

## 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  
That the ones who call the shots won't be among the dead and lame  
And on each end of the rifle we're the same

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### Contributed by John McCutcheon:

The Christmas Truce of 1914 on the Western and Eastern Fronts may well represent the last time that the face of humanity would be seen in what was rapidly becoming the ultimate nightmare of the industrial revolution. The concept of *total war* would soon replace any outdated notion of chivalry.

Originally incorporated as part of the 1996 Christmas theme on the main page, John's lyrics from this 1984 song capture the spirit of that Christmas so many years ago. I thought it best to leave it up for year 'round access, lest we forget its message.

*Note: Let's attribute the reference to gas in 1914 to artistic license.*