



VETERANS FOR PEACE
HUMBOLDT BAY
CHAPTER 56

THE FOGHORN

DECEMBER
2014

“Cutting Through the Fog of War”

Worth Fighting For Ain't No Fortunate Son

By: *RON JACOBS*

Veterans Day is a holiday whose current meaning is somewhat different than its creators' original intentions. Originally known as Armistice Day and designed to mark the end of the bloodbath known as First World War, Armistice Day became a national holiday in the United States “dedicated to the cause of world peace and to be hereafter celebrated and known as ‘Armistice Day.’” Nowadays, when veterans groups like Veterans for Peace are denied permission to participate in many ceremonies around the United States because of their antiwar philosophy, the day looks much more like a celebration of war. In addition, many of the speeches and ceremonies seem geared to ensuring a never-ending supply of veterans in the future. In other words, Veterans' Day in the US is just one more part of the war machine's propaganda wing. A late buddy of mine who had been in the Navy during Vietnam once sarcastically remarked to me while we drank a beer and watched a Veteran's Day parade in Salinas, California: “This is our day—us vets.” He continued, remarking how much better they treated vets after they were dead. “Shit,” he said. “You even get a decent burial. And a freakin' American flag to go with it. When you're in their goddam uniform, you ain't no better than a maltreated dog who they're trying to kill. If you get out alive, they just want you to go away.”

Since 1991 and the first US invasion of Iraq, the majority of US veterans have spent some time in a war zone. Those numbers increased exponentially when the Bush administration decided to invade first Afghanistan, then Iraq (again.) In fact, according to a RAND Corporation study published in 2013, seventy-three percent of all active duty troops (Army, Marine, Air Force and Navy) did a tour in at least one of those war zones between the years 2001 and 2011 (when all US combat troops were officially out of Iraq) for a total of 1.5 million troop years. Of course, other US military forces did remain in Iraq after the official end of combat and continue to be involved in Afghanistan as of this writing. What this means for most US residents not in the military is that, at the very least, they know someone who has a relative, friend or lover who participated in at least one of those imperial adventures. For some of these civilians, this fact is a source of worry and concern, while for others it is a point of pride; still others find it to be a bit of both. For those of us who oppose US wars, the question remains as to how to prevent any more men and women from participating in them.

There is a tradition of veterans writing about their experience. Sometimes this appears as fiction, sometimes memoir. Occasionally, as in the case of Vietnam veteran W.D. Erhard, it is written as poetry. Relatively recent examples of this genre of fiction and memoir include popular books like Ron Kovic's *Born on the Fourth of July* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*—both from the US war in Vietnam. More recent examples include Kevin Powers's *Yellow Birds* and Geronimo Johnson's *Hold It 'Til It Hurts*. The former tale is about Iraq and the Johnson's is about Afghanistan. To this growing group can be added Rory Fanning's memoir titled *Worth Fighting For*.

Fanning enlisted in the Army in 2001, angry at the events known as 9/11 and eager to render justice to those he was told were responsible. One of the people responsible for his decision to enlist was football player Pat Tillman, who forsook a multimillion dollar career playing in the National Football League and joined the Army for reasons quite similar to Fanning's. Later, he was killed in what the military euphemistically and erroneously calls a “friendly fire” incident. After enlisting, Fanning ended up in a Special Forces group within the army called the Rangers. Like the Green Berets and Navy SEALs, the Rangers are trained (some would say brainwashed) to believe that they are the toughest,

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VFP 56 meetings will once again be held at 550 Union Street, 7:00 pm, Arcata, until further notice.



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meanest and best warriors in the world. The fact is they are honed into human killing machines for the Pentagon and those it serves. Sometime during his enlistment, Fanning began to question what he was doing and why. After what one can only imagine was a soul-searching experience, he applied for conscientious objector status. After months of delay and being ostracized by his fellow Rangers, his request was finally granted. This is where his book begins.

