

Football Truce

A truce is a temporary pause in an argument or a war. It can be used to allow each side to rest or to recover their fallen soldiers. There was a famous truce during World War I called the Christmas Truce.

The war began on the 28th of July, 1914, and many soldiers hoped that it would be over quickly. By Christmas, it became clear that the war wasn't going to end any time soon. This had a terrible impact on the morale of soldiers. They were cold, wet and afraid for their lives. They wanted to be back home with their families.

Soldiers were spending most of their time in trenches at that point. These damp ditches were close together - some were only a hundred metres apart. On Christmas Eve, 1914, some British soldiers heard the German soldiers singing Christmas carols. They saw lanterns being lit and even small fir trees being placed along the trenches. They shouted friendly messages to each other into the night.

The next day, something strange happened. British and German soldiers met each other in the land between the trenches known as No Man's Land. This was usually a deadly place to be, but there was a truce between them. They exchanged gifts and took photos. Many of them took part in football matches. They took the time to bury fallen soldiers and repair their trenches.

This has become a bit of a legend over time. It happened in many places along the front line, but not everywhere. There were still areas where fighting took place, and many soldiers lost their lives on Christmas Day, 1914. Many officers were annoyed at the truce. They worried that their soldiers wouldn't want to continue fighting once they had become friends with the enemy.

After the Christmas Truce, officers tried to stop their soldiers from doing it again. It never happened on such a big scale after that, but there were still smaller truces agreed from time to time. This was called the "Live and Let Live" system. Soldiers would shout out to their enemies for a truce, and if it was granted, they would spend time repairing their trenches and chatting to each other.

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These brief moments of humanity in such a violent and bloody war show how similar the soldiers of both sides were. None of them were cold-hearted killers. They were there to defend their countries, but they were also humans. They were scared, cold and sad. When they managed to spend time together, they often realised how similar they were.

One of the long-term effects of the truce was that it changed how the officers dealt with troops. They made sure that they were kept alert and that they saw the German soldiers as the enemy and not friends.

RETRIEVAL FOCUS

1. When did most people expect the war to be over by?
2. When did the football truce happen?
3. According to the text, who started singing first?
4. Did every soldier take part in the truce?
5. Was that the final truce?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

S	Why were officers annoyed by the truce?
I	Why might it have felt strange playing football where they did?
V	What do you think “humanity” describes in this context?
V	Find and copy a word that means “swapped”.
I	Why do you think soldiers on both sides were eager to accept a truce?

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