

## The Christmas Football Truce 1914

The following article was excerpted from DailyIndia.com.

A letter documenting the famous Christmas Day truce of 1914, when guns fell silent along the Western Front, and feuding German and British soldiers engaged in a friendly soccer match in the icy mud of No Man's Land in France, has been found 92 years after it was first written.

The letter, written in the British trenches by a British private, details the truce when the Kaiser's soldiers and British Tommies exchanged pleasantries and celebrated Christmas together and engaged in what was to become famous as the world's only friendly football match between enemy soldiers during a war.

Written in pencil on five pages of paper torn from an Army-issue notebook, the private tells his "dear Mater" how on a frosty, moonlit Christmas Eve, the Germans began placing "lights all along the edge of their trenches and coming over to us wishing us Happy Christmas etc."

He says it was "the most memorable Christmas" he has ever spent or is likely to spend. "Since about teatime yesterday, not a shot has been fired on either side up to now.

"They also gave us a few songs so we had quite a social party. . . . Some of our chaps went over to their lines. I think they've all come back bar one from E Co. They no doubt kept him as a souvenir. . . ."

"After breakfast we had a game of football at the back of our trenches! We've had a few Germans over to see us this morning. They also sent a party over to bury a sniper we shot in the week. He was about 100 yds from our trench. A few of our fellows went out and helped to bury him.

"About 10.30 we had a short church parade, held in the trench. How we did sing: 'O comes all ye faithful.'"

The private identified only as a boy, further says that at night German and British soldiers had a joint Christmas dinner comprising "fried bacon and dip-bread followed by hot Xmas pudding, then muscatels and almonds, oranges, bananas, chocolate, cocoa and smokes.

"You can guess we thought of the dinners at home. Just before dinner I had the pleasure of shaking hands with several Germans: a party of them came halfway over to us. So several of us went out to them. I exchanged one of my balaclavas for a hat. I've also got a button off one of their tunics. We also exchanged smokes etc. and had a decent chat. They say they won't fire tomorrow if we don't, so I suppose we shall get a bit of a holiday—perhaps.

"After exchanging autographs and them wishing us a Happy New Year, we departed and came back and had our dinner. We can hardly believe we've been firing at them for the last week or two—it all seems so strange. At present it is freezing hard and everything is covered in ice.

"There must be something in the spirit of Christmas as today we are all on top of our trenches running about. Whereas other days we have to keep our heads well down. . . . I had a parcel from B.G.'s Lacey Dept. containing a sweater, smokes, underclothes etc. We also had a card from the Queen, which I am sending back to you to look after, please."

Near the end of the well-thumbed letter, he tells his mother: "As I can't explain to everyone how I spent my 25th, you might hand this round please. . . . I never expected to shake hands with Germans between the firing lines on Christmas Day and I don't suppose you thought of us doing so.

“So after a fashion we've enjoyed our Christmas. Hoping you spend a happy time with George Boy as well. How we thought of England during the day. Kind regards to all the neighbours. With much love from Boy,” the letter concludes. Historian Felix Pryor, manuscripts consultant to auctioneers Bonhams, who is offering the letter for sale on November 7, has termed it as "a desperately poignant—almost surreal—document.”

“I have never in my career seen anything like it. To find a letter written home on the actual day of one of the most famous incidents in military history is amazing," *The Times* quoted him as saying.

“The envelope is missing and the intensely moving letter has long since been separated from the sender’s family. It is therefore, quite literally, the work of an Unknown Soldier,” Pryor added.

In the historic and unique truce, firing stopped along the entire 500 miles of the Western front. The Germans sang “Stille nacht, heilige nach” (Silent night, holy night), while the British responded with a rendition of “O Come all ye Faithful.”

In one sector, the Germans produced a Christmas tree and staged the famous football match. In some areas, the truce lasted only one day; in others it continued until close to the New Year.

The letter was discovered in a box of otherwise undistinguished manuscripts, and is expected to fetch around 500-1000 pounds at auction.