Utilizing the form of a road journal reflecting his decision to walk across the United States and raise funds for the Pat Tillman Memorial Fund, Fanning's book *Worth Fighting For* describes the geography of his journey and the people he meets along the way. He also provides historical vignettes of certain places he walks through. More importantly, though, is his growing awareness of the nature of the political and economic system that defines the United States historically and in the present. The essential element of Fanning's text is his growing awareness of how the warmakers operate; from their domination of the economy to the pervasiveness of the myths they utilize to get young people to fight their wars. Knowing this can lead one down a couple different paths, with apathy fueled by despair being one and committing oneself to changing that system being another. It seems fairly clear by the time Fanning reaches the Pacific Coast that he has chosen the latter course.

Blending a story of the road in the tradition of Kerouac with some politics and his search for meaning to a life after battle, Rory Fanning has composed an absorbing narrative. The writing is concise and heartfelt. The experiences he shares reveal something too many of us often forget—that the men and women in the imperial military are more than just uniforms and weapons; more than pawns to be used by a power structure that needs war to survive; and much more than so many uniforms to be manipulated by the media at sporting events and TV specials serving that power structure. The politics are subtle and personal; and ultimately an indictment of that power structure by a man who served it willingly and with conviction—until he came up against its ugly truth.

Ron Jacobs is the author of the just released novel *All the Sinners, Saints*. He is also the author of *The Way the Wind Blew: a History of the Weather Underground and Short Order Frame Up* and *The Co-Conspirator's Tale*. Jacobs' essay on Big Bill Broonzy is featured in CounterPunch's collection on music, art and sex, *Serpents in the Garden*. His third novel *All the Sinners Saints* is a companion to the previous two and is due out in April 2013. He is a contributor to *Hopeless: Barack Obama and the Politics of Illusion*, published by AK Press. He can be reached at: ronj1955@gmail.com.

22 A DAY

By: Rob Hepburn

*22 veterans will kill
themselves today.
Today and tomorrow
and every day.
22 veterans will end
their lives in suicide,
again and again,
and again.
And on Armistice Day
there will be many parades.
There will be many
flowers put on graves.
And 22 veterans will kill
themselves.
Maybe more that day.
They are the one percent
that fight our wars,
over and over and over again.
They are our own collateral damage
come home
from our wars
22 a day, 22,
forever until we the people
of this nation say "NO MORE!"
Say with our vote
and our feet,
and we the people
end our nation's wars!*



Golden Rule Project Update for November 2014

By: Chuck DeWitt

October has passed on Humboldt Bay and along with it Indian Summer. The rains have returned, the forest fires are out, the rivers are flowing and full of Salmon and the roof is leaking. Life goes on and with it progress on the Golden Rule. The three way lights installed by Steve Ninehaus render the inside of the Rule totally red at night. The cabin looks like the inside of a submarine in combat mode. Mike Gonzalez has finished the pulpit and moved on to the main mast. Turning eight, twenty foot vertical grain Fir planks into four, forty foot planks is proving to be complicated and time consuming. The scarfs required to join the boards together end to end must be almost perfect with no more than a playing cards thickness between them, slightly cupped to hold enough epoxy to make them stronger than one natural piece of wood.

The next step will be gluing the four planks together. To accomplish this we're going to need a team of around ten warm bodies, maybe twelve to mix the epoxy; brush it on and clamp it together. The first coat of epoxy will be clear, bushed on to soak into the wood and then a second coat of runny epoxy with wood flour brushed over the first. The 1st. and 2nd. boards are then placed together and the process is repeated between the 2nd. and 3rd. board and again between the 3rd. and 4th.. the next step is to place six or so clamps on the sides to prevent any horizontal movement. Thirty or more clamps will then be placed at equal spacing the entire forty foot length and snugged up to squeeze the planks together vertically. Excess epoxy squeezed out needs to be wiped off and all this must be done in a very timely manner as the epoxy tends to start setting up in perhaps less than hour.

