



The Christmas Truce

**St Andrew's Church
Maple Road
Surbiton
KT6 4DS**

**13 December 2014
7.30 pm**

£1.50

The 1914 Christmas Truce

By late November 1914 the Western Front had become a stalemate. Open fighting had halted and the German and Allied forces had dug in and constructed approximately 475 miles of trenches cutting through Belgium from Nieuwpoort on the North Sea, south past Ypres, then east past Verdun, before finally turning south along the Luxembourg border and down to Switzerland. Trench warfare had never before been fought on this scale.

The German trenches were well constructed. The Germans had a vested interest in staying put, and laying claim to the land that they had occupied, so they built with permanence. They generally selected higher, well drained ground for their trenches, and used concrete pill boxes, and extensive underground artillery bunkers. By contrast, the Allied forces were told not to construct permanent trenches because they would be moving on soon. Their trenches were often waterlogged, infested with lice, fleas and rats - some rats were reported to be as big as cats, and the latrines (toilets) frequently overflowed into the trenches. Trench foot, caused by standing in water for long periods, was common, and could result in amputation. There was a real threat of disease from the dead bodies lying in no man's land.

Life in the trenches was very drab, and was driven by routine: 5am - stand-to-arms (prepare for an enemy attack at daylight); 5:30am - receive rum ration; 7am - breakfast (usually bacon and tea); 8am - soldiers wash themselves, clean their weapons and tidy the trench; 12:00 - dinner; after dinner - sleep and relaxation, reading and writing letters (with one man in ten on duty); 5pm - tea; 6pm - stand-to-arms before dusk; 6.30pm onwards - work all night (patrols, digging trenches, putting up barbed wire, getting stores) with some time for rest. The proximity of the trenches, they were only between 80 and 100 yards apart in places, meant that you could hear the enemy in their trenches.

In early December 1914 there was an initiative by Pope Benedict XV requesting that the nations "cease the clang of arms while Christendom celebrates the Feast of the World's Redemption". Germany agreed to this, so long as the other nations did so too - they did not agree.

Militarily, the beginning of December saw strong pressure from the French to take the initiative, and several piecemeal and very costly attacks took place. After a failed Allied attack on the 19th December, the Germans declared a local truce on the front of the 22nd Brigade. The Germans collected in British wounded from no man's land, and Lt. G. Heinekey of 2nd Queen's reported that there was contact that lasted all morning, however there was firing and there were casualties among the British helping with the wounded.

On Christmas Eve the weather changed to a hard frost. This made conditions in the trenches a little more bearable. Hostilities continued and 98 British soldiers were reported killed, mainly due to sniper fire. During the afternoon and early evening, British infantry were astonished to see Christmas trees, with candles and paper lanterns, appearing on enemy parapets. There was singing of carols, hymns and popular songs, with an exchange of communication and even meetings in some areas. Many of the meetings were to arrange the collection of bodies from no man's land and their burial. This truce did not apply to all areas and in other places firing continued. Battalion officers were uncertain how to react but in general they remained cautious. The night brought clear, still air with a continued hard frost. Units behind the lines attended church services and had arranged Christmas dinners, which took place in barns and shattered buildings.

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The Manger Throne

Like silver lamps in a distant shrine,
The stars are sparkling bright;
The bells of the city of God ring out,
For the Son of Mary was born to-night;
The gloom is past, and the morn at last
Is coming with orient light.

Never fell melodies half so sweet
As those which are filling the skies;
And never a palace shone half so fair
As the manger bed where our Saviour lies;
No night in the year is half so dear
As this which has ended our sighs.

The stars of heaven still shine as at first
They gleamed on this wonderful night;
The bells of the city of God peal out,
And the Angels' song still rings in the height;
And love still turns where Godhead burns,
Hid in flesh from fleshly sight.

Faith sees no longer the stable floor,
The pavement of sapphire is there;
The clear light of Heaven streams out to the
wold;
And Angels of God are crowding in the air;
And Heaven and earth, through the spotless
Birth,
Are at peace on this night so fair.

