

Christmas, 1914

Rob Davis

The Private said, "What's up, lads?
it seems right quiet out there,
but I don't mind if Christmas morn
has no attack affair."
We peered out from our trenches
(and so did all the Frenchies).

The Corporal said, "Stand fast, lads;
for we'll not fight today.
For once, no battle, just because
it's Christmas, and we'll have a pause.
We'll give Fritz no *melée*."
We Privates thought this sounded fine,
and stood down right along the line.

The Sergeant said, "Stand fast, lads;
we'll wait all quiet, and see
what happens, and if Fritz is still,
we'll not attempt to do him ill;
all peaceful it will be."
The Corporal nodded, all a-smile,
there'd been no rest for quite a while;
we Privates stood down all content,
against the walls our rifles leant.

The Captain said, "Stand fast, lads;
we'll play it cool, and this'll
do just fine, we'll keep it calm
and hope that Fritz he wants no harm,
and doesn't blow his whistle."
The Sergeant said "Very good, Sir!
Enjoy your Christmas pud, Sir!"
The Corporal he gave orders,
"Stay well within your quarters!"
And told us all to lay off;
we'd likely get the day off.

The Colonel said, "Stand fast, lads;
here's something to be seen;
a ray of light for trenches murky,
tinned chocolate, a slice of turkey
a present from the Queen."
The Captain said "God save Her!
We're grateful for the favour."
The Sergeant, warmly dressed
was mightily impressed.
The Corporal passed the tins,
and said "Lads, here's your dins."
We Privates didn't quibble,
we'd Christmas pud to nibble.

The General he said "What?"
And rose up from his benches,
"Whilst Fritz is eating Christmas pud,
our lads can do a whale of good,
and storm his ruddy trenches."
The Colonel was dismayed,
but plans to go were laid.
The Captain said to "Stick it,
it simply isn't cricket."
The Sergeant he knew who was boss,
and didn't argue much the toss.
The Corporal gave a telling,
"You there, lads, get fell in!"
We Privates downed our trifles,
and took up with our rifles.

Then came a voice from the other line -
"Merry Christmas, Tommy" – sounded fine;
so we all called, with no alack,
"Merry Christmas, Fritz!" we shouted back.
Then sailed into our dingy hide
a piece of sausage, then a tide
of bread, and bully, cheese and such.
For finest fare, it didn't measure
but sure enough it gave us pleasure,
for tucking into bread and ham
beats shooting at the other man.

We tossed across what we could spare,
some tins and such flew threw the air;
(it made a change to not abrade
his dugouts with a Mills grenade.)
A face peered out from firestep yonder
and wondered if this all was blunder?
But then we all saw Fritz produce
a white shirt waved to show us truce.

The Corporal at the Sergeant looked
to see if this our goose was cooked,
the Sergeant caught the Captain's eye
and saw his eyebrows rise on high.
The Sergeant saw his head a-nodding
and needed no more gentle prodding.
"Wave them back, lads, it's all right!
What's to hand that's clean and white?"

We found a scrap of off-white cloth
and quickly tied it, nothing loth
to rifle's end, and raised it so
that Fritz could see we'd have a go
to rise up from our muddy place
and be more friend than deadly foe.
Now we saw them, one by one
and cautiously with careful treads

without their rifles, no grenades
just tin hats on their grimy heads.

Our Captain was, by us, respected;
and sure enough, as we expected
he clambered up, to quickly meet
with Flanders mud beneath his feet
a German Hauptmann, where they stood
face to face, right where we could
see our Captain's hand salute
the man who yesterday - he'd shoot.
We watched them both, tense to a man
'til saluted back the proud Hauptmann.

The Corporal cried, "It's Christmas Day!
For Fritz and us, no fight - hooray!"
The Sergeant cried, "That's right, I think!
We'll share our humble food and drink
with Fritz, and find out if we can
what kind of enemy is our man."
The Captain cried, "It's safe, I reckon!"
We Tommies followed at his beckon.
Herr Hauptmann called out loud in German
and from his trench rose Wolf and Hermann.

A football from the blue appeared
and as we watchers waved and cheered
a kick-about 'tween trench occurred;
no man on either side demurred.
Fritz and Tommy swapping cadges,
gaspers, lucifers, jacket badges;
no need to hide in trench's cover
for all there understood the other.

Nobody seemed to want to war
like yesterday, or the day before;
amongst their crowd I picked a man
and thought "I'll just see if I can
meet up, and without being rude
be pals for this short interlude."

So Tommy there with Fritz did stand
to shake each other by the hand;
In Christmas cheer and gay bonhomie
"Good Luck, Fritz" and "Good Luck, Tommy!"
Whatever lay ahead their fate
men found men they could not hate.

Our Captain and the Hauptmann tall
saluted each and other all;
a whistle blew to spell the end
of peace 'twixt enemy and friend.
We turned and trudged in fading light
and wondered why we had to fight.

The next day, had the bubble burst?
We waited - but who would fire first?
No rifles spoke, or Lewis chattered,
to keep things quiet was all that mattered.
But as sun lit the hills, we see
Fritz pounded by Artillery.

So it all began again
the senseless slaughter, and the rain
of shells and whizzbangs, frozen breath;
and friend, with foe, alike in death.



"Were you in the War, Grandad?"
Aye I was, and now right glad
that desperately so I tried
to shoot to miss, and aim aside.
For once I'd met Fritz, face to face
to shoot and kill was not my place.
I know it seems a shame
but I never knew his name;
and when the war was over
I'd have been pleased
to have had
a pint
with him.