Mike and I are accumulating all the tools and materials that will be needed. Eight to ten cans for the epoxy, brushes, ratchet wrenches, scrapers, drop cloths, hand protection for everyone and a lot more. We'd originally thought to have this gluing party on Saturday the 8th. of November, but it's been postponed because I've been called out of town on family business. However, anyone that would like to be a part of this step of restoration speak up, we seriously need a small squad of able bodies and I use that term loosely as most of us are way over fifty. Mikal Jkubal will be on hand to film for the documentary so if you've ever wanted to be in movies here's your chance for stardom. Once we get a full group together we'll have a quick briefing so every ones familiar with the process and comfortable with the clamps and so forth. Even though I'm out of state I'm still on line for E-mails and cell calls 707 832 7565,.. We need 12 volunteers to get dirty and there will be room for spectators and I'll spring for beers after.

Doris Timm, A member of our advisory board and I have put together an accounting of all our finances from August 2010 thru October 2014 and I'm amazed at the number of supporters we have from not just the U.S. but from all over the world. We can see the light at the end of the tunnel. Doris and Skip Oliver are presently working on several grants that hopefully will carry us though to completion. The Golden Rule will sail again.

Respectfully Submitted by Chuck DeWitt

Veterans Honor the Christmas Truce of World War I with Concert Featur- ing John McCutcheon

November 18, 2014

Concert Date: December 20, 2014

Concert Time: 7:30pm, doors open at 6:30pm

**Concert Location: Great Hall, Cooper Union, 7 East
7th Street, New York NY**

Tickets available at: <http://www.brownpapertickets.com/event/917668>

\$35 general admission; \$25 limited income

New York City – November 9, 2014 — The Veterans Peace Council of Metro New York will sponsor a commemoration of the World War I Christmas Truce on Saturday, December 20th at 7:30pm. Renowned folk musician John McCutcheon will perform at the Great Hall of The Cooper Union in honor of the centennial of the truce

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Next VFP56 meeting will be held
on Thursday, December 4th at
7:00 PM.
Meeting will be held in the
Commons Room at 550 Union
Street in Arcata.
Veterans and non-veterans are
more than welcome to come and
help us dialogue about what we to-
gether can do to bring about peace
in this complex world.



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created by soldiers fighting on opposing sides of the front line during the early months of the Great War.

Mr. McCutcheon's audience will include many veterans of recent generations who have fought too many wars since The War to End All Wars failed to achieve its goal. Their longing for a true and lasting peace derives not only from first-hand experience in wars ranging from World War II, Korea, and Vietnam to Iraq and Afghanistan, but acute awareness of war's "collateral damage" including civilian deaths, population dislocation, lasting environmental devastation and waste of global resources.

John McCutcheon, acclaimed by music critics around the world, has released 36 albums to date and is the recipient of six Grammy nominations. An extraordinary instrumentalist, his repertoire includes virtuoso performances on hammered dulcimer, guitar, banjo, autoharp, mountain dulcimer, fiddle, and jaw harp. Mr. McCutcheon's classic tribute to World War I truce, "Christmas in the Trenches," is included in Folk Alley's 100 Essential Folk Songs and will be a highlight of his Great Hall concert.

The concert is sponsored by the Veterans Peace Council of Metro New York, whose member organizations include Veterans For Peace (VFP), Vietnam Veterans Against the War (VVAW), Iraq Veterans Against the War (IVAW), Military Families Speak Out (MFSO), and Friends and Family of the Abraham Lincoln Brigade (FFALB). These organizations are involved in efforts that include the Vietnam Agent Orange Relief and Responsibility Campaign, which provides aid and support to those in both the U.S. and Vietnam afflicted with the multigenerational ravages of that chemical; the Iraq Water Project, which is helping to rebuild Iraq's water infrastructure, largely destroyed by U.S. bombs; a number of programs directly aiding veterans grappling with moral injury and post traumatic stress; and groups like Warrior Writers, which encourage veterans to use the healing power of the written word to examine combat and military service.

THE JOURNEY TO FOREVER

Episode XI

By John Mulloy

(This is the last part of John Mulloy's manuscript which has been printed here, in the Foghorn, over the past months. VFP56 wishes to thank John for sharing his writings and giving us a glimpse of him during his formative years on the journey to becoming the remarkable person we know today).

