The Christmas Truce of 1914

How enemy soldiers let peace prevail in the midst of WWI

Thesis

The winter of 1914, as soldiers continuing to dig trenches in the midst of the Western Front, a truce evolved and German troops came together, talking, sharing cigarettes, and playing soccer. This truce was a turning point, showing the possibility of peace in the midst of war.

The Christmas Truce

Triumph on December 25, 1914

A Truce Not Forgotten

You Not Shoot, We Not Shoot

A New Kind of Miracle

Peace Won

An Accomplishment That Separates War

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AN ASSASSINATION THAT SPARKED WWI

On June 28, 1914, the TRAGEDY of WWI began after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand, the heir to the throne of Austria-Hungary. Austria claimed Serbia responsible, leading to countries from around the world to become involved in a conflict that lasted longer than anyone had expected and that caused tremendous suffering and death.

With tensions already running high among Europe's powers, the assassination precipitated a rapid descent into World War I. First, Austria-Hungary gained German support for punitive action against Serbia. It then sent Serbia an ultimatum, wording in a way that made rejection unlikely. Serbia proposed arbitration to resolve the dispute, but Austria-Hungary instead declared war on July 28, 1914, exactly a month after Ferdinand's death. By the following week, Germany, Russia, France, Belgium, Montenegro and Great Britain had all been drawn into the conflict, and other countries like the United States would enter later. Overall, more than 9 million soldiers and nearly that many civilians would die in fighting that lasted until 1918. - Christmas Truce of 1914.

A NEW KIND OF WARFARE
TRAGEDY LIKE THE WORLD HAS NEVER SEEN

WWI saw some of the most brutal warfare yet. Machine guns, long range artillery, and new types of rifles were used on the battlefield. Gas warfare was first seen. This weapon could burn skin, blind, and choke opponents.

TRENCH WARFARE

Conditions in the trenches were horrific. Soldiers were exposed to ice, rats, flooding, freezing temperatures, human waste, disease, and corpses of the dead.

"They were direct from the line and their faces were white and drawn and their eyes glazy from lack of sleep. There were great hulky men, crying with the pain of gaping wounds and dreadfully discolored trench feet. There were strings of from eight to twenty blind boys filing up the road, their hands on each other's shoulders and their leader some bearded, bandaged, limping youngster." Sister Helen Dore, a nurse. Great War.
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PEACE AT WORK
EVENTS LEADING UP TO CHRISTMAS DAY

Soldiers thought the war would be over by Christmas, but it dragged on. The Allied and German forces tried to improve the spirits of their soldiers with the upcoming holiday. Families could send parcels to their loved ones on the front lines. Germany sent Christmas trees to their troops. Despite this, soldiers were becoming frustrated.

"They were drenched from the line and their faces were white and drawn and their eyes glazed from lack of sleep. There were great husky men, crying with the pain of gapping wounds and dreadfully dislocated trench feet. There were strings of eight to twenty blind boys filing up the road, their hands on each other's shoulders and their leader some bestrapped, bandaged, limping youngster." Sister Helen Done, a Russian, quoted.

"In a penetrating and filthy search, a constellation of scabbed, festering vegetation and the stink which arose from the decomposing bodies of real or sham animals. This smell seems a permanent feature of the fighting line." British soldier, quoted.
TRENCH WARFARE

Conditions in the trenches were horrific. Soldiers were exposed to ice, rats, flooding, freezing temperatures, human waste, disease, and corpses of the dead.

“Trench warfare was hell. The banks on each side were full of buried and half-buried corpses and the stench was appalling. You put out a hand to steady yourself, the earth gave way and you found that you were clutching the blackened face of a half-buried German.”

British soldier, 1917

“...a combination of stink, rotting vegetation and the stink which rises from the decomposing bodies of men and animals. This smell seems a permanent feature of the firing line” British soldier, 1917

PEACE AT WORK

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On 25 December an attempt was made to secure an official truce for the holiday. Pope Benedict XV had declared a day of prayer and peace for Christmas. The German command recommended the idea to their officers, who then passed the order down to the lower ranks. The officers agreed that the men would allow their unit to take a brief break. However, the soldiers were wary of the idea when their superior officers brought it up. But there was even more from unidentified soldiers on other fronts. By the end of the day, the United States and other nations had also declared a brief truce for the holiday.
THESIS

In the winter of 1914, as soldiers on opposing sides were beginning to realize the horrors of World War I, Allied and German troops came together, defying their commanding officers' orders, and celebrated familiar Christmas traditions to both sides, resulting in a remarkable unification of soldiers, and creating an unbelievable truce in the middle of wartime tragedy.

THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE
TRIUMPH ON DECEMBER 25, 1914

Christmas Eve, Allied and German soldiers on the Western Front began meeting in no man's land for small truces, despite some initial officers' orders to stay in their trenches. The soldiers celebrated Christmas together as friends. They exchanged wine, cigars, food, pictures, addresses, and even played football matches. Most gunfire ceased and peace triumphed over violence that day. The soldiers even helped bury each others' dead.

"YOU NOT SHOOT, WE NOT SHOOT"

It's been the strangest Christmas I ever had. Last night about 8, the guns went quiet. That's when we heard the singing. At first, it was just one voice singing in German. We didn't understand the words, but we all knew the tune. I was a Green Line, and we were all singing in German. I didn't have the words, but we all knew the tune. We were all singing together. Then we heard the voices of the British soldiers singing. We were all singing together. It was the most beautiful thing I've ever heard.

Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht
Nur der Vater lacht
Nur der Vater lacht
Nur der Vater lacht

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"You Not Shoot, We Not Shoot"

Christmas Eve, Allied and German soldiers together in no man's land. No man's land was 100 yards over. In the end, the Christmas Truce was seen as a symbol of hope and humanity during a time of war.

"Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!"

"Stille Nacht! Heilige Nacht!" is a Christmas carol that was first sung in 1818. It has since become one of the most popular and well-known Christmas carols in the world.

"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer"

"Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer" is a Christmas song that was first published in 1939. It has since become a beloved holiday classic.

"Silent Night"

"Silent Night" is a Christmas carol that was first sung in 1818. It has since become one of the most popular and well-known Christmas carols in the world.
Aftermath

The Christmas Truce of 1914 was a rare moment of peace during World War I. Despite the ongoing conflict, soldiers from both sides engaged in friendly exchanges, playing games and sharing food. This truce was seen as a victory of humanity over the brutality of war.

A TRUCE NOT FORGOTTEN

The Christmas Truce of 1914 is often remembered as a moment of compassion and humanity amidst the horror of war. It was a rare opportunity for soldiers to interact peacefully and form bonds of friendship across the divided lines.

A personal story of a soldier from the war:

"I remember how we played soccer with the enemy. It was a small field, but we had a great time. The game was friendly, and we were able to laugh and joke with each other. It was a moment of relief from the constant noise and tension of the war."
A TRUCE NOT FORGOTTEN
LONG TERM IMPACT

The Christmas truce is a TRIUMPH over the TRAGEDY of war. It is a TRIUMPH of humans' desire for peace. It is a TRIUMPH of seeing the "enemy" as similar to yourself, with similar values and needs. It is a TRIUMPH of the Christmas message, goodwill toward all people. The truce is honored still today, and is an important part of history for it's promise that humanity can still TRIUMPH despite the darkest of times.