The Christmas Truce

The Christmas Truce of 1914 was an unofficial **ceasefire** that took place on some battlefields during the First World War.

Background

The First World War began in July 1914 and lasted until November 1918. By December 1914, fighting between the **Allies** and Germany showed no signs of stopping. Soldiers were spending all their days and nights in cold, unsanitary conditions inside trenches and bunkers on the battlefield. The pope invited European leaders to consider a ceasefire by asking "that the guns may fall silent at least upon the night the angels sang". Despite the leaders of the **British Expeditionary Force** (BEF) disagreeing with it, many of the soldiers on both sides wanted to call a **truce** on Christmas Day. However, such appeals for peace were ignored. The Allied Forces were told that the Germans were planning an attack on Christmas Eve to encourage them to continue to fight.

The Ceasefire

The German troops began singing carols on Christmas Eve. The Allied troops heard the sounds and caught sight of small fir trees and lanterns illuminating the German trenches. Soon after, German soldiers emerged cautiously from their trenches waving their arms to signal that they weren't carrying weapons. The men from both sides then met in the centre of No Man's Land.

Soldiers from both sides exchanged festive greetings in their native languages and even gave gifts. The British gave items like chocolate to the German soldiers and the Germans gave gifts including sausages to the British. They also had a funeral service for those soldiers who had died and buried them alongside each other.

Did You Know…?

On Christmas Day, football matches were played between German and British troops. It is reported that Germany won one of these matches 3-2!

Did You Know...?

When the war first began, many people in Britain believed that it would be 'over by Christmas'. However, it continued for another three and a half years.

Glossary

Allies: The Countries that fought with Britain in the First and Second World Wars.

British Expeditionary Force: The army forces from Britain that went to northern France at the start of the First and Second World Wars.

ceasefire: A temporary suspension of fighting.

High Command: The commander-in-chief and other senior staff of the armed forces.

truce: An agreement to stop fighting.

This Christmas truce did not happen everywhere; fighting continued in many other places over the Christmas period. The **High Command** on both sides were very unhappy about the ceasefire. So, they lit a flare at midnight to signal that the truce was over and that fighting must begin again. By Boxing Day, most of the fighting had continued on the battlefields. However, it wasn't until New Year's Day that fighting in other places began again.

After the Truce

Many people believed the Christmas ceasefire to be a myth. It was only when photographs emerged of German and British troops standing shoulder to shoulder that people were able to believe that this temporary ceasefire had happened.

Did You Know...?

This one-off Christmas truce was never again repeated during the First or Second World Wars.

Questions

1. Which words from the text have a similar meaning? Tick **two**.

   ○ truce

   ○ attack

   ○ troops

   ○ ceasefire

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they occur in the text.

   ☐ Allied Forces were told that the Germans were planning an attack on Christmas Eve.

   ☐ Football matches were played between German and British troops.

   ☐ The High Command lit a flare to signal that the truce was over.

   ☐ Many of the soldiers on both sides wanted to call a truce on Christmas Day.

3. Find and copy one word which shows that the trenches were unhygienic and dirty.

   _____

4. What did many British soldiers give to the Germans?

   _____

5. Fill in the missing words.

   The High _____ on both sides were very unhappy about the

   _____.

6. **Many people believed the Christmas ceasefire to be a myth.**
   Explain what is meant by this sentence.

   _____

   _____

   _____

7. What is the purpose of the glossary box in this text?

_____

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8. Discuss why these British soldiers may have thought that it was safe to meet with the German's in No Man's Land.

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Answers

1. Which words from the text have a similar meaning? Tick **two**.

   - ✓ **truce**
   - ○ attack
   - ○ troops
   - ✓ **ceasefire**

2. Number the events from 1-4 to show the order that they occur in the text.

2	Allied Forces were told that the Germans were planning an attack on Christmas Eve.
3	Football matches were played between German and British troops.
4	The High Command lit a flare to signal that the truce was over.
1	Many of the soldiers on both sides wanted to call a truce on Christmas Day.

3. Find and copy one word which shows that the trenches were unhygienic and dirty.

   unsanitary

4. What did many British soldiers give to the Germans?

   Many British soldiers gave chocolate to the German soldiers.

5. Fill in the missing words.

   The High **Command** on both sides were very unhappy about the **ceasefire**.

6. **Many people believed the Christmas ceasefire to be a myth.**
   Explain what is meant by this sentence.

   Pupils' own responses, such as: This means that people found the story so hard to believe that they thought that it had been made up.

7. What is the purpose of the glossary box in this text?

   Pupils' own responses, such as: The glossary box helps the reader to understand the text by explaining what some of the words mean.

8. Discuss why these British soldiers may have thought that it was safe to meet with the German's in No Man's Land.

   Pupils' own responses, such as: The British soldiers may have thought it was safe because they heard singing and saw Christmas lights which would seem peaceful. The Germans also waved their arms to signal peace when leaving the trenches.