William Chatterton Dix (1837-1898)

O Tannenbaum

O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
wie treu sind deine Blätter.
Du grünst nicht nur zur Sommerzeit,
nein, auch im Winter wenn es schneit,
O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
wie treu sind deine Blätter.

O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
du kannst mir sehr gefallen.
Wie oft hat nicht zur Weihnachtszeit
ein Baum von dir mich hoch erfreut.
O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
du kannst mir sehr gefallen.

O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
dein Kleid will mich was lehren:
Die Hoffnung und Beständigkeit
gibt Trost und Kraft zu jeder Zeit.
O Tannenbaum, o Tannenbaum,
dein Kleid will mich was lehren.

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us.
They are green when summer days are bright,
They are green when winter snow is white.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your branches green delight us.

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
You give us so much pleasure.
How oft at Christmas tide the sight,
O green fir tree, gives us delight.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
You give us so much pleasure.

O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your boughs can teach a lesson
That constant faith and hope sublime
Lend strength and comfort through all time.
O Christmas Tree, O Christmas Tree,
Your boughs can teach a lesson.

Joachim August Zarnack (177 – 1827) & Ernst Anschütz (1780 – 1861)

Stille Nacht

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!
Alles schläft; einsam wacht
nur das traute hochheilige Paar.
Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar,
schlaf in himmlischer Ruh,
schlaf in himmlischer Ruh!

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!
Hirten erst kund gemacht!
Durch der Engel Halleluja
tönt es laut von fern und nah:
Christ, der Retter ist da,
Christ, der Retter ist da!

Stille Nacht, heilige Nacht!
Gottes Sohn, o wie lacht
Lieb aus deinem göttlichen Mund,
da uns schlägt die rettende Stund,
Christ, in deiner Geburt,
Christ, in deiner Geburt!

Silent night, holy night!
All is calm, all is bright.
Round yon Virgin, Mother and Child.
Holy infant so tender and mild,
Sleep in heavenly peace,
Sleep in heavenly peace!

Silent night, holy night!
Shepherds quake at the sight.
Glories stream from heaven afar
Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia,
Christ the Saviour is born,
Christ the Saviour is born!

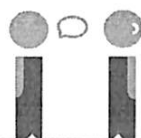
Silent night, holy night!
Son of God love's pure light.
Radiant beams from Thy holy face
With dawn of redeeming grace,
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth,
Jesus Lord, at Thy birth!

Joseph Mohr (1792 – 1848)

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Minuit, chrétiens, c'est l'heure solennelle

Minuit, chrétiens, c'est l'heure solennelle
Où l'Homme-Dieu descendit jusqu'à nous,
Pour effacer la tache originelle,
Et de son Père arrêter le courroux.
Le monde entier tressaille d'espérance,
À cette nuit qui lui donne un Sauveur.
Peuple, à genoux, attends ta délivrance
Noël! Noël! Voici le Rédempteur!
Noël! Noël! Voici le Rédempteur!

Le Rédempteur a brisé toute entrave,
La Terre est libre et le Ciel est ouvert.
Il voit un frère où n'était qu'un esclave,

L'amour unit ceux qu'enchaînait le fer.
Qui lui dira notre reconnaissance?
C'est pour nous tous qu'il naît, qu'il souffre et meurt.
Peuple, debout! Chante ta délivrance.
Noël! Noël! Chantons le Rédempteur!
Noël! Noël! Chantons le Rédempteur!

Midnight, Christians, it is the solemn hour
When God as man descended among us
To expunge the stain of original sin
And to put an end to the wrath of his father.
The entire world thrills with hope
On this night which gives us a saviour.
People, on your knees, attend your deliverance.
Christmas! Christmas! Here is the Redeemer!
Christmas! Christmas! Here is the Redeemer!