SOME THOUGHTS:

A). BRIDGE BUILDING

There seems to be an almost primal tendency in the human species, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, or economic class, to spend

a lifetime busily building a protective shell around oneself. This process is represented on all levels of SELFHOOD: physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual. The parameters of the KNOWN are so powerful, that negative or stagnant relationships, ideas, or feelings become cemented into the psyche. Even if pain, fear and despair are attached to the KNOWN, "Well..., at least you are used to dealing with what is." "If the clothes make the man, the majority of folks will stick with the same old shoes, pants and shirt." "Change is scary." "Don't rock the boat."

The official social institutions of life-government, education, institutional religion, the corporate world – are not merely reflections of the needs of the citizenry. They also put up protective barriers around their bureaucratic selves. Structured social institutions instill fear and anxiety in the citizenry. They always attempt to shove the seekers of knowledge back into a shell. It is the way of organized control freaks.

Despite the all-encompassing nature of the 'shell', it has little or nothing to do with morality, of good/bad. The vast majority of folks, though wary, are approachable. If you claim the search for universal consciousness as a mantra, then you understand that knowledge comes from thousands of sources, mostly human. This is the information that is processed into truth and wisdom. You may encounter a few exceedingly wise individuals on your life's journey, but they are mainly guideposts/mirrors. They will find you; you don't have to search for them.

When you encounter a fellow citizen's protective shell, it is up to you, the 'seeker', to establish credibility and trust. Calm earnestness and warmth of character go a long way. Weather, sports, or a myriad of on-the-spot banalities (sharing the laundromat or the counter at a diner, for example) establishes you as citizens of equality. Deeper discussions can evolve, sometimes with greater speed that you would assume. Such encounters are wonderful, for they show each of you the depth of connection that can exist between each SELF, almost spontaneously. Don't blow it by being overly aggressive, stand offish, or a 'know-it-all'. If you make any if these pitfalls, that 'shell' might be harder to crack in the future, either by you or someone else. With careful engineering, you can start to construct a bridge that will allow the 'other' entity to do likewise, in trust. A successful bridge building benefits ALL, beyond just the parties directly involved.

B). PROGRESSIVE ALTRUISM INTERNAL SEARCH ENGINE

On the political-sociological stage, there seem to be three competing attitudes that bring their weight to bear on the struggle to keep civilization afloat. First, with every incentive to stay high in the saddle, are the extremely well organized cadres of the CORPORATE ELITE. They have interlocking power bases, with plenty of financial and material resources. The ruling class has the military/police forces in their control and their hands are firmly on the electoral machinery of government.

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When corporate economies are rolling ‘high on the hog’, some members of the ELITE are willing to throw bones and scraps at the feet of the downtrodden, but that’s it for social conscience. There is no conscience when it comes to the EMPIRE. To be honest, they are virtually impossible to topple from their pedestal, at this time.

Secondly, we have the CURMUDGEONS, a very large collection of intellectually bedraggled folks. They center around the conservative Republican crowd, celebrating selfishness. “It’s my BALL”, is their mantra. Sadly, they usually vote and organize against their own natural interests as members of the human community. For example, they work to block universal health care, even though such a program would help their cash flow. Also, they refuse to act against U.S. military forays around the world, thus draining the U.S. economy and putting their own children at risk. The ruling class has successfully used the Curmudgeons to block progressive causes. While seeing themselves as ‘patriots’, these folks are really only ‘tools’ of those in charge, the CORPORATE ELITE.

Finally, we come to the wondrous world of progressive idealism. Here, a wide range of ‘causes’ gather under a loving umbrella, sometimes disjointed in their efforts, but united in HOPE. Progressives are imbued with the concept of healing the Earth and the protection of the planetary life forms and contents. A central tenet is the betterment of the human race, in terms of egalitarian principals of justice and economic security. Anti-imperialism, pacifism, environmental protection, food and housing programs for those in need, universal health care, and electoral democracy are good examples of progressive agendas. Running into the stone wall of the ELITE is not a lot of fun. Neither is dodging the interference of the CURMUDGEONS. Progressive activists have learned to take joy and satisfaction in the attempt to create positive social change.

