

CHRISTMAS TRUCE AT FRO

STORY TOLD IN
LETTERS FROM
THE TRENCHES
TO DAILY MAIL

AN E-MAIL SITUATION REPORT (SITREP) OF THE PUTNAM COUNTY VETERANS
SERVICE AGENCY



Christmas in the Trenches

by John McCutcheon

My name is Francis Tolliver, I come from Liverpool.
Two years ago the war was waiting for me after school.
To Belgium and to Flanders, to Germany to here
I fought for King and country I love dear.
'Twas Christmas in the trenches, where the frost so bitter hung,
The frozen fields of France were still, no Christmas song was sung
Our families back in England were toasting us that day
Their brave and glorious lads so far away.
I was lying with my messmate on the cold and rocky ground
When across the lines of battle came a most peculiar sound
Says I, "Now listen up, me boys!" each soldier strained to hear
As one young German voice sang out so clear.
"He's singing bloody well, you know!" my partner says to me
Soon, one by one, each German voice joined in harmony
The cannons rested silent, the gas clouds rolled no more
As Christmas brought us respite from the war
As soon as they were finished and a reverent pause was spent
"God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen" struck up some lads from Kent
The next they sang was "Stille Nacht." 'Tis 'Silent Night'," says I
And in two tongues one song filled up that sky
"There's someone coming toward us!" the front line sentry cried
All sights were fixed on one long figure trudging from their side
His truce flag, like a Christmas star, shown on that plain so bright
As he, bravely, strode unarmed into the night
Soon one by one on either side walked into No Man's Land
With neither gun nor bayonet we met there hand to hand
We shared some secret brandy and we wished each other well
And in a flare-lit soccer game we gave 'em hell
We traded chocolates, cigarettes, and photographs from home
These sons and fathers far away from families of their own
Young Sanders played his squeezebox and they had a violin
This curious and unlikely band of men
Soon daylight stole upon us and France was France once more
With sad farewells we each prepared to settle back to war
But the question haunted every heart that lived that wonderous night
"Whose family have I fixed within my sights?"
'Twas Christmas in the trenches where the frost, so bitter hung
The frozen fields of France were warmed as songs of peace were sung
For the walls they'd kept between us to exact the work of war
Had been crumbled and were gone forevermore
My name is Francis Tolliver, in Liverpool I dwell
Each Christmas come since World War I,
I've learned its lessons well



Each year our Christmas Issue opens the same way. The message is so powerful and universal it should be read each year.

In 1914 there was an unprecedented and unofficial Christmas truce between the British and German Troops. The US had not entered the war; in fact the war was only a few months old. Perhaps the troops knew that it was going to be a long and bloody war, they were the people who were doing the actual fighting after all. There was never another Christmas Truce during the War to End all War. Garth Brooks, in his classic song "Belleau Wood", created an American Christmas Truce. The only problem is that the Battle of Belleau Wood took place in June of 1918 not Christmas time. Also as mentioned earlier the US was not in the war at the time of the truce.

Notwithstanding creative history let each of us embrace the spirit of that Christmas Truce and pray for peace and keep close to our hearts those who even now guard the gates of freedom.

From the Veterans Service Agency Staff

Barbara Steve, Tanya &
Karl



PUTNAM COUNTY EXECUTIVE
KEVIN M. BYRNE



December 2024

As we enjoy the holidays and spend this festive season with family and friends, I wanted to take time to reflect and express my gratitude to the Veterans and active military of our County.

I've always been amazed by the incredible support and love Putnam County shows to its Veterans. We have amazing community partners and active local organizations who always lend their time and effort supporting the men and women who have served in our Armed Forces. Not a week goes by that organizations like Guardian Revival, United for the Troops or our local VFW's and American Legions are not working on behalf of Putnam County Veterans.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank our outstanding Putnam County Veterans Service Agency, led by Director Karl Rohde, our new Deputy Director Tanya Pennella, and newly retired former Deputy Art Hanley. They take great pride in assisting the Veteran community, and I am grateful for their work. The annual Row of Honor is a cherished tradition in Putnam County, and it's always a great privilege when Karl invites me to visit the residents at the unique, county-owned and operated Putnam County Veterans' Residence.

We highlight this time of the year as a time we give to others. Yet I've seen firsthand throughout this year the people of Putnam County donate their time, money, and talents to support our remarkable Veterans.

Thank You to the men and women of Putnam County who have served this nation. I wish you all a Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, and safe, happy and healthy New Year!

Sincerely


Kevin M. Byrne
Putnam County Executive

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Before surviving a 13-month deployment to Iraq, my holidays were all about presents and joy and family and food and fun.

