



Christmas Truce of 1914

The concept of a truce in war is an old, established practice in which both sides stop fighting for a designated time. During the Crimean War of the 1850s, French and Russian troops exchange drinks and cigarettes. The period during the American Civil War saw competitions between bands and exchange of newspapers and cigarettes. Then during the Second Boer War, there was a truce in which Boers, who did not fight on Sundays, and English troops played a football game.

The most famous wartime truce came at the end of the first year of the Great War in 1914. The Christmas Truce was different in that it was done without any organization from the top or bottom ranks. It was spontaneously held along the frontlines. However, there was not the same degree of fraternization across a 20-mile frontline. Some sections just stopped fighting to bury the dead, and others met in a no-man's-land to exchange stories and items.

These men in the frontlines were professional soldiers at the time and not the recent volunteers driven to the war by propaganda. The British line was made up of First Corps that did not participate in the truce, the Second Corps had seven battalions participated, Third Corps had 23 of 28 battalions participated, Fourth Corps had 21 of 28 battalions, and the third of fourth battalions of the Indian Corps participated in the truce. In the German army were the Saxon and Bavarian troops that set out Christmas trees and candles and sang Christmas carols. Each side sang to the other and ended up meeting in no-man's-land to exchange food and gifts and play a football match. Neither side saw the truce as the end of the fighting, but both saw that victory very near. The German troops told the British that Germans were at Windsor gates and the fighting would be over soon.

Myths have grown around this event in 1914, one being that the high command shut the whole thing down and punished those that participated in the episode. Another was that it was the common soldier rebellion against the leadership in the government and military. The event was well known from letters written home and newspaper reports. That fact is that only two individuals were ever court-martialed for dealing with the enemy. Officer Miles Barne was tried and found not guilty in 10 minutes, and Captain Iain Colquhoun of the Scots Guard was tried and defended by the son-in-law of the prime minister. Colquhoun was found guilty, and the sentence was remained, or set aside.

Right after the war ended during the 1920s, the Christmas Truce was used to show the disillusionment with war. By the 1960s, the Christmas Truce was used as proof that the soldiers rebelled against the class system in Great Britain. In a BBC documentary on the Truce, called "Days That Shook the World: The Christmas Truce," the producers left out the mention of reports to headquarters of the meetings in no-man's-land by Officer Edward Hulse of the 2nd Scots Guards.

There was another Christmas Truce in 1915, which never gained a strong footing in the frontlines, and the war and troops were different by then.

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