

January / February 2023

The Christmas Truce Narrative

Midnight was sneakily creeping up on us yet a tingle in my whiskers gave me information that tonight was somehow different. As I made my way through the waterlogged, muddy hell pit of trenches, I came closer and closer to the narrowing walls; my brain being attacked by claustrophobia. My once tatty pelt plastered with mud and the eerie darkness consuming the sound of my footsteps. With frost covering my already muddy body, I looked out into No-Man's-Land - a place where all I could smell (with my scent of 1000 yards) was rotting, maggot-infested corpses. However, it was also a place of greater adventure than the tedious labyrinth of mazes I was standing in. Normally, the incessant gunfire would put me off my adventures but today there was no such thing.

At this time of day, the warzone would be full of Khaki Tommy soldiers and Grey Fritz huddled like secretive penguins however, at this time of night all I could see were crimson, blood-shed bodies. I was relieved that my owner Colonel Colton - who sported a greatcoat - was not one of them. Carrying on across the somewhat silent battlefield, I came face to face with two of my best furry friends - Jimmy and Jeffrey - who are both messenger dogs unlike myself. They are both black-furred, five-year-old Dobermans. Important messages are delivered across the battlefield by their rapid feet whilst dodging gunfire simultaneously. We conversed briefly and then took our own paths - they went back to the trenches while I continued to push forward onto the blood-strawn ground in earnest. Love it or loathe it, it was here to stay - along with the terribly cold temperature.

Soon after, I realised that there was no adventure to be sought out here and began to saunter with boredom back to my trench, dodging the barbed wire and climbing down the ladder. After a hard day's work of sniffing out the Fritz, I sat down ready to sleep in my little dugout when I heard what sounded like Silent Night in German being sung by the enemy. I wondered, did they also sing Silent Night at Christmas or does it just sound like that? I found out soon. Suddenly, my Colonel Colton began singing along in English. I couldn't believe my eyes... and ears! The Fritz and Tommies had been singing for at least 10 minutes before they stopped. This intrigued me - what would this mean tomorrow on Christmas Day? The interesting thoughts sweetly rocked me to sleep like a mother's dulcet tones.

As the sun dawned on us and the muttering of soldiers grew louder, I knew it was time for the five o'clock spot-check. Within ten minutes, everybody was geared up and seemed to have forgotten all about last night's singing. It seemed as though they had forgotten that it was Christmas Day. Fortunately, I was mistaken. After the spot-check was over, the soldiers instantly went to their care packages from home. My Colonel Colton, who had received a fruitcake from back in England, was looking very happy. Suddenly, I heard shouting: "Colonel, Colonel," I heard Private Henries cry, "I've heard that there are some who are thinking of... leaving the trenches." "What!" bellowed my owner, "Have they completely lost their minds?" He was visibly shaking. "How do we know that this isn't a trick by the bloomin' Fritz?" He was answered immediately. There was a German out in No-Man's-Land. A German without his rifle. A German without his rifle but holding a pack of sausages. "Hey Tommies, we have bratwurst and tobacco and you have fruitcake and chocolate, ja? You want to share, ja, ja?" Everybody was too surprised to do anything

until my Colonel Colton went up himself to meet the German. Following his lead, the soldiers scuttled over too, one by one, into the middle.

When Colonel Colton had reached the middle of No-Man's-land he heard a German nearby offer again, "Hey Tommy over zere, you have fruitcake and schocolate and you want to exchange, ja? My name is Hanz and you are...?" "Johnny Colton," replied my Colonel Colton cheerfully. I couldn't believe it! The once blood-strewn battleground was now crowded with grey and khaki greatcoats all sharing gifts and photos. "And this," he continued; patting my head, "is my lovely dog Scout."

"Vell, guten tag Scout and guten tag Johnny Colton. Zis is lovely weather, nein, with ze air crisp and ze ground frosty; perfect for Fußball, nein? You want to play later, nein? It is great weather for football, isn't it?" stated my Colonel Colton, "Would you like to sit down and have a bit of a picnic so we can have some food?"

"Of course," replied Hanz happily, getting the packet of sausages. Fortunately, I got to try some Bratwurst and it was the best I've ever had. My Colonel Colton was also delighted: I could tell by his reaction.

After everyone had been fed and the exchange of gifts had finished, midday had arrived and the two sides had eventually come to an agreement of playing a football match. Luckily, I got chosen to be the Allied Forces' mascot - I didn't know what that meant at the time but I think that I was supposed to give encouragement and cheer for the players. A few minutes prior to the start of the match, I noticed that a Brit and a German had waked up to the middle of the pitch (one was my Colonel Colton and the other was

Hanz) and tossing a coin, which presumably chose which side would start. I thought my guess was pretty close as me and my owner had gone to watch football games in London many a time. It only took a few minutes for the game to get underway as I plopped myself down on the sidelines.

As the game got into full swing, the Allies soon proved to be the better team; having the French and the British on one side. When the match had progressed into the second half, the onlookers were becoming more and more... vocal with their opinions. "Bloomin' eck," exclaimed a Brit as another offside pass was made by the opposition, "I thought the Germans were supposed to be good at football." "Vell," replied an agitated German angrily, "zis isn't even our eins team from home. And ve still have the better sausage. Besides, ve could still vin." However, as the match continued and the sunset crept up on us, it was particularly evident that the Germans weren't going to win. When the final whistle sounded, and the utter annihilation and humiliation of the Central Powers was, I stretched my weary legs and trotted over to my Colonel Colton, who was being congratulated by everyone for his excellent performance. He said his goodbyes before walking with me back to our trench, very happy with himself.

By the time we had finally reached our trench, the day we had just experienced already seemed like a distant memory and my head was burning with questions. Would they still go back to fighting after today's events. I wish this war could just end. Why should all good things come to an end.