The Redeemer has broken all shackles.
The earth is free and heaven is open.
He sees a brother were there was once but a slave;

Love unites those who restrain the sword.
Who will tell him our gratitude?
It is for us all that he was born, that he suffered and died.
People, stand up, sing your deliverance!
Christmas! Christmas! Let us sing the Redeemer!
Christmas! Christmas! Let us sing the Redeemer!

Placide Cappeau (1808-1877)

Translation Todd Victor Leone

Die beiden Grenadiere

Nach Frankreich zogen zwei Grenadier';
die waren in Rußland gefangen.
Und als sie kamen in's deutsche Quartier,
sie ließen die Köpfe hangen.

Da hörten sie beide die traurige Mähr!
daß Frankreich verloren gegangen,
besiegt und geschlagen das tapfere Heer
und der Kaiser, der Kaiser gefangen!

Da weinten zusammen die Grenadier',
wohl ob der kläglichen Kunde.
Der Eine sprach: "Wie weh wird mir,
wie brennt meine alte Wunde."

Der Andre sprach: "Das Lied ist aus,
auch ich möcht' mit dir sterben,
doch hab' ich Weib und Kind zu Haus,
die ohne mich verderben."

Two grenadiers were returning to France,
From Russian captivity they came.
And as they crossed into German lands
They hung their heads in shame.

Both heard there the tale that they dreaded most,
That France had been conquered in war;
Defeated and shattered, that once proud host,
And the Emperor, a free man no more.

The grenadiers both started to weep
At hearing so sad a review.
The first said, "My pain is too deep;
My old wound is burning anew!"

The other said, "The song is done;
Like you, I'd not stay alive;
But at home I have wife and son,
Who without me would not survive."

Gewähr' mir, Bruder, eine Bitt':
wenn ich jetzt sterben werde,
So nimm meine Leiche nach Frankreich mit,
begrab' mich in Frankreichs Erde.

Das Ehrenkreuz am roten Band
sollst du auf's Herz mir legen;
die Flinte gib mir in die Hand,
und gürt' mir um den Degen.

So will ich liegen und horchen still,
wie eine Schildwach', im Grabe,
bis einst ich höre Kanonengebrüll,
und wiehernder Rosse Getrabe.

Dann reitet mein Kaiser wohl über mein Grab,
viel Schwerter klirren und blitzen;
dann steig ich gewaffnet hervor aus dem Grab,
den Kaiser, den Kaiser zu schützen!"

Heinrich Heine (1797 - 1856)

Promise me, brother, one request:
If at this time I should die,
Take my corpse to France for its final rest;
In France's dear earth let me lie.

The Cross of Valour, on its red band,
Over my heart you shall lay;
My musket place into my hand;
And my sword at my side display.

So shall I lie and hark in the ground,
A guard-watch, silently staying
Till once more I hear the cannon's pound
And the hoof beats of horses neighing.

Then my Emperor'll be passing right over my grave;
Each clashing sword, a flashing reflector.
And I, fully armed, will rise up from that grave,
The Emperor's, the Emperor's protector!"

Translation: Walter Meyer

Les anges dans nos campagnes

Les anges dans nos campagnes
Ont entonné l'hymne des Cieux,
Et l'écho de nos montagnes
Redit ce chant mélodieux.
Refrain:
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Cherchons tous l'heureux village
Qui l'a vu naître sous ses toits
Offrons-lui le tendre hommage
Et de nos cœurs et de nos voix.
Refrain:

Bergers, quittez vos retraites,
Unissez-vous à leurs concerts,
Et que vos tendres musettes
Fassent retentir dans les airs:
Refrain:

Angels in our fields
Launched into the hymn of heaven
And the echo of our mountains
Repeats this melodious song
Refrain:
Gloria in excelsis Deo!
Gloria in excelsis Deo!

Search all the happy village
That has seen him born under its roofs
Offer him tender homage
From our hearts and our voices
Refrain:

Shepherds, leave your shelters
Join their concerts
And may your sweet accordions
Keep their tunes
Refrain:

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