

# More Than Synthetic Poppies and a Day Off

By Jonathan SMITH

This year on November 11, just as in years past, people will have gathered at their local cenotaphs to commemorate and remember all those who gave their lives fighting the devastating wars that ravaged the world over the last century. Unfortunately, each year there are fewer and fewer of those whose memories are personal and first-hand. With each passing generation, it would seem that Remembrance Day has taken on a more ritualistic meaning and has lost some of its original emotional content. Television and other media sources remind us to "remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice" and "wear a poppy". To some, it has become merely another day off from school and work. Has it really gotten to the point where we as a society have to be reminded of why we celebrate the 11?

To truly understand the meaning of Remembrance Day, perhaps we need to associate it with our own lives. We know that "thousands died", but that has little meaning to us these days beyond a statistic, albeit a horrifying one. We've all heard the same lectures while growing up. That we should be thankful for our freedom, that we live our lives the way we do because of their sacrifices, but we as a society rarely seem to stop and actually think about it. Perhaps what we need is to put a face, or at least a name and a



**Flander's Field taken on a stereograph, showing Scottish soldiers wearing kilts**

background, to some of the statistics.

Arthur Haliburton King was born on June 28, 1924, and had he lived long enough he would have been my great-uncle on my mother's side of the family. Known as "Sunny" by family and friends, he was the youngest child and only son of my great-grandparents. An army cadet sergeant growing up, he had a passion for the sea. In 1941 he left school, and at the age of 17 became a merchant mariner on the SS Cathcart. In 1942, he was called into active duty and was posted onboard the HMCS Ottawa, which served as an escort for convoys between Canada and Britain. Arthur wrote his last letter to his mother in August 1942, informing her that due to

circumstances letters would be few and far between, but assuring her that he would be fine and hoped to be home before Christmas. Aside from a final telegram from Britain, that was the last his mother would hear from him. The HMCS Ottawa was torpedoed and sunk on the night of September 13-14, 1942, hundreds of miles of the coast of Newfoundland. There were many casualties, including the captain, three officers, over one hundred naval ratings, and Ordinary Seaman Arthur Haliburton King. He was just 18 years old.

Now I look at my own life. At 18, I'm a student at the University of Prince Edward Island. If things work out, I'll have a future that will suit me.

Life is just starting to open up its doors, and I have a chance to choose which one I will go through. Arthur King never had that chance. His life was just beginning too, but he was robbed of it by circumstances well beyond his control. He never had the chance to make something great and memorable of himself. Now, as time passes and history moves forward, he is but a branch on my family tree that regrettably extends no further than himself. How dare I ever complain about the hand that life has dealt me, compared to the hand it dealt him?

It is for Arthur King, and others like him, that I celebrate Remembrance Day. They are the reason that I wear the synthetic poppy available at any number of local businesses that, on the eleventh, can almost seem as real as the actual flower that blooms on the graves of the soldiers who lie in the ground below. Yes, this *is* another one of those be-happy-for-what-you-do-have essays, but what's wrong with that? What would be wrong would be to allow Remembrance Day to become simply another day on the calendar, another day that we don't have to go to class. Fortunately, I don't think this has happened yet, and regardless of how you celebrate it, we should strive to make sure that it doesn't become "just another day off".

