

Claire Hoy ? They're not ?glorifying war?

For those with an itch to travel beyond the borders of our own great country, there are a ton of books detailing places and things to see and do before you die.

Fortunately, for me at least, my long journalism career allowed me to see many of these places first-hand. Not all of them, of course, but enough to say I've been lucky enough to visit every continent and numerous sites within those continents.

And while it's impossible to pick a single site as an all-time favorite, I can say without question that the most moving place I've been in Flanders Field in Belgium, the site of Canadian physician Lt. col. John McCrae's famous poem:

?In Flanders fields the poppies blow

?Between the crosses, row on row??

It was this poignant poem, written by McCrae the day after he witnessed the death of a close friend, another soldier, which ultimately sparked the widespread movement to adopt the red poppy as the symbol of Remembrance to those who made the ultimate sacrifice to protect the freedoms we all now enjoy.

The further away these distant events grow, the easier it is, one supposes, to forget what they really mean, to overlook the extraordinary sacrifices, not just those who lost their lives ? although they will always have a special place ? but to all those who fought and supported the fights.

In World War 1 alone, about 620,000 Canadians ? a staggering number from a population of just 8 million ? served overseas, and 66,655 of them died. Another 172,950 were wounded. In World War II, about 1.1 million Canadians served. Canada was the first Commonwealth country to send troops to Britain in 1939. Indeed, between 1939 and 1945, when the war ended, more than 40 percent of the male population aged 18-45 signed up, nearly all of them volunteers. (In Ontario alone, 47.77 percent of that population served, a remarkable show of loyalty and courage.)

Alas, 46,998 Canadians died in the second great war and 172,950 were wounded.

Add to those totals the 516 Canadian military personnel who died in Korea, 121 during various peacekeeping tours, and 157 in Afghanistan, and nearly 115,000 Canadians gave their lives in the pursuit of freedom.

The least we can do is remember them.

Which brings me to those ninnies who, year in and year out, are prepared to dishonor those heroes by claiming that the red poppies we wear on our lapels ? and which, by the way, raise about \$16 million a year to help out veterans ? are somehow not symbols of peace and hope but, as they like to say, are ?glorifying war.?

Instead of the traditional red poppies, they've taken to hand out white poppies. Or, as one of their organizers ? Celyn Dufay, a University of Ottawa student ? told the Sun News Network recently, ?Young people don't want to celebrate war. We want to work for peace.?

The first thing he should do is read McCrae's poem, which is a call by the dead warriors themselves to end war, finishing with the lines:

?If ye break faith with us who die

We shall not sleep, though poppies grow

In Flanders fields.?

Then he might want to find a veteran ? any veteran ? who fought in a war and ask him or her if war is ?glorious.? And he might want to give a little thought ? assuming he's capable of it ? to what kind of world he'd be living in if, let's say, all those young men (mostly men, but some women as well) in the prime of their lives hadn't decided to put their own lives on hold and head to Europe to face the evil incarnate that was Adolf Hitler and his Nazis.

He may wish to ponder ? if he can get past his own addled, left-wing tripe ? whether he would now enjoy the freedom to be able to make an ass of himself the way he and his fellow white poppy propagandists have?

He may wish to consider, on human terms, how disrespectful he and his colleagues are being to those who freely gave up a good chunk of their youth ? not to mention those who died and suffered grievous injuries ? to protect the life we still enjoy.

Instead of insulting the memories of those noble veterans, he may wish to offer ? along with me and millions of other Canadians ? a prayer of gratitude for what these people did for us.

May we never forget.

