

Veterans Day Poppies

The Canadian Ambassador to the United States made a surprise visit to the State House last week, and he spoke to the House of Representatives about our nations' shared heritage. He and his associates all wore unusual red decorations on their lapels.

The round items reminded me of the artificial poppies sold by the Veterans of Foreign Wars to support their veteran service activities. I remember selling those poppies one Memorial Day weekend when I was a child, though I haven't seen much of them lately. The paper flowers seem to be out of fashion, and even in the past they were not common on business suits.

My curiosity about the items was satisfied on Veterans Day through a newspaper column on the subject. The items were indeed poppies, and they were also worn by Prince Charles last week when he called at the White House. Wearing the poppies in the days leading up to November 11 is a tradition in Great Britain and Canada as a sign of support for needy veterans. The tradition, once part of American life, began after World War I as an annual fundraiser for needy veterans. It has continued in Great Britain and Canada even as it has waned in the United States.

The memory of seeing the colorful rosettes at the State House has stayed with me, heightened by an e-mail message that arrived at the office a few days ago. The message asked me to wear red on Fridays.

The message, entitled Red Fridays, introduced a campaign for Americans to wear red every Friday as a visible show of support for our troops. Now Veterans Day has passed and the poppies will disappear from British lapels, but we can keep their bright color on display throughout the year by wearing red. And maybe we can even bring about a return of the poppy tradition to America.

Veterans Day was the first Friday after the e-mail arrived, so I wore a red jacket to the East Longmeadow commemoration of the town's veterans. When it was my turn to speak, I asked townspeople to stay in contact with any soldiers in their acquaintance who are on duty in war zones. I asked them to thank those returning soldiers when they meet them. And I asked them to wear red on Fridays to show public support of their work.

I don't know the source of the e-mail or how widely it has traveled, but it offers a good idea. The unnamed author states, "The first thing a soldier says when asked 'What can we do to make things better for you?' is... We need your support and your prayers." Let's get the word out and lead with class and dignity, by example; and wear some thing red every Friday.

Maybe the message has been circulating for years, or perhaps it is a recent creation. Just in case it is an idea that is getting off to a good start, why not think next Friday about the young Americans who are deployed on our behalf. Then take something red from your closet to wear. And tell your friends that you are showing your support for our troops.