



Transcript

Extract from a report in war diary of 15th Infantry Brigade to Headquarters describing events of Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, 1914

Note: 'Norfolks' and 'Cheshires' were the names of particular regiments linked to particular counties in the UK. The infantry is the branch of an army that carries out military combat on foot, unlike cavalry or tank forces.

Some words defined in [square brackets].

Headquarters,
5th Division

I beg to report that an informal meeting took place yesterday between the lines of trenches of ourselves and the Germans, at which about 200 of our men assisted, and an even larger number of Germans.

It appears that on Christmas Eve there was a good deal of shouting and chaff [joking/banter] between our right trenches (Norfolks) and the Germans about LA PETITE DOUVE Farm, each inviting the other to come over. Although there was a certain amount of firing on our part all yesterday morning and up to 2 p.m. (Christmas Day), there was no response of rifle fire from the enemy on our front (only a few shells in the early morning some distance to the North). About 2 p.m. a German Officer or N.C.O. [Non Commissioned Officer – a soldier who did not lead men] appeared and walked over to our trenches holding up a box of cigars. He was not fired at, and one or two of our men went to meet him. Others, German and Englishmen, chimed [joined] in and soon there were large numbers in the space between the trenches nearer the German ones than to ours, talking and fraternizing [being friendly] and accepting each other's cigars and cigarettes etc. Most of the Norfolks and some of the Cheshires (on their left) from the fire trenches took part in this informal gathering including several officers.

The latter reported that the Germans refused to talk "shop" but were very friendly and appeared to have no evil intention of any sort. They said the war would be over and ourselves beaten, in two months and said they hadn't begun in earnest [started fighting their hardest] yet, although we had the best of them up to the present [we had been winning at the moment]. They also showed an official memo [message] stating that the Russians had been smashed and were fleeing to WARSAW, also the Austrians had occupied BELGRADE.

...

26/12/14

Sd. Gleichen, Brigadier General.

Commanding 15th Infantry Brigade

P.S. The Germans stated that they were not taking any action by fire or otherwise from 25th to 27th instant. I have however ordered hostilities [firing of guns] to proceed [continue] as usual.

 **Transcript****Letter from A. Maggs, B.E.F. 20th December 1915**

B.E.F.
France
December 20/15

Dear Mr. Clarke,

The parcel has arrived in good condition and its contents quite intact [not damaged], and I hasten to write back to thank you and all those kind friends who have so generously contributed towards making our Christmas as happy as possible. I have divided the parcel and handed to Corporal Woodhams his 'moiety' [share]. Opportunities this year are much more numerous than last for celebrating the great festival and I feel confident that our Xmas day menu will include a little more in addition to army biscuits and corned beef, which then was our ration day after day.

Thanking you and all the old friends at the office for your kind wishes and gifts and trusting that they will enjoy a happy Xmas,

I remain yours sincerely,

A. Maggs

Transcript

Letter extract from Arthur Smith, Royal Engineers, III Corps Railhead, B.E.F. January 1916

Note: The following letter extract is from a soldier based at a railhead. This is a point behind the frontline trenches where railways, used to transport men, supplies and ammunition, met. As it was behind the line, men stationed there would sometimes go to nearby villages to get other food supplies. This soldier would have split his time between the railhead station and the frontline trenches. Working at the railhead he would have been involved in laying and fixing tracks and cables, loading and unloading supplies, transporting supplies to the frontline and so on.

Six of us spent Christmas Day together in this truck and on the whole we had a jolly time. We were not free from work on Christmas Day but the work was not extra hard. For Xmas dinner we had two roasted stuffed chickens, roast potatoes, lime juice and Perrier water [fizzy water], Xmas pudding, nuts and last of all a bowl of champagne. Of course, we had to buy these extra things, but that was of our own free will as a good dinner would have been prepared for us in any case. The Xmas pudding we had for Xmas dinner was the gift of one of the Daily papers. Our Officer the R.T.O. [Railway Transport Officer] gave us cigarettes and bought, or helped to buy, a pig and some beer for consumption on the Railhead. We six in our turn contributed and presented him with two boxes of Marcella cigars with which he seemed to be pleased. Temperance [not too much drinking alcohol] was our motto all through Xmas and so things ended happily.

The weather here lately has been generally wet ...