What is the SOUL’S creative force that propels an altruistic world-view? Primarily, it is the ability to empathize with ‘the OTHER’, any human, or even another species, that lies outside of our ego view of ME world. In political-sociological contexts, it is empathy with those who are many circles away in terms of physical existence. For example, citizens of differing ethnicities and geographic locations may overcome the ELITE’S policy of ‘divide and conquer’. Bridge building will reveal commonalities that create or reinforce empathetic bonding of ‘others’.

War can provide an ultimate testing of altruism. When combatants sense the humanity of their opposites on the battlefield, the rule of EMPIRE is threatened. For instance, a U.S. soldier may come to awareness on the level of conscience, after becoming empathetic with the hopes and fears, the humanhood of the ‘enemy’, be they Vietnamese revolutionaries or Afghan/Iraq insurgents. At that point, the genie can’t be put back into the bottle. Once you reach outward to the ‘other’, neither knowledge gained nor conscience revealed can be erased.

Attempting to fulfill altruistic hopes on the political front takes enormous energy, what with harassment by the corporate rulers and

their vassals, the caterwauling CURMUDGEONS. It is absolutely necessary to replenish energy reserves during the struggle to create progressive change. Outdoor activities, loving relationships, and hobbies are excellent for renewal. Without replenishment, the SELF constricts, becoming less able to effectively process knowledge into wisdom. Universal healing and personal healing go hand-in-hand.

Lastly, there is one great reward for the altruistic seeker of a more progressive civilization. The more expansive the reaching out to the OTHERS, the more reciprocal energy comes back to the sender’s SOUL. You do literally ‘reap what you sow’. This wave of introspective energy brings knowledge that allows you to work gently on the primal questions of who, why, what, that cut to the core of wisdom and SELF awareness. This incoming energy, based on what you transmitted outward, is your Internal Search Engine (to borrow from the computer/internet world) with which you can plumb the deepest depths of your SOUL. If you give love, you will receive love. And that is the milieu for wisdom and the answers to the primal questions.

C). SOUL SCHOOL

SELFHOOD is the viewfinder of the SOUL. Each of us is unique – we are all ‘ME’, with our own senses and brain; individual flowers on the TREE of LIFE. Universal consciousness is within our grasp, because that is both our origin and our destination. On this Earthly stage, we learn many lessons about emotions and attitudes – love and hate, sharing and greed, empathy and indifference, etc. Also, that ‘WE’ is a state of existence that is greater than the sum of ‘ME’s’.

PERFECTION is not ‘in the cards’. FINALITY of answers to the primal questions are not obtainable during this voyage. Only the naïve or deluded would say, “Your new plumbing system will never clog or need repairs. And, by the way, here is one of the FINAL SOLUTIONS to the MEANING of LIFE”. Rather, life is continually in flux. We gather information, sort out the pieces of the knowledge puzzle, and process into rudimentary wisdom.

Problem solving is the main milieu in the quest for enlightenment. The decision-making challenges, big and small, stretch from the personal to the societal, from the technical to the ethical/spiritual. We have the ability to formulate plans to overcome obstacles and create pathways to wisdom. This is at the heart of the SOUL SCHOOL that we inhabit. We are not allowed to FLOAT; we must ENGAGE.

SOUL SCHOOL is our joyous blessing. And while it is true that we have not come to final understandings, it is the ‘search’ that leads to the potential for knowledge and wisdom. There is no hurry, for the JOURNEY is FOREVER.



Christmas Truce at the World War I Front

By Jennifer Rosenberg

Though World War I had been raging for only four months, it was already proving to be one of the bloodiest wars in history. Soldiers on both sides were trapped in trenches, exposed to the cold and wet winter weather, covered in mud, and extremely careful of sniper shots. Machine guns had proven their worth in war, bringing new meaning to the word “slaughter.”