Today, the season means enduring chronic pain as well as Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and Traumatic Brain Injury (TBI). This time of year is riddled with landmines of depression, weather that can set pain levels off the charts, and triggers that leave me exhausted, stressed, and unable to get out of bed. Some days I am barely able to function.

Despite their good hearts, my family often has no idea how to support me. Facing another rough holiday season, I have come up with a list of simple ways that we can all help the veterans in our lives.

1) Understand why the holidays are hard for veterans.

“Moral injuries,” which result from violating deeply held moral beliefs, such as killing another human being, often result from combat. For those who live with a moral injury, we are now entering the time of year closely associated with “goodwill,” and it can feel like the world is judging us for all we have done — whether through a religious lens or a secular one. During a season meant to highlight the best in humanity, all we can see is the worst in what we’ve done in the past.

The holiday season can also serve as an anniversary of a military moment, another trigger. For example, the “survivors guilt” that combat veterans frequently experience can be triggered by anniversaries, be it the day that a comrade was killed or the last Christmas dinner shared in Iraq.

Finally there is no escaping the holidays, whether on a coffee cup or by walking past the lights at city hall. I can leave town during the 4th of July to avoid PTSD-inducing fireworks, but I have no means of hiding from the holidays.

2) Communicate with the veterans in your life.

In a safe time and place – not during half-time or while driving in traffic – ask and then listen to veterans in order to find things out. What are their needs? What are their fears? How do they want to be supported?

Be ready to hear things that you may not like or that may even upset you. Often times the things that have given us great joy in the past and may still give you great joy are the very things that now bring us the most stress or can trigger PTSD.

3) Never shame or “guilt trip” veterans.

Veterans are likely feeling a lot more guilt than you can see or that they are willing to disclose, so any added guilt you pour on is just that — added guilt.

Before Iraq, I loved outdoor ice skating. Now my chronic back pain won’t allow me to do it. I used to love gathering in large rooms with my family to eat and exchange gifts, but with PTSD this is impossible now.

Shopping is out of the picture as it gives me panic attacks. I need to be able to communicate these things to my family and caregivers without criticism or judgment. I carry enough stress and anxiety without “extra” guilt being put on my back, however unintentional.

4) Prepare family members before any visits.

Letting fellow family members know what to expect before any interaction with a veteran can help them not to do all of the things that you have been working on not doing yourself. It can also help spread understanding of what veterans are facing throughout the community.

Make sure you tell family members what they can do to be supportive, what questions to ask, and what subjects to avoid. If the veteran in question is dealing with substance abuse — or merely substance use — this may be an area to spend extra time discussing with family.

If the veteran you love is trying not to drink, remind folks to refrain from extending an invite for a beer; or if the veteran is having a few extras, refrain from making any judgmental comments.

All that said, make sure you are not disclosing what is not yours to disclose. Remember it is still the veteran’s life and their story to tell. Talk to the veteran first about what you plan to tell other family members. Ask what you can and cannot tell others about their private business, especially if it is related to medical conditions.

5) Find new traditions.

Do not give up on having fun during the holidays, but instead build new traditions as you find the new you. I am not the same person that deployed to Iraq in 2004. I have had to find new ways to live my life, which also means new holiday traditions.

This can mean Skype sessions with family members, which is great for those of us who have moved far away from home. Or more visits with fewer people at a time, so that we can still see our families but not feel overwhelmed by large group settings.

While shopping trips can still be fun, exchanging gifts does not have to equal big crowds at big box stores. Amazon is there for those of us who would rather avoid the mall.

6) Be creative, and above all do not give up on each other.

By Geoff Millard

His Christmas dinner will have all the trimmings he loved at home



ARMY'S CHRISTMAS DINNER

- Fresh Fruit Cup Celery Olives
- Cream of Celery Soup
- Roast Turkey with Sage Dressing
- Giblet Gravy Cranberry-Orange Relish
- Buttered Green Beans
- Snowflake Potatoes Tomatoes
- Hot Rolls Lettuce with Russian Dressing
- Mince Pie Pumpkin Pie Ice Cream
- Spice Cake
- Fresh Fruit Mixed Nuts Mints
- Coffee Cigarettes

NAVY'S CHRISTMAS DINNER

- Stuffed Celery Sweet Pickles Ripe Olives
- Cream of Tomato Soup
- Roast Turkey with Oyster Dressing Giblet Gravy
- Baked Spiced Ham Candied Sweet Potatoes
- Fresh Cranberry Sauce Rolls and Butter
- Hot Mince Pie Fruit Cake Fresh Fruit
- Candy Mixed Nuts Coffee Cigarettes

