

## WHY DO WE REMEMBER?

Every year we have this rather odd ritual. We allow old men in silly outfits wearing tinkley bits of metal on their chest to parade up and down the streets. To most of the children who see them it is all very odd, and each year it becomes odder to them. Why is this so? It is because we have failed in a promise. Failed to learn a lesson. Failed to pass that lesson on to our mystified children who can longer grasp what the fuss is all about. The air you breathe is a result of the pain and suffering they endured so you could continue to do so. So let us remember...

**In a far off field some time ago lay thousands of men.** They came from Topeka and Winnipeg. They came from the farms of Iowa and the sheep farms of Australia. They came from towns and villages often so small no one has ever heard of them. They speak all languages and dialects and come from the vast ethnic pool that the world offers.

They left mothers, fathers, wives, siblings, children and the land they loved behind. It wasn't for adventure or glory that they came, though some hoped for it. They came because our way of life was threatened and we needed them badly.

There can be no pretty words here. Nothing to inspire or evoke greatness. The lucky ones are already dead. Those who yet live lay in the muck with the stink of stale blood, rotting flesh, feces and urine mixed with cordite as their sacramental incense. They lay with bodies torn apart in great torment for hours and sometimes days. Sometimes they do it in stunned stupor and sometimes screaming their lives away in agony. They suffer for each breath you and I take for granted. They force their hearts to beat even though each pulse soaks the filthy soil of this far off place with another squirt of their precious blood. Observe the glory of war, for the only glory here is in surviving it.

They do so without the comfort of family and friends. They do so without solace of any kind. There is no one to give them the last rites or for them to spend their final moments with. Many of them are so young they are little more than children. Many do not understand why they are dying because the pain has taken their reason. But we know why.

We sent them to do it and they went because it was so very important if we were to continue to have the freedoms we now enjoy. We did not send them for land or power or money. They went because they wanted their families safe from the storm.

**The battlefields roll past:** The Somme, Ypres, Spain, Maginot, Dieppe, Monte Cassino, Hochwald, the Scheldt, Berlin, the 54th Parallel, the Inchon Valley. Both sides pay a terrible price for fanatical visions. The glimmer of light finally fades from those young eyes in such a far off place. We have lost a doctor, a poet, a writer, a great artist, a cure for cancer. We have lost son, father and lover.

Those that return will never be the same, for the memories of the horrors they have witnessed will haunt them forever. Some will be with us without parts of their bodies and others without parts of their minds. The toll mounts even among those that come home. Everyone on both sides suffers terribly. So what are we to do then?

**We made a promise near the start of the last century.** It was made in good faith and we seem to be forgetting it. We promised that we would remember all they endured and honor them for it. We promised that we would learn and try to do better so that no more of our people would have to suffer through what has gone before. As the new century unfolds before us, remember this promise "lest we forget" and renew it. Their sacrifices have allowed us to walk into the new century with eyes bright and full of hope. Lets not leave them behind.

With tears for what you gave....

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