

CHRISTMAS TRUCE

by

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OVER BLACK

SUPER (WHITE CAPS):

"THIS NARRATION DEALS WITH EVENTS DURING THE CHRISTMAS TRUCE OF WW1. IT'S BASED ON LETTERS AND REPORTS SOLDIERS INVOLVED COMMUNICATED ABOUT HAPPENINGS AND IMPRESSIONS AT THE WESTERN FRONT IN EUROPE. THE FOLLOWING STORY SHOULD BE SEEN AS A VAGUE ILLUSTRATION OF THOSE IMPRESSIONS."

**FLANDERS 1914**

FADE IN:

EXT. TRENCH OF THE CENTRAL POWERS - DAY

Mist flows above the ditch. RIFLE SHOTS ROAR, MACHINE GUN FIRE RATTLES.

BERNHARD FELDMANN, a young German private, leans against the wall of soil. A rifle lies on his upper body. His face trembles. He's full of brown dried sludge.

From the parapet snow slips down to Bernd's picket helmet. His boots rest on planks which almost float in the mud.

Beside Bernd, in the same pose, wearing the same field gray uniform, sits a CORPSE.

FRANZ WIELAND, 28, passes Bernd, sidles along to the dead.

FRANZ  
Scheiße. Emil.

FRANZ (SUBTITLE)  
Shit. Emil.

Franz closes the corpse's eyes, strokes its forehead.

FRANZ  
Bernd, du kannst nicht  
den ganzen Tag in dieser  
Pampe sitzen. Du kühlst  
aus, mein Junge.

FRANZ (SUBTITLE)  
Bernd, you cannot sit  
in this mush the whole  
day. You cool down, my  
boy.

BERND  
(German; subtitled)  
Why is it so calm?

FRANZ

(German; subtitled)

It's December the 24<sup>th</sup>. Aren't you forgetting something? We try to swap some wounded with the Brits. Come along!

They stumble through the flooded tunnel of mud. It all looks the same: planks and sandbags stabilize the walls; wooden duckboards lie in the water; off and on corpses, GROANING wounded surrounded by medical orderly.

Franz and Bernd pass some smoking soldiers while the rifle fire roars louder and louder.

They reach a group of FIVE SOLDIERS. The willingness to kill in their eyes. Their rifles lie in the snow over the parapet.

Lieutenant KURT ZEHMISCH, 42, stands upright among them.

LT. ZEHMISCH

(German; subtitled)

Cease firing! Stop firing!

Zehmisch whistles loudly with two fingers. He picks up a long stick with a firmly fixed sheet of paper at the far end. Raises it up, out of the trench, right when we start to fly from the German's firestep up into the

NO MAN'S LAND

above huge shell craters, barbwire, broken trees, rifles with bayonets, and most noticeable, POOLS OF BLOOD, CORPSES, BODY PARTS, BADLY WOUNDED SCREAMING SOLDIERS.

We pass 40 yards of this total destruction, when we recognize the surreal near, how precariously close both opponents' front lines sit

as we enter through the small mirror of a periscope, and down into the TRENCH OF THE ALLIED POWERS, towards the staring pupil of PRIVATE JAMES TAFT.

JAMES

Sir... The Huns... They go crazy, I think.

CORPORAL SHUFFLEBOTHAM, 44, appears from behind, takes the periscope off James hands, and looks in.

CPL. SHUFFLEBOTHAM

Stand by!

His staring eye dilates.

CPL. SHUFFLEBOTHAM

Stand ease!

Immediately SIX SOLDIERS ready for combat, standing inside the two firebays beside the Corporal's position, sink down on the sandbags, relax. They take tobacco out of their muddy brown khaki uniforms and start to roll cigarettes.

THROUGH THE PERISCOPE

Across the horrible battlefield, at the end of no man's land the sheet juts out of the German's trench: "YOU NO FIGHT, WE NO FIGHT."

EXT. NO MAN'S LAND - DAY

Brown and green uniformed men pick up their same colored wounded and fallen comrades from the ground.

Plenty soldiers of both opponents stuck their heads above the sandbags and watch the scenario at the battlefield. They all breathe deeply. A slightly expression of safety is written all over their faces.

EXT. TRENCH OF THE ALLIED POWERS - DAY

Cpl. Shufflebotham faces Pvt. Taft.

CPL. SHUFFLEBOTHAM

Private. Send over some  
Christmas Puddings to Fritz.  
Today seems to be as  
important to him.

LATER

British soldiers throw bundles out of the trenches.

EXT. TRENCH OF THE CENTRAL POWERS - NIGHT

Soldiers cower beside each other. Some read Christmas cards. A few of them cry. The majority eats the Christmas Puddings, drinks beer and smokes.

Bernd treads on the firestep. He lights a candle, places it on the sandbag wall of the parapet. Franz steps beside, puts the arm over the young man's shoulder, and places a tiny Christmas tree next to the candle.

EXT. TRENCH OF THE ALLIED POWERS - NIGHT

The soldiers cheer, clap their hands, and whistle towards their opponent's front line. Many are climbing on stapled wooden duckboards, a broad smile in all their faces, because-

THEY LOOK INTO AN OCEAN OF SMALL CHRISTMAS TREES LIGHTENED BY DOZENS OF CANDLES WHICH ILLUMINATE THE WHOLE BATTLEFIELD.

Cpl. Shufflebotham raises his deep voice passionately:

CPL. SHUFFLEBOTHAM

(sings)

The first Nowell the angel  
did say  
was to certain poor shepherds  
in fields as they lay;

Ten British soldiers climb up the ladders, sit down on the sandbags and join the corporal's voice louder and louder.

BRITISH SOLDIERS

... in fields as they lay,  
keeping their sheep,  
on a cold winter's night that  
was so deep.  
Nowell, Nowell, Nowell,  
Nowell,  
Born is the King of Israel.

The Germans' applause and hand clapping sound through the night. They reply with a German Christmas Song:

GERMAN SOLDIERS (OS)  
Stille Nacht! Heilige  
Nacht...

OVER THE MIDDLE OF THE NO MAN'S LAND

The peaceful atmosphere around the battlefield takes more and more over. Soldiers of both opponents near from more distanced trench systems and fortifications to the front lines' trenches.

They all sing Christmas songs; even try to sing songs in their opponent's language, which sounds just fine.

- Cpl. Shufflebotham steps into the candle illuminated no man's land.

- Lt. Zehmisch jumps off the German's trench.

Both officers face in the middle of no man's land. They don't salute, but take off their leather caps and shake hands. Each of both watches their enemy's front line: all these young men, comrades, which mirror, in same team structure and behavior, their own regiments.

More than hundred soldiers climb out of the trenches, step outside the breastwork, and sit down on the sandbags.

They study their officers in the middle of the battle field, see their opponents behind, and finally study the whole curiosity of the world they are thrown in this night:

The trees. The candles. The hell of no man's land. And peacefully singing enemies at the front lines.

Their eyes show, and it's written all over their faces, that they are overwhelmed of these happenings.

MOMENTS LATER - NO MAN'S LAND

Hundred of brown and green uniformed men talk to each other. Change tobacco, drink beer, and sing.

- A Saxon juggles with beer bottles. His audience is all eyes.

- A Scottish barber shaves a German who sits on a stool; he carefully pulls the razor blade along the man's throat.
- Several English and German soldiers play soccer with a bale of clothes.
- They view family photos, change addresses.

The AULD LANG SYNE sounds while we're amid the fraternizations on Christmas 1914.

FADE OFF.