MARINES' CHRISTMAS DINNER

- Stuffed Celery Sweet Pickles Ripe Olives
- Cream of Tomato Soup
- Roast Turkey with Oyster Dressing
- Giblet Gravy Baked Spiced Ham
- Candied Sweet Potatoes
- Fresh Cranberry Sauce
- Rolls and Butter
- Hot Mince Pie Fruit Cake
- Fresh Fruit Candy Mixed Nuts
- Coffee Cigarettes

Uncle Sam will be a genial host over the holidays

THIS Christmas, millions of men in service will find their Holiday Dinner as bountiful as they enjoyed at home.

But only the trimmings make the Christmas Dinners shown here different from their everyday meals. Nine out of ten men in uniform are getting better balanced, more nourishing meals than they ate in civilian life. For example, Uncle Sam sees that they get plenty of the muscle-building meat they need—a pound of meat per man per day.

Because Armour and Company and the other packers have such great facilities,

they are able to rush millions of pounds of meat every day to our armed forces. Every kind and variety of meat...from Armour's Cloverbloom turkeys for Christmas...to Star Ham, juicy steaks and hearty roasts for year 'round meals.

With so much meat going to our armed forces and vast additional shipments to Lend-Lease, our government asks civilians to share equally the meat remaining available.

That's why every patriotic American will cooperate in the "Share-the-Meat" program by limiting himself to 2½ lbs. per week. It is a way we can all help to keep our men in service better fed...and maintain a strong, healthy nation at home.

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FREE Illustrated Booklet: "Food For Freedom," shows why our soldiers, sailors and marines are the best fed, best equipped in the world. For your free copy, write Armour and Company, Dept. 110, Chicago, Illinois.



Why the Christmas Truce Endures in Historical Memory

Five months of hard fighting during the 1914 'Race to the Sea' quickly transformed into a harsh, no-man's land where entire divisions became casualties. Christmas 1914 saw something extraordinary though; companies of British, French, German, and Belgian soldiers along the front held unofficial ceasefires in their respective sectors. The short reprieve consisted of soldiers exchanging gifts, burying dead comrades, and hosting an impromptu football match. A handful of firsthand accounts record the truces along the Western Front, capturing the moments of calm, miraculous relief. Captain Edward Hulse of the Scots Guards claimed it was 'the most extraordinary Christmas...you could possibly imagine.'

News of the truce spread haphazardly in Europe; French and German newspapers heavily censored the ceasefires, but stories were shared by soldiers in letters home. Despite suppression, the historical memory of the Christmas truce lives on and in light of the war's centennial, examining its role within the larger memory of World War I is paramount. In four years of war, a brief aside from the death provided a symbol of hope.

Contemporary public reaction to the Christmas truce in 1914 was counter to the hateful propaganda demonizing enemies. British newspapers like *The Times* and *Daily Mirror* printed letters from soldiers involved with the truce, showing the positive, upbeat character, and fraternization, they shared with the enemy. Soldiers described it as 'one of the greatest surprises of a surprising war' and 'absolutely astounding' in their correspondence, but that sentiment was not shared by their superiors. Generals and senior staff ex-

pressly forbade any type of communication between opponents. Any contact was interpreted as fraternization, establishing grounds for treason charges.

Despite these directives, the proximity between soldiers and trenches made fraternization a regular feature of the Western Front. These men lived, fought, and died in the trenches beside one another, making the war a deeply personal matter. Senior staff unable to witness this interaction firsthand would have a markedly different view on how their soldiers fraternized with the enemy. Because of the subversive nature that commanding officers might interpret the truce, French and German soldiers were likely discouraged from revealing their involvement. Statistically, many of the soldiers who did participate in the truce were likely killed in later months, like Captain Hulse at Neuve-Chapelle. They understood that the realities of war still existed and would resume after Christmas.

What survived were stories shared by fellow soldiers. Oral histories and letters entered the public memory, becoming part of the larger historical rhetoric. Press censorship covering the war would have suppressed it from reaching a wider circulation more than likely. The stories that did reach the public though illustrated that despite such carnage, small moments of hope illuminated the otherwise dark stain of warfare.

