

# Remembrance Day

The 11<sup>th</sup> hour of the 11<sup>th</sup> day of the 11<sup>th</sup> month signifies the moment when hostilities (fighting) ceased on the Western Front during the First World War. This is universally associated with the remembrance of those who had died in the war.



*Tomb of the unknown Australian soldier in the Hall of Memory at the Australian War Memorial*



*Red Poppy of Flanders*

The Flanders poppy has been a part of Armistice or Remembrance Day ritual since the early 1920s. During the First World War, red poppies were seen to be among the first living plants that sprouted from the devastation of the battlefields of northern France and Belgium. Soldiers' folklore had it that the poppies were vivid red from having been nurtured in ground drenched with the blood of their comrades. This powerful symbolism is now attached to the red poppy—that of the sacrifice of shed blood.



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At 11am on 11 November 1918, the grounds of the Western Front during the First World War fell silent after more than four years continuous warfare.

The allied armies had driven the German invaders back, having inflicted heavy defeats upon them over the preceding four months. In November the Germans called for an armistice (suspension of fighting) in order to secure a peace settlement. They accepted the allied terms of unconditional surrender.

The first modern world conflict had brought about the mobilisation of over 70 million people and left between nine and 13 million dead, perhaps as many as one-third of them with no known grave. The allied nations chose this day and time for the commemoration of their war dead.

## \* Two minutes silence

On the first anniversary of the armistice, 11 November 1919, the two minutes silence was instituted as part of the main commemorative ceremony at the new Cenotaph in London. The silence was proposed by an Australian journalist working in Fleet Street, Edward Honey. At about the same time, a South African statesman made a similar proposal to the British Cabinet, which endorsed it. King George V personally requested all the people of the British Empire to suspend normal activities for two minutes on the hour of the armistice; 'Which stayed the world wide carnage of the four preceding years and marked the victory of Right and Freedom'. The two minutes silence was popularly adopted and it became a central feature of commemorations on Armistice Day.

## \* Remains of an Unknown Soldier

On the second anniversary of the armistice, 11 November 1920, the commemoration was given added significance when it became a funeral, with the return of the remains of an Unknown Soldier from the battlefields of the Western Front. Unknown soldiers were interred with full military honours in Westminster Abbey in London and at the Arc de Triomphe in Paris. The entombment in London attracted over one million people within a week to pay their respects at the Unknown Soldier's tomb. Most other allied nations adopted the tradition of entombing unknown soldiers over the following decade.

## \* Remains of an unknown Australian soldier

In Australia on the 75th anniversary of the armistice, 11 November 1993, Remembrance Day ceremonies again became the focus of national attention. On that day the remains of an unknown Australian soldier, exhumed from a First World War military cemetery in France, were ceremonially entombed in the Australian War Memorial. Remembrance Day ceremonies were conducted simultaneously in towns and cities all over the country, culminating at the moment of burial at 11am and coinciding with the traditional two minutes silence. This ceremony, which touched a chord across the Australian nation, re-established Remembrance Day as a significant day of commemoration.

## \* Proclamation of Remembrance Day

Four years later, in November 1997, the Governor-General, Sir William Deane, issued a proclamation formally declaring 11 November Remembrance Day. He urged all Australians to observe one minutes silence at 11am on 11 November each year, to remember those who died or suffered for Australia's cause in all wars and armed conflicts.