In a place where bloodshed was nearly commonplace and mud and the enemy were fought with equal vigor, something surprising occurred on the front for Christmas in 1914. The men who lay shivering in the trenches embraced the Christmas spirit. In one of the truest acts of goodwill toward men, soldiers from both sides in the southern portion of the Ypres Salient set aside their weapons and hatred, if only temporarily, and met in No Man’s Land.

After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914, the world was plunged into war. Germany, realizing they were likely to face a two-front war, attempted to defeat the western foes before the Russians were able to mobilize their forces in the East (estimated to take six weeks), using the Schlieffen Plan.

Though the Germans had made a strong offensive into France, French, Belgian, and British forces were able to halt them. However, since they were not able to push the Germans out of France, there was a stalemate and both sides dug into the earth creating a large network of trenches.

Once the trenches were built, winter rains tried to obliterate them. The rains not only flooded the dug-outs, they turned the trenches into mud holes - a terrible enemy in and of itself.

It had been pouring, and mud lay deep in the trenches; they were caked from head to foot, and I have never seen anything like their rifles! Not one would work, and they were just lying about the trenches getting stiff and cold. One fellow had got both feet jammed in the clay, and when told to get up by an officer, had to get on all fours; he then got his hands stuck in too, and was caught like a fly on a flypaper; all he could do was look round and say to his pals, ‘For Gawd’s sake, shoot me!’ I laughed till I cried. But they will shake down, directly they learn that the harder one works in the trenches, the drier and more comfortable one can keep both them and oneself.

The trenches of both sides were only a few hundred feet apart, buffered by a relatively flat area known as “No Man’s Land.” The

stalemate had halted all but a scattered number of small attacks; thus, soldiers on each side spent a large amount of time dealing with the mud, keeping their heads down in order to avoid sniper fire, and watching carefully for any surprise enemy raids on their trench.

Restless in their trenches, covered in mud, and eating the same rations every day, some soldiers began to wonder about the unseen enemy, men declared monsters by propagandists.

We hated their guts when they killed any of our friends; then we really did dislike them intensely. But otherwise we joked about them and I think they joked about us. And we thought, well, poor so-and-sos, they’re in the same kind of muck as we are.

The uncomfortableness of living in trenches coupled with the closeness of the enemy who lived in similar conditions contributed to a growing “live and let live” policy. Andrew Todd, a telegraphist of the Royal Engineers, wrote of an example in a letter:

Perhaps it will surprise you to learn that the soldiers in both lines of trenches have become very ‘pally’ with each other. The trenches are only 60 yards apart at one place, and every morning about breakfast time one of the soldiers sticks a board in the air. As soon as this board goes up all firing ceases, and men from either side draw their water and rations. All through the breakfast hour, and so long as this board is up, silence reigns supreme, but whenever the board comes down the first unlucky devil who shows even so much as a hand gets a bullet through it.

Sometimes the two enemies would yell at each other. Some of the German soldiers had worked in Britain before the war and asked about a store or area in England that an English soldier also knew well. Sometimes they would shout rude remarks to each other as a way of entertainment. Singing was also a common way of communication.

During the winter it was not unusual for little groups of men to gather in the front trench, and there hold impromptu concerts, singing patriotic and sentimental songs. The Germans did much the same, and on calm evenings the songs from one line floated to the trenches on the other side, and were there received with applause and sometimes calls for an encore.

After hearing of such fraternization, General Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien, commander of the British II Corps, ordered: The Corps Commander, therefore, directs Divisional Commanders to impress on all subordinate commanders the absolute necessity of encouraging the offensive spirit of the troops, while on the defensive, by every means in their power.

Friendly intercourse with the enemy, unofficial armistices (e.g. we won’t fire if you don’t etc.) and the exchange of tobacco and other comforts, however tempting and occasionally amusing they

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may be, are absolutely prohibited.

Christmas at the Front

On December 7, 1914, Pope Benedict XV suggested a temporary hiatus of the war for the celebration of Christmas. Though Germany readily agreed, the other powers refused.

Even without a cessation of war for Christmas, family and friends of the soldiers wanted to make their loved ones' Christmas special. They sent packages filled with letters, warm clothing, food, cigarettes, and medications. Yet what especially made Christmas at the front seem like Christmas were the troves of small Christmas trees.