As years go by and the historiography of World War I expands, questions about the war's purpose and nature are thoroughly examined. A common theme that emerged was why the war was even fought when they account for its numerous causes. World War I's placement in the broader context of global social, military, and political history provides unique insight into its historical memory. Public memory about the war cen-

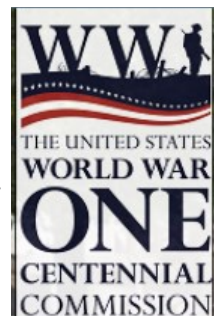
ters on its ferocity, trench warfare, and the introduction of modern warfare. The industrial scale destruction was unheard of even in 1914 and consequences are still visible today.

Accompanying all this, why does an event like the Christmas truce endure? The accuracy of the truce is still scrutinized by historians, but the memory of the truce itself perpetuates the longing hope that soldiers held whilst facing certain death. The public remembers the Christmas truce not only for the romantic image of soldiers coming together as brothers exchanging gifts, but the realization that this was a reconciliation. Reconciliation not only for their actions, but for their nations because if the soldiers could lay down their arms willingly, then nations could find alternatives to their troubles.

Popular portrayals of the truce, such as the 2005 film 'Joyeux Noel', present a dramatized insight into what could have transpired on the front, while maintaining the central theme that reconciliation is more powerful than artillery and bloodshed. The memory of the Christmas truce endures for the factual accounts and the broader message of hope for both nations and soldiers dying in the trenches.

The popular notion of 'the war will be over by Christmas' has carried throughout numerous wars; people anticipating that the violence ends and anxiously await their loved ones' return. In a way though, the Great War did end on Christmas in 1914, even if for a few hours.

By Thomas
Richardson





What It's Like Celebrating Hanukkah On Deployment

I always felt particularly lonely and isolated as a Jew deployed to the Middle East during Hanukkah, the week-long Jewish festival of lights. The holiday celebrates miracles and triumph in the rededication of the second temple in Jerusalem following a successful revolt of the Maccabees against the Syrian empire. Like many Jewish holidays, the overall theme of the holiday is to celebrate being alive. While Christmas is a big deal for most service members, and usually celebrated as a large group, the small number of Jews in any unit means Hanukkah can be a lonelier time. One deployment, I lit candles on a menorah, the traditional candelabrum of the holiday, on top of my foot locker alone in my containerized housing unit.

It was different when I was a kid. I grew up on the heavily Jewish Upper West Side of Manhattan and never felt that it was a big deal. In the Navy, I was suddenly part of a minority. Of the seven Hanukkahs I spent in the Navy, I spent nearly all of them away from family, including years I wasn't deployed.

Don't misunderstand. I found the military very welcoming and even encouraging of my decision to practice my faith,

but often the fact that the Jewish calendar is not in synch with the Gregorian calendar meant that Hanukkah occurred during the frenetic final work days before holiday stand down. And though some of my Hanukkahs in the Navy were lonely, other years I found closeness in a makeshift family of teammates, some Jewish, and some who were just willing to learn about Jewish traditions and make me feel supported.

My first year in the Navy, I was at Officer Candidate school in Newport, Rhode Island, likely screaming my head off and doing pushups for some infraction real or invented. On Friday nights Jewish candidates were permitted to go to a temple in nearby Middletown for Shabbat services. I hope it doesn't ruin it for current candidates to admit that we told the duty driver to pick us up later than the service ended because there was always plenty of otherwise-forbidden cookies and cake. We celebrated the second night of Hanukkah there, a welcome pause from the chaos of accession training.

I spent two Hanukkahs on deployment. On the first one, I was Jewish lay leader on an amphibious assault ship. On a ship of 3,000 people, we had anywhere from 6-10 people show up for services every Friday

night. Some were Jewish, some were 7th Day Adventists, and some others just came because they were curious. The culinary specialists made a terrific challah bread for us and we'd go over lessons from the weekly torah reading that were relevant to our deployment. Days on deployment blend together, even moreso on ship than on land, largely because you rarely see the sun. Friday nights marked the fact that time was in fact passing, that the handful of us who observed the end of the week together would endure to the next one. Hanukkah in particular reminded us that the *months* had gone by. That year, for me personally, it meant it was almost time to go home. Right before Christmas, I transferred back to the United States and began training, only to go on deployment again shortly afterwards.

My loneliest Hanukkah was on an expeditionary ground deployment to the Middle East. Teammates joked I needed to hide my Jewishness, and perhaps not mention my last name so much (this proved to be irrelevant, but it made me nervous at the time). The Star of David necklace usually worn under my uniform was left back in the States. That was the year I lit the Hanukkah candles completely alone in my CHU.

