



The Christmas Truce: Myth, Memory, and the First World War

Terri Crocker

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In late December 1914, German and British soldiers on the western front initiated a series of impromptu, unofficial ceasefires. Enlisted men across No Man's Land abandoned their trenches and crossed enemy lines to sing carols, share food and cigarettes, and even play a little soccer. Collectively known as the Christmas Truce, these fleeting moments of peace occupy a mythical place in remembrances of World War I. Yet new accounts suggest that the heartwarming tale ingrained in the popular imagination bears little resemblance to the truth.

In this detailed study, Terri Blom Crocker provides the first comprehensive analysis of both scholarly and popular portrayals of the Christmas Truce from 1914 to present. From books by influential historians to the Oscar-nominated French film *Joyeux Noel* (2006), this new examination shows how a variety of works have both explored and enshrined this outbreak of peace amid overwhelming violence. The vast majority of these accounts depict the soldiers as acting in defiance of their superiors. Crocker, however, analyzes official accounts as well as private letters that reveal widespread support among officers for the *détentes*. Furthermore, she finds that truce participants describe the temporary ceasefires not as rebellions by disaffected troops but as acts of humanity and survival by professional soldiers deeply committed to their respective causes.

The Christmas Truce studies these ceasefires within the wider war, demonstrating how generations of scholars have promoted interpretations that ignored the nuanced perspectives of the many soldiers who fought. Crocker's groundbreaking, meticulously researched work challenges conventional analyses and sheds new light on the history and popular mythology of the War to End All Wars.

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