
A Christmas truce

WORKSHEET A

If someone talks about 'Christmas spirit' they usually don't mean eating too much or hoping to receive lots of presents, but that Christmas is a time for being kind to other people, which includes trying to get on better with people we don't have a good relationship with. There is a traditional Christmas message that expresses this very well: 'Peace on Earth, goodwill to all men'.

One of the most famous stories about Christmas spirit comes from the First World War (1914-18), in which many soldiers had to live in trenches and tens of thousands of them died in battles in which the side that 'won' often moved forward just a few hundred metres. At Christmas in 1914, a few months after the start of the war, the British were fighting the Germans in northern France and Belgium, with their trenches only about fifty metres apart in some places. On Christmas Eve, near Ypres in Belgium, the German soldiers started singing Christmas carols, including one called *Stille Nacht* (*Silent Night* in English) that is still very popular today. Opposite them, in the British trenches, Scottish soldiers replied by singing carols in English. Soon the Scottish and German soldiers were shouting friendly Christmas messages to each other.

Next, something even more surprising happened: groups of soldiers from both sides went into no man's land (the space between the trenches), to exchange small Christmas presents such as whisky and chocolate. Soldiers also went into no man's land to pick up and bury the dead bodies, with British and German soldiers standing together at some of the burial ceremonies. In a letter home, one young British soldier wrote, 'I had the pleasure of shaking hands with several Germans ... They say they won't fire tomorrow if we don't so I suppose we shall get a bit of a holiday.'

News of the truce travelled quickly along the lines of British and German trenches, and other groups of soldiers decided they wanted to do the same. In one place in northern France, British and German soldiers even went into no man's land to have a game of football on Christmas Day. Generals in both armies were angry about the truce, and ordered the soldiers to start firing again. The Christmas spirit of 1914 soon died, but it has not been forgotten.

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WORKSHEET B

Exercise 1

Answer the following questions about the text on Worksheet A.

1. In which countries were the British and German soldiers fighting?
2. Where did many soldiers have to live?
3. How did the Scottish soldiers reply to the German soldiers' singing?
4. What did the British and German soldiers exchange in no man's land?
5. What game did the soldiers play in no man's land on Christmas Day?
6. In what year did the Christmas truce take place?
7. Who ended the truce by ordering the soldiers to start firing again?
8. When did the First World War end?

Exercise 2

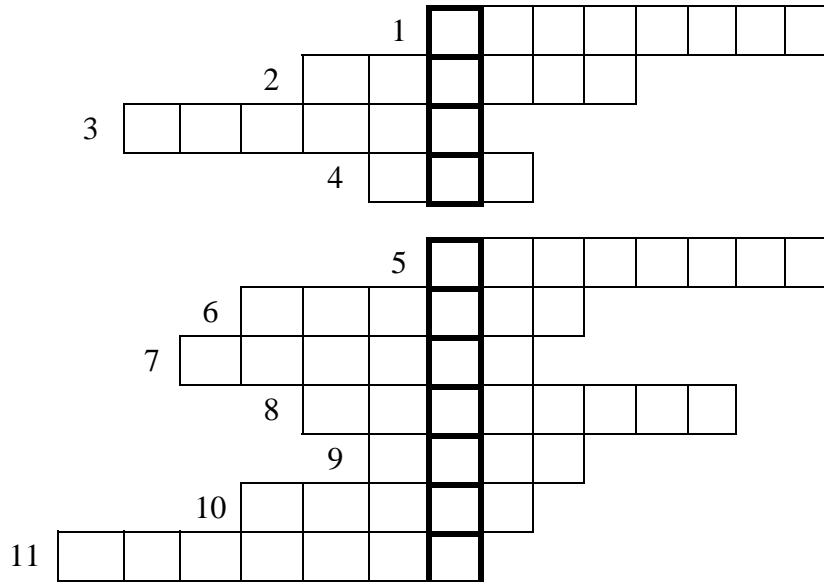
Decide whether the following statements are true (T) or false (F), or if the text doesn't say (D).

1. Showing Christmas spirit usually means being kind to other people.
2. The carol singing between the British and German soldiers took place on Christmas Eve in 1914.
3. Only very few people still know the carol *Silent Night*.
4. No man's land was an area behind the British trenches.
5. Ypres is in France.
6. The game of football between the British and German soldiers took place in Belgium.
7. British and German soldiers stood together at some burial ceremonies for dead soldiers.
8. In most places the trenches of the British and German soldiers were about a hundred metres apart.

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Exercise 3

Complete the crossword below. If all the words are correct, the approximate number of soldiers killed in the First World War will read from top to bottom.



1. The game of football on Christmas Day took place in _____ France.
2. _____ was one of the presents the soldiers exchanged.
3. *Silent Night* is called *Stille Nacht* in _____ .
4. Christmas is supposed to be a time for trying to _____ on well with other people.
5. The German and Scottish soldiers shouted friendly _____ across no man's land.
6. The British and German _____ were fighting in northern France and Belgium.
7. Both the German and the Scottish soldiers sang Christmas _____ .
8. There were dead _____ lying in no man's land.
9. During the truce the soldiers did not _____ their guns.
10. The young British soldier who wrote the letter _____ hands with a lot of German soldiers during the truce.
11. No man's land was _____ the British and German trenches.