

HOW DO YOU REMEMBER

by Rick Grant

Remembrance Day. It was called Armistice Day in the beginning, but times changed and the Armistice decayed.

The holidaying atmosphere does more harm for the memory of the dead than not bothering to remember at all. For the majority of students, November 11 is a day to study, go skiing, or to pick up a chick and go to a bar for the day. For others who have been led through the school system, colouring God knows how many pictures of Flanders Fields and spending the eleventh watching the cenotaph services on CBC out of a sense of obligation, the day is nothing except tradition.

Remembrance Day does not mean feeling sorry for the dead but instead actually trying to understand the horrors of war. To spend the day feeling sorry for the dead puts a premium on dying for the glory of a political system that ceased to mean anything years ago. We have become so full of the idea that to die for your country in a war is the highest form of honour that we become almost eager for another so we too can make the "noblest sacrifice".

I remember that after we had searched quite thoroughly for the complete dead we collected fragments. Many of these were detached from a heavy, barbed-wire fence which had surrounded the position of the factory and from the still existent portions of which we picked many of these detached bits which illustrated only too well the tremendous energy of high explosive.

Remembrance day originated as a vehicle for showing people the horrors, futility, and wastefulness of war in any form.



Instead, we have transformed the dead into heroes, while they aren't anything except dead. We have supported the idea in movies and books that war is a time of great adventure and wonderful romance when in fact it was quite a bit different. We forget the manner in which people die in a war, we forget the destruction of culture and industry, we forget the waste of young men, and we forget the complete destruction of the world's civilisation.

Men do not on a whole want to die. But why did they die?

The answer is that they were forced to die against their will. They were caught up in a machine that was a product of their times. A machine built political ideology, national pride, flag waving, and rampant nationalism.

"It was thus, without any of the pre-conditions of war, that those prosaic midwestern names of Edmonton, North Battleford and Saskatoon tumbled into that deep sub-strata of history which holds all the dark misery evoked by the mention of Lidice, Dresden, Coventry, Hiroshima and Vietnam."

They went, for the most part, willingly to war, because they did not know any better. They did not know the horrors of the battlefield and as a result they were dead before they knew it.

They died in the mud of France, the sands of Africa, the seven seas, and in the skies. Their deaths were not pretty. Few of them were able to die with the noble dignity portrayed by Hollywood. Even fewer of the civilian victims died with dignity.

How for example can a child of two feel the romance in glorious combat when his city is firebombed and a shower of phosphorous eats into his body? How can a man feel the honour of saving democracy from the foe when he is trapped in the hull of a ship sinking into the depths of the ocean? How can the residents of an insignificant German village feel proud of their fight against the enemy when a pitched battle between two armies reduces the place to rubble?

How can you feel proud of our "glorious dead" when you know the permanent harm they and the survivors did to our civilisation?

When the last post sounds on Thursday you could do worse than refuse to honour the fallen. The only people who should honour the dead are the live ones that came through the wars with the knowledge of what it was really like. For those of us who have not had the experience of being part of a world destroying machine the day should be spent in trying to learn what really went on during the wars. We should be forced to watch films of men dying, cities burning, and the terrible destruction of war so we will not be so eager to join when some power mad leader sounds the clarion call to arms.

"It has therefore never been possible to establish the exact death toll taken by the nuclear explosions. But on that night, and in the following two weeks, it has been estimated that more than three million died. At the time the population of the three cities of Edmonton, Saskatoon, and North Battleford were calculated respectively at 750,200, 140,000 and 25,000, a total of 915,200 people. As far as it has been possible to tell, only 143 people survived from these three cities, and only twelve were traced from what used to be the metropolitan area of Edmonton."

Most of us have seen film footage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki when the American Air Force dropped the Atomic bombs. We saw the bomb itself go off with its awesome power and we saw what it did to the cities. We saw the survivors and the ugly burns they had. We saw the dead and the dying, the blinded and we saw what was left of their homes.



What we might not realize is that the horrors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were not the only acts of destruction. Dresden was destroyed by air forces and the city was destroyed. Dresden was destroyed and no effort, there were few real people left in the city and the only purpose was to destroy the morale of the G. Allies succeeded but was it really?

If only a small part of the day was devoted to the horrors of war, it would be a greater depth of meaning in the Remembrance Day.

Until the dead are buried they appear each day. The horror of the war is from white to yellow, black. If left long enough they will to resemble coal-tar, especially broken or torn, and it has a iridescence. The dead grow like sometimes they become like white uniforms, filling these until they are enough to burst. The unbearably fill as taut and globular as balloons.