On Christmas Eve, many German soldiers put up Christmas trees, decorated with candles, on the parapets of their trenches. Hundreds of Christmas trees lighted the German trenches and although British soldiers could see the lights, it took them a few minutes to figure out what they were from. Could this be a trick? British soldiers were ordered not to fire but to watch them closely. Instead of trickery, the British soldiers heard many of the Germans celebrating.

Time and again during the course of that day, the Eve of Christmas, there were wafts towards us from the trenches opposite the sounds of singing and merry-making, and occasionally the guttural tones of a German were to be heard shouting out lustily, 'A happy Christmas to you Englishmen!' Only too glad to show that the sentiments were reciprocated, back would go the response from a thick-set Clydesider, 'Same to you, Fritz, but dinna o'er eat yourself wi' they sausage' In other areas, the two sides exchanged Christmas carols.

They finished their carol and we thought that we ought to retaliate in some way, so we sang 'The first Noël', and when we finished that they all began clapping; and then they struck up another favourite of theirs, 'O Tannenbaum'. And so it went on. First the Germans would sing one of their carols and then we would sing one of ours, until when we started up 'O Come All Ye Faithful' the Germans immediately joined in singing the same hymn to the Latin words 'Adeste Fidéles'. And I thought, well, this was really a most extraordinary thing - two nations both singing the same carol in the middle of a war.

This fraternization on Christmas Eve and again on Christmas was in no way officially sanctified nor organized. Yet, in numerous separate instances down the front line, German soldiers began yelling over to their enemy, "Tommy, you come over and see us!" Still cautious, the British soldiers would rally back, "No, you come here!"

In some parts of the line, representatives of each side would meet in the middle, in No Man's Land.

We shook hands, wished each other a Merry Xmas, and were soon conversing as if we had known each other for years. We were

in front of their wire entanglements and surrounded by Germans - Fritz and I in the centre talking, and Fritz occasionally translating to his friends what I was saying. We stood inside the circle like street corner orators.

Soon most of our company ('A' Company), hearing that I and some others had gone out, followed us . . . What a sight - little groups of Germans and British extending almost the length of our front! Out of the darkness we could hear laughter and see lighted matches, a German lighting a Scotchman's cigarette and vice versa, exchanging cigarettes and souvenirs. Where they couldn't talk the language they were making themselves understood by signs, and everyone seemed to be getting on nicely. Here we were laughing and chatting to men whom only a few hours before we were trying to kill!

Some of those who went out to meet the enemy in the middle of No Man's Land on Christmas Eve or on Christmas Day negotiated a truce: we won't fire if you won't fire. Some ended the truce at midnight on Christmas night, some extended it until New Year's Day.

One reason Christmas truces were negotiated was in order to bury the dead, many of whom had been there for several months. Along with the revelry that celebrated Christmas was the sad and somber job of burying their fallen comrades. On Christmas day, British and German soldiers appeared on No Man's Land and sorted through the bodies. In just a few rare instances, joint services were held for both the British and German dead.

Yet many soldiers enjoyed meeting the un-seen enemy and were surprised to discover that they were more alike than he had thought. They talked, shared pictures, exchanged items such as buttons for food stuffs. An extreme example of the fraternization was a soccer game played in the middle of No Man's Land between the Bedfordshire Regiment and the Germans. A member of the Bedfordshire Regiment produced a ball and the large group of soldiers played until the ball was deflated when it hit a barbed wire entanglement.

This strange and unofficial truce lasted for several days, much to the dismay of the commanding officers. This amazing showing of Christmas cheer was never again repeated and as World War I progressed, the story of Christmas 1914 at the front became something of a legend.





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LET US HEAR FROM YOU!

If you would like to submit an article, opinion, comment or response to anything you have read which might interest the members of VFP-56, please e-mail it to turtldncer@aol.com, in word format, or mail to Jim Sorter at 1762 Buttermilk Lane, Arcata, CA 95521. Submissions will be included on a first come basis until the newsletter is full. Late arriving submissions will be archived for future issues.



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