



The Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States was the first veteran organization to promote a nationally organized campaign for the annual distribution of Poppies assembled by disabled and needy veterans.

The Poppy movement was inspired by the poem, "In Flanders Fields" written by Colonel John McCrae of the Canadian forces before the United States entered World War I. Distributing replicas of the original Flanders' Poppy originated in some of the allied countries immediately after the Armistice.

No definite organized distribution of Poppies on a nationwide scale was conducted in America until 1921, when the Franco-American Children's League distributed Poppies ostensibly for the benefit of children in the devastated areas of France and Belgium. Madam Guerin who was recognized as "the Poppy lady from France", sought and received the cooperation of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. early in 1922, after the Franco-American Children's League was dissolved. The VFW conducted a Poppy campaign prior to Memorial Day 1922, using only Poppies that were made in France. In the 1923 Poppy campaign, due to the difficulty and delay in getting Poppies from France, the VFW made use of a surplus of French Poppies that were on hand and the balance was provided by a firm in New York City manufacturing artificial flowers.

It was during the 1923 campaign that the VFW evolved the idea which resulted in the VFW Buddy Poppy fashioned by disabled and needy veterans who were paid for their work as a practical means of providing assistance for these comrades. This plan was formally presented for adoption to the 1923 encampment of the VFW at Norfolk, Virginia. Immediately thereafter the VFW Buddy Poppy Factory was established in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where all VFW Buddy Poppies for the 1924 campaign were assembled by disabled veterans. General Frank T. Hines, Director of the U.S. Veterans Bureau, endorsed the plan and pledged the cooperation of his department. All men employed in the assembling of the Buddy Poppies for the 1924 campaign were sent to the VFW Poppy workshop by the U.S. Veterans' Bureau regional manager in Pittsburgh. The designation "Buddy Poppy" which originated with the men themselves, was adopted at that time.

In February 1924, the VFW registered the name "Buddy Poppy" with the United States Patent Office, and a certificate was issued on May 20, 1924, granting the VFW all trademark rights in the name of "Buddy" under the classification of artificial flowers. The VFW has made that trademark a guarantee that all Poppies bearing that name and the VFW label are genuine products of the work of disabled and needy veterans. No other organization, firm or individual can make legal use of the name "Buddy" Poppy.

Following the 1924 campaign, a number of the larger Departments (States) of the VFW believed it would stimulate local distribution if the Poppies they used were assembled by disabled veterans in hospitals within their own jurisdiction. The 1924 encampment of the VFW at Atlantic City granted this privilege, under the provision that all Poppies would be produced according to specifications set forth by the National Buddy Poppy Department, and that all Poppies would be assembled by disabled veterans in government hospitals and by needy veterans in workshops supervised by the VFW.

The VFW has steadfastly adhered to the policy of veterans assembled Poppies. The VFW organized the first nationwide distribution of Poppies ever conducted by a veterans organization in May 1922, Immediately thereafter, the Poppy was adopted by the National Encampment held in Seattle, Washington, during August of that year as the official memorial flower of the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States.

In September 1920, the National Convention of the American Legion held at Cleveland, passed a resolution adopting the Poppy as the official flower of that organization. However, at the third National Convention of the American Legion held in Kansas City in October 1921, the American Legion repudiated the Poppy and adopted the daisy as its official flower.

In October 1922, following the first nationwide distribution of Poppies conducted by the VFW during the month of May of that year, the fourth National Convention of the American Legion held at New Orleans, Louisiana, in October, adopted the following resolution which is taken from a printed summary of the proceedings: "Resolved, that the Poppy is hereby declared to be the official American Legion flower, instead of the daisy, which was adopted by the 1921 convention of the American Legion".

This indicates the daisy was adopted by the American Legion in 1921 and following the successful Poppy campaign conducted by the VFW in May 1922m the American Legion realized the financial possibilities of the Poppy movement. In the spring of 1923, following the New Orleans encampment and one year after the first Poppy campaign of the VFW on a nationwide scale, the American Legion conducted its first Poppy distribution using Poppies supplied by a French manufacturer as shown in the report of the National Adjutant for the year ending October 15, 1923.

The records are clear, however, on the subject of the first nationwide distribution of Poppies by the Veterans of Foreign Wars of the U.S. in May 1922.

From the very beginning, the Buddy Poppy project of the VFW has received the endorsement and cooperation of the Director of the Veterans Administration, and the support of administrators and medical officers of government hospitals. All Presidents since Warren G. Harding (1921-1923) have conveyed to the nation at large, endorsement and recognition of this VFW effort.

Today, VFW Buddy Poppies are assembled by disabled, needy and aging veterans in VA Hospitals, State Veterans Homes and Domiciliary across the country. The majority of proceeds derived from each campaign conducted by VFW Posts and their Auxiliaries is retained locally to provide for veteran services and welfare. The minimal assessment (cost of Buddy Poppies) to VFW units provides compensation to the veterans who assembled the Poppies, provides financial assistance in maintaining state and national veterans' rehabilitation and service programs, and partially supports the VFW National Home for orphans and widows of our nation's veterans.

Buddy Poppy proceeds represent no profit to any VFW unit. All money contributed by the public for Buddy Poppies is used in the cause of veterans welfare, or for the wellbeing of their needy dependents and the orphans of veterans.

*Article provided courtesy of VFW National Buddy Poppy Department.*