

The Christmas Truce

The First World War began in August 1914 and lasted until November 1918. It was a trench war. Trenches were long, narrow ditches dug into the ground where soldiers lived. On the western front there were long series of trenches, where German soldiers fought against British and French soldiers. By December 1914, fighting between the Allies and Germany was the worst it had been and soldiers were exhausted.

War at Christmas

When the war first began, many people in Britain believed that it would be 'over by Christmas' but by December 1914, the war was still going on. Soldiers were fighting from ditches and bunkers, spending all their days and nights in the cold and in unhealthy conditions. Many of the soldiers, on both sides, wanted to call a truce on Christmas Day. However, the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) disagreed with this. The BEF even told the Allied soldiers that the Germans were planning an attack on Christmas Eve in the hope that they would continue to fight.

Late on Christmas Eve, the British soldiers heard the German soldiers carol singing. They could also see small fir trees and lanterns lighting up the German trenches. Then the British responded by singing carols, too. Opposing troops waved across the trenches, then courageously came out and met in no man's land, the middle area of the battlefield. These men were enemies, but they were united by a common destiny. The soldiers sang together and even gave each other gifts - the British gave chocolate to the German soldiers, and the Germans gave sausages to the British. They also had a funeral service for those soldiers who had died and buried them alongside each other.

Christmas Day

On Christmas Day, a football match was played between German and British troops. This began when a British soldier kicked a football out of his trench. The German soldiers joined in and the match began. It is reported that Germany won the match 3-2! Because the generals in charge were angry about the truce, at midnight a flame was lit to signal that the truce was over. Fighting began again. But news of this extraordinary unofficial truce reached the media and German and British newspapers published this story of friendship between opposing armies.

Although many had hoped the war would be over by Christmas, it continued for another three and a half years.

The Christmas Truce of 1914 has remained a powerful symbol of hope, peace, and the shared humanity between enemies. This episode has inspired many songs, paintings, novels and films. There are also monuments to the event. One of these is in Ploegsteert in Belgium, it is an iron sculpture in the shape of a shell, with a football on the top.

TRUE OR FALSE:

1) Decide if the sentences are true (T) or false (F). Then correct the false ones.

- 1) The land between the trenches was called “no man’s land”
- 2) Living conditions were healthy in the trenches
- 3) The authorities called a ceasefire
- 4) British soldiers decorated their trenches
- 5) There is a monument in Belgium dedicated to the Christmas truce

2) Answer the following questions

- 1) What were trenches?
- 2) When and where did the Christmas Truce take place?
- 3) What does “BEF” stand for?
- 4) What did the soldiers do during the truce?
- 5) What presents did the soldiers exchange?
- 6) How did the football match start and who won it?
- 7) Why did the fighting resume after the truce?
- 8) What does the Christmas Truce of 1914 represent now?

3) Write a summary of the text (max. 150 words)