

The Christmas Truce

The First World War began in August 1914 and lasted until November 1918. By December 1914 – which was the first Christmas during the war – hostilities between the Allies and Germany were the worst they had been. When the war first began, many people in Britain believed that it would be 'over by Christmas'. However five months in, during December, the war showed no signs of ending soon. Soldiers were entrenched in ditches and bunkers, and were spending all their days and nights in the cold, unsanitary conditions.

Despite the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) disagreeing with it, many of the soldiers on both sides wanted to call a truce on Christmas Day. The BEF told the Allied Forces that the Germans were planning an attack on Christmas Eve in the hope that they would continue to fight. However, late on Christmas Eve, the sound of Christmas carol singing could be heard from the German troops. The Allied troops could also see small fir trees and lanterns lighting up the German trenches.

The middle of the battlefield was known as 'no man's land' and on Christmas Eve, soldiers from both sides met there to sing Christmas carols. The men even exchanged gifts with one another – 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.

On Christmas Day, another unique event occurred – 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 commenced. It is reported that Germany won the match 3-2!



The generals and commanders in charge were unhappy about the truce and so at midnight, they lit a flare to signal that the truce was over and fighting must begin again.

Although many had hoped the war would be over by Christmas, it continued for another three and a half years. Millions of soldiers and civilians were sadly killed during this time.

Questions

1. What do you think the word 'truce' actually means?

2. How did The Christmas Truce actually start?

3. What was 'no man's land'?

4. What events took place on Christmas Eve?

5. The soldiers were entrenched in bunkers and ditches. What do you think the word 'entrenched' means?

6. How do you think the soldiers on both sides would have been feeling at Christmas?

7. Why do you think the generals were angry about the truce?

8. Why do you think the soldiers were able to put aside the fighting and sing carols and play football with each other?

9. Why is The Christmas Truce seen as such a historic and important event?

Answers

1. What do you think the word 'truce' actually means?
The word truce means to come to an agreement or to stop fighting.
2. How did The Christmas Truce actually start?
The Christmas Truce started because the Allied troops heard the German troops singing Christmas carols.
3. What was 'no man's land'?
No man's land was the middle of the battlefield, which was neither British nor German territory. The soldiers met here to sing carols.
4. What events took place on Christmas Eve?
On Christmas Eve, the soldiers sang carols together, exchanged gifts and had a funeral service for their comrades who had died during the fighting.
5. The soldiers were entrenched in bunkers and ditches. What do you think the word 'entrenched' means?
Entrenched means they were living there, spending all their time there and were unable to leave except to battle.
6. How do you think the soldiers on both sides would have been feeling at Christmas?
Example answers: I think that the soldiers would have been missing their friends/families. They would have been unhappy because they wanted to be at home. The soldiers would have been thinking about what their families and friends were doing at home.
7. Why do you think the generals were angry about the truce?
The generals were angry about the truce because the soldiers were fighting in a war and should not have been friendly to each other. The generals were worried they would see each other as people just like themselves and not as the enemy.
8. Why do you think the soldiers were able to put aside the fighting and sing carols and play football with each other?
Example answers: I think they were able to put aside the fighting because they were all in the same position and understood how each other felt. They were all away from their families and friends at a difficult time of year.
9. Why is The Christmas Truce seen as such a historic and important event?
The Christmas Truce is seen as such a historic and important event because nothing like this had ever happened before or since.