

Christmas Truce 1914 --- Olympic Truce 2018

(includes excerpts from an article by Erin Kelly on December 17, 2017)

During the Christmas Truce of 1914, WWI soldiers sang carols, exchanged gifts, and supposedly even played a soccer game. In the midst of the unrelenting violence of World War I, a ceasefire suddenly swept across areas of the Western front in 1914. Massive amounts of life had already been extinguished, but there was one circumstance that halted the brutality and bloodshed. It was the first Christmas of the war. It was a day for peace, if only fleeting.

On the night before Christmas, Captain Arthur O'Sullivan of the British army's Royal Irish Rifles was stationed in Rue du Bois, France. He heard a German accent float from across the barracks. It said, "Do not shoot after 12 o'clock and we will not do so either." Then, "If you English come out and talk to us, we won't fire." One Irish rifleman ventured out of his trench to test the invitation. After arriving back safely with a German cigar as a gift, others made their way onto the still battlefield. No Man's Land filled with soldiers meeting each other halfway.

And so began the unofficial Christmas Truce of 1914. Along the lines in France and Belgium, soldiers began hearing carols in the distance. German troops sang "Stille Nacht, Heilige Nacht" ("Silent Night, Holy Night") and the Allied troops chimed in – singing in alternating languages.

Cautiously, more soldiers began emerging. Germans held up lanterns and called to the British – assuring them in broken English that they wouldn't shoot. Instead, they wished them a Merry Christmas. Men from both sides intermingled, shook hands, and shared cigarettes and food. Some, despite a great debate of the event, even say that a soccer game broke out...

The Christmas Truce also provided a time for the armies to collect their deceased soldiers from the fields. This gesture meant a lot in terms of respect for the dead for both sides.

Many generals and senior officers were not on board with this overall show of goodwill. In some areas, peace lasted until the first few days of 1915 without many shots fired. The military made it clear that this was not acceptable wartime behavior. Another holiday truce of this kind was never recorded.

Back in 1914, the human face-to-face nature of war allowed for some holiday spirit. The propaganda machine hadn't yet churned up seething hatred against sides. Military strategies were not yet massively impersonal.

Today, even with the changed nature of war, the United Nations is asking its member states to observe an Olympic Truce during the upcoming February 9-25 Winter Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, and for one week on either side. That would be February 2 to March 4, 2018.

South Korea has asked the United States to delay its war rehearsal flights over South Korea until after the truce. If the world can prove that it can refrain from war during a sports competition, it will have proved that it can do so after the competition as well. If the United States can also refrain from its war "games," negotiations between it and North Korea may be possible.

This is a serious opportunity to prevent a catastrophic war. Please sign an online petition supporting the Olympic Truce at

<http://www.rootsaction.org/take-action/1702-urge-world-to-support-the-olympic-truce>

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