

Republican Perspective

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by Ed Manning

The Christmas Truce of 1914

"At the beginning of this War megalomania was the only form of sanity." Sir Winston Churchill, November 15, 1915

World War I killed nearly 7.6 million individuals and left a greater number of casualties. However a little known truce occurred during Christmas of 1914 along the cold mud and muck of the trenches on the Western front. The British Army occupied a twenty-seven mile stretch from Ypres, Belgium to the La Basse Canal in northern France. Historical reports state the German trenches were only between seventy and thirty yards away. The area between the two combatants was known as "no man's land".

Christmas Eve was a cold clear day and both British and Germans were thankful that the rain had stopped and held hopes that mud might dry. The story goes that along part of the British line, the Germans managed to slip a chocolate cake with a note proposing a cease fire in order to enjoy Christmas and celebrate their Captain's birthday. The Brits accepted and on Christmas Eve soldiers from both sides met in no man's land to extend good cheer and exchange gifts.

Frank Richards was a British soldier that experienced the Christmas Truce and here is part of his account:

"On Christmas morning we stuck up a board with 'A Merry Christmas' on it. The enemy had stuck up a similar one. Platoons would sometimes go out for twenty-four hours' rest – it was a day at least out of the trench and relieved the monotony a bit – and my platoon had gone out in this way the night before, but a few of us stayed behind to see what would happen. Two of our men then threw their equipment off and jumped on the parapet with their hands above their heads. Two of the Germans done the same and commenced to walk up the river bank, our two men going to meet them. They met and shook hands and then we all got out of the trench.

Buffalo Bill [the Company Commander] rushed into the trench and endeavored to prevent it, but he was too late: the whole of the Company were now out, and so were the Germans. He had to accept the situation, so soon he and the other company officers climbed out too. We and the Germans met in the middle of no-man's-land. Their officers was also now out. Our officers exchanged greetings with them. One of the German officers said that he wished he had a camera to take a snapshot, but they were not allowed to carry cameras. Neither were our officers.

During the whole of Boxing Day [the day after Christmas] we never fired a shot, and they the same, each side seemed to be waiting for the other to set the ball a-rolling. One of their men shouted across in English and inquired how we had enjoyed the beer. We shouted back and told him it was very weak but that we were very grateful for it. We were conversing off and on during the whole of the day."

On this Christmas Eve of 2014 it remains doubtful that the black-hooded, fanatical ISIS will share one day of peace with people of Christian and Jewish faith...

The Republican Club of Rossmoor wishes you Happy Holidays and a very Merry Christmas!