funds collected are recycled into programs for veterans and their families.

The scarlet blooms we wear on our lapels today represent remembrance and life, just like the sturdy poppies that still blossom in the once-bloody fields of Flanders.

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