Chaplain (Capt.) Andrew Cohen stands behind a lit menorah during the eighth day of Hanukkah at Joint Base Balad, Iraq.U.S. Air Force photo/Airman 1st Class Jason Epley



Chaplain (Capt.) Andrew Cohen stands behind a lit menorah during the eighth day of Hanukkah at Joint Base Balad, Iraq.U.S. Air Force photo/

I am delighted when people wish me "Merry Christmas." The intent of "I wish you a joyous season" is there. But I also always appreciated when people *did* acknowledge that I was missing a different holiday, that I felt the same loss of acutely missing family that comes with this time of year, and wished me "Happy Hanukkah" as well.

To the Jewish service members who have the watch, happy Hanukkah.

ANDREA N. GOLDSTEIN, Task and Purpose



DECEMBER CALENDAR

WEEK 1

SUN 12/1 Homefront Holiday Family Photo Shoot ^*
12 PM in Beacon

MON 12/2 First Line In-Person Gathering ^
7 PM in Carmel

MON 12/2 iRest Meditation ^
8 PM via Zoom

TUES 12/3 Jam Session ^
6 PM in Beacon

WED 12/4 Reducing Stigma +
9 AM in Beacon

WED 12/4 Wellness Wednesday ^
5 PM via Zoom

THU 12/5 Revive and Thrive +
5 PM in Peekskill

FRI 12/6 Vet2Vet Gathering ^
6 PM via Zoom

SAT 12/7 Fahnestock Day Hike ^-
10 AM in Putnam Valley

WEEK 2

MON 12/9 First Line Gathering ^
7 PM via Zoom

TUES 12/10 Jam Session ^
6 PM in Beacon

TUES 12/10 Mobility for Health ^
7 PM via Zoom

WED 12/11 Wellness Wednesday ^
5 PM via Zoom

THU 12/12 ASIST - Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training +
8:30 AM in Beacon

FRI 12/13 Vet2Vet Gathering ^
6 PM via Zoom

WEEK 3

MON 12/16 First Line In-Person Gathering ^
7 PM in Carmel

MON 12/16 iRest Meditation ^
8 PM via Zoom

TUES 12/17 Jam Session ^
6 PM in Beacon

TUES 12/17 Yoga ^
7 PM via Zoom

TUES 12/17 Woman Guardian Gathering ^
8 PM via Zoom

WED 12/18 Wellness Wednesday ^
5 PM via Zoom

WED 12/18 Campfire Men's Circle ^
7 PM in Beacon

FRI 12/20 Vet2Vet Gathering ^
6 PM via Zoom

WEEK 4


FRI 12/27 Vet2Vet Gathering ^
6 PM via Zoom

WEEK 5

TUES 12/31 New Year's Eve Sunset Hike ^
1:30 PM in Beacon

LEGEND:

- ^ Guardians Only (Veterans & First Responders)
- Bring a Buddy (Adults)
- * Family Friendly (Kids welcome)
- + Open to the Public
- # Spouse/Partner w/Guardian
- ; Guardian Spouses Only

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As we approach another New Year I thought that this story I wrote a few years ago would be apt. Please have a wonderful New Year!:

"Often I hear my Navy friends wishing people calm seas. A comforting wish indeed. Recently while on Route 17 motoring to the western side of New York I saw a billboard advertising a therapeutic center. The center was called "Calm Seas Therapeutic Center". Again giving people hope for life to be calm for all their journeys to be calm. As is often the case my mind started to play with the words calm seas. Tumbling them over and over, altering the context, wondering if there could be another reality to what those words were meant to express. Yes that is how my mind works and I seemingly have little actual control of the workings. Another expression from my Navy friends sailed into my mind if you will. You can never become a good sailor if you have only sailed on yes-calm seas. Wow. My mind then churned out other things related to the Navy analogy about the nature of becoming a good sailor. Could a soldier in the Army or a Marine become good at what they do if they never encountered a battle? Could an airman become proficient if they never encountered turbulence in the air? Part and parcel of that is a play on the words. To survive the turbulent waters or the hell of battle you have to remain clam because "Calm Sees". A person must remain calm to see how to survive. The analogy is valid in many pursuits. Vividly in sports the good hitter in baseball sees the 100 mph ball with a calmness that makes it seem slower and hittable the quarterback being blitzed remains clam to see the best route to score. The analogy breaks down with golf where there has to be total silence while the golfer attempts to hit a ball that is not moving but it works in all other sports. Other analogies work as well a firefighter running toward a fire sees beyond the flames a police officer assessing a hostage situation uses his calm to see an assessment. A nurse in an ER experiences calm sees.

So as we move toward New Years let me wish you "Calm Sees". My wish is calm for you so that you may see during the ensuing year and perhaps for life."

Karl