**The Christmas Truce**

It was 24 December 1914 – Christmas Eve. Many children were getting ready for Christmas without their fathers. Earlier that year, in August, war had broken out right across Europe and around the world. Germany had invaded the next-door country of Belgium. Britain had agreed to help defend Belgium and so hundreds of thousands of men had set sail to France. Before very long they were facing German troops in a long line of trenches. These deep trenches were dug to protect soldiers on both sides from the guns of the enemy. Even so, already thousands of men on both sides had been killed.

As the British soldiers kept watch, they heard something which surprised them. It was not gunfire but singing. As dawn broke, instead of the guns starting up once more there was a strange calm. Someone in the German trenches raised a board on which they had written the words, “You no fight, we no fight”. Along the line, a German officer raised a white flag. Nervously, some British soldiers stood up above the trench – and nothing happened. Cautiously they began to advance, without their guns, towards German lines. The Germans, too, came forward and began to greet their enemies with warm handshakes. “Happy Christmas, Fritz!” and “Merry Christmas to you, too, Tommy.”

By that afternoon, thousands of soldiers on both sides were talking and laughing and singing. Some showed their new friends pictures of their loved ones. Some Germans had been working in England just before the war and one soldier asked a British officer if he would take a letter back to his English girlfriend. There was much swopping of small presents such as cigarettes, tinned food, plum puddings, and even helmets! Someone else found a football and a game began. Other games started and where there was no ball, tin cans or sandbags stuffed with straw were used. And all the while, carols continued to be sung in both languages. This truce had been started by ordinary soldiers not wishing to fight on Christmas Day. The officers who were fighting with them joined in the truce but officers higher up were not at all pleased.

When the Generals commanding the war got to hear of it, they were very angry. They feared that their soldiers would lose the will to fight because they could see that their enemies were people just like themselves. The army commanders acted quickly to prevent this ever happening again. Orders went out that there was to be no more contact with the enemy and before long, sadly, the shooting began again.

Many people had hoped the war would have been over by Christmas that year. Sadly, it went on for another three and a half years. By this time, millions of soldiers around the world, and even more civilians, had died.