

What really happened in the Christmas truce of 1914?

Christmas eve: Silent night

It was a Christmas card Christmas eve. There was white beautiful moonlight, frost on the ground – almost white everywhere. And round about – I should think - 7 or 8 in the evening we heard this singing and a lot of commotion and we saw some lights. I don't know what they were – some lights – and later we heard them singing 'Silent Night' – 'Stille Nacht' – I shall never forget it. It's one of the highlights of my life absolutely to see them. I thought what a beautiful tune.

I thought well a very different Christmas this is going to be from any I've spent up 'til now - feeling pretty miserable all together. Then all of a sudden lights appeared all along the German trench and I thought 'There's a funny thing' and then the German's started singing 'Stille nacht, heilige nacht'. I woke up – well all the other sentries did the same thing – we all woke up the other people to come along and see this – what on earth's going on.

They finished their carol – we applauded them then we thought we must retaliate in some way so we replied with 'The First Noel'. When we finished that they all began clapping then they struck up their other favourite carol of theirs 'O Tannenbaum' which is the same tune as 'The Red Flag'.

So we went on – first the Germans singing one of their carols then we'd sing another of ours. Then we started up 'O come all ye faithful' and the Germans immediately joined in singing the same thing to the Latin words of 'Adeste Fideles'. Well I thought this was rather an extraordinary thing really – to think of the two nations both singing the same carol in the middle of a war.