

# For a brief, precious moment it really was



# All quiet on Western Front

British and German troops meeting in No-Man's Land during the unofficial truce. (British troops from the Northumberland Hussars, 7th Division, Bridoux-Rouge Banc Sector)



The 1st Battalion East Lancashire Regiment facing the enemy at Solesmes on August 25, 1914

Photo courtesy of Lancashire Infantry Museum

"Presently the Germans on our front get up on their trench parapets and commence to wave their arms to us. We do the same (and) in 20 seconds we are out in No Man's Land talking to the Germans, or trying to. They gave us bottles of wine and cigars; we gave them tins of jam, bully, mufflers, tobacco etc. I annexed a tin of raspberry from the sergeant's dug-out and gave it to a stodgy and bespectacled Saxon. In return he gave me a leather case containing five cigars, they were a Christmas present he received from Baden Baden. The line was all confusion; no sentries and no one in possession of arms.

"A party of Saxons have already commenced to bury

some of their dead which have been lying in the mangel wurzel field since we made our first counter-attack in October. We were thankful for that at least, for when the wind blew in the direction of our trenches it made us sick with the foetid atmosphere of decaying bodies.

"The awful slaughter had been unable to check the spirit of Christmas. We could stand upright and smoke, draw water and rations in security. Would it not be splendid if it were always like this, but then no one would be getting killed and the war would last forever."

Burnley's Pte Harold Pickering, of 1st East Lancashire Regiment, showed a bit more cheer in a letter home to his family:

"Did you enjoy yourself all right at Christmas? I enjoyed myself all right.

"We did not fire a single shot on Christmas Day. We and the Germans came out of our trenches and met each other halfway.

"We shook hands with each other and they gave us cigarettes and cigars and we sang together. They wanted to play us at football, but we had no ball. It made me think the war was over."

Sadly Col Lawrence's dreams of a football match were dashed with the resumption of hostilities between the two sides after the truce ended.

The colonel wrote home in the New Year to share his dis-

appointment at the turn of the events.

He wrote: "Well we never got off our football match. The Germans were not for it and have been sniping all day. General Wilson, commanding IV Division, and his Chief Staff Officer turned up at 11am to see it but were disappointed and various other fellows turned up but they had to return without any excitement.

"Colonel Seely also turned up in the afternoon to wish us a Happy New Year. We sat up last night to see the New Year in and drank to sweethearts and wives and our noble selves.

"At 11pm firing broke out all along the line. It appears that the German time is one hour

# CHRISTMAS TRUCE

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# n the front



Image courtesy of Imperial War Museum North

ahead of ours so they out of gaiety put two shells into our convent which is a building just behind our trenches and put their rifles in the air and fired a feu de joie!

"A regiment on our right replied to the fire with maxims and rifles and it sounded like a regular engagement but after 20 minutes it all died down and the Germans began blowing bugles and penny whistles and yelling. Then both sides wished each other a Happy New Year."

Army records show almost 100 bodies were buried in one mass grave on Christmas Day by soldiers from the 1st East Lancs and their German foes under the command of Captain E. C. Hopkinson. Most of the

dead were German but some Brits were laid to rest alongside the enemy.

Early in January the Second Army issued an order forbidding all informal undertakings with the enemy under penalty of trial by court martial bringing to a close perhaps the most remarkable chapter in British military history.

● *With thanks to the Lancashire Infantry Museum ([www.lancashireinfantrymuseum.org.uk](http://www.lancashireinfantrymuseum.org.uk)), IWM North, part of Imperial War Museums, Roger Goodwin and local historian Keith Johnson for their kind help in researching this article.*

**SEE OVERLEAF**



*A trench at Le Gheer*



*trench at Le Gheer*

Trenches at Le Gheer occupied by 1st Battalion East Lancashire Regiment. It was from these trenches that the East Lancs (proud cap badge pictured inset) went forward to meet the Germans in No Man's Land. Note the rough and still rudimentary nature of the trenches; far narrower, less developed and organised than the sophisticated versions which appeared later in the war. The photos were taken by Major T. S. Lambert in 1914 and are published for the first time courtesy of Lancashire Infantry Museum